

20 July 2023

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair
Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dear Jenny Rathbone MS

Inquiry into the public health approach to preventing gender-based violence in higher education

I am writing in response to your letter date 29 June 2023, regarding the Inquiry into the public health approach to preventing gender-based violence.

Our response provides information as requested on: universities funding a roll out of bystander interventions; their implementation of interventions such as the Intervention Initiative; how such activity is monitored and evaluated; and our comments on the Inquiry's terms of reference.

To frame our response, we are providing some policy context which informs universities' considerations. We have also outlined HEFCW's recent interventions in this area.

UK-wide policy context

Universities' actions to tackle gender-based violence in higher education are informed by a series of evidence-based [Universities UK](#) Changing the Culture publications between 2016 and the present which include:

- [Changing the culture](#) 2016;
- [Changing the culture: directory of case studies](#) 2017;
- [Changing the culture: one year on](#) 2018;
- [Changing the culture: two years on](#) 2019;
- [Changing the culture: tackling staff-to-student sexual misconduct](#) 2022;
- [Changing the culture: sharing personal data in harassment cases](#) 2022.

HEFCW activity

In 2020, we published guidance for universities on [Tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in HE](#). This publication drew attention to Welsh

Mr Rob Humphreys
Cadeirydd | Chair

Dr David Blaney
Prif Weithredwr | Chief Executive



Government and Public Health Wales campaigns. We published from universities in Wales provided ten case studies of actions to tackle violence, abuse and sexual violence and included a link to a UK-wide [directory](#) of a further thirty case studies.

In 2022, we held a knowledge exchange seminar on tackling violence, abuse and sexual violence in higher education. The Welsh Government presented its strategic position and BAWSO, Public Health Wales and Welsh Women's Aid provided an update on campaigns, including bystander training.

In 2023, we published [Safe and inclusive higher education: supporting equality and diversity education](#). This circular:

- promotes the European [UniSAFE](#) project, funded to produce gender-based violence and sexual harassment evidence and operational tools for higher education, research organisations and policymakers;
- encourages universities to include actions to strengthen preventative approaches to tackling violence, harassment and abuse in all forms in corporate documents, including strategic equality delivery plans and well-being, health and mental health strategies;
- expects universities' actions to include appropriate violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence training to be rolled out comprehensively and effectively for all staff and students, with future actions including promoting information on reporting serious incidents, how staff and students reporting these incidents will be supported, and a commitment not to use non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in cases of sexual misconduct. See [Welsh universities publish statement on use of NDAs](#).

Our policy developments recognise issues of intersectionality impacting on violence, abuse and sexual violence in all forms. All universities in Wales have committed to achieve a race equality charter by 2025. To make progress at pace towards achievement of the charter, we committed to provide universities £1m a year, match funded by them. Our funding commitment is currently to 2024/25 and takes account of the establishment of the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research which will oversee the whole post-16 education system.

Action by universities in Wales

Universities are using a range of information, guidance and training to support staff and students experiencing violence, abuse and harassment in all its forms as set out below. While we have not included the Open University in Wales in the figures below, as it operates UK-wide and is taking a four nation approach to this matter, we have included the Open University in Wales' related activities in this response.

Six of eight universities have set aside funding for specific bystander interventions in 2022/23 and will continue to do so in 2023/24. The two other universities are either in the process of developing online e-learning bystander training and/or providing other interventions. Two universities providing bystander training confirmed that it would be challenging to continue funding training in 2023/24 due to budget constraints.

None of the universities confirmed that they are currently implementing the Intervention Initiative. From the information available to us, we are unclear how many English universities are using the Intervention Initiative toolkit developed by University of Exeter and funded by Public Health England. The Intervention Initiative does not appear to be referenced on the Public Health Wales website.

All universities are delivering a range of training and activities to tackle gender-based violence. The most recent examples we have received include, but are not limited to:

- developing a specific sexual violence and harassment prevention and support strategy;
- delivering 'recognise, enquire and act' training for staff as well as bystander and consent training for students in partnership with the Students' Union;
- providing all student-facing staff in Student Services with accredited [DICES](#) risk assessment training which includes training and risk assessment toolkits and risk management plans for sexual assault and violence;
- delivering a range of training and awareness raising activities, in collaboration with third sector agencies including Brook, New Pathways and Limeculture;
- delivering a bilingual sexual consent module as part of student inductions;
- establishing a violence against women domestic abuse and sexual violence working group;
- employing specialist support staff with therapeutic training and experience of working with those facing gender-based violence;
- establishing a women's autism group for 2023/24 to address topics such as healthy relationships and personal safety; and
- committing to the White Ribbon pledge with a steering group to lead on actions.

Universities are using a range of processes to monitor and evaluate the above interventions, including:

- reporting through overarching strategies such as strategic equality plans and well-being and health strategies. Performance against these corporate documents is reported to university executive committees;
- collaborating with Students' Unions and third party organisations, for example New Pathways and Brook;
- taking account of the student and staff voice to inform planning, for example through feedback in a student welcome survey;
- using evaluation and other feedback to measure the impact of bystander and other training; and
- ensuring that all cases of violence, abuse and harassment are recorded and monitored.

Committee Terms of Reference

Finally, in relation to the committee's terms of reference we suggest the inclusions of the following actions:

- examine the effectiveness of collaboration and joined up approaches to maximise impact and ensure effective use of resources Wales-wide;

- ensure findings are informed by the lived experience of survivors and perpetrators, including an understanding of work place experiences informed by social partnership working with trade unions;
- examining the extent to which training and provision is available in Welsh.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Blaney', written in a cursive style.

David Blaney