1.0 Introduction to ProtectED

ProtectED is a not-for-profit membership organisation and national accreditation scheme that aims to drive up standards in student safety, security and wellbeing in the university sector. The scheme has been developed over three years by academics and security experts at the University of Salford and K7 compliance Ltd., and is supported by leading organisations in the security and university sectors. Work has involved a national student survey with the National Union of Students (NUS), focus groups with university security managers, campus police officers and student sabbatical officers, and a comprehensive review of good practice recommendations relating to student welfare issues. The ProtectED Code of Practice and associated membership, assessment and accreditation programme was published in 2017.

At present, university policy and practice to ensure students’ safety, security and wellbeing is fragmented — different institutions do different things. This fragmentation in practice means that some students will be better supported than others, depending upon their choice of institution. For example, despite the fact that student suicides are at record levels, only 29% of universities have an explicit mental health and wellbeing strategy. And even though 3 out of 5 students have experienced sexual harassment or assault at university, 39% of institutions provide no staff training on dealing with sexual misconduct. ProtectED creates a ‘gold standard’ for universities to work towards, with the goal that all students will receive the same high standard of support.

ProtectED takes a student-centered approach — the Code of Practice addresses across the whole student experience — both on and off-campus. The ProtectED Code of Practice contains the following sections:

- Core Institutional Safety and Security
- Student Wellbeing and Mental Health
- International Students
- Student Harassment and Sexual Assault
- The Student Night Out.

1.1 Why is ProtectED submitting evidence?

Sexual assault is one of the most pernicious and complex problems ProtectED seeks to address. Such victimisation can be linked to problems emerging in other areas of ProtectED, such as mental health and the institutional security response. Consequently, it was suggested by partners in the security industry that ProtectED should submit evidence to Parliament’s Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace.

2.0 Response to issues identified by the committee
This written submission will address five of the six issues identified in the invitation for written evidence:

1. **How widespread is sexual harassment in the workplace, and has this increased or decreased over time?**

   A. *In relation to the higher education context, sexual violence is a significant problem.*
   
   Sexual violence on university campuses is an issue that has dominated higher education headlines in recent years. NUS Hidden Marks (2010) was the first nationwide report into female students’ experience of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault. This study found 68% of students had been subject to verbal or physical sexual harassment, and nearly 1 in 4 had experienced unwanted sexual contact. A steady stream of reports confirming these findings have been published since, including research for Drinkaware that found 54% of female students and 14% of male students had received inappropriate sexual comments or inappropriate sexual touching on a night out. More recently, a national student survey conducted by Revolt Sexual Assault found that while 62% of students and graduates experienced sexual violence at university, only 2% felt able to report it to their institution.

   B. *The extent of the problem and whether it is increasing or decreasing, remains difficult to judge.*
   
   The full extent of the problem of sexual harassment and assault is still unclear, as universities are not legally required to collect or publish data on the incidence of sexual violence. Indeed, focus group research undertaken for ProtectED suggests some institutions may be purposefully choosing not to collect data to avoid having to reveal it in freedom of information requests (their primary concern being not to scare off potential students).

   In contrast, ProtectED member institutions are obliged to collect such data as part of the ProtectED assessment and accreditation process, and must show they understand and are addressing this problem. ProtectED requires universities to provide accessible, anonymous reporting options for students. In terms of good practice, the University of Cambridge is one of the first to take action in this area. The university has launched an anonymous reporting tool for students and has made public the number of sexual misconduct complaints received. While such reporting tools may result in an increase in students coming forward, universities need to more accurately understand the nature and extent of the problem to be able to effectively address it in an evidence-based manner.

2. **Who experiences sexual harassment in the workplace, who perpetrates it and what is the impact on different groups?**

   A. *The victims and perpetrators of sexual harassment in a higher education vary depending on the context and type of incident. The impact on a student victim can extend across all aspects of their life — their studies, homelife, social life and mental wellbeing.*
   
   The Hidden Marks report found that the majority of perpetrators involved in stalking, sexual assault and physical violence, were already known to the student affected. The university setting is unique in that students are often living, studying and socialising together. In the event of an incident, it can be difficult for the victim to avoid the perpetrator, which can impact upon the victim’s mental health and wellbeing, as well as their sense of personal safety. Students may also feel less able to speak out about an incident for fear of being judged by their peers.
Perpetrators can also include members of staff at higher education institutions. While the Universities UK Changing the Culture report made important guidance recommendations for universities on dealing with harassment and violence against women, it has been criticised for not addressing the issues of staff-to-student sexual harassment. A 2017 Guardian investigation revealed that almost 300 claims of sexual harassment were made against staff at UK universities in the previous six years, and saw hundreds of students come forward with their experiences of this behaviour.

ProtectED accredited institutions must have formal written procedures for responding to harassment or sexual assault perpetrated by students or staff.

3. **What actions should the Government and employers be taking to change workplace culture to prevent sexual harassment, give people more confidence to report sexual harassment, and make this issue a higher priority for employers?**

A. **Universities must change their culture, but require encouragement to take action.** ProtectED seeks to encourage and support the more enlightened institutions to embrace this change. Across the whole sector, however, the voluntary approach may not be sufficient.

Evidence suggests that, left to their own devices, universities are not dealing with problem of sexual harassment and assault. In order to change what has been referred to variously as a ‘rape culture’ and a ‘lad culture’ at UK universities, institutions must take positive action that draws upon good practice recommendations and expert guidance.

ProtectED requires universities to engage in awareness raising activities and campaigns that clarify behaviours that will not be tolerated. Such activities include mandatory sexual consent workshops for new students. ProtectED Accredited universities will also have procedures in place for supporting both the victim and the alleged perpetrator, following a report of sexual harassment.

ProtectED brings together the guidance on tackling harassment and hate crime in a higher education setting, including embedding all the Changing the Culture report recommendations, and supports member institutions to work towards this standard.

If universities are seen to prioritise student welfare by joining ProtectED and taking the lead on addressing serious issues that are negatively impacting students’ lives, this in itself should help students (and staff) feel more confident to speak out about this behaviour. In addition to providing accessible reporting options, ProtectED also asks member institutions to develop a toolkit to educate the whole university community on what constitutes sexual violence. Staff and students should ideally be given training in how to safely respond if they experience or witness harassment or sexual assault.

This preventative approach extends to bars and venues frequented by students. ProtectED requires universities, along with Students’ Union venues on campus, to sign a zero-tolerance pledge to tackling sexual violence. Universities are encouraged to offer Good Night Out training to bar staff to help them identify vulnerable adults and offer appropriate support. This initiative is especially important as students are most likely to experience sexual harassment or assault at social events (24%) and in social spaces (23%).
4. How can workers be better protected from sexual harassment by clients, customers and other third parties?

A. We are particularly concerned that students in higher education be protected from harassment by students, staff and third parties.

While ProtectED takes a preventative approach to student sexual harassment, member universities are also expected to have a robust framework of support in place, if the worst should happen. It is mandatory that institutions have a formal, written policy on dealing with harassment and sexual assault, covering: awareness-raising initiatives; staff and student training; procedures for recording incidents; procedures for responding to incidents; and the support that will be made available for those involved. There should also be a Code of Conduct between students and the university that highlights the behaviours expected from all members of the university community, sets out the disciplinary sanctions should this be breached, and states the institution’s commitment to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all students.

Underpinning this approach to student support is the ProtectED Safety and Wellbeing Partnership (PSWP). This group is comprised of individuals from within the university, and relevant groups and agencies external to the university (e.g. the police, NHS, relevant charities, and local authority). ProtectED accreditation requires that this group is established, and that they meet regularly to discuss student safety and wellbeing issues. Partnership working is a thread running through the ProtectED Code of Practice. Members of the PSWP can share ideas and resources in order to better understand the difficulties students encounter, and to develop effective solutions. This approach can also help universities more efficiently target their resources.

5. What is the effectiveness and accessibility of tribunals and other legal means of redress and what can be done to improve those processes?

A. Legal means of redress for students is important and university practices and policies can improve accessibility. However, it should be borne in mind that the majority of harassment incidents go unreported, so prevention is key.

If the student victim decides to pursue a criminal investigation, ProtectED universities must have procedures in place to support the student as they move through the judicial process, providing a dedicated support officer who can liaise with academic staff to arrange (e.g. a leave of absence, submit personal mitigating circumstances forms etc.)

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