

Consent training and sexual violence prevention in UK universities

GenPol
GENDER & POLICY INSIGHTS

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GenPol - Gender & Policy Insights is a think tank consultancy and a social enterprise. It advocates for gender equality, researches gender issues, and uses research findings to enable others to understand gender dynamics and find gender-sensitive solutions to their problems.

Research

We believe that gender relations are key to understanding the complexities of the modern world and producing meaningful social change. GenPol's cutting-edge research sheds light on matters of sexuality, violence, media, entrepreneurship, work, technology and social innovation. Making gender research accessible beyond academia, and disseminating data through different outlets and across multiple stakeholders, is crucial to GenPol's mission.

Advocacy

GenPol uses research findings to make political, economic and cultural institutions aware of the impact of gender upon their activities. We regularly publish reports, policy papers and research briefs, and organise a wide range of events to raise awareness on gender equality matters.

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GenPol promotes gender-sensitive policies across different sectors and helps a wide-range of organisations mainstream gender concerns into their work. GenPol can help with: gender-based violence prevention, gender in the workplace, due diligence, gender-sensitive decision-making & governance, gender-aware R&D and sector-specific research.

Teachers should check students if they say anything problematic	HAVING ACTIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH PUPILS.	OFFERING SUPPORT SUCH AS COUNSELLING FOR MORE TIMID PUPILS.	Allow students to have an input and more of a interactive role in discussions/lessons
Bringing in actors to act out scenarios of consent.	Delivered in a positive and engaging way	<u>Honest</u> and <u>open</u> teaching (non-judgemental/relaxed)	Bringing in different types of sex top to destigmatize the use of them.
Teachers, organisations, (official), people speaking from experience.	Role play / workshops	People who are comfortable talking about sex - Teachers or Specialists	Role play scenarios which certain genders/sexualities wouldn't usually confront

More discussion groups in which people can go & talk about their experiences so this raise awareness and get support	ACTUAL EXPERTS BROUGHT IN FOR SPECIFIC TOPICS.	Psychologists close by in case needed during workshops	Students a few years older, someone able to relate, close to our ages.
More sex positive discussion on how to have sex as well as more serious issues.	Open / non-judgementally teaching (no awkward/w) (comfortable teaching)	MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS TO BREAK BOUNDARIES.	Sex and I would like gender groups not to be segregated to talk openly to each other about things such as rape, consent etc
Sex and relationships should be learnt and discussed in a mixed environment & if possible	GIVING PUPILS THE SENSE OF CONFIDENTIALITY.	Start early frequent short bursts throughout the year	Student - ambassador - group being aware of specific staff members who are part of the safe-guarding team

Content Warning: the report does not include graphic accounts of sexual violence, but topics treated may be distressing to some readers.

If you experience reading this report, then the following services provide support:

Lifecentre - Freephone helpline: 0808 802 0808 / Text helpline: 07717 989 022;
lifecentre.uk.com

Rape Crisis - National Freephone helpline: 0808 802 9999 (12–12.30 pm, 7pm–9.30pm every day, plus 3pm–5.30pm weekdays), info@rapecrisis.org.uk

If you have experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment or sexual violence and are based in the UK, you can seek support and information at:

End Violence Against Women Coalition - www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk

Rape Crisis - www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Women's Aid - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

If you are not UK-based, here below is a list of international organisations and resources, whose websites include support services in different countries:

Rape Crisis Network Europe - <https://www.rcne.com/links/international-organisations/>

Rape Abuse Incest National Network (USA) - <https://www.rainn.org>

Ending Violence Canada - <http://endingviolencecanada.org>

Shukumisa (pan-African) - <http://shukumisa.org.za>

OYSS Women (India) - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OYSS_Women

Full Stop Foundation (Australia) - <http://www.fullstopfoundation.org.au>

Sexual Abuse Prevention Network New Zealand - <http://sexualabuseprevention.org.nz>

Asia Foundation - <https://asiafoundation.org/2018/03/14/four-things-know-gender-based-violence-asia/>

Executive Summary

GenPol's report provides an overview of **consent training and sexual violence prevention in British universities**. It draws on specific information gathered through **focus groups, desk research, and an online survey** of Women's Officers and peer-to-peer trainers. This study is part of a broader research project started with '**Can Education stop abuse?**', a comprehensive policy paper in which we examined the linkage between consent-centred sexuality education and gender-based violence at the European level.

This report focuses specifically on the British case and the phenomenon of sexual abuse on campus. It examines the **academic literature on the causes and impact of sexual violence** and the available **prevention strategies**, and offers a **historical review of consent training in British universities**. It then draws on **empirical findings** to assess the state and **effectiveness** of university consent teaching and broader sexual assault and harassment policies, filtered through the **perceptions of peer-to-peer trainers, students** and other relevant stakeholders.

Our data analysis clearly shows that consent training is increasingly perceived as **an effective violence prevention tool** by trainers and beneficiaries alike, and adopted by more and more universities nation-wide. **Different training models** (peer-to-peer, outsourcing, online training, bystander focus, male-centred initiatives) are analysed. A number of **good training practices** are identified, including **break-away group discussions, scenario and myth-busting exercises**, and the use of **national and local statistics on assault and harassment**. However, the report also highlights existing **challenges and areas for improvement**. These include the **reluctance** (mostly male) students to attend consent workshops, existing **time constraints**, and the fact that trainers struggle to find a **suitable language** and cover a plethora of **complex topics**.

Above all, data from both our focus groups and online survey (in line with the existing literature), indicate that **training as a stand-alone tool is not particularly successful**. In fact, trainees turn cynical and lose motivation if they do not see their **institution truly committing to address the problem**, and an **institutional culture of sexual respect** is not developed. Specifically, our respondents complained about the **fragmentation of sexual violence reporting mechanisms and disciplinary procedures** across universities, and even colleges within the same institution. They also felt that specifically **trained personnel and sexual violence professionals (including therapists)** should support Women's Officers and other consent trainers. Rather tellingly, **53.3% of respondents to our online survey reported having received their training only from their student union**. Furthermore, **71,4 % of them** regarded their university's **harassment and assault prevention training for members of staff** as unsuccessful. Similarly, **57% of respondents advocated for further resources for survivors of sexual violence**. (A box comprehensively analysing sexual assault & harassment policies across UK universities can be found at page 33).

Building on these findings, GenPol issued a set of comprehensive **conclusions** and **recommendations** for **peer-to-peer trainers, student unions, universities, sexual violence professionals** and other stakeholders. These include:

- the introduction of **transparent reporting mechanisms** for sexual harassment, assault and discriminatory behaviours across universities nation-wide (ideally, an **anonymous online reporting system** should be developed aside **non-anonymous reporting forms**, easily accessible on universities' websites);
- the introduction of **clear, appropriate and well-advertised disciplinary measures**, and of **specific compulsory training** on gender-based violence and discrimination for members of staff (including an active bystander approach and instructions on how to deal with disclosures).
- **hiring specially trained therapists** to support **survivors of abuse** and their loved ones, as well as students and staff with specific pastoral duties;
- offering **multiple forms of consent training** and spreading teaching **over different sessions**, so that complex topics can be dealt with, and information and ideas can sink in. Specifically, we advise that universities make **either peer-to-peer consent workshops or thorough online training** (approved by student unions and other stakeholders) **compulsory**, and that the entire student population is made to choose at least another training option. These alternatives may encompass: (a) attending 3 different **workshops** on topics such as **respectful and assertive communication, inclusivity and diversity, mental health and gender, emotional management, positive masculinity**; (b) completing **online training** previously agreed upon with student representatives and sexual violence experts; (c) participating in a **student project** on violence prevention matters;
- using in consent training well-tested **delivery methods** such as breakaway groups (with the double option of single-gender groups and mixed ones), open and interactive discussions, myth-busting, scenario and privilege-related exercises, local case studies, reflections on the differences between legal and ethical concerns). We also recommend using **training materials** that portray sexually, racially, culturally and physically diverse people;
- **designing** consent training to **change not only beliefs but behaviours** (through exercises aimed at developing **empathy, processing difficult emotions**, and offering creative strategies to identify and **respond to problematic behaviours**);
- **mapping existing consent-related resources** and making them available to the student community (including **induction materials**, posters and **leaflets**, texts clarifying **university reference points** and their responsibilities, lists of **emergency contacts**, instructions and other supporting materials for student trainers);
- carefully **monitoring and evaluating consent training**. Specifically, we encourage individual trainers to record their activities and distribute **written questionnaires** before and after their teaching, and universities to periodically perform **climate surveys** on sexual violence-related topics.



Credits: Elyssa Ryder

“You want a college, a university to be a community, and that makes it important that consent training is student-led. However, students need support, are under-trained, and sometimes do not know where to refer survivors. And college and faculty reporting and disciplinary procedures – how transparent and accessible they are – are key.”

Focus group participant

“As a peer-to-peer consent trainer, I never had people walking out and saying they've completely changed their mind. But people use what they have learned as a point of reference, and this is most useful in setting precedence, in sending a message.”

Focus group participant

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Foreword by Dr Lilia Giugni, GenPol CEO

I am delighted to present GenPol's report on consent training and sexual violence prevention in British universities. This project was born from the collaboration between GenPol and Dr Tom Dougherty, a philosopher who researches consent at the University of Cambridge. It has seen us working for many months with university staff, students, trainers, sexual violence experts and gender equality activists. Through desk research, focus groups, workshops, and an online consultation, we have aimed to assess how current training practices help prevent sexual violence on campus, and what else could be done to support practitioners and enhance the impact of prevention work.

As think tank researchers and gender equality advocates, at GenPol we work closely with universities, their students and personnel. Many of our researchers are, or have been, academics, and many of our interns study at, or have just come out of, university. Thus, we are painfully aware of the existence of sexual harassment and assault on campus. It saddens and outrages us beyond words, and we are committed to do our bit to end it. We hope that this report may be a useful tool for peer-to-peer trainers, student leaders and activists, as well as for sexual violence professionals and all those who work to tackle gender-based abuse in all its forms. We dedicate it to all victims and survivors, whose courage and resilience is a never-ending source of inspiration.

And now a few, much needed acknowledgements. We are extremely grateful to the University of Cambridge Faculty of Philosophy and the Cambridge Judge Business School for hosting our focus groups, and to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for generously funding one of them with an Early Career Leadership Fellows Award, Council Reference: AH/N009533/1. We are also very grateful to Trinity Hall, Cambridge for contributing to our research expenses, and providing a platform and a space for myself, Tom and many GenPol researchers to meet. Furthermore, Heather Sanderson from the Faculty of Philosophy, Laura Carnicero from the Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation and Jill Noble from the Ethics Committee were all extremely helpful during the focus group organisation. Our colleagues Dr Nick Guyatt, Prof Rae Langton, Tobias Mueller, Pauline Kiesow, Nathalie Greenfield, Antonia Sudkaemper, Dr Neil Stott, Amy O'Leary and Sarah D'Ambrumenil all offered precious support and advice.

We are particularly thankful to Fionn Cremin and Francesca Di Nuzzo for kindly contributing their expertise, taking notes during focus groups and helping drafting questionnaires. Another heartfelt thanks go to Ellen Davis Walker, Anna Yakovleva and Martha Daniels for their hard marketing and communication work, and to Chiara De Santis, GenPol Chief Policy Officer, for competently guiding them (and for keeping me sane during these last few months!). As always, we are also proud to showcase in our publications the gorgeous work of Elyssa Ryder, talented illustrator and feminist activist, who authored the beautiful images that complete the report.

Finally, all authors of this report were involved in this exciting project in multiple ways. Dr Mich Greenfield-Liebst followed the organisation of the focus groups since the very beginning, and expertly monitored data collection operations and carried out desk research. Dr Michelle Fava's great sensitivity and design thinking knowledge allowed us to gather in-depth, rich data and to present them in the most effective manner. Stella Rhode and Lily Rosengard passionately contributed excellent secondary research and empirical analysis, and were most helpful with many administrative and communication tasks. James McCann, together with his colleague Emmanuela Wroth, led the male allies workshop shadowed by GenPol researchers, and contributed valuable expertise on violence prevention training.

Above all, this report would have never existed hadn't we met Dr Tom Dougherty. His nuanced approach to the study of sexual consent and his passion to make universities a safer space for women and people of all genders have inspired us and informed this research collaboration at all times. Tom generously made available research funding, personal networks and logistic resources, and his efforts were crucial throughout data collection, analysis and the final writing-up. While GenPol is enriched by researchers and contributors of all genders, it is a women-led organisation. We always find heart-warming, and thrilling, to work with like-minded, feminist men like Tom.

Last but not least, we are truly indebted to our enthusiastic, thoughtful research participants, including focus group and survey and consultation respondents. Our greatest hope is that our research outputs may be of help to all of them in their indefatigable, inspiring efforts towards a more gender equal world.

Dr Lilia Giugni - GenPol CEO

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lilia Giugni".

Introduction

Raising awareness on the complexities of sexual consent has long been a crucial concern of feminist, violence prevention and social justice movements worldwide. Since the 1970s, feminists have proposed that sexual violence should be understood not as a deviant sexual behaviour, but as a human rights violation and a tool used to oppress women and enforce gendered power relationships (see [Hester, Kelly, & Radford, 1996](#)). Women's movements and progressive thinkers have also contributed to shape our understanding of sexual consent (or lack thereof), shifting the focus away from stereotypical depictions of sexual assault and informing the broad definitions currently adopted by international organisations and several national legislations.

For example, the [World Health Organisation \(2012\)](#) defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion.” Similarly, the Elements of Crime drafted by the International Criminal Court ([ICC, 2010](#)) include “force, threat of force or coercion, including fear of force, duress, detention, psychological oppression and abuse of power” as examples of circumstances under which sexual violence may occur. In the UK, the [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(England & Wales\)](#) and [the Sexual Offences Order 2008 \(Northern Ireland\)](#) establish that individuals consent to sexual activities “by choice”, and only when they have “the freedom and capacity to make that choice”. The [Sexual Offences Act 2009 \(Scotland\)](#), too, defines sexual consent as “free agreement” to engage in sexual activities.

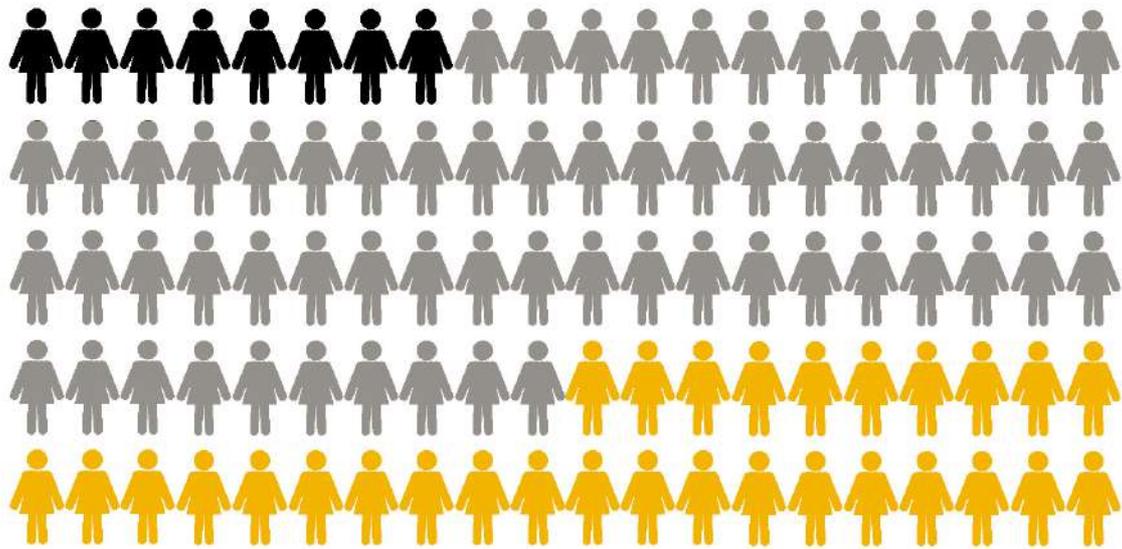
These statutory definitions share the acknowledgment that sexual assault may take place without the use of force. Therefore, they recognise that sexual consent, understood as the active process of willingly and freely choosing to participate in sex of any kind ([GenPol & Serlo, 2017](#)), can be hindered by factors other than physical coercion. However, these are not universally accepted principles. For instance, the definition of rape used in a recent survey of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) required the use of physical coercion ([FRA, 2014](#)). In fact, the legal conceptualisation of rape has this requirement in a number of EU jurisdictions, which prevents the survey (and the national authorities of those states) to capture and address unnumbered instances of sexual abuse.

Well-aware of this substantial obstacle to abuse prevention, gender equality activists and sexual violence professionals still work globally to empower people of all genders to safely recognise and express sexual consent or dissent. During the last few years, awareness-raising initiatives focusing on consent have spread across university and college campuses in many English-speaking countries, as well as in Scandinavia and several African states. This should not come as a surprise. While preventing sexual assault and harassment in universities has been a challenge for decades, abuse cases on campus have gained increasing prominence in the national and global media, and far-reaching reports have shed light on the magnitude of the phenomenon (see, for example, [Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018](#) and [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018](#)).

At the same time, cross-national differences can be explained as a consequence of the different university and college systems world-wide. For instance, countries such as France, Spain or Italy do not replicate the self-sufficient campus model that is common within Anglo-American universities. Students tend to live in independent flat-shares, or in student halls that are less isolated and more integrated into the urban landscape than American or British dormitories. Drinking societies, male sport teams and fraternities, which critics have associated with college 'rape culture' (normalisation and trivialisation of sexual abuse, see [Boswell & Spade, 1996](#)) are also less crucial to student life. To put it differently, while sexual violence is a global issue, the housing structure and social habits typical of campus universities make sexual assault and harassment a specific problem in these communities, and one that requires specific attention.

In sum, consent training and the other related initiatives that emerged in the UK in the last few years can be better understood as a product of Britain's academic environment. On the other hand, consent-centred campaigns are part of a growing global movement that attempts to prevent sexual assault and harassment in universities, and has its centre in countries where campus universities are common.

With this in mind, the report's first section will contextualise the British case, providing some background information on sexual abuse on campus, its causes and its impact. It will also review the history of consent education in the UK, as well as the academic literature on sexual violence prevention training, with the purpose of identifying existing best practices. The second section will introduce our empirical study, including a brief methodological note, and the third one will exhaustively discuss our findings. Finally, the fourth section contains our conclusions and recommendations towards effective consent training and sexual violence prevention in universities, while the appendices present other useful resources available to students, educational institutions and other stakeholders.



70% of female students and recent graduates have experienced sexual violence
 8% were raped while at university Source: The Student Room (2018)

Credits: Michelle Fava

“We can’t deny that so many women are victims of gender violence and discrimination, but we can show to men what they can gain from more gender equality.”

Focus group participant

“We need more staff to be trained around consent, intervention, and properly following procedures when receiving disclosures.”

Online consultation respondent, University of Durham

1-Research Background

1.1 Sexual violence in UK universities

For many people, university years are the defining years of their lives. As institutions whose mission is to contribute to human knowledge, and improve society through learning, research and public engagement, universities have the duty to provide a safe and supportive environment for their students and staff. However, during the last few years, national and international studies have shown the scale of sexual violence across university and college campuses.

In the United Kingdom, the prevalence of sexual violence in tertiary education has received considerable focus by the National Student Union (NUS), which carried out a pioneering, extensive inquiry into this topic in 2010 ([NUS, 2010](#)). Based on an online survey of 2,058 self-identifying female students, the study's results were alarming. More than one third of the respondents reported feeling unsafe when in their university or college buildings during the evening. Furthermore, 68 percent of respondents declared to have been subjects to sexual harassment on campus (including groping, flashing and unwanted sexual comments), while 12 percent had been exposed to stalking. 14 percent had also experienced serious physical or sexual assault on campus, while 1 in 10 survivors had been given alcohol or drugs before the attack. (Male) fellow students appeared to be the majority of perpetrators, with most of them studying at the same institution as the victim or survivor. Reporting levels were low across all surveyed categories of misconduct. 50 percent of survivors of sexual assault indicated shame and embarrassment as their main reason for not reporting, while 43 percent of them feared being blamed for what had happened and 33 percent were scared of not being believed. Respondents to NUS's survey experienced a wide range of consequences after the aggressions, from deterioration of physical and mental health to a far-reaching impact on their educational and professional choices (NUS, 2010)¹.

In 2015, stimulated by NUS's efforts and upon request of the universities minister, Universities UK (UUK, the representative organisation of British universities) established a taskforce to examine sexual violence on campus. The evidence they gathered was submitted by national universities, as well as stakeholders such as student unions, BUCS (the British Universities and College Sports association) and several violence prevention charities ([UUK, 2016](#)). This also covered cases of staff-to-students harassment and abuse, and submissions highlighting the prevalence of violence directed against non-white, non-heterosexual, disabled and non-cisgender subjects. UUK's final report highlighted educational institutions' limited understanding of sexual violence and the inconsistency of their policies, and

¹ It is worth noticing that NUS conducted a follow-up poll in 2015, specifically exploring new students' awareness of reporting procedures for sexual misconduct in their universities. The research, carried out among over 2,000 students of all genders, revealed that 17 percent of the participants had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their first week of term, and that over half of the respondents were not made aware of university policies in this area ([NUS, 2015](#)).

recommended a stronger focus on violence prevention training and more transparent reporting procedures (UUK, 2016).

Since then, sexual abuse at UK universities has continued to attract scholarly and media attention. From 2013, Dr Alison Phipps (Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Sussex) has collaborated with NUS on a research project on 'lad culture' in higher education setting (understood as sexist and sexualised banter likely to spill-over into sexual violence). Based on literature review, interviews and focus groups, her research illustrated how - while largely the preserve of a minority of men - lad culture can dominate university life ([Phipps & Young, 2013](#)).

Moreover, in 2016, the Guardian began an investigation into sexual harassment and assault perpetrated by university staff. They sent a Freedom of Information request to over 100 British universities, and regularly found inconsistencies in the way sexual misconduct complaints were collected and handled ([Guardian, 2016](#)). In 2018, this was followed by a new piece of research authored by NUS, looking into sexualised predatory behaviour of university staff towards students. While not making claims about the general level of staff behaviour nation-wide, the report captured the experiences of the 1,839 students who responded ([NUS, 2018](#)). Concerns related to staff sexual misconduct were increasingly raised, too, by women academics, especially after the #MeToo campaign initiated a global conversation on abuse within several industries (see, for example, [Times Higher Education, 2018](#)).

Finally, in the aftermath of #MeToo, a new survey involving 4,500 students and recent graduates was carried out by the campaign group Revolt Sexual Assault, in collaboration with the online student community Student Room ([Revolt Sexual Assault & The Student Room, 2018](#)). Findings were in line with those reported by NUS 8 years before: 62 percent of total respondents (70 percent of self-identifying female, and 73 percent of disabled participants) had experienced sexual violence in their lives. 8 percent of self-identifying female respondents reported having been raped whilst at university, while only 6 percent of overall survivors informed university authorities or the police (Revolt Sexual Assault & The Student Room, 2018). Sexual abuse within British universities has also recently been the subject of documentaries, such as 'Raped: My Story' on Channel 5 (Channel 5, 2017), and social media campaigns including @EverydaySexism#UnsafeAtUni on Twitter.

Sexual violence on campus: evidence from outside the UK

In several countries, most notably in the USA and Australia, there has been an effort to understand the extent of sexual harassment and assault in university settings. In the United States, studies have been carried out into sexual misconduct on campus since the 1980s ([Koss et al, 1987](#); [Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997](#); [Armstrong et al, 2006](#)). More recently, the 2015 Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Survey on Sexual Assault, drew responses from 150,000 students across 27 institutions. It was found that 11.7 percent of respondents had experienced nonconsensual sexual contact since they had enrolled at their university. The incidence of sexual assault due to physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation among female undergraduate respondents was 23.1 percent, and overall rates of reporting to campus officials and law enforcement were consistently low (5 to 28 percent, depending on the specific type of behavior) ([AAU, 2015](#)). In 2018, a new report specifically assessed the extent to which US women in STEM fields experience sexual harassment and assault in academia, and how this negatively impacts their recruitment, retention, and advancement of women ([National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018](#)).

In Australia, an independent study commissioned by the national Human Rights Commission also examined the nature, prevalence and reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment in universities, as well as institutional responses to the phenomenon (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Based on a survey that measured the experiences of over 30,000 students across all 39 national universities, the research found that 21% of respondents had been sexually harassed in a university setting in 2016. It also reported that 1.6% of student participants had been sexually assaulted on campus in 2015 or 2016. Authors of the report cited sexist attitudes towards women, excessive alcohol consumption, student housing organisation and power dynamics between students and staff as the main causes behind the problem (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018).

Lastly, academic studies on sexual misconduct on campus have also been carried out in New Zealand ([Gavey, 1991](#)) and Canada ([De Keseredy & Kelly, 1995](#)).

1.2 Violence prevention: consent training in the UK

Following the above-mentioned research conducted by British student unions in the early 2010s, the NUS women's campaign decided to target sexual violence on campus through a pilot consent education programme, 'I Heart Consent'. In 2013/2014, the campaign started a collaboration with Sexpression:UK, a student group hosting sex and relationship education initiatives in universities. The two organisations co-led a pilot training scheme, in which 20 student ambassadors selected from different student unions were offered an online consent course as well as campaigning materials to use in their own institution ([I Heart](#)

[Consent, 2015](#)). Going back to their student union, the ambassadors helped develop and deliver the first British consent workshops aimed at new students, sport/societies presidents and other unions' executive members. Feedback from approximately 50 trained facilitators, and 300 workshop beneficiaries were collected ([I Heart Consent, 2015](#)).

Meanwhile, in October 2014, some Colleges at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford introduced consent workshops. These were made a compulsory part of freshers' week at 20 (out of 31) Cambridge colleges, and at 22 (out of 30) Oxford colleges. In the University of Cambridge, this followed the publication of 'Cambridge Speaks Out', a survey conducted by the local women's campaign, which revealed how pervasive sexual violence was on campus ([Cambridge Speaks Out, 2014](#)). In 2015, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) also introduced mandatory, peer-to-peer consent workshops, while non-compulsory consent training was offered at the University of Warwick starting from 2015, and at Durham University, Newcastle University and the University of York from 2016 ([Chronicle Live, 2016](#)).

Since then, student-led consent training has attracted both praise and criticism. Student unions, violence prevention organisations and many survivors of sexual abuse argue that the workshops are an effective way to respond to the prevalence of assault at university demonstrated by many a recent study, as well as to the pitfalls of relationship and sex education in British schools. However, there has been criticism from male students who deem the workshops patronising and accusatory. At the University of Warwick, a male undergraduate wrote an article for the student newspaper Tab, explaining why he 'did not need consent lessons', together with a picture of himself holding a sign saying 'this is not what a rapist looks like', which became well publicised on national media ([The Tab, 2015](#)). At the University of York about 1/4 of the students attending a non-compulsory workshop in 2016 walked out in protest, and one 3rd year student handed out flyers outside encouraging freshers not to attend ([The Independent, 2016](#)).

Despite this resistance, consent workshops are currently taught at many British universities, while many others offer video and online training about consent ([The Tab, 2018](#)). These and other initiatives, including activities specifically aimed at addressing male students' criticisms against consent training, will be analysed in Chapter 3 of this report. Overall, consent education is gaining momentum nation-wide, and is positively regarded by some subject experts, who recommend it as a useful prevention strategy. (See, for example, the recommendation section in the recent UUK's study ([UUK, 2016](#)).

Consent workshops timeline

2014:

- National Union of Students (NUS) launches 'I Heart Consent' workshops.
- Colleges at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge introduce consent workshops: compulsory in most Oxbridge colleges.

2015:

- SOAS makes consent workshops compulsory (having had non-compulsory workshops for a few years).
- University of Warwick consent workshop controversy.

2016:

- Consent workshops are compulsory across all colleges at the University of Oxford
- Students stage walk out protests concerning consent workshops at the University of York.
- Durham University and Newcastle University introduce consent workshops.

2017/8:

- Non-compulsory consent workshops are offered at Loughborough University, Royal Holloway University of London, Queen's University Belfast, University of St Andrews, University of London Union and University of Birmingham.

1.3 Sexual violence prevention training: evidence from multi-disciplinary research

As will be discussed in the findings section, consent workshops across British universities are mainly based on materials and guidelines developed by the NUS and its collaborators. Insights extrapolated from multi-disciplinary scholarship on violence prevention training have provided useful background to some of these activities, as well as to our own research and recommendations. With this in mind, what follows is a review of the key concepts and conclusions of experts in sexual violence, harassment at work and diversity training.

Sexual harassment training in the workplace has attracted the attention of psychologists, sociologists and organisational scholars alike. Altogether, this body of research seems to show that individuals' (particularly university students') knowledge of what constitutes sexual harassment is improved by appropriate training ([Moyer & Nath, 1998](#); [Antecol & Cobb-Clark 2003](#)). However, there is contradictory evidence regarding the effectiveness of training in changing actual behaviour, i.e. helping prevent sexual harassment itself ([Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016](#); [Roheling & Huang, 2018](#)).

In fact, results of tests conducted by psychologists have been mixed. Two experiments tested college undergraduates' responses to brief sexual harassment training. These demonstrated that trainees' ability to identify sexual harassment was improved, but their knowledge of existing policies on the subject was not. The experiments also found that training was relatively more effective for men than for women, who were already more aware of sexual violence issues ([Moyer & Nath, 1998](#)). This conclusion was also confirmed by a survey-based study conducted across all American states, which established that training is associated with an increased probability—particularly for men—of considering unwanted sexual gestures and remarks as a form of sexual harassment ([Antecol & Cobb-Clark 2003](#)).

Yet while men may have more to learn from sexual violence training, they are apparently also more likely to reject it. One study compared university staff who had participated in sexual harassment training to a control group who had not. This showed that male trainees were less likely than male non-participants to report sexual harassment, and more likely to blame the victim ([Bingham & Scherer 2001](#)). Gender differences were also found regarding the perception of trainers. In particular, research suggests that female trainers activate implicit gender stereotypes (especially in male trainees), but are more effective when conveying egalitarian gender messages. Male trainers, instead, appear to be less effective in shaping participants' beliefs, but help men feel less threatened and see their female colleagues as more considerate and less confrontational ([Tinkler, Gremillion & Arthurs 2015](#)).

Further, a set of studies specifically exploring sexual violence and dating violence prevention programmes in US universities found active bystander training (based on improving bystanders' awareness and readiness to intervene in abuse cases) more effective than traditional training methods. Above all, a bystander approach seemed more able to shape attitudes, intentions and self-reported behaviours of college students, student leaders and student athletes of different genders ([Banyard et al, 2009](#); [Moynihan et al, 2010](#); [Cares et al, 2014](#); [Peterson et al, 2016](#)).

A few analyses also looked into the effectiveness of different training methods. On the one hand, video-based training - often proposed as both an alternative to workshops and a useful tool when teaching in person - seems to increase awareness of sexual harassment, but not to influence long-term attitudes associated with the propensity to harass others ([Perry, Kulik & Schmidtke 2006](#)). Another piece of research concluded that prevention programmes are more effective when video-training is combined with other methods, such as discussion of examples and scenarios ([York, Barclay & Zajack 1997](#)).

Overall, sexual violence training can be seen as relatively consistent in increasing knowledge and sensitivity to the phenomenon ([Roheling & Huang, 2018](#)). However, training alone is unlikely to significantly reduce the phenomenon, unless it is supported by the appropriate institutional policies and a strong leadership commitment. Cynicism towards organisations, their ethical climate and ability to change seems to be the strongest inhibitor of trainees' motivation and willingness to learn ([Walsh, Bauerle & Magley 2013](#); [Cheung et al 2017](#)). Building on this, sexual violence seems likely to be prevented only to the extent that there is an appropriate response to perpetrators and that potential bystanders

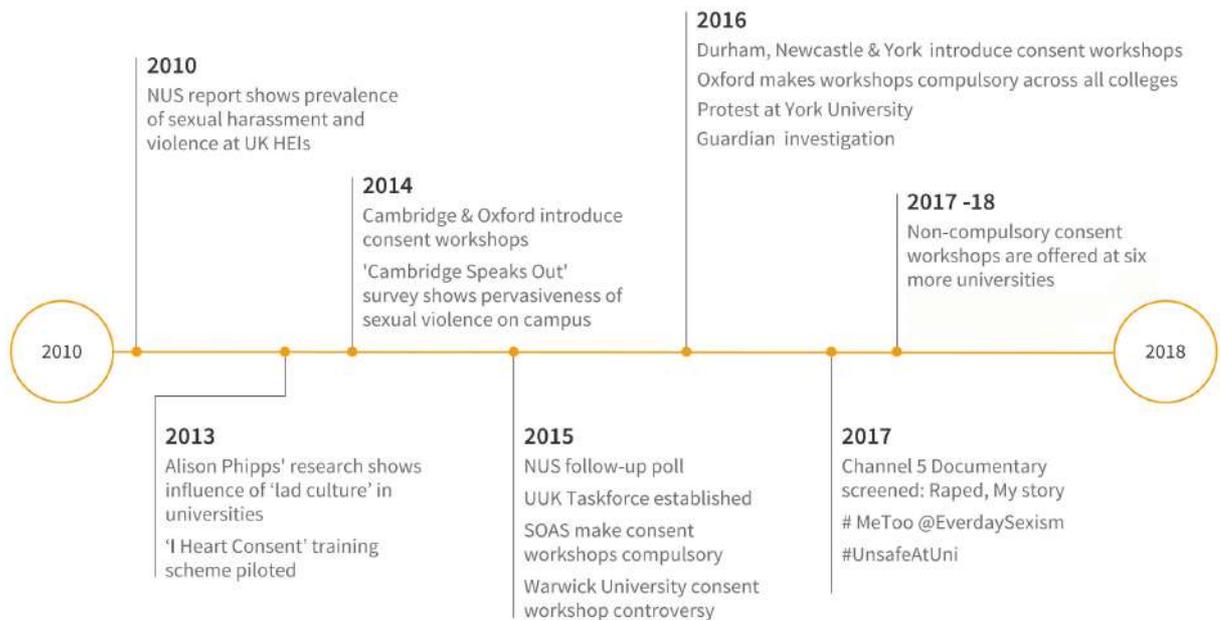
change attitudes and behaviours to the point of re-shaping community norms ([Banyard et al, 2010](#)).

Finally, some useful insights can be also extrapolated from research on diversity and inclusivity initiatives, or on harassment training without a focus specifically on sexual harassment. Diversity training, in particular, is popular in North America, tends to cover matters of gender, and presents challenges comparable to those associated with sexual harassment prevention. Specifically, analyses reveal that positive effects are most likely when diversity training lasts more than 4 hours, is conducted face to face, includes active participation with other trainees on interdependent tasks, and it is customised for the audience and conducted by a supervisor or external expert. Evaluation based on behavioural change rather than acquired knowledge is also recommended ([McGuire & Bagher, 2009](#); [Kalinowski et al 2013](#)).

Other conclusions, which could be usefully applied to consent and sexual violence prevention programs, concern the compulsory nature of diversity training, the composition of trainees' group, as well as teaching methods and the use of emotional arguments and stories. For example, while mandatory training reflects an all-important institutional commitment to promote a positive climate, psychologists disagree on the risks of provoking a backlash. Many admit that no one-size-fits-all approach exists (yet), and that more research is needed in this area ([Paluck, 2006](#)). Another heated question is whether the trainees' group should also involve a minority presence. This issue presents parallels with the debate on the gender of consent workshop hosts. Most experts advocate for inclusive training and intersectional approaches, on the grounds that this brings authenticity and legitimacy to the discussion, and thus increases the group's perceived need for change. However, others argue that tokenism is a concern, and some suggest that a more homogenous group can prevent polarisation and facilitate frank conversations ([Paluck, 2006](#)). Similar considerations apply to the use of emotionally charged materials (including personal stories and statistics demonstrating the scale of violence and discrimination), in order to provoke emotional reactions in the audience. While this can be an effective way to raise awareness on the problem, some suggest also encouraging positive emotions such as empathy ([Kenworthy et al, 2005](#), but see [Banyard et al, 2010](#) on the use of emotions in sexual violence training).

In conclusion, most experts of diversity and inclusivity training also agree that a stand-alone, unilateral approach to training is detrimental. They recommend using mixed teaching methods, and organising training as part of a systematic and planning organisational effort. The use of positive examples and case studies, as well as an intersectional focus, are considered particularly powerful ([Bezrukova et al, 2012](#)). Encouragingly, these conclusions are mirrored in an extensive report drafted by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on the prevention of broadly meant harassment in the workplace ([Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016](#)). Whilst the authors did not find that training on its own worked as a reliable prevention tool, they persuasively advised a holistic approach starting with getting senior leaders within organisations involved. They also suggested that efforts should be made to create a culture of kindness in the workplace.

In the next two chapters, we'll see how these findings informed our research questions and data collection and analysis, as well as our final recommendations in Chapter 4.



2-Our empirical study

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on an independent examination of consent and sexual violence training in British universities, and more broadly of the institutional culture and policies that provide a frame for that training. This examination included both desk research and the collection and analysis of empirical data via a mixed-method approach.

2.1 Methodology: desk research

Existing data, research hypotheses and findings on consent training and sexual harassment and assault policies in UK universities were initially gathered through the examination of secondary sources. These encompassed reports issued by NUS and its collaborators, UUK and individual universities, charities such as Revolt Sexual Assault, and a few extant academic studies. They also included articles on the national and student press, retrieved through search engines and UK media databases. Information extrapolated from the press was cross-checked by triangulating different sources.

Furthermore, we analysed universities' and student unions' websites and social media outlets, and reviewed consent workshop and online training materials as available through these channels.

2.2 Methodology: focus groups, questionnaires and supplementary qualitative methods

Original empirical data were collected between spring and summer 2018. First, a one-day focus group was run at the University of Cambridge. This involved former and current undergraduate students with experience of leading or participating in consent workshops or other violence prevention initiatives at four different universities. The investigation entailed four discussion sessions, focused on different topics: (i) how have peer-to-peer consent workshops been delivered in the past, (ii) best practices for running them, problems that have been encountered and how these might be solved, (iii) possibilities for other types of education in addition. During these discussions, note-takers recorded students' comments, which were complemented with ethnographic observations. At the end of the day's discussion, participants completed a questionnaire. The focus group was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Second, GenPol researchers acted as non-participant observers during a two-hour workshop on 'male allyship' and positive masculinity hosted at the University of Cambridge. Note-takers recorded interactions, and workshop participants completed a questionnaire at the end of the training. An hour-long focus group was then run with both trainers and trainees, during which notes, including ethnographic observations, were also taken. Topics included the effectiveness of positive masculinity training, gender differences in responses to workshops and to trainees of different genders, teaching methods and the combination of training with other violence prevention strategies.

Participants in both focus groups were of different genders, nationalities and ethnic groups, and differed in sexual orientation and identity. A few of them identified as survivors of gender-based violence.

Third, an online consultation was started in summer 2018. A different questionnaire, incorporating insights emerged during the two focus groups, was drafted and submitted to women's officers and student unions' representatives across the country. Questions covered their views on the accessibility and effectiveness of consent training and other sexual violence prevention policies in their university, as well as on the data collection and analysis already carried out by GenPol. Qualitative feedback from members of staff selected from six universities nation-wide were also solicited. Altogether, we received submissions from the universities of Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Goldsmith, King's College London, Leeds, Loughborough, Oxford, Queen's University Belfast, SOAS, Swansea, University of London, Warwick, York.

Data collected through these methods and sources were analysed through open coding.

2.3 Our research questions and research philosophy

Our study aimed to assess the efficacy of consent training, and to identify existing best practices as well as areas for improvement. More generally, we also aimed to pinpoint strategies to make sexual harassment/assault training and prevention on campus more effective. These research questions were informed by both our preliminary review of the existing literature and by our observations on the British case.

Involvement in focus groups, questionnaires and the submission process was voluntary. Survey information was gathered anonymously, and there was no recording of identifying information from contributions received during the focus groups and consultation. Discussions were conducted with awareness of the sensitive and potentially triggering nature of the subject treated. Furthermore, during focus groups, the risk that participants might experience distress was minimised by avoiding discussing actual examples of sexual misconduct. Participants were also encouraged to discontinue participating at any time, and an assistant was available to take care of whomever felt upset. During the online consultation, trigger-warning was used, and a list of resources was provided to help address any difficult emotions experienced by contributors.

Finally, we are aware that our study has several limitations. Our two focus groups were both run in Cambridge, with participants recruited from a limited number of universities. Qualitative evidence was also submitted by members of staff from 6 institutions only. The questionnaire proposed to women's officers and student union members across the country, however extensive, could not reach every single university in the country.

However, the University of Cambridge can be seen as a 'crucial case' as far as sexual violence on campus is concerned ([Gerring, 2007](#)). In fact, the University itself admitted to have a significant problem with sexual misconduct after that 173 complaints were made following the recent introduction of a new anonymous reporting system ([Guardian, 2018](#)). It was also one of the first institutions nation-wide where consent workshops were introduced

and then made compulsory, and where alternative forms of training were also developed. At the same time, our research team includes faculty, alumni and students from the University, which gives us an in-depth understanding of its specific context. We were thus able to use the rich data we collected at Cambridge to formulate questions and hypotheses that we explored and tested throughout our later consultation. The outcome of this mixed-method approach is an analysis, whose conclusions are of interest to practitioners, advocates and other stakeholders across the country.

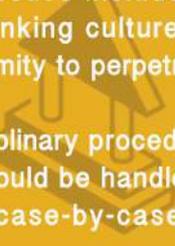
GenPol & Action Research

GenPol's work is inspired by the principles of Action Research (AR). This approach proposes to blend theory and practice in order to identify shared, effective solutions to pressing social problems, and does so by using participatory and interactive methods for data collection and analysis ([Bradbury, 2010](#)). Its key components are:

- *'Knowing comes from doing'*: 'action Researchers' are expected to work closely with practitioners (or to be practitioners themselves).
- *Partnership and participation*: the purpose of AR is emancipatory (i.e. empowering real people to solve real-life problems, producing transformational knowledge). This can be achieved by establishing trust-based relationships with different research participants and stakeholders and - we argue- integrating the principles and practices of intersectionality.
- *Actionability*: the idea that research should provide people with tools for doing things that fit their own purposes and contexts. Therefore, AR suggests mapping and carefully letting emerge the research participants' actual needs, as well as collaborating to pinpoint suitable points for actions. Researchers are also expected to disseminate their studies through channels that are accessible and empowering for everyone involved.

UNDERGRADUATE CONSENT WORKSHOPS

GenPol 2018

WHO IS AFFECTED	 <p>Survivors Friends Family Colleagues Bystanders</p>	 <p>Society Police HE Ombudsman</p>	<p>Issues include drinking culture & proximity to perpetrators</p> <p>Disciplinary procedures should be handled case-by-case</p> 
DELIVERY	 <p>Take a reflective approach</p> <p>Avoid personal testimony in groups</p> <p>Direct people to specialised support</p>	 <p>Presentation Video Printed material Discussion Online content</p>	 <p>Ongoing support beyond workshops</p> <p>A need for protocol & training, within colleges/departments</p>
CONTENT	 <p>Anonymous testimonies</p> <p>Examples in the Media</p>	 <p>Statistics Context Culture</p>	 <p>Behaviour change Personal protection Bystander action</p>
	LOOKING BACK	PRESENT	LOOKING AHEAD

Credits: Michelle Fava

3-Our findings

3.1 Consent training: what, how, where

As discussed in Chapter 1, and despite some protests and controversies, consent workshops and training are considered an effective tool for sexual violence prevention across many UK universities.

Peer-to-peer workshops

Peer-to-peer consent workshops are currently taught² at Oxford, Cambridge and SOAS (compulsorily), and at Warwick, York, Durham, Newcastle, York, Longborough, Royal Holloway, Queen's Belfast, St Andrews, Sussex, University of London Union and Birmingham (non-mandatorily). Workshops are hosted by the local student union and/or women's campaign and generally draw upon the NUS I Heart Consent Workshop Facilitator Guide ([NUS Women, 2015](#)). This guide includes general advice on how to create a safe and open learning environment (e.g. providing trigger warnings, respecting everyone's sexual identities and choices), suggestions to challenge problematic perceptions of sexual violence with accurate information, and ideas for actual exercises (e.g. discussions of 'slut shaming', rape culture and victim blaming, myth-busting activities, encouraging participants to make pledges). Building on these general guidelines, some local student unions have developed their own instructions for facilitators, which include ideas such as the use of sexual abuse statistics and scenario exercises). (See, for example, [University of London Union, 2018](#), or [Bristol SU, 2015](#), even though consent training in Bristol has been later combined with other induction information). In collegiate universities such as Cambridge and Oxford, student representatives (generally JCR and MCR Women's Officers) from each college receive training and material from their student union and deliver face to face consent workshop for first year students during freshers' week ([OUSU, 2018](#)).

Outsourcing

The University of Manchester, the University of Sheffield and York St. John University, rather than promoting peer-to-peer workshops, outsource TalkAboutConsent, an organisation providing sex and relationship education for students of different age-groups as well as their parents. Their consent workshops for universities focus on effective communication, dissecting misleading media messages and training bystanders to intervene in problematic situations ([TalkAboutConsent, 2018](#)). At Swansea University, training has been delivered in the past by Welsh Women's Aid, but not integrated organically into university policies.

Bystander training

² Our review is based on information gathered through desk research and our own consultation exercise. We examined existing surveys, press articles, universities' and student unions' websites, and asked our research participants about policies and practices at their own institution. However, information available online is not always updated, and responses to our consultation did not cover the entire country population. Corrections are welcome at info@gen-pol.org.

Alternative forms of consent-related instruction include active bystander training, which focused on teaching witnesses how to address episodes of violence, harassment and discrimination. This is offered at the University of Portsmouth (optional), the University of Nottingham and Durham University (mandatory, but only for residence mentors and sports clubs) and Imperial College London (for students and staff).

A new programme, 'Intervention Initiative', consisted of 8 facilitated sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, was created at the Universities of West England and Bristol and then piloted at Exeter, Open University and in a few Cambridge colleges ([Fenton, McCartan & Rumney, 2014](#)). Facilitators are provided with guidance and notes for each session, PowerPoint slides and handouts, as well as an accompanying resource setting out the theoretical rationale for the programme and its evaluation ([Social Sciences Exeter, 2018](#)). Similarly, the University of Bath runs a programme called [Bringing in the Bystander](#) (2018), originally developed in the US and research-based after tests in several universities across the world. The programme is based on improving participants' understanding of the impact of sexual violence and their empathy for the victims, situation analysis and exercises that help identify problematic situations, and information and resources on the benefits and costs of a bystander intervention ([Banyard et al, 2010](#)). The role and emotional empathy of facilitators is considered particularly important. Altogether, these bystander approaches are generally praised for focusing on behavioural change, as well as for addressing not only men but entire communities of people of all genders, invited to build a safer environment.

Men-led initiatives

On the other hand, a few attempts have been made to prevent harassment, assault and beliefs and behaviours that are considered conducive to violence through men-to-men training. The Good Lad Initiative (GLI), an independent organisation originally founded in Oxford, has recently established a facilitator hub in Cambridge ([Good Lad Initiative, 2018](#)). Their goal is to promote 'positive masculinity', enabling men to become agents of positive change within their communities. They run workshops for groups of men from sports teams, university colleges and faculties, workplaces and secondary schools, focusing on consent, sexual harassment, peer pressure and banter, as well as power and responsibility. The focus is on a series of scenarios developed from real life situations, and on the idea that while harassment prevention should be regarded as a minimum standard, positive behaviours should be explicitly encouraged. Yet the organisation has attracted criticisms for being excessively male-focused and for ignoring structural issues, risking to perpetuate the power dynamics it is trying to combat ([Huffington Post, 2016](#)). In response, GLI is piloting some initiatives targeting women. Other, currently less structured, 'positive masculinity' and 'male allies' initiatives are also emerging across the country.

Online consent training

Finally, matters of sexual consent are addressed, across many universities, through online training. For example, Durham University, the University of Warwick, the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics and King's College London all use [Consent Matters](#), an interactive e-course meant to help students with communication skills, awareness and recognition of consent. The online training is 45-minute-long, and co-authored by bystander intervention expert Dr Alan Berkowitz and the sexual health charity Brook. It makes use of animations and real student voices to help engage the students, and

provides signposting, positive messages and feedback to their responses, as well as quizzes for evaluation. While simplified, the animations are backed up by academic references, which integrate consent-related laws into general learning about consent. Statistics on sexual assault are kept to a minimum, and the language is respectful of different sexual identities. More generally, paying attention to sexual consent is presented as a way to make one's sexual and relationship life more fulfilling.

Comparably, Bristol and University College London also offer some consent e-induction materials, and the University of Sussex requires that students undertake compulsory online training, providing extensive resources. These include scenario exercises, myth-busting sections, and tests (with the extra incentive of several prizes).

3.2 Mapping the needs: what works in consent training, and what does not

Several conclusions emerged from our data analysis.

Consent training is an effective tool

While our respondents hold different views on the impact of different training formats and prevention initiatives, largely agreed that consent training should be taught at the university level. In particular, it was suggested that this is a sustainable way of introducing new, positive social norms, especially considering that many students did not have good quality sexuality and relationship education at school, and that universities are diverse, international communities, where people experiences of law and education can notably differ. It was observed, too, that the university environment has specific requirements: students are away from their families and normally have more sexual freedom than they had at school. Furthermore, it was proposed, there is often pressure to drink alcohol, go clubbing and joining social gatherings where consent-related issues can arise.

Good practices

Respondents appeared satisfied with a number of current training practices. For example, the open and non-judgemental atmosphere of most consent workshops was praised by focus groups and online consultation participants alike, as well as the interactivity of the discussions, which makes people feel involved rather than lectured to. A few respondents highlighted the importance of having peer-to-peer learning, or at least workshop hosts whose age is similar to the audience's, as "it is helpful to speak to people that look like you" (participant of focus group at Judge Business School).

Other good practices which were brought up in both focus groups and questionnaires were the use of break-away group discussions, scenario and myth-busting exercises, and that of national and local statistics. (Some trainers observed that the reliability of statistics is sometimes contested by reluctant trainees.) The habit of introducing legal definitions of consent at the end of the discussion and focusing on positive behaviour all-along was also commended, as that prevents the training from revolving around legal concerns only.

The idea of single-sex workshops was controversial. Our research participants, which included Good Lad Initiative and other 'positive masculinity' facilitators, were divided on this topic. While acknowledging that tight groups enable trainees to feel more at ease and

to express emotional vulnerabilities, several focus group participants suggested that mixed gender training can more powerfully challenge gender stereotypes. Specifically, during the focus group that followed a men-only 'male allies' workshop in Cambridge (facilitated by a man and a woman), participants all reported feeling comfortable in interacting with facilitators of both genders. As non-participant observers, GenPol researchers noticed that some trainees responded differently to the male and female facilitator. This latter commented:

"Yes, people respond differently (sometimes more defensively) to my female colleague and myself. The dynamics do change when women are in the room from when they are not. I did men-only thing a few times. For political reasons, I feel women should always be in the room. However, for strategic reasons, you may want to make different choices depending on your goals, your target audience, the specific purposes of that workshop. For example, I have done workshop on pornography consumption habits with young boys, they wouldn't have felt comfortable with a woman in the room. But we want men to understand that if, in a patriarchal system, they are the 'masters', then, as Audre Lorde says, it is in everyone interest to destroy the masters' house."

Interestingly, when invited to fill up questionnaires after the workshop, 100% of the (male) participants reported that they were likely to apply what they had learned in their daily life, and about 83% of them said they were likely to actively bring other men into the conversation.

Challenges and areas for improvement

Several obstacles to effective training were also identified. First, trainees' attitudes and motivation were considered central by our research participants. For example, it was suggested in both our focus groups (as well as our online consultation) that many male students object to or are angered by consent workshops being compulsory, especially when this is a relatively new university policy. Some respondents also proposed that some people see consent workshops as the imposing of a feminist or progressive 'agenda', whereas other safety talks are regarded as necessary and uncontroversial. In different groups, two men claimed that feminist terminology can be seen as sometimes off-putting. One of them argued that it can come across as demonising:

"I see where this terminology is coming from, what's the political point, but at the same time it is not very conducive to a good and healthy interaction. It's not constructive."

Another male participant observed:

"Fancy jargon can put lots of people off. People back home might feel they are being lectured to, as if elite people were trying to patronise them and impose some ideology upon them. I personally love reflecting about feminist terminology, but it is such an example of linguistic gymnastics that it might put lots of less educated people off."

At the same time, a focus group female participant explained that she did not feel like participating at her university consent workshop, fearing it would have been an unsafe environment in light of her acquaintance with sexual violence and its impact. Other women participants felt that words such as 'patriarchy' and 'intersectionality' were necessary to convey crucial concepts.

Second, many current and former student consent trainers find it difficult to cover all important aspects during peer-to-peer workshops. Intersectional concerns, such as LGBTQ+ and racial fetishisation issues, are often treated as a side-note or squeezed in at the end of the training. Peer-to-peer trainers also reported finding it difficult to strike a balance between overcomplicating things and missing out important matters in the name of simplification. They also found it challenging to differentiate between legal definitions of consent and more complex moral issues.

Third, while 60% of our focus group for workshop convenors 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they knew where to find resources on consent, 100% of them 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that they had a good understanding of how consent training is led at other universities besides their own. During the focus group discussion, it emerged that participants were interested in the idea of bystander training or assertive communication and active listening courses, but were unsure of where to access such resources. They also knew little about freely available online training existing in other institutions, and how to evaluate the impact of their own and other examples of consent training. (For an example of impact measurement, see the work of the Oxford Student Union, [OUSU, 2018.](#))

During our online consultation, the 'training of trainers' also emerged as an important aspect. In fact, 53.3% of respondents reported having received their training only from their student union, while complaining for the lack of further support at the university level.

The importance of institutional culture

Finally, in both our focus groups, most participants agreed that training should go beyond minimising assault, and cultivate a deeper understanding of inequality issues as well as a sense of community and social responsibility. Yet they argued that this is only possible when universities and other organisations visibly commit to address sexual violence. As noted by a woman who had experience of delivering consent training:

"You want a college, a university to be a community, and that makes it important that consent training is student-led. However, students need support, are under-trained, and sometimes do not know where to refer survivors. And college and faculty reporting and disciplinary procedures – how transparent and accessible they are – are key."

Focus groups participants complained, too, about the fragmentation of sexual violence reporting mechanisms and disciplinary procedures across British universities, and even colleges within the same institution (such as in Oxford, Cambridge and Durham). They also felt that specifically trained university staff (including faculty members) and sexual violence professionals (including therapists) should support women's officers and other student activists and consent trainers.

These findings were mirrored in our online consultation. When asked about the effectiveness of their university assault and harassment prevention policies and, specifically, of reporting mechanisms, 47% of our respondents said to consider them not effective or not at all effective, while 33% regarded them as somewhat effective. However, the policy regarded as most effective was awareness raising work (69%), while harassment and assault

prevention training for members of staff was held the most ineffective (71,4%). Staff training was a particularly crucial concern for our respondents from Warwick, York and Durham.

Furthermore, 57% of our research participants advocated for stronger support for survivors of sexual violence. One submission from the University of York vehemently raised attention on the inadequacy of provisions in her university:

“We have partnerships with different external services to offer a bit of support to survivors, but nothing specific offered within the university. We have an open-door counselling service, but no specific care for victims, only mental health care. There is some disclosure training for students and staff, but these aren’t implemented effectively and not taken up often. Very bare bones, just info like ‘stay calm when something is disclosed’”.

Similarly, a respondent from Warwick observed:

“There have been issues with the lack of specialist mental health provision for victims of sexual violence. The main channel of reporting sexual assault is through personal tutors, who do not receive adequate training in dealing with these issues. Personal tutors are usually full-time academic staff with limited availability.”

We summarised our respondents’ feedback on their university assault and harassment policies, together with the further details we retrieved through desk research, in the box here below. While the primary focus of our report is consent training, we felt it was useful to provide some context on the institutional framework within which training was developed. Following our focus groups and online consultation, we mainly sought information regarding the presence of specifically trained staff in every university, their reporting and disciplinary procedures (including standards of proof), and the availability of clear and accessible information on this matter.

Reporting mechanisms & broader university policies/responses in selected UK universities

University	Specific staff training on assault & harassment issues	Anonymous reporting system for assault & harassment cases	Non-anonymous reporting form provided online	Required standard of proof for harassment & assault cases	Other wellbeing/ support services made clear/available on university websites	Accessible and easy to find information on university polices on assault & harassment
Newcastle University	University Counsellor, Campus Police, Security Team	Yes -reporting to local SU	Yes	Balance of probabilities	Available and very clear	Very straight-forward
Manchester University	Harassment Advisor’s Network, Advice Service	Yes	Yes - but only as a means to speak to an advisor	Unspecified on university outlets	Reasonably clear	Reasonably clear

UCL	Student support and wellbeing team	No - or not obviously	No – one has to report to either the Director of HR or registrar	Balance of probabilities	Reasonably clear	Straight-forward
Leeds University	University Student Counselling and Wellbeing Service, LUU Student Advice	Yes	Yes - anonymous reporting form (they then respond detailing support available)	Balance of probabilities	They detail advice only once one has made an anonymous report	They detail advice only once one has made an anonymous report
Manchester Metropolitan University	MMU's Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service	No - or not obviously	Yes (filling out a form linked on the complaints procedure, but it is unclear how to find it and if it covers sexual assault)	Balance of probabilities	Rather obscure	Very obscure
University of Nottingham	Student Welfare Services, University Counselling Service	No - or not obviously	No (only advice provided is to go to the university counselling service)	Balance of probabilities	Reasonably clear	Very obscure
Swansea University	Trained harassment advisor	Yes	No - for informal procedures one is invited to see a member of staff, and otherwise to write to the Director of Academic Services	Balance of probabilities	Quite obscure	No advice is given specifically for sexual assault survivors
Cambridge University	Full time sexual assault & harassment advisor	Yes	Yes (a form to be filled out and emailed to someone)	Beyond reasonable doubt	Reasonably clear	Clear (reports can be made via individual colleges, whose systems vary. University and colleges won't both investigate the same matter)
Bangor University	Student Equality and Diversity Officer	Not fully (one is directed to a member of staff/the equality & diversity officer, and only then can submit anonymous reports)	No (one is advised to speak to a member of staff)	Balance of probabilities	Very clear	Very clear
University of Edinburgh	The Advice Place, Student counselling service	No - or not obviously	Yes (form to be filled out and emailed to someone)	Not advertised	Very clear	Fairly useful website, but it is unclear how to

						actually make a report
Cardiff University	Yes - disclosure response team, student leaders, bystander intervention	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Official information is hard to find, although blog posts connected to the university website provide useful details
Nottingham Trent University	Yes - can be contacted here	No - or not obviously	<u>Yes</u> - but it is unclear whether this is an incident reporting form or a way to ask for a meeting with student support services	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Rather obscure
University of Sheffield	Yes - welfare & guidance team, counselling service	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>	Not advertised	Very clear	Very clear
University of Glasgow	Yes - student counselling	No - or not obviously	No - sexual assault specific page simply re-directs to the student support services. An email address to contact in case of incidents of any kind is provided.	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	<u>Rather ambiguous</u>
University of the West of England	University wellbeing service	No	No – one has to contact the student policy team	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Reasonably clear	No specific page about sexual assault, but general incident reporting procedure are made relatively clear
University of Liverpool	Student Welfare Advice & Guidance	Not obviously- one has to contact the student welfare service	No – one has to contact Student Welfare Advice & Guidance	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Very clear
University of Southampton	<u>Various members of staff</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Reasonably clear

University of Warwick	SU advice centre, wellbeing support services, counselling service	Yes, but ‘Students are discouraged from making anonymous complaints as it hinders investigation.’ —	<u>Yes</u> , but it’s not made very obvious	This information is not made public	Very clear	Unclear how to report assault - lumped in with any other kind of complaint about the university services. Also, complaints must be raised within 3 months of the incident
University of Bristol	Student counselling service, plus the Bristol SU ‘Just Ask’ officers	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u> - filling out a form and sending it to the Student Complaints Officer	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Reasonably clear
University of Oxford	<u>Specialty trained harassment advisors</u> , university counselling service	No - or not obviously	No - complaints against a student/staff member should be brought to the Proctor’s Office. How to make that complaint is not specified on university website	Unavailable information	Clear	Very obscure on how to report an incident, or whether this is a possibility
Durham University	Counselling service, college student support officer refers you to specialist help	<u>Yes</u> , via the reporting form	<u>Yes</u> - via a reporting form sent to the Student Support and Training Officer	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Very clear
Anglia Ruskin University	<u>Sexual Violence Liaison Officers</u> (SVLOs), counselling services	No	No - it is simply recommended to see one of the VLOs. General complaints can be made here	Unavailable information	Very clear	Very straight-forward
SOAS	Counselling service	<u>Yes</u> (via SU)	<u>Yes</u> - via a form emailed to a student complaints address	Unavailable information	No information could be retrieved on their website	Reasonably clear
London Metropolitan University	Unclear – there is, however, a counselling service	Not obviously - there’s a <u>general form</u> to report misconduct of any kind	<u>Yes</u> , but only a general one for reporting any kind of misconduct	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very obscure	Very obscure
University of Bath	Wellbeing advisors and counsellors	No or not obviously/explicitly	<u>Yes</u> - form to be emailed to the director of student services	Unavailable information	Very clear	Very clear

Ulster University	Trained counsellors	No or not obviously - they just have a general complaint form	No – apart from general <u>harassment policy</u> - unclear whether sexual violence is covered by the student misconduct code	Unavailable information	Rather obscure	Very obscure
Exeter University	Student welfare caseworkers,	<u>No</u> – one must contact the Single Point of Contact (SPOC)	No – one has to contact the Single Point of Contact (SPOC)	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	No specific details on how to report an incident
University of Dundee	Unclear – but student services listed <u>here</u>	<u>Yes</u>	Yes - <u>this form</u> covers any kind of complaint	Unavailable information	Reasonably clear, but no specific resources for sexual violence survivors	Very obscure
Loughborough University	Unclear, but SU deliver workshops in every halls	No	No - website just <u>directs one to university staff</u>	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Reasonably clear
University of East Anglia	Student support service	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Balance of probabilities</u>	Very clear	Very clear

3.3 Practitioners’ reflections and suggestions to improve current practices

Motivating participants

In both focus groups, participants engaged in break-away discussions and presented their solutions to further motivate training participants. For example, it was proposed that more realistic, multifaceted scenarios are introduced as teaching materials, with the purpose of demonstrating that consent is complex and it is not patronising to unpack its dynamics. Further, both focus groups agreed that the focus should be on showing how everybody, women, men and people of all genders, have to gain from a more gender equal, less violent world. Some suggested that this entails shifting the blame from individuals to broader structures and gendered systems of power, and looking at individual men as part of larger structures of power. A focus group participant observed:

“It’s best to convey a positive message, showing men how they can benefit from feminism: it has longer term effects. Then, of course, shocking data and negative messages have strongest immediate effect. Maybe one can start with what one is NOT trying to do. Like, feminism isn’t (only) about X, Y and Z, it is about A, B and C.”

Multiple training options

Research participants also reflected upon new ideas to improve training techniques, formats and practices. Focus group participants agreed that consent learning should not end after

the initial training offered, or established, by many universities nation-wide. They acknowledged that different formats work for different people, and that -whilst peer-to-peer training is important to create community values – this can be combined with online training or optional workshops offered by external organisations. Similarly, respondents to our online consultation from the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, York all advocated for follow-ups to freshers’ week consent training throughout the academic year.

They concluded that this would also help cover more sub-topics, and in more depth. Some respondents also suggested that having peer-to-peer consent workshops in freshers’ week, when students do not yet know each other, may be daunting for some. Some argued that different follow-ups training could be arranged throughout the year.

Different topics to be covered

Sexual violence and non-consensual sexual interactions do not exist in a vacuum. Research participants from both our focus groups agreed that issues of sexism, discrimination and stereotypes (including challenging gendered language) should be addressed for effective violence prevention. At the same time, they were aware that complex nuances cannot always be conveyed in brief peer-to-peer training. However, they suggested that intersectional concerns can be mainstreamed and threaded the whole way through, without addressing them in a separate training session. Participants of one focus group proposed that this could be done by using LGBTQ+ scenarios and discussion cues.

Respondents also recommended new topics to be dealt with, provided that the multifaceted training model outlined above is adopted. These include relationship and communication management, and mental health awareness, with a special focus on emotional expression/suppression and learning to manage rejections. This is exemplified in this extract of a conversation between a few male focus group participants:

«I think that working on men’s fear of rejection and relationship failure is very important. It goes hand in hand with understanding sexual consent, or lack thereof. »

«Yes! Sadly, assaults and other extreme outcomes are the result of male archetypes based on a sense of entitlement.»

«I think it’s also very important to understand why many men are bad at anger management, understanding why one’s angry and what to do about it.»

We also collected input on how masculinity issues could be covered. Some respondents (mainly trainers in men-only workshops) thought it essential to stimulate young men to reflect upon positive masculine traits, such as healthy male bonds, or being an ally to social causes. Yet other respondents (of all genders) observed that it is difficult to pinpoint positive masculinity, as “it seems to revert back to old stereotypes, e.g. the true gentlemen and so on.” Others thought that positive male role models, such as examples of men who are emotionally intelligent, allow themselves to be vulnerable, and support women and other men, could do much to help prevent sexual violence. A male facilitator also suggested that this can be a liberating experience, and show young men that they can be anything they want to be, despite prejudices and stereotypes.

Different exercises

Finally, our research participants reviewed existing training exercises, and proposed some specific new ones. They mostly felt that it makes sense to bring the conversation close to home, and present trainees with case studies from their local institution or city. As consent appears to many as a slippery consent, some advised to start discussions with excessively simplistic definitions of consent, and then bring in concerns relating to manipulation, psychological coercion, power dynamics and so on.

In one of the focus groups, there was a debate on whether personal experiences should be discussed and even solicited during consent workshops. Everyone agreed that it needs to be made clear that no one should feel pressured into difficult disclosures, but some suggested that positive sharing could be stimulated in other ways, for example proposing lessons to be learned from documentaries or movies.

Lastly, even though this is used more commonly in diversity training than in sexual violence prevention work, blind privilege exercises, in which participants close their eyes and are invited to put their hands up or down according to different questions, were appreciated by focus group respondents. In fact, it was agreed, while the exercise tends to stir quite emotional reactions, anonymity creates a safe environment where people can reflect on how power differences inform discrimination and violence.

Consent training outside the UK

Consent training emerged in the UK following the efforts of student unions and other student activists. It was, and it is, a bottom-up solution to a pressing national (and global) problem. As discussed in Chapter 1, other countries have university systems comparable to that of Britain, and also witnessed an epidemic of sexual violence on campus. There, sexual violence prevention work took different forms, and is in many cases led centrally by university authorities or outsourced to external organisations. While our study focuses on the UK case, we chose to review some of these practice to provide context:

United States: In the US, no standardised provisions exist on consent training, and different universities adopt different prevention programmes. A number of campuses have adopted the [“Consent Is Sexy” \(2018\)](#) programme, a poster campaign and workshop series developed by a psychologist and a former campus minister that can be tailored to individual colleges. Other initiatives include: anti-assault education improv shows, theatrical performances and musicals ([NY Times, 2016](#); [Sex Signals, 2018](#)), photography campaigns ([#BetterSexTalk, 2018](#)), video inductions and special sessions for parents. Actual live workshops have generally a focus on active bystanders’ intervention and role-playing. External organisations delivering training for students and staff are “Green Dot Training”, “One Act” and “Step Up!” (all delivering by-stander training). In larger, urban campuses such as Columbia University and New York University, administrators emphasise the importance of repetitive training to get information across to the entire student body. At Columbia University, incoming freshmen receive materials over the summer before starting classes, and are also required to reflect on the link between sexual respect and participation in a university community. Once enrolled, they can then choose between different forms of training, which include watching films, participating

in discussions or workshops on specific themes such as LGBTQ+ issues, and creating a piece of art as a part of the reflection.

Canada: No federal provisions exist, and different provinces and individual universities have promoted their own prevention programmes. For example, the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario created a toolkit to foster a consent-based culture on campus, containing sexual assault policy templates, safety checklists, glossaries and even tips for “snappy responses to spicy pushbacks” ([Campus Toolkit for Creating Consent Culture, 2018](#)). Consent workshops have long been compulsory for freshers at McGill University and Concordia University, and entail training on effective communication. Other institutions, such as the University of British Columbia, have opted for online training.

South Africa: The “Consent is Sexy” campaign has been rolled out in various campuses. Specific versions, tailored around the institution’s own needs, have been developed at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth; University of Western Cape, University of Cape Town, University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, Durban University of Technology; University of Witwatersrand, University of Johannesburg.

Australia: Some Australian universities (Bond University, University of New South Wales, University Wollongong, RMIT, University of Canberra, University of Southern Queensland) are combatting sexual assault and harassment on campus through compulsory consent courses, usually delivered by university staff or facilitators from platforms such as Step Up. Others offer optional consent workshops (Deakin University, Charles Stuart University, Macquarie University, University of South Australia, University of Western Sydney, University of Western Australia) or compulsory online training, mainly through the Consent Matters programme (Australian National University, Flinders University, University of Sydney, University of Tasmania, Victoria University, James Cook University, Monash University, University of Queensland, New South Wales, La Trobe University, University of South Australia, University of Melbourne) ([ABC, 2018](#)).

Other initiatives: we explained in the Introduction how sexual violence in universities, while a global problem, presents many peculiarities in countries with a university campus system. Elsewhere, though, student activists and feminist academics have staged protests against abuse within broader social movements and campaigns, such as SlutWalks, #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos, starting with several European, Latino-American and Asian countries (see [SVRI, 2010](#); [NY Times, 2017](#); [BBC, 2018](#); [Times of India, 2018](#)).



Credits: Elyssa Ryder

“I often wonder what one can do, as a man, to support women’s struggles and I want to learn more. I often find the help one wants to provide is not useful, because we do not really understand the problem.”

Focus group participant

“I think that working on men’s fear of rejection and relationship failure is key. It goes hand in hand with understanding sexual consent, and lack thereof.”

Focus group participant

4- Our conclusions and recommendations

1) Consent training is a key violence prevention strategy, but only if institutions visibly commit to support it.

Our empirical study, together with insights from international and multi-disciplinary research, show that **sexual consent training can be an effective violence prevention strategy**. However, training as a stand-alone tool is never particularly effective, as trainees turn cynical and lose motivation if they do not see their institution truly committing to address the problem, or an **institutional culture of sexual respect** is not developed.

With this in mind, universities should tackle abuse by incorporating consent-related values into their communities. Specifically, they must introduce **transparent reporting mechanisms** for sexual harassment, assault and discriminatory behaviours, and **clear, appropriate and well-advertised disciplinary measures**.

2) Universities need to develop accessible and effective reporting mechanisms and disciplinary procedures, together with staff training and support strategies for survivors.

Ideally, an **anonymous online reporting system** for sexual assault, harassment and discrimination cases should be developed aside, while **non-anonymous reporting forms** should be easily accessible on universities' websites. When dealing with instances of abuse, especially appointed committees and other authorities should be assisted by sexual violence professionals, and made aware not only of legal standards, but also of restorative justice mechanisms and other means to support survivors.

Furthermore, university staff, including faculty, student leaders, welfare officers, residence and college reps and all those in a position to provide pastoral care, should **receive specific compulsory training** on gender-based violence as well as broadly meant discrimination, including an active bystander approach and instructions on how to deal with disclosures. Specifically **trained professionals** should be available to **support survivors of abuse**, as well as their loved ones and students and all staff with specific pastoral duties. An institution's (and its leaders') **commitment to end abuse** should be made as visible as possible through campaigns and high-profile ambassadors.

3) An integrated approach: different consent training and violence prevention formats work for different people. Several set-ups should be offered, but at least some training should be mandatory.

Our study (like others carried out in different countries) demonstrates that training is most effective when it is **spread over different sessions**, so that complex topics can be dealt with, and information and ideas can sink in. At the same time, different training and learning methods suit different people, and the specific needs of individuals and communities (above all, of abuse survivors) need to be taken into account. Therefore, we recommend that **different kinds of training** are provided.

We believe that at least some forms of sexual violence education should be mandatory. However, we are aware that effective training needs to be customised to the audience, and that there is a risk of alienating trainees. Research also highlights that face-to-face training is more impactful, but that e-learning methods and other supporting tools can be helpful.

Following this, we advise that universities make **either peer-to-peer consent workshops or thorough online training (approved by student unions and other stakeholders) compulsory for all students on campus**. We also urge that the entire student population is made to choose at least one of the **following options**:

- attending 3 **different workshops during the academic year(s)**, as provided by student unions and activists, charities and social enterprises, or university counselling services, prioritising topics such as: **respectful and assertive communication, active bystander training, inclusivity and diversity, mental health and gender, emotional management, positive masculinity**. Specific workshops and **support groups for victims and survivors of abuse** should be available too, and specifically trained staff should be available to discuss their options with them.
- completing **online training** on at least three of the above-mentioned topics (a list of resources should be agreed upon with student representatives and sexual violence experts, and widely advertised on university websites);
- participating in a **student project** on topics related to violence prevention, including creative, art- or writing-based projects, student campaigns or peer-to-peer support initiatives, volunteering for a charity or organisation in this area, attending movie screenings or shows on these themes, and so on.

Students' choices could be indicated when enrolling at the beginning of every academic year, but could be discussed later on with directors of studies, course directors, mentors, supervisors, tutors or other university personnel. **Positive incentives** (such as awards for the best student project) could also be used.

- 4) **Consent workshops should be accessible, inclusive, interactive and use different teaching techniques. They should be openly informed by political values, but also evidence-based.**

Consent workshops - as delivered by fellow students, but also by external organisations – are most effective when they are **interactive** and take place in a frank, respectful and **mutually supportive atmosphere**. Building on this, intersectional concerns should be constantly taken into account, but an effort should be made to use accessible language and **‘call people in, rather than out’**. Workshops should be a **safe space** for everyone, and strategies such as trigger warning, availability of a quiet space and helpline/therapist reachable on the phone, should be adopted to protect survivors and victims of abuse or trauma.

Well-tested **delivery methods** include breakaway groups (with the double option of single-gender groups and mixed ones), open discussions, myth-busting, scenario and privilege-related exercises, case studies, reflections on the differences between legal and ethical concerns. Ideally, **instructors of different genders** should be available. **Training materials** should be carefully chosen and portray sexually, racially, culturally and physically diverse people. Also, as discussed, training is most powerful when it is **tailored around the community** of beneficiaries, which means not only that ‘local’ stories and data can be helpfully used, but also that values resonating within the community (say, a college or a sport team) should be made central.

Finally, on the one hand, the use of statistics, research findings and theories of change (e.g. being explicit with trainees regarding the workshops’ objectives and how they are going to be achieved) can help present the training as sound and evidence-based. However, consent training is inspired by specific political values (such as equality and social justice). It might make sense to be honest and **explicit about these values**, but also contextualise them and explain how they are meant to inspire and help that community and its members thrive.

5) Consent training, in all its forms, should be designed to change not only beliefs but behaviours.

As we saw, an extensive literature shows that too much sexual harassment and violence prevention training raises awareness and provides information on the phenomenon, but does not necessarily enable to **change abusive behaviour**.

Yet American studies on bystander approaches suggest that lasting behavioural change can be achieved when training design focuses on a few key stages. These include, first, consciousness raising, second, empathy-building (while taking care of processing the difficult emotions associated with it), third, environmental and personal re-evaluation (e.g. inviting trainees to reflect on their personal stories and identify positive intervention strategies) and fourth, a final call to action, such as a personal action plan or pledge (see [Banyard et al, 2010](#)). These insights – we believe - could be usefully applied to consent training in UK universities.

In particular, we recommend that consent workshops include not only information on the extent and nature of sexual violence, and discussions enabling trainees to grasp (cognitively) how toxic masculinity traits, gender norms and stereotypes, or unrealistic sexual expectations can all lead to sexual violence. We maintain that

participants should also be helped to develop empathy (for example, through privilege exercises). At the same time, training should be a compassionate platform for everyone to process all kind of difficult emotions, including guilt, anger and pain.

Lastly, we advise that students are empowered to identify not only problematic behaviours, but also specific, creative strategies to respond. Importantly, this should include ways to intervene in support of vulnerable members in their communities, while recognising that however a victim or survivor reacted to an aggression, they are never to blame. At the end of training, students should also be invited to list their takeaways, intentions and plans for action, which could include how to become positive role models or 'consent ambassadors' within their community.

6) Consent training is enhanced by effective resources. While great resources already exist, they should be mapped and made available to the student community. Cross-sector partnerships can help students and staff identify and make the most of them.

As discussed throughout this report, student unions, sexual violence specialists and other organisations, in the UK and abroad, have already developed good-quality materials and resources for consent workshops, online training and other abuse prevention initiatives. However, trainers, students and staff are not always aware of initiatives in place elsewhere, and risk reinventing the wheel when their energies could be better spent otherwise.

This report has mapped good practices and resources used across the country and abroad, and so have other research pieces cited in our bibliography. We recommend that, when developing new training materials, trainers make use of these guidelines. At the same time, we noted earlier how different formats suit different beneficiaries. We thus suggest that universities, student unions, activist groups and other stakeholders make available on their websites - and give visibility within their networks and on their media – to training options and materials other from those that they use directly.

We recommend that, apart from actual induction materials, shared resources include posters and leaflets, texts clarifying university reference points and their responsibilities, lists of emergency contacts (rape crisis centres, hotlines, sexual violence and mental health organisations), together with instructions and other supporting materials for student trainers (starting with information on where to seek mental health support should their work become too intense).

7) Consent training should be carefully monitored and evaluated, and regularly updated incorporating feedback from beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

While NUS, several individual student unions and most training organisations attentively measure the impact of their activities, it is a shame that other initiatives,

especially some local peer-to-peer consent workshops, are monitored and evaluated only irregularly. Yet testing consent training is essential to make it more impactful.

On the one hand, we urge that individual trainers record their activities and distribute written questionnaires before and after their teaching. Questions should be designed to assess not only changes in the participants' beliefs and attitudes, but also in behavioural intentions (this generally entails statements such as "After the training, I am more/less likely to...").

On the other hand, we suggest that universities periodically perform climate surveys on sexual violence-related topics (see [Sue, 1991](#)). Universities, student unions, training organisations and independent evaluators should periodically evaluate all violence prevention programmes through measurement strategies that go beyond self-reported intentions. Creative measurement methods, to be used at least a few weeks after training, and potentially comparing trainees to a control group which did not participate in the programme (see [Pendry & Driscoll, 2011](#)), include:

- affective scales (e.g. how do you feel about the notion of rape culture?);
- self-reported behaviour (e.g. have you witnessed any non-consensual/discriminatory act while at university? How did you react?);
- knowledge/awareness (e.g. how would you define sexual consent?);
- perceived importance (e.g. how important are clear and transparent sexual harassment reporting mechanisms?);
- third party reports from outside sources, including supervisors and independent evaluators.



“Some scenario exercises are really helpful. I once used a scenario asking: x has received photos of y, y sends them to z, z puts the photos in a group chat. At what point was this wrong? Very relatable situation. Being able to talk through these things, and understanding the different levels of what you're trying to get to, is very important. It sets a base level of what is okay and what is not.”

Focus group participant

Useful resources

Consent training resources for students and staff

<https://gen-pol.org/2018/03/genpol-serlo-team-up-to-bust-myths-about-consent/>

<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/liberation/women-students/lad-culture/i-heart-consent>

<http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/11107/l%20Heart%20Consent%20guide.pdf>

<https://www.breakingthesilence.cam.ac.uk/training-and-events/training-staff>

<https://www.reportandsupport.manchester.ac.uk/campaigns/where-do-you-draw-the-line>

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/students/documents/participant-workbook.pdf>

<https://www.studentcentral.london/asset/News/6013/love-consent-guide-updated.pdf>

<https://www.oxfordsu.org/pageassets/your-union/governing-documents/Oxford-SU-Impact-report-SPREADS.pdf>

<http://www.talkaboutconsent.co.uk/workshops.html>

<http://www.consentissexy.net>

<http://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Consent-Toolkit.pdf>

<https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/sexual-assault-awareness/consent>

<https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/consent-training/>

<http://www.bstcampaign.org>

<https://counselingcenter.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/Molly%20McLay--Queering%20FYCARE%20Presentation%2009-2015.pdf>

Bystander training

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/research/interventioninitiative/toolkit/#a10>

http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/28656/1/PHE_PublishedLitReviewApr2016.pdf

<https://cultureofrespect.org/program/bringing-in-the-bystander/>

<http://stepupprogram.org/about/>

Ideas from school and workplace training and violence prevention programmes

<https://gen-pol.org/what-we-do/think-tank>

http://www.2020dreams.org.uk/sexual-bullying-at-school?doing_wp_cron=1533414247.5081551074981689453125

<http://www.scarleteen.com>

<http://diversiti.uk>

<https://alteristic.org/services/>

<http://www.safelives.org.uk>

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/preventing-abuse/>

https://gen-pol.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GenPol-policy-paper_Can-Education-Stop-Abuse.pdf

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