UUK taskforce on violence against women, harassment and hate crime
Summary note of first meeting

The taskforce met for the first time on Tuesday 17 November 2015. The taskforce, led by Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of Universities UK (UUK), has been established to explore what more can be done to support the higher education sector to prevent and respond to incidents of violence and sexual harassment against women, hate crimes and other forms of harassment. It brings together experts from across the sector with both student and university representatives. A full list of taskforce members can be accessed via the UUK press release following the first meeting.

In attending the meeting, Jo Johnson MP, Minister for Universities and Science, highlighted the importance government attaches to eradicating violence and harassment against women across all parts of society. The need to develop practical recommendations that encourage and allow for action to be taken was of key importance to the minister, and the group is committed to this objective.

The taskforce agreed to the terms of reference and acknowledged that the membership was appropriate, with the right mix of expertise and perspectives. It also agreed that wider stakeholder engagement would be crucial to fulfilling the objectives of the taskforce.

A substantive part of the first meeting was dedicated to considering the current evidence on the nature and scale of the problem. The discussion highlighted the complexity and sensitivity of the issues in hand and the importance of institutions providing effective support. Taskforce members suggested areas for further focus including:

- Evidence gathering on international approaches and interventions
- Exploring the issue of ‘backlash’ to various interventions
- Further evidence on the problem of underreporting and what drives this
- Reviewing the legislation due to changes in the law
- Looking at communities in which students live and draw on their experiences given incidents of harassment were not confined to the campus
- Exploring activities to support cultural and behavioural change such as the Bystander Initiative, developed by Dr Helen Mott, member of the taskforce, with Dr Rachel Fenton, Senior Lecturer at the University of West of England, Bristol

The taskforce considered the key themes and challenges highlighted by UUK member input, which also made evident the great deal of work already underway. From the evidence gathered so far a number of key themes have begun to emerge, including:

- Promoting a culture of inclusivity and zero tolerance
Having clear reporting and referral mechanisms in place
Information on the support available from trained staff
Having policies and processes in place to challenge harassment, bullying and hate incidents/crimes and for responding to student concerns
Ensuring a high level oversight of procedures
Developing appropriate external links with the wider community, for example with the police and Rape Crisis centres

Next steps are set out below.

**Phase 2**
- Further development of the evidence base via engagement with UUK members and wider stakeholders consisting of organisations with specialist understanding of the experiences of those who have been victims of violence, harassment or hate crime on the basis of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act.
- An updated evidence paper will be prepared for the second meeting of the taskforce early in 2016, along with initial recommendations based on this evidence.

**Phase 3**
- Development and finalisation of the generic framework required for effective institutional responses, informed by evidence gathered.
- The taskforce will explore how this might be adapted specifically for incidents related to violence and harassment against women, as well as harassment or hate crime on the basis of other protected characteristics.

**Phase 4**
- Awareness raising and the sharing of good practice across the sector to provide support for the implementation of the taskforce’s recommendations.
- The final meeting of the taskforce will approve the final report and recommendations.

The taskforce will maintain a focus on developing practical recommendations that universities and students’ unions can adapt and implement to suit their own context.

Seeking further input from universities, students and key interest and specialist groups will form a crucial part of the work for the taskforce over the coming months. To support this process please forward examples of resources and initiatives which have been successful, case studies or any other information you think would be helpful to harassmenttaskforce@universitiesuk.ac.uk.

Response to the work of the taskforce so far has been extremely positive. We hope that universities and students’ unions across the UK will make the most of this opportunity to proactively tackle this type of behaviour, which has no place either in student life or any other part of society.

The second meeting of the taskforce will take place in mid-March 2016.