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Office for
Students



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2 April 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

Update on OfS pilot sexual misconduct survey

Thank you for your letter of 12 March to our CEO, Susan Lapworth. Susan has asked me to respond on her behalf as the Director responsible for this area. The OfS understands how important this aspect of our work is to ensure the sector we regulate can act to prevent, and respond effectively to, harassment and sexual misconduct and we share your deep concern on the impact it can have on students.

As you will know, sexual misconduct can have a profound impact on students both in terms of their wellbeing and of their academic experience. This is why our recent work in this area has included consulting on a new approach to regulating harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education in England, as well as our pilot survey of sexual misconduct. The consultation can be found at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/consultation-on-a-new-approach-to-regulating-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct-in-english-higher-education/>

While I welcome your proposal in relation to the questions in our survey, this was completed late last year and, as a result, we are unable to include the suggested question; however, I would be happy to provide you with further information. I have set out below details on the survey development process as well as an update on the progress of our work on sexual misconduct.

Prevalence survey

In designing our survey, we focused on the needs of students. We consulted directly with them and used an independent research agency to test questions for suitability and comprehension. Students' feedback was clear that some of our questions were challenging but the majority said they would be happy to answer given the importance of these issues.

We expect to publish findings of the survey shortly and will look carefully at the data and draw out insights at a sector level. The pilot is also allowing us to test the process for administering a national prevalence survey in England and the outcomes will inform any decisions about an approach for a future survey. Alongside this, we will publish further details on the questionnaire design process.

Consultation on a new condition of registration

As you may know, we published a consultation on a new condition of registration relating to harassment and sexual misconduct in 2023. In our consultation, we proposed a definition of sexual misconduct with the headline description of 'any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.' It is our intention that this definition would include behaviour such as non-consensual strangulation. We received a high number of thoughtful responses to this consultation and are currently developing our final policy position, which we expect to publish alongside the findings of the pilot prevalence survey.

I am grateful for the work you do to tackle sexual misconduct and its effect on women and girls and thank you again for taking the time to write to the OfS on this important matter.

Yours sincerely

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

David Smy
Deputy Director of Enabling Regulation