



Stopping sexual harassment and assault, on and off campus

Wednesday 13 April; 1:00 pm-2:00pm; Committee Room 21, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

The APPG convened a roundtable on stopping sexual harassment and assault, on and off campus. The meeting was attended by parliamentarians, students' union officers, local authority representatives, charity representatives, and organisations in the higher education and further education sectors.

Roberta Huldish, Women's Campaign Officer at Cambridge University Students' Union, opened the event by discussing the treatment of sexual harassment and assault cases by universities, and raising the perception that the burden of support for survivors is on students, students' union officers and survivors themselves rather than universities. She suggested that there should be a shift away from pushing for formal reporting and investigatory bodies towards what survivors want and need, with clear information, confidentiality and trained support staff.

Bryony Beynon, Co-Director of Good Night Out and Hollaback London, addressed the variation in frameworks and levels of response, within and between universities, to sexual violence. She called for UK-wide standard practice guidelines that are easy to adopt and accessible so that students aren't left vulnerable. She emphasised that training is necessary for every university staff member, who might be approached with a disclosure by a survivor.

Nicola Dandridge, chief executive of Universities UK, spoke about the issues emerging in the work of the Universities UK taskforce on violence, harassment and hate crime affecting students. She spoke of the need for clear and consistent processes and for review mechanisms, and stated that the taskforce is committed to reviewing and updating the Zelic guidelines.

In following comments, students' union representatives gave examples of initiatives by students' unions and students to combat sexual harassment and assault:

- Attendees shared the examples of bystander training, first response training and action targeted at sports societies (where 'lad culture' can typically be prevalent) as students' union initiatives.
- It was noted that consent workshops run by students are being run in several institutions.
- However, attendees expressed concern that the onus was falling on students to take these initiatives, and that universities were simply encouraging such projects rather than proactively leading their own.

A theme in the comments noted the importance of support for students and guidance for universities being long-term and fit for purpose, and the necessity of cultural change alongside this:

- Concern was expressed that consent workshops at universities may be inherently undermined by attitudes that have already been engrained whilst at school.
- An attendee raised the need to address the long-term mental health issues that can come with being a survivor and to ensure that procedures exist for academic work to take this into account.
- It was also noted that any guidance for universities on how to handle cases should be fit for purpose regarding LGBT students, for example.

Another theme was the limited data available on incidents of sexual assault and harassment. The potential of a geo-located app to record incidents was raised. Attendees discussed the idea of incorporating data on reporting numbers into university rankings, though others raised concerns this would discourage reporting or reflect badly on institutions that had positive and effective reporting procedures.

Attendees were clear that for a coherent response to harassment and assault, institutions, students' unions and local communities need to work closely to achieve positive change. The proactive leadership 'from the top' in institutions was deemed vital as was the willingness for institutions and unions to collaborate on any new report findings and recommendations. It was noted that because these issues are often localised, and incidents can happen off campus, universities need strong links with local organisations.

For further information, please contact Alexander Lee, Public Affairs Officer, National Union of Students (alexander.lee@nus.org.uk).