

Help students help themselves: The Intervention Initiative

There can be no doubt that sexual violence, harassment and stalking are significant problems for UK students. But while raising awareness of the problem is important, it will not be enough to effect the fundamental cultural change we need.

Nor will that change be effected through piecemeal efforts or by sermonising to students. International evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of so-called bystander intervention programmes, which teach students to see themselves as agents for social change and to speak out when they witness problematic behaviour.

Public Health England commissioned our multidisciplinary team at the [University of the West of England](#) to develop such a programme, which we call the [Intervention Initiative](#), specifically for UK university settings.

Based on a review of the best available evidence and freely available online, the programme is designed to be delivered to all students via eight hours of workshops led by experienced facilitators. In addition to raising awareness and challenging myths, it equips students with the skills to intervene safely to prevent violence and abuse, such as by calling out sexual harassment or spotting a risky situation in a nightclub and identifying how best to intercede. It also empowers students to promote healthy social norms so that problematic behaviours are challenged and become socially proscribed.

Additional, demonstrable positive benefits of doing the course relate to graduate employability and the student experience. In their feedback, students rated all aspects of the course at UWE as excellent, and several other UK universities have decided to run it this academic year.

The National Union of Students and individual students' unions are already running powerful campaigns, but these need to be part of comprehensive university-wide strategies to combat sexual violence and harassment. Vice-chancellors must not pass the buck. If they were all to mandate the Intervention Initiative, then we could transform the culture of a generation.

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