

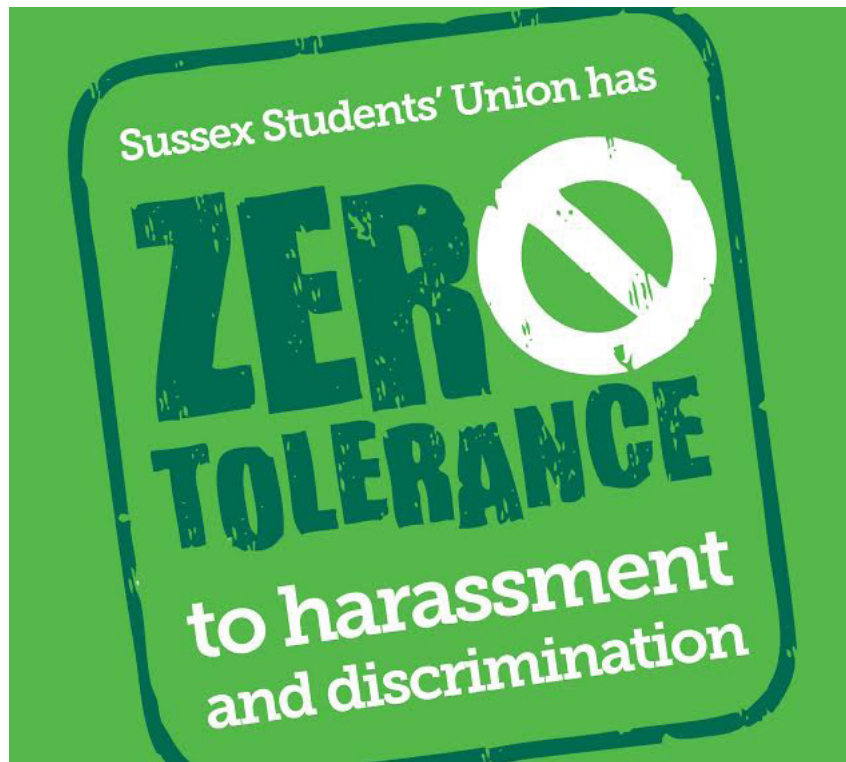
# Addressing the rise of 'lad culture' and violence in higher education

**Ground-breaking research from Dr Alison Phipps at Sussex has brought the ugly spectre of sexual harassment and violence against women in our higher education institutions under the spotlight. Her work has generated media attention and public policy debate and has led to the development of action plans and zero tolerance campaigns, primarily by student organisations, to tackle the rise of 'lad culture' and violence in higher education.**

## Overview

Gender equality in higher education has been a long-held ideal; indeed it is now a requirement under the Gender Equality Duty, which came into force on 6 April 2007. Perhaps more than in other areas of society, one might expect that institutions of higher learning would be communities where gender equality is the norm. Yet research conducted by Dr Alison Phipps (Director of Gender Studies at the University of Sussex) suggests that universities are far from the egalitarian institutions that we would expect or desire and that women students are increasingly subject to discomfort, sexual harassment and, occasionally violence as a result of the rise in so-called 'lad culture'. In response to Dr Phipps' work, lad culture among students and violence against women students in higher education has become an issue of national significance.

Dr Phipps' research, carried out between 2008 and 2013, initially focused on UK sexual violence policy and criminal justice procedures,



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and highlighted the need for more emphasis on prevention and more attention to underserved groups in the criminal justice system. As a result of her expertise and growing interest in students as an underserved population, the National Union of Students (NUS) invited her to work on their 'Hidden Marks' project: a survey of over 2,000 female students in further or higher education on their perceptions of safety and experiences of stalking, harassment and physical

and sexual violence. The report found that 14 per cent had experienced serious physical and sexual violence and 68 per cent sexual harassment while in higher education, while 10 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, had reported their experience to the police or their institution.

Subsequently, Dr Phipps was commissioned by NUS to conduct a study on lad culture in higher education. This was carried out in collaboration with researcher Isabel



Young, and incorporated extensive literature review, interviews and focus groups. The report, entitled *That's what she said*, was launched by NUS on International Women's Day 2013. Phipps' and Young's research demonstrated that, while largely the preserve of a minority of men, lad culture can dominate university social life. Research participants described this culture as being characterised by sexist and sexualised banter and activity that could spill over into sexual harassment or violence.

## Achieving impact

Dr Phipps' research has had major impact in five areas: informing policies and interventions adopted by NUS; improving public and policy understanding of issues around violence against women students; students' unions adopting zero-tolerance policies in relation to sexual harassment and abuse; helping institutions develop procedural frameworks around reporting and addressing violence against women students; and the inclusion by government, public- and third-sector organisations of students as a key demographic in their policies.

Dr Phipps' work on 'Hidden Marks' and *That's what she said* has influenced NUS debate and led to a national zero-tolerance campaign and the adoption of violence and objectification towards women students as the lead issue for NUS Women's Campaign. At local levels, a number of students' unions have adopted zero-tolerance policies or implemented other initiatives to address problematic 'laddish' behaviours. In an informal survey in 2012 of 75 students' unions across the country, 96 per cent reported having engaged with 'Hidden Marks' in some way and 75 per cent had run a zero-tolerance campaign in line with the NUS model.

Prompting institutional responses has been more difficult but some universities have responded positively. Dr Phipps had substantial input into the drafting of Corpus Christi College Oxford's Sexual Assault Policy; Durham University has instituted a group to review disciplinary procedures; and the Glasgow University Senate is investigating lad culture on campus. At Sussex, there has been broad discussion among faculty and students, and the Students Against Sexual Harassment Campaign has

developed into an institutional working group and zero-tolerance initiative.

Phipps' and Young's research has also been extensively covered in the British media and has been read, cited and disseminated by policy-makers and third-sector organisations, increasing their knowledge and influencing current and planned interventions.

*That's what she said* was featured in over 50 articles in the tabloids, broadsheets, magazines and student publications, and has been the subject of discussion in blogs and on social networking sites such as Twitter. A 'Tweetathon' hosted by the Everyday Sexism project received posts from over 300 men and women. There are also numerous examples of national and local government and non-government organisations acting on the research. For example, the Home Office agreed to add information on violence against women and girls to its Student Survival Guide (published in partnership with NUS), to make links with NUS on their This is Abuse campaign targeted at teenagers, and to engage with the Association of Chief Police Officers to try to improve advice given to students on violence.

## Future impact

The impact of this work is ongoing. A year after the publication of the ground-breaking *That's what she said* report, in February 2014, NUS held a Lad Culture Summit for students and students' unions in higher education, which brought together representatives of organisations such as Everyday Sexism, No More Page 3, The Great Initiative, Girlguiding, The Fword and The Good Lad, to discuss and launch a national strategy to tackle lad culture on campus. Live updates were reported on the Guardian Web site during the course of the summit. Phipps and Young are both members of the National Strategy team that has now been formed by NUS.

## Funding and partnership

The research was funded by a grant from the National Union of Students (G0985).



# That's what she said

Women students' experiences of 'lad culture' in higher education

Summary report

## Working with us

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