

TO: Assembly
FROM: Meg Haskins
RE: **Sexual Violence: Core SU Position**
DATE: 12 March 2019

The belief and its justification:

No student should have to experience, or fear sexual violence. We believe that a zero tolerance approach, backed by support and resources for prevention, reporting and helping those who have experienced sexual violence are essential. We also believe that parts of the Durham University culture normalise behaviours that contribute to or in fact are, sexual violence. Our whole community must tackle the cultural issues which underpin attitudes surrounding sexual violence, as well as continue to track incidents of sexual violence, advocate for specialised training to departmental and pastoral staff and support victims/survivors through effective and appropriate signposting. Sexual violence is an incredibly serious and wide-spread issue, which is not confined to one section of society. This means that sexual violence has the potential to affect all members of our University community, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability or any other protected characteristic.

Definition of a better future:

The culture of Durham University should be one of collective responsibility for ending sexual violence on campus, with a zero-tolerance attitude across the University and the Students' Union. Anyone who witnesses sexual violence should feel confident in challenging this, and witnesses and victims/survivors should always feel supported.

The barriers:

A culture which normalises, excuses and even condones sexual violence, as well as places blame upon victims/survivors, still exists in some parts of society. This can lead to victims/survivors not talking about, or reporting, their experiences and subsequently can lead to a distorted view of what sexual assault is. Whilst the aforementioned culture exists throughout all of society, research has shown that sexual harassment and violence is widespread in Universities in particular. Whilst recognising that sexual harassment can occur to any individual of any gender, often this culture referred to as 'lad culture', which reflects a form of gender-based discrimination, underpinned by historical power dynamics which typically privilege males and oppress females.

A reluctance to report incidents of sexual violence makes it difficult to fully understand the extent of the issue, and subsequently the ways in which sexual violence can be tackled. This reluctance to report exists within Universities, as well as across the wider population.

Belief about the change and the responsibilities:

The position of Durham Students' Union is:

That the Union should continue to empower students to be active bystanders in our community and confidently challenge any behaviour that enables a culture of sexual violence.

That a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence should be embedded throughout the Students' Union and the University.

That the underlying behaviours and beliefs which contribute to this culture should be challenged by all staff and students in our community to promote and enact culture change.

That the SU should promote a safe and supportive environment for all victims/survivors.