

## **Written submission from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (SPP0113)**

I am writing this letter in response to questions raised by the Women and Equalities Select Committee held on 4 July 2018 regarding government's role in tackling sexual harassment on university campuses.

I would like to reassure the Committee that this Government takes any form of violence and sexual harassment, including in higher education, extremely seriously and this remains a priority for this Government.

As autonomous institutions, higher education providers have a responsibility to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students. This is why we asked Universities UK (UUK) to set up a sexual violence and harassment taskforce specifically to tackle this issue. The UUK Taskforce report 'Changing the Culture' made a series of key recommendations to providers on how to tackle sexual harassment and hate crime on UK campuses. Government is working closely with UUK to support the HE sector in adopting these recommendations

As the Committee indicated, the new regulator for Higher Education, the Office for Students (OfS) plays a pivotal role in addressing sexual harassment in higher education at the sector level. In its Ministerial Guidance to the OfS, Government has requested that the OfS promote providers' continued positive engagement with work to counter harassment and hate crime in higher education. This includes supporting the work of the UUK Taskforce. Government has also asked the OfS to work with providers, on equalities issues and support them in meeting their obligations under the Equality Act 2010, working with the Equality and Human Rights Commissions and other key organisations, as appropriate.

The OfS is currently supporting and evaluating 119 projects looking at harassment and hate crime as part of student safeguarding. These were originally set up by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the previous funding body for higher education, in 2017 and is being continued by the OfS. This includes:

- £2.45 million (63 projects) for projects addressing the safeguarding of students, most of which have focussed on sexual harassment.
- £1.8m (45 projects) For projects addressing all forms of hate crime and online harassment
- • £480,000 (11 projects) on religious-based hate crime

The Committee asked about the collection of data on sexual harassment in universities and the impact of this on student safety.

The responsibility for data collection relating to reported instances of sexual harassment is for individual providers.

Underreporting of sexual harassment and sexual violence is common and it is important that providers recognise the value in collecting good and accurate data on harassment incidents. They should also continue to break down barriers to reporting so that students feel confident and able to report any issues. This was a key element of the UUK Taskforce's recommendations and government expects providers to take this issue seriously.

Providers across the sector are rising to this challenge. For example, the University of Cambridge introduced an anonymous reporting tool in May 2017, as part of a sexual misconduct and victim support project. As a result, 173 reports were received.

There is more to do to ensure that this work goes on to make a real difference to students across the country. This is why government has asked Universities UK to conduct research to evaluate the progress of the sector in addressing the Taskforce's recommendations.

The first part of this research was published on 28 March 2018. This provides a clear indication that there has been a step change in the way the sector is tackling harassment but indicates that progress is variable overall. The second part of this research will report later this year.

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