

# CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION:

Responding to domestic violence  
and technology mediated abuse  
in higher education communities  
during the Covid-19 pandemic



Universities UK

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## INTRODUCTION

This is Universities UK's second briefing on responding to domestic violence and technology mediated abuse in the higher education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. This briefing has been written at a time when the scale of restrictions varies geographically across the UK and the fast pace of change should be taken into consideration when reading. It makes reference to:

1. key messages from Universities UK's (UUK) webinars on [domestic abuse](#) and [tech-mediated abuse](#)
2. case studies to illustrate the range of responses, strategies and approaches adopted by universities to respond to the increased risk of domestic violence and tech-mediated abuse during the pandemic
3. signposting to further helplines and information, including a suite of resources highlighting support helplines which institutions can use in their awareness raising activities

### **Message from Nicole Jacobs, Designate Commissioner for Domestic Abuse**

I really welcome this briefing from Universities UK, which brings together important information and resources. We all have a role to play in responding to domestic abuse, and I welcome the commitment from Universities UK to doing its part.

Universities UK has shown how important it is to reach out to students, staff, and their local communities to raise awareness of domestic abuse and identify and support victims and survivors. Its focus on domestic abuse during this particularly difficult and dangerous time is particularly needed, and I look forward to continuing to work with Universities UK on this agenda.

## Definition of domestic abuse and tech-mediated abuse

Domestic violence and abuse includes physical and sexual violence, verbal abuse, coercion and threats, emotional abuse, stalking and financial control, between intimate partners and family members, including adolescent to parent abuse.

When carried out through social media, email, text or phone messages it is known as technology-mediated violence and abuse. This can occur during or after a relationship has ended. It is now well documented that these behaviours might escalate in times of lockdown, constant physical proximity and emotional intensity.<sup>1</sup>

How domestic abuse manifests for an individual will vary significantly, this may include one or more type of abuse, and will be influenced by gender inequality and other factors such as racism, homophobia and health fears. For those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination including Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women, disabled people and LGBT+ victims/survivors, the barriers to safety are multiplied.

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For legal definitions of domestic abuse:  
[England and Wales](#)  
[Scottish universities](#)  
[Northern Ireland](#)

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Universities should already have, or be in the process of developing, policies and practices to support their staff and students experiencing domestic and technology-mediated abuse. However, Covid-19 has resulted in significant changes to higher education which have impacted the way universities can support those who have experienced domestic abuse. Changes to student living arrangements have also occurred with some students returning to their parental home and others such as international students, care leavers or estranged students remaining in, or moving into university accommodation. Alongside these developments, we have seen significant increases in the levels of domestic and technology-mediated abuse in society.

Responding to these developments, UUK published a [briefing note](#) (April 2020) to explore how universities could support students and staff that may be at greater risk as a result of the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> [Policy Brief No 17 UN Women. Covid-19 and Violence Against Women and Girls: addressing the shadow pandemic](#)

## UUK webinars on tackling domestic abuse

UUK held two webinars in June, the first on tackling domestic violence and the second on technology-mediated abuse.

The purpose of the webinars was to:

- share information on developments in wider society
- hear directly from professional services staff in universities on the impact of the pandemic on students experiencing domestic violence and technology-mediated abuse
- understand the issues involved in delivering an effective response in a university context
- share ideas and responses and signpost to further information

**WATCH: DOMESTIC ABUSE WEBINAR (10 JUNE)**

**WATCH: TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED ABUSE (22 JUNE)**

## SETTING THE CONTEXT: NATURE AND SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The scale of the problem during Covid-19

A global surge in domestic abuse has been reported during the coronavirus pandemic as those living with domestic violence have faced greater risks at home during lockdowns and support services have been harder to reach.

The UK has followed the global pattern with an increase in the reporting of domestic abuse during the crisis: as it has continued, calls and contacts to helplines have increased with incidents becoming more complex and serious, and higher levels of physical violence and coercive control, including multiple homicides.<sup>2</sup>

The Counting Dead Women project [estimates](#) that 26 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner during

<sup>2</sup> [Home Affairs Committee's Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home](#)

the seven-week lockdown period. This equates to nearly double the national average of two women a week.

According to [Safe Lives](#), the majority of high-risk victims are in their 20s or 30s, with those under 25 most likely to suffer interpersonal violence. Women are also much more likely than men to be the victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse: 95% of those going to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)<sup>3</sup> or accessing an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA)<sup>4</sup> service are women.

### How has Covid-19 changed the nature of domestic violence and tech-mediated abuse?

The nature of domestic abuse and online harms in wider society has changed due to the pandemic:

- Specialist women's organisations report that perpetrators have been using Covid-19 as a tool of abuse and manipulation, often using Covid-19 to induce fear.
- Women have experienced escalating violence and abuse.<sup>5</sup>
- Women from BAME communities face additional vulnerabilities and barriers.<sup>6</sup>
- A complex picture is emerging of [economic abuse](#) which can limit an individual's choices and ability to access safety.
- The [Revenge Porn Helpline](#) has reported a doubling in cases of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, known as 'revenge porn' and the use of threats to share intimate images as a tool of coercive control.<sup>7</sup>
- Close family proximity has seen an increase in adolescent to parent violence.

<sup>3</sup> A MARAC meeting brings together representatives from a number of agencies in the local area to discuss the safety, health and wellbeing of people experiencing domestic abuse (and their children).

<sup>4</sup> IDVA address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members to secure their safety and the safety of their children.

<sup>5</sup> [Briefing on the easing of Coronavirus restrictions](#), End Violence Against Women

<sup>6</sup> [Increasing safety for those experiencing family and intimate relationship harm within black and minority ethnic communities by responding to those who harm](#), University of Suffolk

<sup>7</sup> Email from Sophie Mortimer, Helpline Manager, Revenge Porn Helpline dated 19 August 2020

### Useful Resources

- [Report: Domestic Abuse in a time of quarantine](#)
- [Report: Economic abuse and the Coronavirus outbreak](#)
- Natwest and SafeLives: [Signs of financial abuse to recognise during Covid-19 lockdown](#)

Although capacity to support survivors had been impacted by Covid-19 there is evidence that local and national organisations worked well together to provide support for victims/survivors.<sup>8</sup>

### The higher education context

Data on domestic and technology abuse experienced by staff and students in higher education during the pandemic is not available. However, the Office of National Statistics indicates that young adults aged 18 to 24 tend to be at higher risk of domestic abuse.<sup>9</sup>

Domestic abuse in the university context can sometimes look different to that found in wider society. Within student populations, concerns about domestic abuse and harassment have been increasing for some time. Although cases can occur in domestic settings, eg flatmates living in halls of residence or private accommodation, they can also involve control and coercive relationships between students living physically apart.

Coercion mediated through technology is also prominent, such as exclusion from group chats, malicious gossip, slut-shaming and threats of harassment and/or violence.<sup>10</sup> Online harassment linked to coercion-control can also occur in legitimised spaces such as online teaching. Media coverage during the pandemic indicates an increase in incidents of online lectures being interrupted with distressing comments, videos, or abusive, indecent images.

University staff may experience domestic abuse in their personal lives and domestic settings. As staff go back to offices and workspaces this may provide a safe space, however, prior to the pandemic, 75% of people experiencing domestic abuse were still targeted by their abuser while in the workplace.<sup>11</sup> Abuse could also occur

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Young adults aged

**18 to 24**

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**75%** of people experiencing domestic abuse were still targeted by their abuser while in the workplace.

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<sup>8</sup> [The impact of Covid-19 on domestic abuse support services: findings from an initial Women's Aid survey](#), Woman's Aid

<sup>9</sup> [Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), Office for National Statistics

<sup>10</sup> For information on the criminal offence of coercive control see '[An introduction to coercive control](#)' by SafeLives

<sup>11</sup> [Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. A Guide for employers](#), EHRC, CIPD (2013)

in the workplace due to those in more powerful positions using their power to abuse, coerce or threaten those with less power.

The most dangerous time for survivors and children is when they leave the home.<sup>12</sup> Universities may experience an increase in demand for support when local lockdown restrictions are eased, although the messaging around 'stay at home' does not apply to victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Furthermore, during lockdown perpetrators are likely to have experienced an increased sense of control, however, as lockdown restrictions are eased this feeling could be threatened which could lead to perpetrators intensifying coercive control or engaging in new more harmful behaviour to re-exert control.

### Government response

Responding to the increase in domestic violence, the government launched a public awareness campaign in April 2020, [#YouAreNotAlone](#). The campaign highlights sources of support and the message that anyone at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse is still able to leave home and seek refuge. This was followed by a summit on Hidden Harms in May, hosted by the prime minister to develop an action plan to tackle domestic abuse and deliver a more co-ordinated approach across government departments. This coincided with the launch of a [codeword scheme](#) where victims can signal they need immediate support in participating outlets such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

In May the government also announced £28 million to help survivors of domestic abuse and their children which included a £10 million Covid-19 Emergency Support Fund for charities providing refuge. This included support for services that help particular groups such as BAME, LGBT and disabled people.

<sup>12</sup> [Why do victims stay](#), The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence,

### Useful resources

- [Signs to look out for in adult survivors and perpetrators](#) from the Home Office.
- [Online questionnaire](#) to help recognise domestic abuse by Women's aid



[#YOUARENOTALONE](#)

FIND SUPPORT AT: [GOV.UK/DOMESTIC-ABUSE](https://www.gov.uk/domestic-abuse)

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

## Response by Designate Commissioner for Domestic Abuse

Speaking at UUK's webinar, Nicole Jacobs, [Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#) for England and Wales, reported that tackling domestic abuse remains a government priority. The government created the post of Domestic Abuse Commissioner within the [Domestic Abuse Bill](#) to drive action forward in this area, although the position remains firmly independent of government.

If passed, the bill will provide: the first statutory definition of domestic abuse which highlights that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic; a statutory duty for local councils to provide refuge space; and gives the commissioner powers to request information to deliver change.

Ms Jacobs reported that national police forces had recorded an increase in domestic abuse incidents compared to an equivalent time last year. This included an increase in issues relating to people of university age such as LGBT+ students moving home and experiencing multiple forms of abuse. Police were also using proactive and innovative tactics to tackle domestic abuse in local areas including South Yorkshire, Cumbria, Oxford, South Wales and Sussex, which included campaigns, dedicated web portals for reporting, and methods for better identifying those posing the highest risks of offending.

## KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE UUK WEBINARS

### 1. The primary focus should continue to be on prevention

While lockdown was being eased nationally, the possibility of restrictions being imposed now, or in the future at a local level, remain. Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of the Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, encouraged universities to be part of the solution for radical change in addressing domestic abuse and online harms.

The primary focus should be on prevention; this could be supported by:

- having policies in place to respond to domestic abuse
- reviewing these policies in light of social distancing and the possibility of a return to a full lockdown, which could include reviewing where students and staff are based, eg at home, abroad, or on placement
- having champions within senior management teams
- engaging men to be part of the solution

With the increasing use of technology to deliver lectures, seminars and tutorials, attention was also drawn to the need to support students and staff to engage with technology safely and to raise awareness of the potential harms from online harassment.

## 2. Promote support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and gender-based-violence

**Universities can be a lifeline for survivors by signposting support** to those who need to access help, including internal counselling and student services and external specialist and community-based services. During the pandemic, several institutions such as Cardiff University have enhanced their intranet support pages, covering a range of topics such as:

- getting help within the university
- community support
- online and personal safety
- recognising signs of violence and abuse
- helping someone else if you are worried about them
- urgent advice
- links to training

**The type of services that are appropriate will vary among victims and survivors.** Hosting guidance by other organisations may be useful. Resources that are particularly relevant for students are online chat services such as [Chayn](#) (multi-lingual), [Women's Aid](#) chat services, the [Revenge Porn Helpline](#) or Respect's perpetrator web service. SafeLives has a [comprehensive list](#).

**Consider having a domestic abuse policy within supporting guidance/webpages, which asks the user to consider whether their partner/family member makes them feel scared.** Advice from those working with survivors suggests this may be more effective than using phrasing around domestic abuse or gender-based violence.

**Being agile and identifying innovative ways to offer support is critical.** For example, a student moving out of home to escape violence may find it difficult to secure rented accommodation if lockdown restrictions are in place; or a student experiencing violence/abuse from parents/carers in the home may not be eligible for normal safeguarding as a child via social services, but

### Useful resources

Many universities, such as Middlesex University, have used third party online support resources such as the [Togetherall](#) (previously Big White Wall) to offer an additional resource for staff and students.

may still require support. For supporting staff, the [Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#) provides practical examples of how employers can help, such as giving a survivor a reason to leave home.

**Encourage students to have a safety plan or revisit an existing one as situations change and lockdown eases.** SafeLives has developed a [series of questions](#) for safety planning. Advice is also available from the [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) and apps such as [Hollie Guard](#).

**Advice to self-isolate due to coronavirus does not apply if you need to escape from domestic abuse.** Ensure your messaging to students is clear that if lockdown restrictions have been imposed, it is still possible to leave the home to escape domestic violence, or to seek medical attention from health services and hospitals. Free travel remains in place via [Rail to Refuge](#) for anyone travelling to refuge accommodation. Tickets are accessed through [Women's Aid Federation of England](#) and [Imkaan](#) which addresses violence against Black and Minoritised women and girls, and can be obtained from a local domestic violence service.

**Messaging about support available needs to be straightforward and in clear language.** This is particularly important as students and staff may not identify their experience as domestic abuse. Using a wide range of communication channels to facilitate learning about domestic abuse will also support this. For example, film and media students at Middlesex University developed a [film](#) to raise awareness of domestic abuse.

**Being proactive by providing clear messaging to students and staff on a zero-tolerance approach** to domestic abuse and harassment and abuse in online spaces, along with examples of such abuse will help raise awareness. This could include examples of [bi-directional harm](#), where both parties use violence and/or abusive behaviours to one another.

### 3. Create specific campaigns in response to Covid-19 to raise awareness

The following are some examples of how campaigns could address the domestic violence and abuse during Covid-19:

- Use targeted messaging to address aspects of gender-based violence exacerbated by Covid-19 and lockdown including domestic abuse, online harassment and child sexual abuse and exploitation (see [Glasgow Caledonian case study](#)).
- In terms of the student context, universities may find it helpful to think about how domestic violence situations between students can impact the whole household, and to educate students who witness these situations in how to respond, eg informing the university rather than trying to step in.
- Work in partnership with specialist organisations on messaging for students.
- Encourage students and staff to show solidarity and support for those who may be experiencing domestic violence or any form of abuse eg [#YouAreNot Alone](#), [#UKSaysNoMore](#).
- Link institutional campaigns to national awareness campaigns, eg [White Ribbon Campaign](#), [#AskAngela campaign](#), as well as mechanisms for reporting abuse and harassment.

**Make Yourself Heard**

**In danger, need the police, but can't speak?**

- 1 Dial **999**
- 2 Listen to the questions from the 999 operator
- 3 Respond by coughing or tapping the handset if you can
- 4 If prompted, press **55**. This lets the 999 call operator know it's a genuine emergency and you'll be put through to the police.

**OPC** Independent Office for Police Conduct **#YouAreNotAlone** Supported by **women's aid** until women & children are safe **NPCC** National Police Chief's Council

**DOWNLOAD THE GRAPHICS**

#### Useful resources

The Independent Council for Police Conduct have revised their [#MakeYourselfHeard](#) campaign to raise awareness of the Silent Solution system that helps people alert the police when they are in danger and unable to speak.

## Useful Resources

### Campaign resources to raise institutional awareness

With funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland and Advance HE have developed a suite of resources for universities to use to help raise awareness of support and helplines for students and staff experiencing domestic abuse. These are now available for institutions in the rest of the UK.

- The resources were developed to support institutions alongside any existing initiatives already in place which are specific to the institution.
- The majority of the assets are aimed at victim/survivors of gender-based violence and domestic abuse but there is an additional set which is aimed at those perpetrating abuse.
- Some of the assets combine messages and specialist support services relating to gender-based violence and mental health as we recognise that institutions are likely to have already increased their communications to students as a result of the pandemic and we did not want these important issues to 'compete' with each other for space or priority.
- The resources can be used in a variety of ways such as posters, email signatures and social media

**DOWNLOAD  
RESOURCES**

## 4. Use disclosure response teams

Disclosure Response Teams have been established by some universities to support students who are experiencing any form of violence or abuse. Although these teams have had to adapt to the pandemic by working remotely, in many cases, services are still available such as video, telephone and email support.

The role of disclosure support teams involves:

- supporting students on managing their safety; disclosure responses should be survivor-led as survivors understand their own situation the best.
- providing practical guidance, support and options for reporting (such as reporting via online disclosure and reporting tools, including an anonymous disclosure option) navigating university complaints procedures; signposting to specialist services and support for navigating reporting to the police.

- providing practical support with housing, financial and academic needs including information on what to do if you live or study with someone who has been violent or abusive.
- monitor reports and evaluate effectiveness of raising awareness campaigns; reporting mechanisms and interventions.

## 5. Work with multi-agency partners including local statutory services, local domestic violence support services, charities, NHS and police

**Partnering with local domestic abuse charities or domestic abuse services** can provide additional specialist training to professionals and support the development of trauma informed policies and procedures. This can be particularly vital for vulnerable students and staff where their trauma may be compounded by other factors such as being isolated in a rural community, being BAME, LGBT+, disabled, or a combination of these.

**Engaging with external agencies** can also be helpful in ensuring the appropriate referral of students to specialist services, and in accordance with contingency arrangements that these services may have put in place due to the pandemic and measures of self-isolation and social distancing.

**Engaging in an integrated way of working** can support external agencies to have an understanding of students' needs and the support an institution can provide, such as funded emergency housing and financial awards, resulting in better outcomes for students.

**A multi-agency approach** can also facilitate the sharing of effective practice across community groups/partners, and support practitioners to stay aware of local developments and policies that may impact the sector.

**Regular engagement with local police** can be helpful in ensuring pathways are open to provide information on high risk cases; support joint assessment of risk; facilitate the sharing of effective practice and enhance the local police's understanding of the higher education context and student and staff populations.

## 6. Risk assessment and care pathways

Once a victim/survivor has made a disclosure of domestic violence or abuse and this has been acknowledged, an assessment of the danger the person is in may be required alongside information on the support available. Where this is the case, universities are advised to signpost a victim/survivor to a statutory and specialist service who can complete a Risk Identification Checklist (RIC).

There may, however, be occasions when a student may not wish to engage with these services which means the university will hold the risk. Where this is the case, universities can complete a standardised risk assessment in-house. Some universities have trained key staff to use the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment Risk Identification Checklist ([DASH-RIC](#)) developed by [SafeLives](#). This enables the university to make referrals and share relevant risk information appropriately and to review where the responsibility for this would sit.

An RIC not only identifies those who are at high risk of harm, but also provides information on the support that might be needed, which could include referral to a MARAC meeting. This is a domestic abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference ([MARAC](#)) meeting that brings together representatives from a number of agencies in the local area to discuss the safety, health and wellbeing of people experiencing domestic abuse (and their children). Often the local police/MARAC coordinator will have specific paperwork that requires completion before a person can be referred (or, if someone is referred to a specialist service, they can do the paperwork).

Finding a route into a MARAC may not always be easy, given there is no established route to enable universities to support students to participate. A number of universities have developed flow diagrams to map out the different referral routes once a disclosure of domestic violence abuse has been made.

### Useful resources

- Example [MARAC](#) form used by Cardiff University
- [Flow diagrams](#) of referral routes used by the University of Sussex

## 7. Domestic abuse and raising child protection concerns

Universities can face challenges when raising child protection concerns. Having a clear, robust policy and procedure for safeguarding children is essential – this should include reference to an internal route for raising child safeguarding concerns, where to get advice and the name of the institutional safeguarding lead.

When considering a case, a university will need to determine whether or not children may be at risk. If there is someone at risk who is under 18, then there is a statutory duty to disclose; this could be a sibling of a student or their own child. This requires asking the right questions, ensuring links are in place with appropriate external agencies/local safeguarding hub, such as the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) and having the confidence to seek advice and refer. At Middlesex University, Barnet's LADO sits on the university's Safeguarding Board and provides input on cases and on the university policies and procedures. For some universities this may mean engaging with LADOs across more than one local authority. At Middlesex they have also used contacts in the Metropolitan police to bridge the gap across local authorities.

### Useful resources

- [Operation Encompass](#) is a police and education early information sharing partnership enabling schools to offer immediate support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. The organisation has also developed guidelines on domestic abuse.

## 8. Planning for the return of students

Given the difficulty some survivors may have faced in accessing support during lockdown, the return to university may be the first opportunity or safe space to seek help. Universities should therefore be prepared for a spike in students seeking help on their return. Ensuring communication and access to services will be essential. Survivors that may have been in an abusive relationship in university (and maybe sought help in lockdown) may need different support as the return to university presents an increase risk through proximity, especially if the relationship has ended. Safety planning and the use of DASH assessments may be required in these cases.

**Planning to ensure (where possible) counselling and student support services have capacity** to respond is important. This might also include engaging with local specialist services to ensure counselling and support services are available. Ensure that students are aware that support may continue to be mixed, with more support provided via the phone and online than existed pre-Covid.

**Institutions should also be aware of the potential for an increase in incidences of domestic abuse** arising from students having to spend more time in their accommodation than would normally be the case due to socially distanced campuses and limited social spaces. Consideration should be given to having policies and procedures for moving students to different accommodation including how to do this in a safe way, especially if there is another lockdown and if the accommodation is also a bubble.

**If putting on, wearing, or removing a face covering will cause a person severe distress, victims/survivors of violence and abuse can be exempt from wearing face coverings.** Universities should consider how to inform others sensitively and subtly that some people will not wear a covering and to be respectful of this. They could also share useful resources with victims /survivors, such as those developed by [Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre](#).

**References to national services may also be helpful for any students and staff not returning to campus or living locally.** Although universities may have a disclosure response team available for all students wherever they are located, an institution may be more limited in terms of the support that can be provided if a student is currently living overseas etc. Where this is the case, universities can encourage students to refer to international directories of specialist support services such as [Chayn](#).

**The increased amount of time spent online** and the use of formal learning platforms and informal social media channels means it is essential that universities have IT usage policies and clear information on expected behaviours in the online sphere and these are communicated to students.

## Coventry University: Protecting staff and students from domestic abuse

### Connections Matter

Coventry University has developed a holistic programme for staff and student health and wellbeing which includes responding to domestic abuse.

When the university closed, the institution established ‘Connections Matter’. Through this initiative, to date the institution has sent over 250 health and wellbeing resources via a weekly email to staff and students, including information about how to access support for domestic abuse. The university also set up a working group to explore how to support staff and students on their return to campus.

### Reporting and responding processes

Currently, official reports of domestic abuse can be made in various ways such as to HR for staff, and student services/the students’ union advice centre for students. Unofficially, staff and students can make an online report (which includes an anonymous option) and request a face-to-face meeting with a case manager. The case manager offers signposting and discussion of internal and external options – this is important given not all wish to make a report.

The biggest barrier to staff and students not reporting domestic abuse is not recognising that this is what they are experiencing or understanding the many forms domestic abuse can take. Shame and the fear of blame are also factors.

In responding to domestic abuse the university has found the following works well:

- Utilising counselling response skills to create an environment of acceptance and belief can be helpful in supporting a person and validating their experience.
- Ensuring staff and students understand the support available to them, including linking into specialist services. This is facilitated by the university having a good relationships with local specialist services and other specialists and researchers in the field.
- Having an awareness of domestic abuse and stalking issues, the impacts and specific difficulties/barriers related to different protected characteristics.
- Finding colleagues, including senior managers who are willing to engage with issues that are complex and difficult to manage can be vital for the success of initiatives.

Free resources are available, including an online bystander module from Dr Jane Osmond, [arx162@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:arx162@coventry.ac.uk)

### University of Brighton: New self-help guides on domestic abuse

The University of Brighton has developed four new Covid-19 themed self-help guides for students and staff. This includes a guide aimed at students/staff who are experiencing or may be at risk of [domestic violence](#) and a guide aimed at students/staff who are experiencing [online harassment](#).

Both guides outline support at the university and specialist agencies, as well as options for reporting to the police, university authorities, or other relevant organisations (for example, social media platforms in the case of online harassment). The resources also include guidance on how to stay safe during this time, for example the domestic violence guide provides information on a victim's options if they would like to leave the abuser, the legal protection they are entitled to and tips for self-care and wellbeing. Each guide was adapted from resources and guides originally developed by Universities UK, Get Safe Online, Women's Aid and Safe Lives.

### Middlesex University, London

#### Working with students as agents of change

Prior to the pandemic, alongside having policies in place to support students who have experienced domestic abuse, the university has worked with film and media students to explore ways to raise awareness of these issues, particularly in engaging with students and using students' work. In 2019 students developed a [film](#) on domestic abuse. In 2020 the university repurposed this as a way to provide information on support and ways to report abuse during lockdown.

#### Engaging with the local community

During the pandemic, the university has worked collaboratively with external agencies. This included offering university halls as safe spaces to the local authority. Although, it was noted that university halls may not be the solution if children are also involved and it's important that survivors have an exit strategy from hall.

### University of Derby: Social media campaign

The university has developed a social media campaign about domestic abuse targeted at students and staff, wrapped around the government campaign. The campaign includes information on university, local and national support. Students and staff can also report and access support via the Report and Support service.

Practical support to students includes:

- access to the Health and Wellbeing Team through appointments by phone, video call and email
- therapy via phone and video call – for students where voice calls may not be safe and/or private, they are using asynchronous and synchronous therapy
- financial support through the Discretionary Support Fund for students experiencing domestic abuse
- enabling students to move to a place of safety, including emergency accommodation
- conducting risk assessments and working with students to create their own safety plan
- having a clear safeguarding protocol and working with local services and the Adult and Children’s Safeguarding teams

### The University of Brighton: UoB Together Apart

The University of Brighton created a new Facebook group ‘UoB Together Apart’ for sharing tips on managing self-isolation and what to do if a student was worried about another student. The group has now closed and users have been linked to appropriate long-standing channels of support. On Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, the university hosted weekly themed Q&A sessions where members of staff in the Student Wellbeing Team answered students’ questions in short videos.

### University of Suffolk: Initiatives to help students stay connected

The University of Suffolk undertook a similar approach to supporting students with weekly videos from the vice chancellor, #wearetogether online chats and virtual coffee mornings, supporting wellbeing advice and guidance and a comprehensive guide on how to report concerns including online abuse and harassment.

## Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU): #erasethegrey campaign

GCU's campaign, originally launched in 2017, is targeted at exposing the myths of gender-based violence (GBV) while revealing the truth; the former is demonstrated in grey text and the latter 'take home message' in white text. The original campaign used a number of assets including posters, pole banners, and motion graphics for social media and digital screens. Initially the campaign consisted of 14 messages addressing the wide spectrum of GBV.

In response to Covid-19, GCU has worked with specialist organisations including the [Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership](#), The [#EmilyTest](#) and [Police Scotland](#) to develop nine further messages to address aspects of GBV exacerbated by lockdown and isolation such as domestic abuse, online harassment, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. The campaign will be relaunched to students and staff as a social media campaign in October 2020.

The campaign is available free of charge under licence to universities.

FIND OUT MORE



Image from Glasgow Caledonian University : [www.gcu.ac.uk/theuniversity/commongood/erasethegrey/](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/theuniversity/commongood/erasethegrey/)

## University of Liverpool: Tackling online harassment through research informed interventions

The University of Liverpool ran the project #Speakout from December 2017 – April 2019. The project developed and implemented research-informed interventions to tackle and prevent online harassment between students on the university campus, including incidents that can occur in domestic contexts, such as shared accommodation. Four interventions emerged from this project:

### A centralised information hub

A new centralised information hub on the university website provides information about online harassment and publicises relevant institutional policies, disciplinary and reporting procedures in ways that aim to improve their visibility and accessibility within the university community.

### #Call it out campaign – fostering a respectful online culture

A campus-wide campaign titled ‘#Call it out’ on the university campus advocated an active bystander approach by encouraging everyone within the university community to ‘call out’ online harassment if observed within their peer groups in ways that aimed to mitigate these practices and foster a respectful online culture.

### Encouraging active bystander intervention

Training resources for an established Active Bystander Intervention Programme on the university campus aims to equip students with the skills required to identify specific forms of online harassment, including those that are identity-based, and to safely intervene if they observe these practices in their peer groups.

### Online module - Developing a positive online presence

A new training module, ‘Developing a positive online presence’ aims to improve understanding about digital citizenship and equip students with the skills required to guide their own ethical and moral judgements about how to behave online in ways that will enable them to develop a positive digital footprint. The project took an institution-wide approach and had multiple stakeholders on the university campus, including the Safe and Welcoming Campus Board, Student Support Services, the Liverpool Guild of Students and Sport Liverpool.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

### London South Bank University (LSBU): Domestic Abuse Working Group

London South Bank University formed a Working Group on domestic abuse in direct response to concerns about the Covid-19 lockdown and the impact on the lives of women and children experiencing, or at risk from, domestic abuse. At the heart of the group sits a clear and strong commitment to supporting students and staff living with domestic abuse.

Initially the group comprised of only four academics. It now has representation from across the university, including the students' union, the Head of Student Wellbeing, Staff Wellbeing Advisor, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion representative. among others. The group has full endorsement from the executive team at LSBU.

Some examples of the actions the group has implemented since inception, include:

- Proactive and timely messaging: the vice-chancellor sent a message to all students across the university early into lockdown reminding that support was still available for those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Signposting to internal and external support services: the message to students included links to domestic abuse organisations, particularly those with online support facilities, such as chat rooms. This recognised that those living with abuse under lockdown may find their usual means of reaching out for support closed to them. Students were also signposted to internal university support systems.
- Using campaigns: staff across the university received communications reminding them help was still available to anyone at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse. Messaging reflected the government public awareness campaign (#YouAreNotAlone).
- A new webpage was added to the staff intranet that focussed specifically on domestic abuse. It hosted information about domestic abuse including signposting to organisations that could offer support.
- Raising awareness on a national level: The Working Group published an [article in WonkHE](#) to highlight the consequences for students of Covid-19 lockdown and potential exposure to increased risk of domestic abuse.

The Working Group is currently working closely with colleagues in Student Mental Health and Wellbeing on various new initiatives, including staff training on domestic violence awareness, and an updated focus on domestic abuse on a student-facing website, and a Student Wellbeing link embedded on the LSBU's Virtual Learning Environment.

## RESOURCES

### Government and NHS guidance

Relevant government and NHS guidance includes:

- [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): support for victims of domestic abuse](#) – this briefing has a comprehensive list of resources across the UK
- [The Home Office Brandworkz portal](#) – the Home Office, in collaboration with a number of other government departments, has produced information and guidance for those who are still operating in communities and may not be trained to recognise the signs of abuse or neglect. The guidance covers signs to spot and what to do if there is a concern and can be repurposed and adapted.
- [Draft Statutory Guidance Framework for Domestic Abuse Bill](#) (published July 2020). The information within this guidance is relevant to universities in England and Wales. Universities in Wales should refer to the relevant Welsh legislation, such as the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 and associated guidance, which is referenced throughout this document.
- [NHS guidance](#) – this provides information on where to get help and support for domestic abuse.

### Economic abuse

Surviving Economic Abuse provide resources including guidance on [Spotting the signs of economic abuse during COVID-19 outbreak](#).

They also provide information and [resources for women](#), and resources to support [professionals working with victim-survivors](#) of economic abuse

## Stalking

Suzi Lamplugh Trust runs the [National Stalking Helpline](#) and has also produced:

- an [animation](#) that explains animation stalking
- an [online assessment tool](#) that students or a university team could use with a student if they were uncertain as to whether they should call the national stalking helpline or police.

[The Cyber Helpline](#) has a [Cyber Stalking Action Plan](#)

## Technology mediated abuse

Some useful resources to support staff or students who are experiencing tech mediated abuse include:

- [Shattering lives and myths](#) – a report on image based sexual abuse by Professor Clare McGlynn, professor Erika Rackley and Assistant Professor Kelly Johnson
- [Higher education online safeguarding review toolkit](#) by the University of Suffolk (2019)
- [resources](#) by Refuge on tech abuse and tech safety
- [resource pack](#) by AVA on digital safeguarding
- [online welfare advice pack](#) for students and staff created by the Revenge Porn Helpline, Report Harmful Content, the Professionals Online Safety Helpline, the National Stalking Helpline and the National Crime Agency
- a [Safer Online Parties Guide](#) by Good Night Out Campaign, in collaboration with Queer House Party to prevent online Zoom bombing in response to a rise in organised troll attacks during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Coercive control restraint design article from BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT:
- [Coercive Control Resistant Design: the key to safer technology](#)

## Child protection

Further information is available:

- England – [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)
- Wales – [Keeping Learners Safe](#)
- Northern Ireland – [Safeguarding and child protection in schools](#)
- Scotland – [National guidance for child protection](#)

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