

Working in partnership to improve international student integration and experience: call for evidence

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About you

Which category best describes you?

Other (please specify):

Higher education research staff

What is the name of your organisation? (if relevant)

University of York

What is your name?

Anna Bull, Erin Shannon

What is your role?

Lecturer in Education (Anna Bull), Research Associate (Erin Shannon)

What is your email address?

████████████████████

What is your telephone number?

██████████

Section A: Activity overview and design

Please provide an overview of the activity you are submitting. Please include: information on how the activity corresponds to our identified theme(s) a clear statement of what the activity was intended to achieve. There is a word limit of 500 words.

We are submitting evidence that speaks to the need to prevent and address sexual misconduct. We gathered this evidence from interviews with international students attending UK universities about their experiences of both sexual misconduct in the university setting and reporting sexual misconduct to their universities in order to understand the limits and possibilities of HE complaints processes. Five key issues emerged relating to international students' experience of sexual misconduct:

- 1) Patterns of sexual misconduct: Two Ph.D. students from our study, both from China, shared that the people who sexually harassed and assaulted them were also sexually harassing and assaulting other female students from East Asia. One of these perpetrators was a student while another was an academic member of staff. Perpetrators may target international students coming from particular areas or countries.
- 2) Visa limitations: Visa issues came up for two students. In one case, the requirement for a PhD supervisor to regularly sign a form enabling Tier 4 visa status was used to bully the student; and in a second case, visa status was a reason why a student had to terminate the complaints process rather than continuing with the process through an appeal.
- 3) Lack of support networks: Being far away from family and support structures exacerbated the experience of staff sexual misconduct. Sometimes international students didn't want to tell their families about what was going on because they didn't want them to worry when they were so far away. This in turn made the experience even more difficult as they were less supported.
- 4) Difference in HE culture: EU as well as international students noted the difference in culture in education institutions in the UK compared to their home country. This could contribute to making it difficult to understand what was acceptable behaviour and what was not from supervisors and teaching staff.
- 5) Perception of gender equality: The prestige of UK higher education and the perceived high levels of gender equality in the UK meant that it was sometimes difficult for international students to make sense of their experience of staff sexual misconduct and the poor institutional responses that they received. These experiences contrasted strongly with their perceptions of HE in the UK and gender equality in the UK.

These experiences indicate that universities need to acknowledge specific forms of sexual misconduct and how international status can make students more vulnerable to targeted sexual misconduct and isolation after the incident(s). Universities should put special support in place for international students around reporting sexual misconduct and supporting students in its aftermath.

We also interviewed UK HE staff members who respond to sexual misconduct. One example of good practice in supporting international student survivors included a team of part-time specialist sexual violence support staff, one of whom had a main role in the university's immigration and visa compliance team. That staff member was uniquely qualified to understand the challenges international students face when deciding to report sexual misconduct to their university.

Section B: Evaluation design and findings

Please provide details of the methods and design you used when conducting the evaluation. Please include information about: the evaluation approach and methods used the sample size and basic demographic breakdown the impact of the activity the strength of the evidence. There is a word limit of 500 words.

We are submitting evidence from semi-structured 1-2-hour-long interviews with UK HE staff and students who experienced sexual misconduct in the university setting about their experiences of misconduct and reporting, and interviews with HEI staff who respond to sexual misconduct reports. Staff and student reporters of sexual misconduct self-selected into the study after a call for participants on Twitter, and response staff members agreed to participate under a partnership agreement made with 3 UK HEIs. Our total sample includes 29 reporters, of whom 6 were international students who reported sexual misconduct, 15 were home students, and 8 were staff members; and 20 response staff members across 3 UK HEIs. Of the reporting parties, 27 were women and 2 were men, and of the response staff, 15 were women and 5 were men. This research is one of the first projects to examine university responses to sexual misconduct, and offers integral insights into how a selection of universities respond as well as how staff and student reporters experience university sexual misconduct complaints processes. The data is rich: The interviews themselves are detailed accounts of university cultures and structures, and of navigating complaints processes; participants reviewed their initial transcripts to ensure utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

Section C: Recommendations and conclusions

Please provide an overview of the key recommendations and conclusions from your evaluation, including any weblinks or publication details.

There is a word limit of 300 words.

Based on our data, we recommend the following:

- 1) Universities should be aware of racialised sexual harassment and violence, and have the appropriate staff training, signposting for complainants, and intersectional support services available.
- 2) Creating communication pathways between immigration support staff members and staff members responding to sexual misconduct to ensure response staff are aware of how international students' visa restrictions may impact their decision/ability to report, and what support can be provided.
- 3) Targeted and purposeful reaching out to different international student communities to make them feel supported and included as members of the broader university community, and aware of the resources available to them.
- 4) Universities should diversify their consent training to make sure it is representative of their student bodies so international students can better recognise when sexual misconduct occurs.
- 5) Sexual violence response staff should be aware of any kind of cultural hesitance in disclosing sexual misconduct, and should offer appropriate pastoral support even if international students do not want to formally lodge a complaint.