

# Workshops: Professional Boundaries and Sexual Harassment Experienced by Postgraduate Researchers.



## Business case for prevention through training

**This document is designed to help you create a business case to enable our training to be delivered within your HEI.**

Since the 2016 changes brought in under the [Changing the Culture](#) report from UUK, preventing and responding effectively to sexual violence, harassment and misconduct (SVHM) has been an urgent issue for higher education institutions in the UK.

The importance of training both staff and students to build awareness, to develop skills in responding effectively, and to promote active bystandership was the central focus of prevention efforts. This continues to be the case, with the Office for Students (OfS) making training a central feature of its [Statement of Expectations](#) (s.4) and the recent [evaluation by SUMS Consulting](#) doing the same (p.45). It is highly likely that training and skills development will be a core factor in the forthcoming regulation of HEIs in England and Wales by the OfS.

To support departments and schools in their culture work, specifically the prevention of sexual harassment, The 1752 Group [offer a package of training](#) on professional boundaries and sexual harassment experienced by postgraduate researchers, with sessions for [academic staff](#), and a [separate session for postgraduate researchers](#). There is a [further half-day training session](#) for HR and other staff involved in handling staff-student sexual misconduct reports to support improved responses to reports. A report on delivering these sessions at University of York in 2023 [is available](#), with participant feedback. This will assist HEIs to meet the requirements of existing guidance and further, will place them in a strong position for delivering against new regulation.

## How the training can feed into prevention of sexual harassment and policy compliance.

- From October 2024, the [Worker Protection Act](#) comes into force. This requires employers to take 'all reasonable steps' to protect employees from sexual harassment.

***Our training is one step that you can take - alongside wider work - to prevent sexual harassment in your institution.***

- Tackling gender-based violence and harassment is now [one of the principles of the Athena Swan Charter](#).

***Our training - and the evaluation data gained from it - can be used to evidence culture change work and include in Athena Swan applications within departments or across your institution.***

- Following the publication of [UUK guidance on tackling staff-to-student sexual misconduct](#), the consultation on OfS regulation made tackling staff-to-student sexual misconduct a priority. It is notable that this type of sexual misconduct is disproportionately experienced by postgraduate students<sup>1</sup>, yet this student group has been largely overlooked in prevention efforts and is seldom included in student training strategies.
  - It is highly likely that training and skills development will be a core factor in the forthcoming regulation of HEIs in England and Wales by the Office for Students. However, PGRs are often forgotten in this work.

***Our training can evidence your work with PGRs to prevent sexual harassment to demonstrate OfS compliance.***

- **PGRs and survivors want this work to happen.** [Research by The 1752 Group](#) with students who have been subjected to sexual misconduct highlights a call from survivors for more and better awareness-raising and to give witnesses and bystanders the knowledge they need to identify abuses of power, take appropriate action, and develop a shared sense of appropriate professional boundaries.

***Our workshops will support the development of positive cultural norms that are hostile to sexual harassment, that support survivors and witnesses, and that hold those causing harm to account.***

***Ultimately, this work will help to nurture a working and learning community where everyone has the best chance of achieving their full potential.***

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. (2017). Change The Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities. Australian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/change-course-national-report-sexual-assault-and-sexual> ; Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Harps, S., Townsend, R., Thomas, G., Lee, H., Kranz, V., Herbison, R., & Madden, K. (2019). Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct (p. 433). Association of American Universities. <https://www.aau.edu/key-issues/campus-climate-and-safety/aau-campus-climate-survey-2019>

## Economic costs of sexual harassment

In addition to these ethical, educational and policy drivers for preventing sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in HEIs, there is also a business case for investing in prevention training. This is outlined below to support budget holders and decision-makers.

- In 2018, Deloitte calculated **the cost of sexual harassment** in Australian workplaces as:
  - o \$2.6 billion in lost productivity, \$0.9 billion in other financial costs
  - o Loss of wellbeing for victims led to an additional \$250 million costs, or \$5000 per victim on average.<sup>2</sup>
- In England and Wales, “the **annual cost to organisations of domestic abuse** (resulting from lost output due to time off and reduced productivity) was £14 billion,” according to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, (2021).<sup>3</sup>

## Preventing negative impacts of sexual harassment in your organisation

As well as these financial costs, further negative impacts of sexual harassment in organisations include:

- **Increased levels of stress and stress-related illness** – poor morale and negative work environments can result in stress-related illness, with considerable cost to both the employee/s and the organisation.
- **Poor morale** – as well as the negative impact on the morale of those targeted, wider teams of staff and students can become divided and in conflict, or disillusioned with the institution or academia more widely.
- **A threat to organisational reputation** – public coverage of incidents raises reputational risk that is multi-faceted, from crisis management to the impact on donors and partners.

---

<sup>2</sup> Deloitte (2020). The economic cost of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Available at :

<https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/perspectives/economic-costs-sexual-harassment-workplace.html>

Accessed 4 March 2024

<sup>3</sup> *Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse*, p.8, referenced in Khan, R. (2021) *Domestic Abuse Policy Guidance for UK Universities*. Honour Abuse Research Network, University of Central Lancashire.

Found at

<https://clouk.uclan.ac.uk/37526/1/Domestic%20Abuse%20Policy%20Guidance%20for%20UK%20Universities%202021.pdf>

- **Funder requirements** – funders such as UKRI and the Wellcome Trust require HEIs to disclose upheld findings of harassment including sexual misconduct against any person working on a project they are funding. Failure to do so may put the HEI’s access to funds from these organisations at risk.
- **Negative effect on productivity** – Evidence shows that productivity is negatively affected for those targeted, as well as for the wider team where individual colleagues are supporting either party, or where the reported behaviour is well known by the wider team but seemingly unaddressed.
- **Negative impact on student and/or staff retention** – this has a financial cost, and may also create reputational issues.
- **Lack of faith in senior leadership** – where sexual harassment is not effectively prevented or addressed by those with power, confidence in and loyalty towards leadership at all levels is likely to be compromised.
- **Negative effect on recruitment** - it may be harder to recruit both staff and students if the HEI has a reputation for responding poorly to, or trivialising the impact of, sexual harassment. One study, based on a survey over 2700 respondents, found that potential employees would reject an organisation that fails to address sexual harassment and take a lower paid job to avoid such an organisation.<sup>4</sup>

The sessions for staff, as well as the sessions for postgraduate researchers, have both received positive feedback from participants (see below as well as the full [report](#)). We are currently carrying out a formal evaluation of the sessions to evidence the sustained change in awareness and attitudes that occurs as a result of the training.

To discuss your institutional or departmental needs further, please email [contact@1752group.com](mailto:contact@1752group.com).

## Feedback from participants

- **“I definitely felt more empowered after the session** and also felt more empowered to help others who may in a position where they have experienced or are experiencing forms of sexual harassment or a breach of boundaries.” [sic] (PGR)
- “I found this session really valuable. The structured discussion worked really well to amplify the message, and the balance of content volume and pace was perfect. **The coordinators set a really positive tone that made this**

---

<sup>4</sup> Rosenbluth, F., Folke, O., Rickne, J. and Tanaka, S. (2020) *The business case for dealing assertively with sexual harassment: A survey of Students and Alumni of the Business Schools in the Global Network for Advanced Management*. Available at [https://globalnetwork.io/sites/default/files/2020-03/YALE\\_GN-SURVEY2020\\_05.pdf](https://globalnetwork.io/sites/default/files/2020-03/YALE_GN-SURVEY2020_05.pdf)

**difficult topic seem approachable.** Thank you again for this workshop - I'll certainly recommend it to colleagues in future." (PGR)

- **"I think I really benefited from the session.** I also really appreciated that training like this is occurring and that people cared enough to show up, it was particularly reassuring to see many male PhD students attending." [sic] (PGR)
- **"Very helpful session and very well run.** I would make it compulsory for staff to attend." (Academic staff member)
- "To departments: **these conversations should be central (and mandated)** to all members of staff."(Academic staff member)

For more examples of feedback, see the [full report](#) on delivering these sessions at one UK HEI in 2023.

See [our website](#) for our full training and consultancy offer.