

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg ynghylch aflonyddu rhywiol rhwng cyfoedion ymysg dysgwyr](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners](#)

PPSH 18

Ymateb gan: Undeb Cenedlaethol Myfyrwyr Cymru (UCM Cymru)

Response from: National Union of Students Wales (NUS Wales)

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad, sydd wedi'u grwpio'n 5 thema: | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes:

1. Maint | Scale
2. Effaith | Impact
3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions
4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context
5. Arall | Other

1. Maint | Scale

This submission draws from the NUS Women's Campaign's report 'Sexual Violence in Further Education'¹ which was published in June 2019. The report was based on a UK-wide survey of more than 500 students in further education institutions. NUS also conducted three focus groups to explore the attitudes of further education students towards sexual harassment, violence and violence protection. Content warning: Abuse; Sexual Assault / Rape; Suicide.

75 per cent of respondents to the NUS UK survey said they had experienced an unwanted sexual experience at least once. 28 per cent had been pressured to establish an unwanted sexual or romantic relationship, 14 per cent had experienced

¹ <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/report-on-sexual-violence-in-further-education>



unwanted physical attempts at sexual intercourse, and 12 per cent had experienced unwanted sexual intercourse.

More than a third of respondents experienced unwanted sexual contact such as pinching or groping, and a similar proportion had someone attempt to kiss them against their will. One in five respondents reported unwanted exposure of their own bodies, such as someone else lifting up their skirt or pulling their trousers down.

48 per cent of respondents had experienced unwanted sexual remarks on at least one occasion, and over a third (37 per cent) had received such comments via social media or text message. 29 per cent had received unwanted genital exposure, and six per cent had sexual photos / videos of themselves distributed to others without their permission - a practice commonly known as revenge porn. 17 per cent of respondents had experienced stalking.

33 per cent of incidents of sexual harassment experienced by further education students took place at their education institution. It was not always possible for respondents to profile those demonstrating the unwanted sexual behaviour they experienced but in 43 per cent of cases they reported that other further education students were responsible for them. Beyond sexual harassment, other further education students were reported as being responsible for 61 per cent of sexual assaults experienced by respondents.

It is disappointing that Estyn's report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils² found that schools report few instances of bullying and rarely report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment. The report also noted a lack of consistency in how local authorities collect, analyse and use school bullying and harassment data. We support the recommendations in Estyn's report, particularly around the recording of data and ensuring staff are trained to deal with these matters, and believe such recommendations could also extend to further education institutions, to ensure consistency through levels of education.

2. Effaith | Impact

42 per cent of respondents reported feeling anxious as a result of unwanted sexual behaviour, while 34 per cent said they had distanced themselves from others and 33 per cent had avoided social events. A third of respondents also said they experienced

² https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-12/Experiences%20of%20peer-on-peer%20sexual%20harassment%20among%20secondary%20school%20pupils%20in%20Wales_0.pdf



depression, and 13 per cent felt unsafe at their college. The same proportion said they used drugs or alcohol excessively because of such experiences. Particularly concerning were those students who had considered suicide (15 per cent), considered self-harm (13 per cent) or attempted suicide (seven per cent).

Unwanted sexual behaviour also negatively impacted students' studies, causing 18 per cent of respondents to miss classes, 17 per cent to lower their academic performance, and 14 per cent to consider dropping out of college altogether.

The vast majority of all reported sexual harassment was carried out by men, with women respondents being significantly more likely to experience this (93 per cent). Women were responsible for 17 per cent of unwanted sexual behaviour and this was significantly more likely to be experienced by male respondents.

LGBT+ respondents were consistently disproportionately affected by unwanted sexual behaviour. Bisexual students were more likely than students of other sexual orientations to say that embarrassment caused them not to report an incident.

Disabled students were significantly more likely to have experienced several forms of sexual misconduct at least once. Disabled students who had experienced any form of unwanted sexual behaviour outlined in the survey but who did not report it were more likely to cite being too embarrassed as a reason for this (one in three compared to one in five non-disabled respondents).

The NUS survey and Estyn report suggest sexual harassment and violence are commonplace in schools and further education settings. The findings of the NUS report allude to several factors that create a wider environment that tolerates and normalises these behaviours. Respondents consistently report high rates of awareness of the prevalence of unwanted sexual behaviours – and younger respondents (aged 22 and younger) were significantly more likely to know of peers who had experienced these behaviours.

3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions

The NUS UK report clearly demonstrates that sexual harassment is prevalent in further education institutions across the UK, and that peer-on-peer sexual harassment is a significant issue that requires attention from institutions, sector bodies, local authorities and government. A significant proportion of students are not aware of the processes and procedures in their institution to report a case of



sexual harassment. Furthermore, many students still see sexual harassment as a taboo subject that they are too embarrassed to talk to anyone about, while some students are uncertain about what constitutes sexual harassment.

The report makes several recommendations aimed primarily at further education institutions, students' unions and relevant sectors bodies in the UK nations. These recommendations focus on strengthening existing policies and reporting procedures, bolstering support services for victims of sexual harassment, raising awareness of sexuality and relationships issues, and working across sectors to ensure sexuality and relationships education is consistent throughout the learner journey.

The Estyn report discusses the lack of data collection, sharing and analysis when it comes to peer-on-peer sexual harassment in schools. We support recommendations around improving this aspect and believe they should also apply to further education institutions.

4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context

The NUS UK survey explored further education students' attitudes towards sexual harassment. While respondents consistently reported high rates of awareness of the prevalence of unwanted sexual behaviours, just 14 per cent of students who had experienced this had reported it to anyone. For those who reported it, 47 per cent told the police, 22 per cent told their college, and one in seven told a friend.

Students who chose not to report their experience largely stated this was because they did not think it was serious enough (57 per cent of those who had such an experience), while one in four did not consider the behaviour to be problematic. A quarter of respondents said they were too embarrassed to report unwanted sexual behaviour and 21 per cent said they were afraid no one would believe them. 20 per cent said they did not know who to tell, suggesting there is a lack of information about the kind of support and responses available.

The new Curriculum for Wales will play a crucial role in fostering healthier attitudes towards relationships and sexuality. We are pleased that RSE is mandatory in the new curriculum for all learners from the age of three to 16. Developing healthy attitudes at an earlier age will increase learners' awareness of the issues discussed in this submission and have an impact further down the line on students at further and higher education institutions.



Within the curriculum, NUS Wales believes there should be additional and specific consideration for those from marginalised groups, and the support and understanding that they receive. LGBT+, disabled, trans and black students are disproportionately affected by acts of sexual violence and harassment in schools and institutions, and there needs to be reference to the support that can be offered to those who have experienced peer-on-peer sexual harassment within these groups. It is important to NUS Wales that whilst we discuss the impact and prevalence of this issue, we also address how we can support and empower survivors and ensure that they have access to support that reflects the nuances and unique experiences of students within these groups.

In terms of the role of the justice system, there is clearly work to be done to build trust between institutions and young people experiencing sexual harassment. Of the 14 per cent of students who have reported unwanted sexual behaviour, less than half (47 per cent) reported this to the police. Recent high-profile cases have affected public trust in the police, especially that of young women, and more needs to be done to give victims viable avenues of justice and support without putting themselves at further risk of trauma or stress. As well as the experiences of women, it is also important to consider the experiences of other marginalised groups with the police and wider criminal justice system. It is important that while these issues persist, authorities ensure there is a culture within schools and colleges where students feel comfortable reporting sexual harassment internally, so that they do not see the police as the only available reporting mechanism.

5. Arall | Other

