

Firstly, thank you for inviting me here today to talk to you all about an issue that NUS has worked for years to bring to national attention. It's an honour to be able to have the chance to speak on behalf of the generations of student activists that have paved the way to this point in time where people in the highest positions are listening and willing to make the important changes to make UK campuses safer from sexual harassment, assault and lad culture.

The reason why tackling lad culture has been a key aspect of the women's campaign for years is because we believe that as long as misogyny, harassment and sexual violence are normalised as part of the student experience, women students do not have equal access to university education.

In 2010 we focused on the presence of sexual harassment and assault on campus, launching the Hidden Marks, the first ever nationwide report into women students' experience of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault - a report which revealed that 1 in 7 women students that had experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student.

In doing so, we discovered that in order to properly tackle sexual harassment and assault on campus, we must acknowledge that this behaviour is in fact sustained within a wider problematic culture that exists on campuses across the UK, commonly known as lad culture. This was defined by students in our 2013 report "That's What She Said" as group or 'pack' mentality residing in activities such as sport, heavy alcohol consumption and 'banter' which was often sexist, misogynistic, racist or homophobic. A sexualized culture which involves the objectification of women and rape-supportive attitudes, and occasionally spilling over into sexual harassment and violence.

Some of you will argue that lad culture and sexism exist everywhere. I agree, that is true. However we would be lying to ourselves if we didn't acknowledge there's something about the university campus, the invasion of young people, first time living away from home, the peer pressure from other students to drink excessively, to have sex with as many people as possible - We would be lying if we didn't acknowledge that there is something in the makeup of the student experience itself that contributes to a specific type of atmosphere that made sexual violence against women students appear normal.

I doubt there's a university in the UK who wouldn't say that they didn't take sexual harassment and assault seriously or that they didn't have robust reporting systems. However the lad culture audit report that we launched earlier this year showed that a large majority of universities lacked the policy, training education and support services to actively tackle lad culture and sexual violence.

And in our lad culture and sexism survey this year, 61% of students stated that they were not made aware of any codes of conduct and 66% stated they were not aware of the procedure to report these incidents. For me, the proof of how much universities take these issues seriously, or how robust their systems claim to be is shown in the treatment of student survivors

themselves.

The following words are from a blog post written by a student survivor:

"When I went to the university I was cynical about how much they could do. But, even with my expectations at rock bottom, I hadn't imagined that at the end of it all I'd be the one threatened with expulsion and legal action.

At the start of the school year I'd been informed by staff that, all things considered, we shouldn't file a complaint against him; it might render the university liable further down the line in a criminal case. No, it was police or nothing, despite the endless list of reasons that this was a terrible idea. I'd heard the stories from other survivors; "it was like being raped all over again", or even "it was worse" featured heavily. Only one of us wanted to go to the police, but it was the only option given to both. The police all but laughed us off.

Sitting in the same university office several months later, I was nearly speechless with rage and fright. Now I was being told that he'd filed a complaint against me for harassment, citing the police as his evidence."

This is a story that I've heard many times from many student survivors across the country. University reporting processes being impossible to navigate and disciplinary processes doing more to protect the university's reputation and the alleged perpetrators than the student survivors themselves.

So you see, while NUS has worked with so many universities and colleges across the UK to embed much needed consent education on campuses, there's only so much we can do when the institutional procedures work against student victims of sexual harassment and assault instead of supporting them.

Therefore, on the 25th of November, which is the international day for elimination of violence against women, we launched the Stand by Me campaign. It is a national call out for the repeal of the 1994 Zellick guidelines in HE and for a consultation including student movement & specialist services for the creation of new robust reporting and disciplinary guidelines as well as student survivor support. We are also calling for the government to secure national funding for rape crisis centres, as they provide services that many student survivors rely on when their universities cannot.

By looking at policy, training, education and support systems, the lad culture audit confirmed that Tackling lad culture and sexual violence on campuses is not something universities can achieve by only focusing on part of the issue. As well as challenging the Zellick report, at NUS, the women's campaign are currently working with the pilot unions to develop an award criteria for local lad culture strategies. In order to achieve acceptable standards the students union and the university must show that they have together been able to:

Acknowledge lad culture - by educating students and staff about the impact of lad culture and the importance of equality, diversity and sexual consent.

Challenge lad culture - by training students and staff on how to become active bystanders so that everyone is equipped with the skills, confidence and support to tackle instances of lad culture as and when they happen.

Create Inclusive social spaces - by making sure to promote equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of everything you create for students to get involved in.

Create Supportive structures - by promoting accessible reporting methods and Care pathways

However, we know this will only work when universities and students unions work in partnership to defend and extend the rights of students and actively perform their duty of care. Because it's only when we put the welfare of students at the heart of the system, that together we can create safer and accessible educational communities.