

Universities are failing to deal with serial sexual predators on their staffs, according to new report

September 26 2018

A new report, published today (26 September), examining staff sexual misconduct within the higher education sector reveals the difficult experiences that students have had when they try to report staff sexual misconduct to their university.

The report 'Silencing Students: institutional responses to [staff sexual misconduct](#) in higher [education](#)' has been produced by The 1752 Group, a research and lobby organisation working to address staff sexual misconduct in UK higher education.

It includes data from interviews with students or early career academics across 14 UK HE institutions who experienced sexual misconduct from academic staff and tried to report it. It also includes analysis of 61 policies across 25 UK higher education institutions, in relation to staff sexual misconduct and conflicts of interest.

Some of the main findings from the report are:

- Some universities are failing to deal with serial sexual predators on their staff, as the majority of complaints appeared to deal with staff who had sexually harassed, groomed or assaulted more than one person.
- Many institutions appear to be 'making it up as they go along' according to students and early career staff who tried to report

staff sexual misconduct. This meant that some reports of staff sexual misconduct were not investigated at all, and in other cases investigations were not carried out adequately.

- Investigations could take many months or even years to conclude, and it was rare for staff members under investigation to lose their job as a result of complaints.
- If the complaints process within an [institution](#) failed, there was a lack of redress for complainants. This meant that complainants sometimes had to leave their institution, drop out of education or change career as a result of experiencing staff sexual misconduct.

The lead author of the report, Dr. Anna Bull, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Portsmouth, said: "We need urgent action to improve institutional responses to staff sexual misconduct as well as much more robust oversight across the sector in order to make sure that students are no longer silenced when they try to speak up.

"We know that some higher education institutions and bodies are now working on addressing staff sexual misconduct and we hope that this report will provide evidence to help improve institutional processes in this area."

The [report](#) provides a number of recommendations for institutions and the sector. These include:

- The [higher education](#) sector should explicitly include sexual misconduct and all forms of bullying and harassment within the definition of research misconduct.
- Institutions should implement mechanisms for staff and students to raise low level concerns, including 'grooming' or boundary-blurring behaviours.
- Institutions should urgently improve their internal investigations processes.

- Sector bodies such as the Office for Students need to develop tougher regulation and sanctions to ensure that institutions deal adequately with staff sexual [misconduct](#).

More information: Silencing Students: institutional responses to staff sexual misconduct in higher education. 1752group.files.wordpress.com/.../s_the-1752-group.pdf

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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