Findings from a national study to investigate how British universities are challenging sexual violence and harassment on campus

Dr Cheryl Farrer and Dr Sally Brennan

Introduction

The Universities UK Taskforce published its report on tackling violence against women, hate crime and harassment in UK universities in 2016 (UUK, 2016). The UUK report identified seven key components for change (UUK, 2016: p59):

1. A commitment from senior leadership;
2. Sustainability beyond HEFCE catalyst funding;
3. A complete acceptance of the extent of the problem;
4. A robust policy about staff-student relationships, about sexual violence and consent;
5. A consistent approach to recording and handling all SV reports;
6. Embedding accountability;
7. Training and support for key staff/stakeholders in the whole institution; and to address/pre-empt fears about institutional fears of reputational risk that prevent universities from engaging with the agenda at their institution.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We enquired about how university processes are being navigated by university staff and the current state of play at universities to recommend ways to further the agenda.

Institutional fears of reputational risk that prevent universities from engaging with the agenda at their institution;

Partnership working between student services, Student’s Union and/or research activities.

Factors Supporting Development of the Agenda

Key individuals were seen to drive the agenda forward and there was a commitment from senior management. This was often seen to be sustained over time.

The role of champions who have promoted the agenda.

Sustainability Beyond HEFCE Catalyst Funding

Those who had secured funding from HEFCE were able to sustain their activities with smaller amounts of funding. Those who had not secured HEFCE funding did not have as many resources. The universities that had secured HEFCE funding also had more resources to sustain their activities.

Training and support for key staff/stakeholders in the whole institution;

Lack of Resources

37 out of 68 survey respondents indicated that their institution was able to handle the sexual violence reports with that team.

We did have a team, but due to the restructure... a lot of staff did not.

Lack of Time

53 out of 68 respondents said either yes or maybe.

54% said yes. 

Others were more unsure:

43%

Time;

Lack of Leadership;

Senior Executive buy-in and support to promote engagement of staff.

Partnership working with key stakeholders external to the university.

60% of survey respondents indicated that they were either right at the start of developing or preparing to develop policies.

11 indicated that they were either right at the start of developing or preparing to develop policies.

Training and support for key staff/stakeholders in the whole institution and to address/pre-empt fears about institutional fears of reputational risk that prevent universities from engaging with the agenda at their institution.

Factors Supporting Development of the Agenda

Studying the national survey and the interviews indicated that over 90% of staff observed that the sexual violence agenda was being attended to, and was a priority at their university.

There are a number of examples of good practice, but overall there are significant barriers in moving the SV agenda forward.

39 out of 72 survey respondents said that academic research staff with experience in the field had been involved in gathering to establish the impact or effectiveness of activities.

Whilst some academic research staff are involved (n=29) in research to underpin and/or to evaluate the impact of interventions.

39 out of 68 staff participated in telephone interviews.

54 out of 84 managers said that they either do or are planning to engage with the SV agenda.

36 out of 68 managers said either yes or maybe. 

Researchers and academics.

54 universities were named across a range of professional and/or student support services.

Victims Support, the local GUM clinic. Linking with the local police and external partners, staff and the Students Union was stressed in interviews and survey responses.

What are staff and students doing?

Training and support for key staff/stakeholders in the whole institution to address/pre-empt fears about institutional fears of reputational risk that prevent universities from engaging with the agenda at their institution.

What are the barriers?

Survey respondents in small universities were more likely to rate the lack of resources and time as barriers, while survey respondents in large universities were more likely to rate the lack of leadership, support and training.

What are the national survey and the interviews indicated that over 90% of staff observed that the sexual violence agenda was being attended to, and was a priority at their university.

The role of champions who have promoted the agenda.

The interest in the survey and willingness to be interviewed demonstrates a great deal of positive commitment to addressing SV at universities.

Lack of Resources

Examples of best practice were found where universities acknowledged the extent of the problem and the gendered nature of SV and recommendations to address these barriers.

References:

Fenton, R.A., Mott, H.L., McCartan, K. and Rumney, P.N.S. (2014)