

# Sex & Relationships Survey Report 2018



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Sex & Relationships Survey



## Introduction

My own experiences, the experiences of friends, and anecdotal stories were all motivations for commissioning this piece of research. Rape culture, whilst pervasive throughout society, is particularly acute in the University context. The National Union of Students (NUS),<sup>1</sup> and Universities UK,<sup>2</sup> have over the last few years published reports that evidence the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in Higher Education institutions, highlighting the fact that this is a cultural issue. Recent incidents at the University of Warwick highlight that these issues still exist in the post-Weinstein/ 'Me too' movement world.<sup>3</sup> What our research highlights is that these issues are very much alive and kicking in our student body here at Bristol.



The level of responses to this survey, as well as the honesty and thoughtfulness displayed by respondents, well exceeded our expectations. The issues contained in this report very much struck a chord with students, and it is high time that sex and consent sit within the narratives of the University and Union when discussing pertinent issues such as wellbeing, mental health and the transition into University life. Not merely a women's issue, the anonymity of the research meant that we were able to elicit responses that showed that abuse, sexual harassment and the pressure to have sex, whilst a gendered issue, also impact upon men.

Consent education, adequate support for survivors of sexual assault and harassment are now, more than ever, necessary. It is incumbent, therefore, on those who can action change to do so with haste whilst ensuring efficacy. Quality of student experience, attainment and retention are therefore all at risk in the absence of both proactive and reactive actions to ensure healthy and consensual relationships.

Many believe sex education is the preserve of more formative education, but this survey illustrates that Higher Education does in fact have a duty to educate on these issues. It is clear that a significant number of students come to University with little to no sexual experiences. This coupled with the changing landscape of sexual relationships with 'hook-up culture' and the use of dating apps means that education, at this level, is still necessary to facilitate and promote positive relationships.

The recommendations made at the top of this report are reflective of student experiences and issues that have appeared time and again. What is also required is co-creation between the University and SU to ensure the authenticity of this message and resonance with the student body.

### Desiree Ibekwe, Equality, Liberation and Access Officer (2017-18)

<sup>1</sup> Phipps, A. (2013) *That's what she said: women students' experiences of 'lad culture' in higher education*, London: NUS.

<sup>2</sup> Universities UK (2016) *Changing the culture: Report of the Universities UK Taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students*, London, Universities UK.

<sup>3</sup> BBC (2018) 'University of Warwick suspends 11 students over hate posts', available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-4405207>, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018.



# Sex & Relationships Survey Results: 2018

## Executive Summary

Bristol SU's 2018 sex & relationships survey 'Let's Talk About Sex' covered a broad range of topics relating to sex and relationship education, consent, sexual health and experiences of harassment and assault. The findings provide an important insight into the sex and relationship education received by students before university, students' experiences of sexual health and students' experiences of sexual violence and harassment.

## Key Findings

### Sex & Relationship Education

- 4% of home students and 22% of international and EU students had never received sex and relationship education at school.
- Just 23% of students agreed that the education they had received had prepared them for healthy adult relationships and just 26% agreed that the education they had received had prepared them for a healthy adult sex life.
- Just 35% of students agreed that the education they received had given them a comprehensive understanding of consent.
- Students were most likely to have received an education around STIs/STDs, contraception and the age of consent. Just 38% of students had received an education around understanding when someone is consenting or can consent and just 24% had received an education on healthy relationships.

### Experiences of Harassment and Assault

- 52% of students had experienced sexual harassment whilst studying at the University of Bristol - 63% of women and 21% of men.
- 29% of students had experienced harassment from a fellow student, and 7% had experienced harassment in a hall of residence.
- 16% of students had experienced sexual assault or rape whilst studying at the University of Bristol - 17% of women and 7% of men.
- 30% of women and 14% of men were concerned about being pressured to have sex, and 42% of men and 25% of women were concerned about their partner feeling pressured to have sex.

### Sexual Health

- 41% of students reported that they had never been tested for an STI or STD.
- 34% of students who were not celibate and not in a monogamous relationship reported that they had never been tested.
- In open text comments many students felt that full sexual health screenings should be available at the Student Health Service.
- 31% of students were concerned about a partner respecting their wishes with regards to contraception.
- 2% of students had experienced an unintended pregnancy whilst at university and 1% of students had experienced a miscarriage.



## Experiences of sex and relationships

- 9% of students were currently celibate, with 90% of students reporting they were not celibate and 1% preferring not to say.
- 36% of students reported that they had been a virgin when they arrived at university. BME students and religious students were more likely to have been a virgin when they arrived at university.
- 55% of students reported that they currently consumed pornography - 87% of men and 42% of women.
- Students who consumed pornography were more likely to report that this had a negative impact on their sexual or romantic relationships and personal confidence and self-esteem.

## Summary of Recommendations

Full recommendations can be found on page 21.

### Improving Sex & Relationship Education

- Introduce a comprehensive education programme around consent and healthy relationships. The programme should address concerns raised in this survey and use a tone and language that is appropriate, relevant and engaging for students.

### Tackling Harassment and Assault

- Ensure there are clear processes in residences for reporting experiences of sexual harassment, assault and rape.
- Introduce trauma support as part of the Student Counselling Service and work with students to co-create support for survivors.
- Ensure that it is clear that experiences of harassment, assault and rape can be used as part of the extenuating circumstances process.
- Introduce a Sexual Violence Liaison Officer.
- Improve signposting and review existing reporting and disciplinary policies with external partners.

### Improving Sexual Health

- Work with Bristol SU to lobby the council for additional funding for the Student Health Service, to reintroduce full sexual health screenings.
- Support Bristol SU on any sexual health testing campaigns.
- Introduce free condoms and dental dams in University residences.
- Improve support for students who fall unexpectedly pregnant or experience miscarriage, through the Counselling Service, Student Health and the extenuating circumstances process.

### Improving Experiences of Sex & Relationships

- Reform the extenuating circumstances process to make it clear that relationship break-ups and experiences of abusive or damaging relationships may be considered as extenuating circumstances.

## Background

In April 2018 Bristol SU launched a survey exploring students' experiences of sex and relationships entitled 'Let's Talk About Sex'. The survey ran for two weeks and gathered 693 responses, with a 78% completion rate. All questions were optional.

The survey used a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions, with multiple choice, tick box and open text questions. Qualitative responses were thematically coded using SurveyMonkey.

Given the University's 25,024 students in the 2017-18 academic year, the survey's sample size gave a 3% response rate. BME students, disabled students and students from each faculty were well represented in the sample. Postgraduates, international students and men were notably under-represented. Despite limitations around sample size, the survey gives a snapshot of students' knowledge and experiences of sex and relationships before and during their degree.

## Demographics of the Survey

### Academic/University background

Level of study	Undergraduate	85%
	Postgraduate Taught	9%
	Postgraduate research	6%
Year of study	Year 1	33%
	Year 2	28%
	Year 3	24%
	Year 4	12%
	Year 5+	3%
Faculty	Arts	24%
	Biomedical Sciences	7%
	Engineering	12%
	Health Sciences	12%
	Science	24%
	Social Sciences and Law	25%
Fee Status	Home	86%
	EU	6%
	International	8%

### Age on starting course

Under 21	80%
Mature Undergraduate (Over 21)	7%
Mature Postgraduate (Over 25)	24%
Prefer not to say	1%

### Disability

Physical disability	3%
Non-physical disability	20%
No disability	75%

Prefer not to say	4%
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## Gender and Sexuality

Gender	Man	28%
	Woman	67%
	Non-binary or other gender identity	3%
	Prefer not to say	1%
	Other	1%
Trans status	Transgender	2%
	Not transgender	97%
	Prefer not to say	1%
Sexuality	Straight	67%
	Gay or Lesbian	8%
	Bisexual	15%
	Pansexual	2%
	Queer	3%
	Asexual	1%
	Demisexual	1%
	Prefer not to say	1%
	Other	2%

## Ethnicity

White British, Irish or other White background	82%
Jewish	1%
Arab	0.6%
Asian British or other Asian background	7%
Black British or other Black background	3%
Latin American/Hispanic	1%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean/African	1%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	2%
Any other Mixed/Multiple background	1%
Prefer not to say	1%
Other	1%

## Religion/Belief

Christian	20%
Buddhist	0.3%
Hindu	1%





Jewish	1%
Muslim	2%
Mixed	1%
Atheist	23%
Agnostic	14%
Humanist	1%
No religion/belief	33%
Prefer not to say	4%
Other	1%

## Findings

### Sex & Relationship Education

#### Experiences of Sex & Relationship Education

Students were asked to what extent they felt that the sex and relationship education they received at school prepared them for various aspects of adult life.

7% of students had not received any sex and relationship education whilst at school. International and EU students were less likely to have received sex and relationship education, with 22% reporting they hadn't compared to 4% of home students. The small sample size (74 international/EU student respondents) is worth flagging here, but the difference is notable.

57% of students disagreed that the education they had received had prepared them for healthy adult relationships, with just 23% agreeing that it had.

54% of students disagreed that the education they had received had prepared them for a healthy adult sex life, with just 26% agreeing that it had.

50% of students disagreed that the education they had received had given them a comprehensive understanding of consent, with just 35% agreeing that it had.

47% of students felt that the education they had received had not provided them with information that was relevant to them and their identity, with 30% agreeing that it had. For students who identified other than straight (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual etc) just 11% agreed that they had received an education that was relevant to them and their identity, with 77% disagreeing.

In open text comments many students spoke about how little sex education they had received. Many students, both straight and LGBT+, mentioned the lack of LGBT+ sex education at school.

*'My sex education was very much assuming everyone was heterosexual. I can imagine members of the LGBTQ community would have felt alienated by the education we received. Most of the sex education focused on contraception, there was very little about consent, abortion, having enjoyable sex, etc.'*

Students also commented on a lack of education around consent, with one student praising the University talk they had attended covering this, describing this as 'very useful'. Several students also mentioned the impact of their religious education on

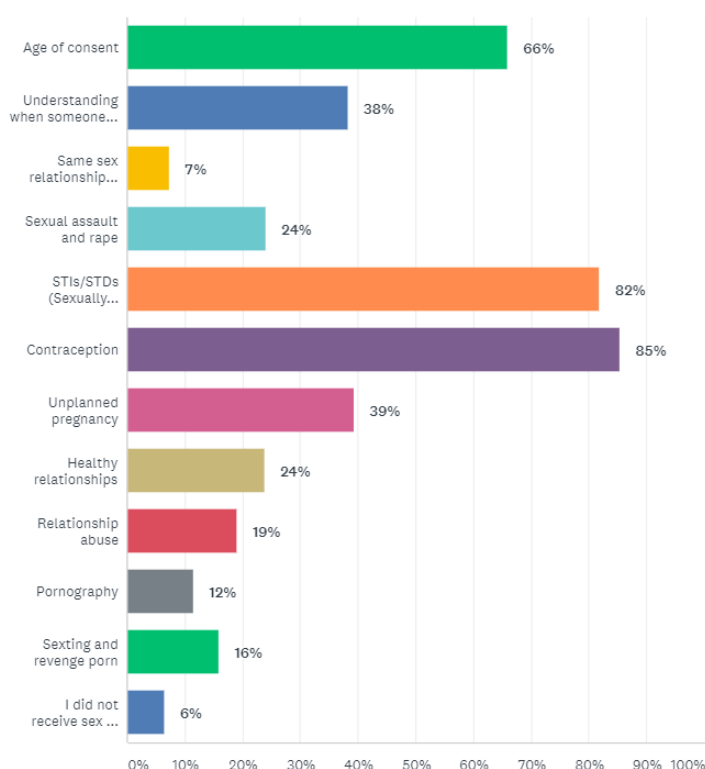


their sex education, with one student commenting 'I went to a nun school where they explained sex through chickens'.

Students were asked what the sex and relationship education at school that they had received had covered. Contraception, STIs/STDs and the age of consent were by far the most covered topics. Just 38% of students reported that they had been taught about understanding when someone is consenting or can consent and just 24% had been taught about sexual assault and rape.

If you received sex and relationship education at school, what did this cover?  
(tick all that apply)

Answered: 545 Skipped: 148



### Gaps in Knowledge before University

Students were asked if there was anything they would have liked to have known about sex or consent before they came to university. There was a wide range of responses to this question, with the most common response being a desire for more consent education. There was again praise from one student for the Unismart presentation they had seen when they started at UoB, which they felt was a 'very good way to educate people in the most entertaining way'. Many students felt they would have liked to have known more about alcohol and consent before attending university, particularly the fact that if you are too drunk to consent, it's not consent.

*'It is not consensual if you are drunk or under the influence of any drug. Men have very little knowledge of what is consensual, all that is understood is that violent rape is not consensual but everything else is seen as consensual.'*

Other common themes were the need for more LGBT+ inclusive education and more information about sexual health, sexual pleasure, contraception options and the fact that it is okay to be a virgin.

*'More of an LGBT+ education would have been good and more of a focus on consent and healthy relationships, rather than just the physical act of sex, the surrounding culture and issues would have been good.'*

*'That sex is something that should give all parties pleasure, how to have sexual relationships that bring you pleasure, that masturbation is also something that can bring you pleasure and is not wrong. That watching porn is not wrong and is not just for males.'*

Students were asked if there was anything they would have liked to have known about having healthy relationships before coming to university. There was a wide variety of responses to this question, including guidance around not rushing into relationships or sex, sexual health information and the importance of prioritising your own wellbeing in any relationship. Several students also brought up that they would have liked to have had more information about LGBT+ relationships and non-monogamous relationships. The most common thing that students would have liked to have known about however were the signs of an unhealthy relationship. Several students spoke about wanting to know this in relation to their friends' relationships so that they could help their peers, with several also speaking about their own experience of an unhealthy relationship.

*'What signs of an unhealthy relationship to look out for, and how to recognise them and intervene in friends' relationships as well.'*

*'I wish I knew about the different types of abusive (gaslighting etc), if I had that knowledge, I probably would have left the relationship earlier.'*

## Experiences of Harassment and Assault

### Consent

25% of students were concerned about being pressured to have sex, compared to 57% of students who were unconcerned. Women were more concerned about being pressured to have sex, with 30% concerned about this, compared to 14% of men.

30% of students were concerned about their partner feeling pressured to have sex. Men were more concerned about this than women, with 42% of men concerned about their partner feeling pressured to have sex, compared to 25% of women.

Students were more confident about communicating about consent with a long-term partner than a casual partner. 87% of students were confident about communicating about consent with a long-term/consistent partner, compared to 64% who were confident communicating about consent with a casual partner. Just 5% were unconfident about communicating about consent with a long term partner, compared to 18% who were unconfident about communicating with a casual partner.



90% of students felt confident in understanding if their partner was giving enthusiastic consent, with 8% feeling neither confident nor unconfident, and 3% feeling unconfident about this.

### Safety at Night

53% of students felt safe walking home to their hall of residence or rented/private accommodation, compared to 24% who felt unsafe. Women were significantly less likely to say they felt safe compared to men, with 40% reporting they felt safe compared to 90% of men.

77% of students felt safe walking around campus, compared to 9% who felt unsafe. Women were less likely to feel safe than men, with 70% reporting they felt safe compared to 97% of men.

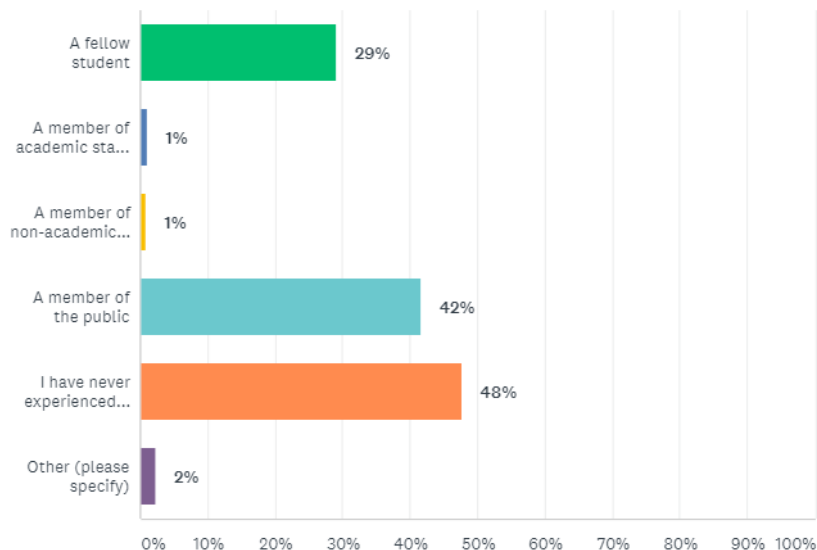
47% of students felt safe walking around Bristol city centre, compared to 31% of students who felt unsafe. Women were significantly less likely to feel safe than men, with 34% reporting they felt safe compared to 78% of men.

### Sexual Harassment

52% of students had experienced sexual harassment whilst studying at the University of Bristol. Women were more likely to experience sexual harassment than men, with 63% of women experiencing harassment compared to 21% of men. Students were most likely to have experienced harassment from a member of the public or a fellow student.

Whilst studying at UoB have you experienced sexual harassment from: (all students)

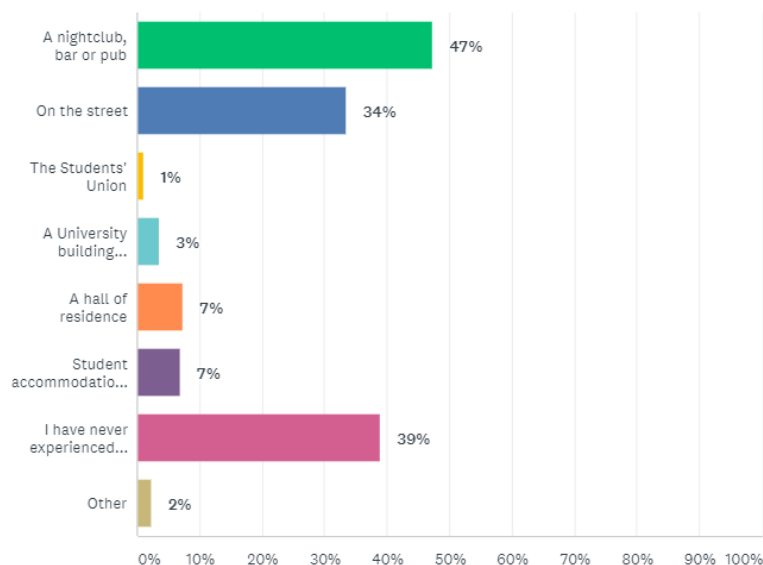
Answered: 524 Skipped: 169



Students were most likely to experience sexual harassment in a nightclub, bar or pub and were also likely to experience it on the street. In terms of university buildings halls of residence were the most likely site of sexual harassment.

If you have experienced sexual harassment, where did this occur? (tick any that apply)

Answered: 459 Skipped: 234



Students were asked about the impact that sexual harassment had on their mental/physical health, studies and university experience. The most common impact reported was on students' mental health. Many students reported feeling worried about being out on their own after the incident, either on nights out or just walking the streets of Bristol. Several students reported feeling 'terrified' and 'nervous' walking around, with some worried about bumping into their harasser. One student based in a hall of residence reported 'increased anxiety' and 'difficulty in attending hall events as we were in the same halls'. Another student had to miss a few lectures and seminars, and one student even had to take a year out of study to improve their mental health.

*'Made me feel more unsafe and paranoid everywhere I went. Affect my studies for a long period of time'*

Several students also reported feeling wary of men since experiencing sexual harassment. Many students reported feeling angry and upset by their experience. Others felt they had become 'used to it' because of how common sexual harassment was, particularly in nightclubs.

*'It made me feel alienated from the groups of men I'm at university with, and feel like I was considered less than human. I'm anxious walking past groups of boys or men especially when on my own. I'm just waiting for them to do or say something.'*

## Sexual Assault/Rape

16% of respondents had experienced sexual assault or rape whilst studying at the University of Bristol.



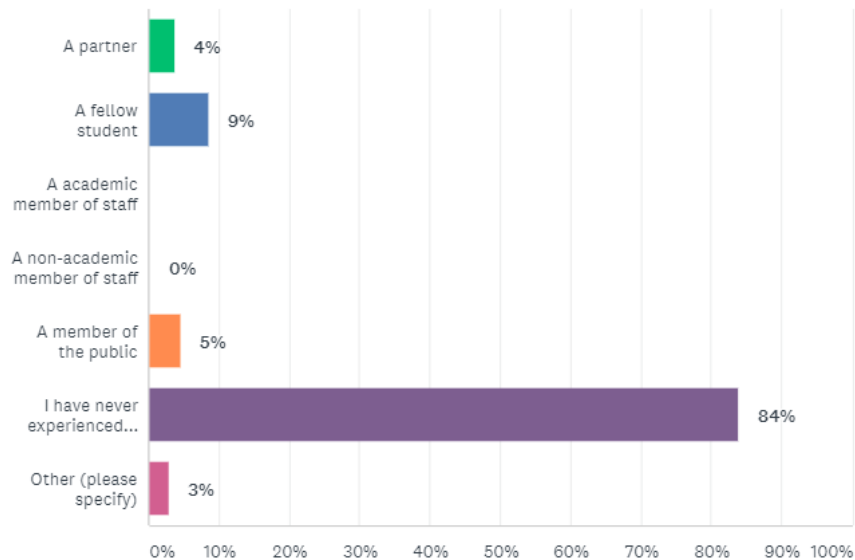
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Women were more likely to experience sexual assault or rape, with 7% of men reporting that they had experienced sexual assault or rape and 17% of women reporting this.

Answered: 490 Skipped: 203



Students were asked what effect their experience of sexual assault or rape had had on them, for example their mental/physical health, studies and university experience. The most common effect reported was on students' mental health. Students reported that the experience had led to feelings of shame and low self-worth, with several students reporting they felt suicidal.

*'It completely tore me apart and it ruined by studies, my friendships, my mental health and I had no idea who to tell, I didn't think anyone would believe me and I didn't want anything bad to happen. By the time I finally considered telling the uni how much it had affected me, I was in my final year and I was worried they would not believe me and think I was just lying'*

The second most common impact reported by students was an impact on their studies. Several students reported having to take a break from their studies, with many reporting that they struggled to concentrate on their work or meet deadlines. Several students also reported missing classes, with one student explaining 'since the perpetrator was a student on my course I was unable to attend many lectures, and had to ask that I take my exams in a separate venue'. Another student felt that their experience did not warrant an extenuating circumstances adjustment, an issue that has come up previously in our research on extenuating circumstances in 2016.

*'Uni work was manageable but hard and didn't feel like this was reason enough to fill out an extenuating circumstances form and did not want to name him/did not want senior tutor/undergrad admin staff to know this.'*

Many students also reported that their experience had affected their social life, with several students expressing worry about going out or going to certain places in case they saw the perpetrator. A number of students also expressed that their experience

had affected their sex life and relationships, and several reported that their experience affected their ability to work.

One student reported that they had to leave their job which had affected their finances and made them worry about their studies. The same student felt that there was 'no support for survivors' at the University and retreated from social spaces because they kept seeing their abusers. This student had also been abused by a member of staff, and reported that no members of staff 'tried to intervene... I had no support whatsoever'. Another student had a more positive experience, reporting that their head of school 'was helpful offering me extra time with work or extra support'.

### Access to Services

Students who had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape were asked if they had been able to access suitable support from the University or local services. 62 students chose to answer this question.

About a third of these students reported that they had not received the support they needed. Comments included the lack of specialised provision for survivors at the Student Counselling Service, and long waiting lists for external support. One student was upset that they had not been able to report their perpetrator to the University without reporting to the police. This issue should hopefully now be resolved thanks to the new Universities UK guidance that has been implemented by the University.

A number of students were unaware of how they could access support, with some feeling frustrated and upset by this.

*'I had no idea that I had anyone I could contact. As a man I feel totally disregarded in the sexual assault issue, I feel like I've been screaming in a room full of people that can't or won't hear me.'*

About a quarter of students who responded to this question reported accessing suitable support, with positive feedback for Student Health, Student Counselling, Just Ask, the police and local services. Several students reported that they had chosen not to access support because they had received help from their friends.

### Support Needs

Students who had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape were asked what more the University could have done to support them. 51 students chose to answer this question.

Common suggestions included better signposting to services, better mental health services and consent education at university. The counselling service was particularly mentioned in relation to mental health services, with the suggestion that the service needed to be equipped to provide counselling for victims of trauma. There was also a suggestion that services needed to reach out to students 'rather than the other way round'. Several students also wanted a better means of reporting incidents, with suggestions of a reporting tool and a better way to let your department know what's happened without having to disclose to multiple people. One student felt that more decisive action needed to be taken and argued that the University should have





separated them from seeing their perpetrator every day at university. Another student had felt very unsupported by Bristol SU after their experience of sexual violence.

*'They should provide compulsory consent classes for first years, I believe to begin with the person who assaulted me in first year didn't realise what constituted consent.'*

More general suggestions included a desire for the University to be more supportive and believe victims when they come forward. Several students also felt that the personal tutor system needed to be improved, with students expressing that they needed someone they could speak to.

*'Have better personal tutors, have a designated team to talk to about these things, have someone that can actually explain the situation to your department without you ever having to talk to them. not everyone wants to talk to a counsellor, they just want someone to have their backs.'*

## Sexual Health

### Contraception use

Students were given a list of contraception or safe sex methods and asked whether they or their partner were currently using any of these methods. Condoms and the contraceptive pill were the most popular contraception/safe sex methods, with 45% of students using condoms and 38% of students using the pill. 7% of students used the implant and 9% used an IUD. No students reported using dental dams.

Students were asked if they had ever struggled to meet the costs of contraception whilst at university. The majority (69%) had not, with 9% reporting that they had struggled and 22% indicating that the question was not applicable.

In open text comments many students highlighted the benefits of receiving free contraception on the NHS. However, many students also reported that they found condoms to be very expensive and one student reported they had experienced difficulty in accessing the morning after pill at the weekend. Throughout the survey several students made comments around the possible side effects of the contraceptive pill, such as ill mental health, which it was felt women needed more information and support on.

*'Always use free condoms and free pill prescription. Condoms are expensive though and not that easy to get free if you aren't going to the drs regularly. Also the ones they give you sometimes aren't that good (too small, or rubbish brand.)'*

*'I was on the pill when starting university, but found that it drained my enthusiasm to have sex and on my mental health. Additionally, I would have bleeding that would last for up to a month sometimes. After stopping it, periods became far more painful but it was worth not being on the pill.'*

### STI/STD Testing



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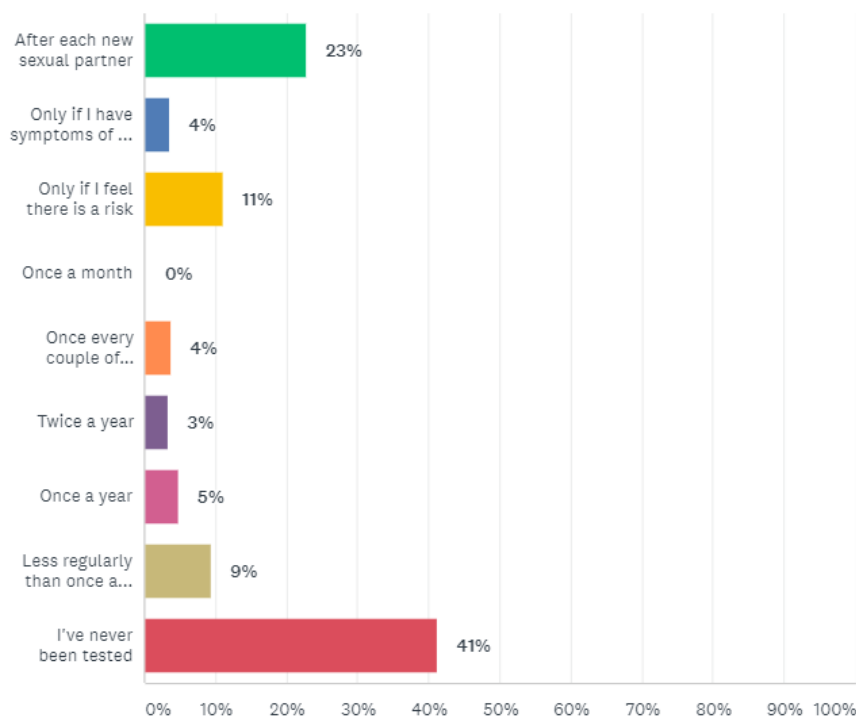


41% of students reported that they had never been tested for an STI or STD.

34% of students who were not celibate and not in a monogamous relationship reported that they had never been tested.

How often do you get tested for STIs/STDs? (all students)

Answered: 552 Skipped: 141



39% of students were concerned about the risk of contracting a STI/STD, with 47% unconcerned about this.

31% of students were concerned about a partner respecting their wishes in regards to contraception, with 53% unconcerned.

77% of students felt confident about communicating about sexual health with a partner, with 12% unconfident about this.

Students were asked how easy they found it to get tested for STIs/STDs in Bristol. 48% of students found getting tested easy, 36% neither easy nor difficult and 16% found getting tested difficult. There was no significant difference between students who had been tested and students who had not.

In open text comments many students spoke about the need to improve the Student Health Service as a full screening is currently not offered at the centre. There were also comments about the distance required to travel to go to the Unity clinic which does do full screenings, though students who had visited the clinic had had a positive experience. Several students spoke about a difficulty around getting tested for HIV, with one gay student reporting that it was difficult to get tested without saying that you'd had unprotected sex. Meanwhile, one trans student reported that

they didn't know who to go and see with regards to getting tested as they weren't sure who would be trans friendly.

*'Unity sexual health clinic is pretty far from uni, probably would have gotten tested more regularly/after each new partner had it been closer'*

*'I go to the Sexual Health Clinic on Tower Hill, which is great! I feel very well supported and informed.'*

Students were asked how supported they felt by NHS services in Bristol, including Student Health, when it came to their sexual health. Just over half felt well supported by NHS services. However, many students felt unsupported by Student Health due to the lack of a full screening service. There were also comments about the difficulty in securing appointments at Student Health. Several students felt they had not received good advice in relation to contraception from Student Health, with one student reporting they had felt pressured into having the coil and another reporting that they had to wait a long time for their contraceptive injection.

*'I think they should have had a tent at the freshers fair that offered advice and free contraception. I wouldn't know where to go to get free contraception or std check - think this needs to be advertised'*

## Pregnancy

2% of students had experienced an unintended pregnancy whilst they had been at university (for themselves or their partner) and 2% were unsure if they had. For one student this had resulted in missing exams and delaying their studies by a year, and another reported that it 'completely threw me off my studies and did not want to use extenuating circumstances due to embarrassment'.

1% of students had experienced a miscarriage whilst at university (either for themselves or their partner), with 1% unsure if they had.

## Students' Relationships

### Kinds of relationship



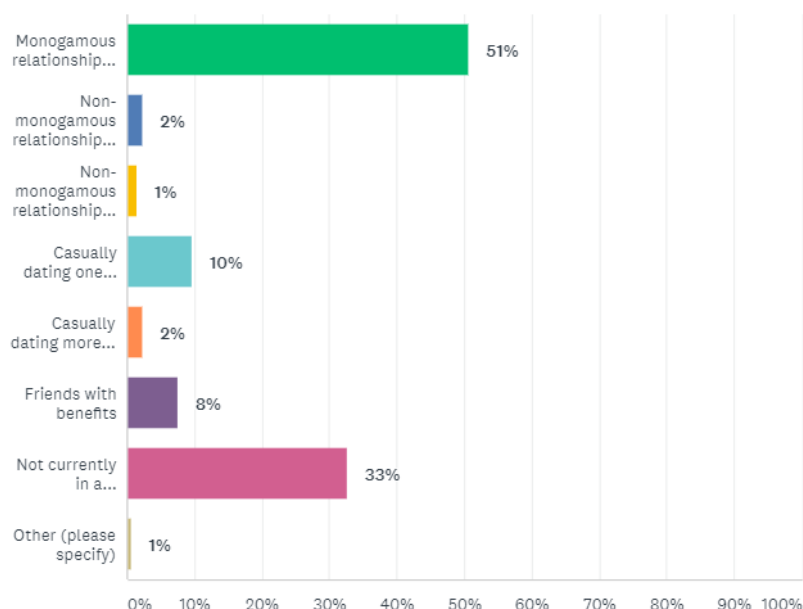
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Students were asked if they were in any of a number of different relationship types. 51% were in a monogamous relationship with one person, 2% were in a non-monogamous relationship with a primary partner and 1% were in a non-monogamous relationship with multiple partners. 10% were casually dating one person and 8% were in a friends with benefits arrangement.

Answered: 631 Skipped: 62



For students in a relationship 29% had met through a social group or friends, 7% through their course, 10% through their halls and 11% through a society or sports club. 11% had met through a dating app. Of those students who had met in another way, 40% had met at school or college, 18% at work and 23% on a night out.

### Impact of relationship status

Students were asked what impact their relationship status had on various aspects of their lives. Students who were in a monogamous or non-monogamous relationship with a primary partner were more positive about the impact of their relationship status, while students not in a relationship were more likely to feel their relationship status had a neutral or negative impact.

52% of students in a relationship felt that their relationship status had a positive impact on their studies, with 37% feeling that it had a neutral impact and 11% feeling that it had a negative impact. Students not currently in a relationship were less positive, with 35% feeling their status had a positive impact on their studies, 54% feeling that it had a neutral impact and 11% feeling it had a negative impact.

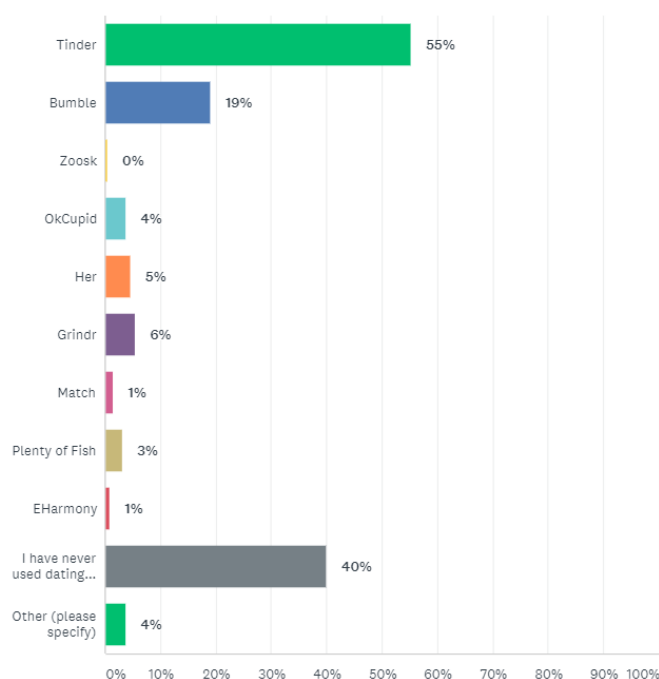
When it came to mental health 85% of students in a relationship felt their status had a positive impact on their mental health or wellbeing, 10% felt it had a neutral impact and 5% felt it had a negative impact. Students not currently in a relationship were again less positive about their status, with 18% feeling their relationship status had a positive impact on their mental health, 37% feeling it had a neutral impact and 44% feeling it had a negative impact.

Similarly, 86% of students in a relationship felt that their relationship had a positive impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem, with 12% feeling neutrally and 2% feeling their relationship had a negative impact. Just 18% of students not in a relationship felt their relationship status had a positive impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem, with 30% feeling neutrally and 52% feeling it had a negative impact.

## Use of dating apps

Have you ever used any of the following dating apps/websites? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 617 Skipped: 76



60% of students had used dating apps. Tinder was by far the most popular app, followed by Bumble. Students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minority sexual orientation were more likely to have used dating apps, with 72% of LGB+ students reporting that they had used the apps compared to 54% of straight students.

Students who had used dating apps were asked what impact the use of these had had on various aspects of their lives. 18% of students felt that dating apps had a negative impact on their studies, with 78% feeling that they had a neutral effect. 26% of students felt that dating apps had a negative impact on their mental health or wellbeing, with 60% feeling that the apps had a neutral impact and 14% feeling they had a positive impact. 23% of students felt that dating apps had had a positive impact on their social life and 41% felt that dating apps had a positive impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem, with 21% feeling the apps had a negative impact.

LGB+ students were more likely to report that dating apps had a negative impact on their studies, with 27% of LGB+ students reporting dating apps had a negative impact on this, compared to 12% of straight students. LGB+ students were also more



likely to report that dating apps had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing, with 34% reporting a negative impact compared to 20% of straight students.

### Experiences of Dating & Relationships

When asked about their relationships and dating experiences at university students took this opportunity to speak about a wide range of experiences. Key themes that came out were the difficulties surrounding meeting someone and a perception of a disposable dating culture at university. One student argued that there was a culture of having sex 'whilst not respecting or caring about the person' which they found very upsetting. Some students were also concerned about the harm that could be caused by casual sex, with several expressing confusion around knowing whether someone liked them, and reporting feeling hurt by the 'hook up culture' of university. A number of students also expressed that it was okay not to have sex, with one male student stating that they'd wished they'd known that 'you can be a guy and be nervous about or not want sex'.

*'There is a lot of pressure to have casual sex. I am a virgin and it is very difficult to have this pressure all time!'*

*'Wish there was a better understanding/communication around the fact that you don't need to be having sex all the time in Uni. I'm not a one-night stand kinda person and I wish I felt less pressure to do so.'*

Several students also spoke about the difficulties that arise when relationships fail, particularly the impact on studies when this happens. One student felt that 'there should be more support for people going through a break up whilst at uni' as they had almost dropped out due to this. A number of students also spoke about being in problematic or abusive relationships whilst at university which impacted on their mental health.

*'I was in an emotionally abusive relationship with another student in my first year (now in my fourth year) which very negatively affected my mental health and self-esteem at the time.'*

## Students' Sex Lives

### Students' Sex Lives

9% of students were currently celibate, with 90% of students reporting that they were not celibate and 1% preferring not to say. For those students who were celibate most reported that they were waiting for the right person, with several reporting that they were asexual or were celibate for religious reasons.

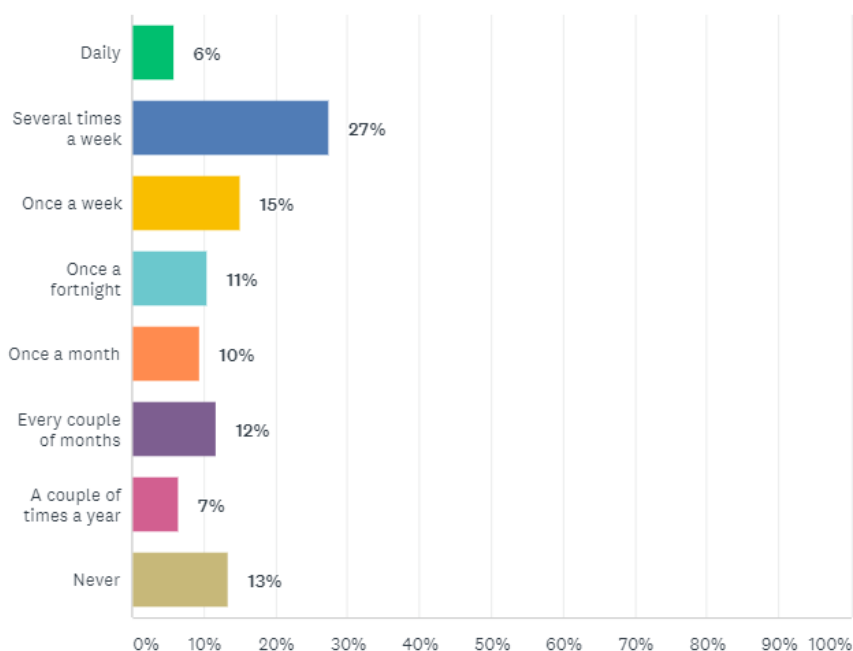
36% of students reported that they were a virgin when they arrived at university. One student commented that 'I thought that would be unusual and super weird even though it turned out it wasn't'. BME students were more likely to have been a virgin when they started university, with 55% of BME students reporting they had been a virgin compared to 33% of white students. Religious students were also more likely to



have been a virgin before coming to university, with 50% of religious students reporting that they had compared to 32% of non-religious students. This may partly explain why BME students were more likely to be virgins upon arriving at university, as they were more likely to be religious (49% religious) compared to white students (20% religious).

Students were asked how often they had sex.

Answered: 568 Skipped: 125



31% of students currently engaged in sexting, 9% in phone sex and 5% in online sex.

Students were asked what impact their current sex lives had on various aspects of their lives. Students who were not celibate tended to be more positive about the impact of their sex life compared to students who were celibate.

For example, 60% of sexually active students felt their sex life had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing, compared to just 24% of celibate students. Similarly, 68% of sexually active students felt their sex life had a positive impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem, compared to just 19% of celibate students. In the open text comment section of this question several students elaborated on how sex impacted their confidence with one male student describing 'deep-rooted issues of guilt and shame' when he couldn't or didn't want to have sex.

### Thoughts and Concerns around Sex

42% of students were concerned about having an orgasm when they have sex. Women were significantly more concerned about this, with 48% of women concerned about having an orgasm during sex compared to 28% of men.

34% of students were concerned about being able to achieve an erection or get aroused during sex, 44% of students were concerned about their ability to perform during sex and 27% were concerned about being seen as inexperienced or a virgin.



At the end of the page on students' sex lives students were asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell us about their thoughts and feelings about sex. There was a wide range of responses to this question. One of the most common responses was a concern around the potential harm of casual sex. One student felt that using casual sex to boost one's self-esteem could leave you 'used and unloved'. Several students expressed confusion around knowing whether someone liked them and felt hurt by the 'hook up culture' of university.

A number of students expressed that it was okay not to want to have sex, with one student saying that they wish they'd known 'that you can be a guy and be nervous about or not want sex'. Students also expressed concerns around the pressure they felt there was to have sex.

*'Wish there was a better understanding/communication around the fact that you don't need to be having sex all the time in Uni. I'm not a one-night stand kinda person and I wish I felt less pressure to do so.'*

### **Pornography**

55% of students reported that they currently consumed pornography. Men were more likely to consume pornography than women, with 87% of men reporting that they did compared to 42% of women. Students who identified as other than straight were also more likely to report that they consumed pornography, with 69% reporting this compared to 48% of straight students.

Students were asked what impact their consumption or non-consumption of pornography had on various aspects of their lives. Students who consumed pornography were more likely to feel that their consumption of pornography had a negative impact on certain areas. For example, 17% of students who consumed pornography felt that this consumption had a negative impact on their sexual or romantic relationships, compared to 2% of students who felt their non-consumption had a negative impact. Meanwhile, 22% of students who consumed pornography felt that this had a negative impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem, compared to 5% of students who felt their non-consumption had a negative impact.

*'It's too fake, and it gave me a wrong sense of what actual sex and relationships are like.'*

### **Sex Work**

Students were asked if they had ever worked in the sex industry in a direct or indirect role. Direct sex work includes selling sexual services to clients e.g. escorting, selling sexual services in a brothel, massage parlour or independently and working as a professional dominant or submissive. Indirect sex work includes acting in the porn industry, sex chat lines, stripping, pole dancing, being a naked butler, glamour modelling and selling services on the internet or through a webcam.

0.7% of students (4 students) had worked in the sex industry in a direct role, and 1.4% of students (8 students) had worked in the sex industry in an indirect role, meaning that 2% of students had worked in the sex industry overall.





*'There needs to be more support for Student sex workers. There is not enough. The university needs to do more to support us.'*

Students were then asked if they had ever considered working in a direct or indirect role in the sex industry. 6% of students had considered working in a direct role and 13% had considered working in an indirect role, meaning that 19% of students had considered working in the sex industry overall.

Students were asked to elaborate on their considerations around working in the sex industry if this was applicable. A significant proportion of students who commented had considered the sex industry to earn money for their fees, bills or studies. A number of these students reported that working in the sex industry felt like easy money, with several commenting that it felt like fun or enjoyable work.

*'It seemed like an easy and fun way to earn money as a student'*

*'I considered getting a sugar daddy to help pay my rent, food and medical prescriptions through uni'*

## Recommendations for the University of Bristol

### Improving Sex & Relationship Education

While the majority of students do receive some sex and relationship education prior to arriving at University, it is clear from the research that this focuses predominantly on issues such as STIs and the age of consent. Many topics which are important to young people's understanding of healthy relationships and sex lives are not covered, and there is evidence that many students are nervous or lack confidence with issues like consent as a result. The University is uniquely placed to support students to further their understanding in these areas as they transition into life as a student, and should take a proactive approach to supporting students' education in this area. We therefore recommend that the University:

- Introduce a comprehensive education programme for first year undergraduates, co-created with Bristol SU, covering; consent, healthy relationships, signs of unhealthy relationships, sexual harassment/appropriate behaviour, pornography and bystander intervention.
- Ensure that any new education programme addresses the student concerns raised in this survey and that the tone and language used is appropriate, relevant and engaging for the audience.
- Review this education programme regularly to ensure it is fit for purpose, particularly in relation to different gender identities and sexual orientations.

### Tackling Harassment and Assault

Sexual harassment and assault are an unfortunate reality for Bristol students, and can have a profound impact on the mental health, education and social experience of those who experience them. For many affected by these issues, the reporting and support structures currently in place did not meet their needs and these urgently need to be improved. We therefore recommend that the University:

- Ensure there are clear reporting processes in place under the new residential support model for students to report sexual harassment, assault and rape.
- Introduce trauma support as part of the Student Counselling service for survivors of sexual assault and rape.
- Work with students to co-create support for survivors, ensuring the University's support offer meets student needs.
- Make it clear through the extenuating circumstances process that experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape can be used as an extenuating circumstance and that support will be offered for student survivors.
- Review existing policies e.g. reporting, dealing with allegations, extenuating circumstances, with external agencies such as Zero Tolerance, SARSAS and Avon & Somerset Police.
- Introduce a new central university position of 'Sexual Violence Liaison Officer' as recommended by UUK, to give students a clear person to talk to and discuss their options with.

- Improve signposting of sexual violence services for students and provide all front-line staff with a signposting chart that will allow them to direct students to appropriate services.

### Improving Sexual Health

A worrying number of students are neglecting their sexual health by not getting sexual health screenings when these would be medically advised. This increases the likelihood of students developing more serious symptoms where STIs go untreated and increases the risk of STIs being spread amongst the student population. The University should ensure that sexual health services should be more accessible for students and more widely understood to be part of a healthy sex life. Adequate support must also be in place for students affected by pregnancy or miscarriage while they are studying. We recommend that the University:

- Work with Bristol SU to lobby the council for additional funding for the Student Health Service, to reintroduce full sexual health screenings.
- Work with Bristol SU on a sexual health testing campaign, highlighting how students can get tested to tackle the low level of uptake of screenings from students.
- Introduce free condoms and dental dams in all University residences.
- Introduce additional support for students who fall unexpectedly pregnant or experience miscarriage, including support through Student Health (e.g. free pregnancy tests), Student Counselling and through a clear extenuating circumstances process.

### Improving Experiences of Sex & Relationships

It is clear that experiences relating to sex and relationships can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of students. This can range from the emotional impact when a healthy relationship breaks up to the long-term mental health effects that are often experienced as a result of abusive or damaging relationships. While the impact of these issues on a person's studies can be addressed through the extenuating circumstances process, this is not widely understood amongst students. We therefore recommend that the University:

- Make it explicit through the extenuating circumstances process that relationship break-ups and experiences of abusive or damaging relationships count as an extenuating circumstance.

## Recommendations for Bristol SU

### Tackling Harassment and Assault

- Continue to work with the Good Night Out campaign to embed anti-harassment training into local nightclubs and bars popular with students.
- Work with UoB, Bristol City Council and local women's organisations on making the campus and city safer for students, particularly women, at night.
- Ensure UoB are included in discussions around Reclaim the Night and other student led initiatives on tackling sexual violence.
- Review internal policies such as the code of conduct with external agencies such as Zero Tolerance, SARSAS and Avon & Somerset Police.

### Improving Sexual Health

- Work with UoB to lobby the council for additional funding for the Student Health Service, to reintroduce full sexual health screenings.
- Launch a campaign promoting sexual health testing within the student body, addressing the low uptake of testing in the student population.
- Introduce free condoms and dental dams in the Richmond building.

### Improving Experiences of Sex & Relationships

- Begin work on fostering more open and honest conversations around sex and relationships in the student body, helping to tackle stigma around virginity and exploring issues relating to modern dating culture, dating apps and pornography.