



Imperial College Union Sexual Misconduct Survey Report 2021



Instagram icon @icustooacampaign

Table of Contents

■ Introduction	3
■ Executive Summary	4
■ Methodology and Limitations	5
■ Prevalence of Sexual Misconduct and Demographics of Survivors	6
■ Settings for Sexual Misconduct at Imperial	8
■ Perpetrators of Sexual Misconduct within the Community	10
■ Reporting and Investigation of Misconduct and Support Services at Imperial College	12
A. Reporting and Procedures	13
B. Availability of Support	14
C. Awareness and Quality of Support Services	15
■ Recommendations	17
■ Conclusion	19

Authors: Diptasri Basu, Nathalie Podder and Cat Turhan

Report commissioned by: Nathalie Podder, Deputy President (Welfare) at Imperial College Union

Survey written by: ICUsToo

Introduction

This survey was delivered in collaboration with ICUsToo¹ to investigate the prevalence of sexual misconduct at Imperial, the spaces where it is most likely to happen, the efficacy of support and types of responses that are given to survivors of sexual misconduct. This is an incredibly sensitive topic that has a profound impact on the lives of those who have been personally affected by it. It is important to keep this in mind when reading this report; every figure has a group of individuals behind it, and every individual has their own experience.

The analysis of this survey coincides with a larger piece of work being done by Imperial College Union to tackle the issue at large. During the Autumn term of the 2021-2022 academic year, the Deputy President (Welfare) has run multiple campaigns against sexual violence, from implementing the “Ask for Angela” scheme at the Union venues to training bar staff on how to test drinks for spiking drugs. The latter of these measures came about as a suggestion from one of the respondents of this survey:

“**... it'll be nice if the uni [sp] (being very STEM in nature) could offer us those testing strips that can identify whether a drink has been spiked with something unwanted**”

With this said, it is important to emphasize that this is meant to be more than just a data-gathering exercise; we intend to use the outcomes and results of this survey to identify problem areas and effect real change that will improve the lives of all students at Imperial by making them feel safer and more included. In doing so, the Union aims to work in collaboration with the College, which has provided timely information on several aspects of research and been receptive towards working together to eliminate sexual misconduct and foster a culture of no tolerance. There is a long way to go in reforming the culture as well as improving attitudes and services for survivors and the Union seeks further cooperation and support from the College in making joint endeavors to tackle concerns.

The Union has already started its own piece of work around this, and we would like to invite the College to take part in it as well. A key point of collaboration will be in the College's upcoming review of its student disciplinary policy and operational guidelines, as an overwhelming amount of the feedback obtained from the students in this survey revolve around issues with the reporting and investigating process, clarity around sanctionable behavior and access to support.

Nathalie Podder,
Deputy President (Welfare) 2021-22

¹ICUsToo is a student-led campaign group at Imperial College London which aims to end sexual violence at the College

Executive Summary

In July 2021 Imperial College Union (ICU) launched this Sexual Misconduct Survey to understand the broader culture around sexual consent among Imperial students and specifically to assess the incidence of sexual misconduct within the institution. In doing so, the survey asked respondents questions about their perception of sexual misconduct, their experience of it both within and outside the Imperial campus as well as specifics about the settings in which they took place and the perpetrators of such conduct.

The survey received 613 responses, which represents around 2.8% of the student population at Imperial, and it was open to all students who are members of Imperial College Union. Given that the survey was filled through self-selection

by students themselves, it may reflect a bias in its results because many students responding may have had prior interest in the topic or a personal experience with sexual misconduct and therefore likely invested in its assessment at Imperial College. The demographics of respondents suggest that women, heterosexual individuals, and undergraduates were overrepresented among respondents and therefore the results should be interpreted with caution – to understand that they are a reflection of the demographics among survey participants and not perfectly representative of the broader community at Imperial College. However, the data could certainly be read in conjunction with wider College level data or UK level data for comparison purposes, to measure progress on actionable recommendations from this report.

Some key observations from the survey responses are:

- 1. 30.8%** and **15.0%** of respondents identified as survivors of sexual harassment and sexual violence respectively.
- More than half of the survey respondents were women. **67.3%** were heterosexual and **73.2%** of respondents were undergraduate students.
- 34.7%** of survey participants identified as BAME and **10.1%** as disabled.
- 84.2%** and **87.5%** of those respondents who were survivors of sexual harassment and sexual violence respectively were women.
- 42.8%** of individuals who were survivors of sexual harassment were also survivors of sexual violence.
- 13.8%** of those who suffered sexual violence were disabled. **51.7%** of disabled respondents identified themselves as a survivor of harassment or violence or both.
- 24.9%** of sexual harassment survivors identified as bisexual and **2.2%** identified as pansexual.
- 82.2%** and **67.3%** of survivors of sexual violence and harassment respectively identified fellow students as perpetrators.
- When asked about the settings under which sexual misconduct is most prevalent, Union bars, Halls of Residence and off campus venues were identified as the top three venues by respondents.
- A significant number of survivors of sexual misconduct lamented the lack of consent training, uncertainty of disciplinary processes and lack of support systems for survivors, quality of support services as some the key improvements needed to make Imperial a place where sexual misconduct is actively prevented and discouraged.

Methodology and Limitations

The online survey was open between 18 July and 31 August 2021 and was advertised through the Imperial College social media channels and website. The survey had **613** responses which corresponds to a response rate of **2.8%** across the University student population. In a survey of this nature, this would be considered a small sample size, particularly because the researchers could not control for the demographic make-up of the participants to ensure that it reflected the student demographics at Imperial College itself. In fact, it is observed that women, undergraduates, and heterosexual and bisexual students were overrepresented within the survey, as were disabled students. Therefore, the findings may not necessarily be accurately extrapolated to the larger student body at Imperial College.

The survey was also conducted online only, through a self-selection method. Therefore, students with prior interest in the topic or experience of sexual misconduct may have taken a particular interest in responding. However, the researchers considered this the most appropriate method for this survey to prioritize maintaining anonymity of the participants and the accuracy of responses of all students given the sensitive nature of the issue.

The survey defined sexual harassment as describing **'unwanted behavior of a sexual nature. This may include, but is not limited to, sexual comments about your body, catcalling, stalking, overtly sexual jokes, unwelcome sexual advances and verbal harassment. This behavior may happen digitally e.g. sending unwanted sexually explicit images.'** It also provided a definition of sexual violence as referring to **'any physical sexual act that was not consented to or was forced upon you. This may include, but is not limited to, forced**

kissing, groping, unwanted exposure of your body (e.g. lifting up a skirt), and rape.'

The definitions included in the survey were also written and agreed upon by ICUsToo.

Whilst ICUsToo considered using direct quotes from the Equality Act 2010 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the two definitions from those statutes had some noticeable disparity in the degree of emotionally evocative language that was used; in order to have a fairer comparison between the two types of sexual misconduct that were being investigated, the group decided to use definitions that were more neutral in their tone.

Although there were clear definitions provided for sexual harassment and sexual violence to survey respondents, there is no direct evidence that the respondents relied entirely on that in recording their responses. However, some respondents have written comments saying that they opposed the scope of the definitions themselves, thereby indicating that they in fact did consider the definition in responding to the survey questions.

All questions were optional, which meant that some questions, including the questions on demographics, had varying numbers of respondents. The researchers felt that it would be important to make all questions optional as the thematic questions were of a sensitive nature, and the demographics questions could make some respondents feel uncomfortable around anonymity.

Readers should examine the evidence presented in this report alongside nationwide evidence such as NUS' research into Sexual Violence in the Further Education Sector².

² nus.org.uk/articles/nus-ground-breaking-report-on-sexual-violence-in-further-education

Prevalence of Sexual Misconduct: Demographics behind the Survey

The Sexual Misconduct Survey at Imperial College Union was commissioned for the first time in 2021 and promoted through the Imperial College Union website as well as social media channels.

The survey was open to participants between July 18, 2021 and August 31, 2021 and 613 respondents participated in it. All questions, including demographics questions, were optional.

Most of the survey participants were women and a substantial proportion also heterosexual. **73.2%** reported as being enrolled in an undergraduate course and **26.8%** in a postgraduate taught or postgraduate research course.

Table 1: Gender of Participants

Gender	% of respondents
Cis Female	54.2%
Cis Male	40.3%
Gender Non-conforming	3.0%
Other	2.0%
Trans Male	0.3%
Trans Female	0.2%
Total number of responses	596

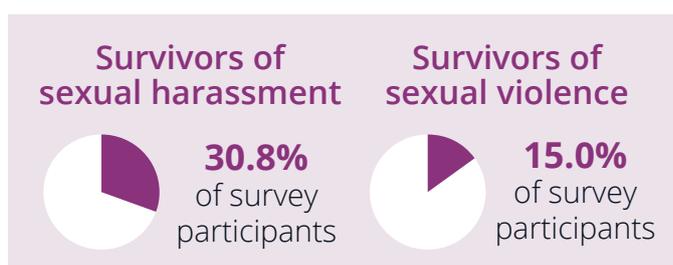
Table 2: Sexual Orientation of Participants

Sexual Orientation	% of respondents
Heterosexual Straight	67.3%
Bisexual	18.7%
Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	5.2%
Questioning/Unsure	4.2%
Other	1.7%
Asexual	1.5%
Pansexual	1.4%
Total number of responses	593

34.7% of participants identified as BAME and 10.1% as disabled. Within these groups women were in the majority. However, the survey also finds representation from a wide range of sexualities that allows for a wider representation of experiences of sexual misconduct within the Imperial community.

Survivors at Imperial College

Survivors of sexual harassment and sexual violence at Imperial College account for **30.8%** and **15.0%** respectively of all survey participants. A significant number of survivors of sexual misconduct at Imperial College identify as women and a large proportion also identify as heterosexual.



A significant number of sexual misconduct at Imperial are heterosexual women



Our survey responses find that while women respondents were more likely to say 'yes' to having experienced sexual misconduct at Imperial, they were also more likely to have answered 'no' when asked whether they approached any support services to seek help.

Among the **34.7%** of participants who identified as BAME, **28.2%** and **15.1%** said yes to having experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence respectively. Among the respondents who identify as having a disability, **50.0%** were survivors of sexual harassment and **20.0%** were survivors of sexual violence.

Among the respondents who identify as having a disability there were:



50%
survivors
of sexual
harassment



20%
survivors
of sexual
violence

Table 3: Gender of Survivors

Gender	% of respondents who experienced sexual harassment	% of respondents who experienced sexual violence
Cis Female	83.6%	86.4%
Cis Male	12.6%	11.4%
Gender Non-conforming	2.7%	1.1%
Other	1.1%	1.1%
Trans Male	0%	0%
Trans Female	0%	0%

Table 4: Sexual Orientation of Survivors

Sexual Orientation	% of respondents who experienced sexual harassment	% of respondents who experienced sexual violence
Straight/Heterosexual	61.3%	65.9%
Bisexual	24.9%	25.0%
Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual	4.4%	3.4%
Questioning/Unsure	2.8%	2.3%
Other	2.7%	3.4%
Pansexual	2.2%	0.0%
Asexual	1.7%	0.0%

A majority of survivors identified as heterosexual, **24.9%** of sexual harassment survivors were bisexual and none of those who identified as pansexual reported experiencing sexual violence while at Imperial.

Settings for Sexual Misconduct

The survey revealed some interesting findings on venues and settings where sexual misconduct is most prevalent. Based on the perception of respondents, the Union Bars were selected as the most common venue for sexual harassment and off campus venues for sexual violence, respectively.

Union Bars were selected as the most common venue for sexual harassment



Table 5: Venues of concern (all respondents)

Venue	Sexual Harassment	Sexual Violence
At the Union Bars	344	248
Off Campus	300	272
At Halls of Residence	280	252
Within clubs and societies	220	157
Others	184	15
Other campus buildings	123	48
Online	33	n/a
I don't perceive it to happen at all	102	165
Total number of responses	596	586



Halls of residence feature prominently among survivors as the second most relevant setting for sexual misconduct

Respondents who identified themselves as survivors of sexual harassment or violence agreed with the above results, as they also identified Union Bars, off-campus events, and halls of residence to be the venues where sexual harassment and violence occurred most often. This parity shows a good awareness within the community of where sexual misconduct happens most often, even among students who have not experienced it themselves. Halls of residence feature prominently among survivors as the second most relevant setting for sexual misconduct overall.

Table 6: Venues of concern (survivors)

Venue	Sexual Harassment	Sexual Violence
At the Union Bars	88	26
At Halls of Residence	79	45
Off Campus	73	47
Other campus buildings	59	8
Within clubs and societies	41	15
Online	33	n/a
Others	7	4
Total number of responses	186	91

Halls of residence are likely to have been identified as a venue of concern due to the nature of sexual misconduct – often, it happens in private spaces and behind closed doors. However, this finding does raise serious questions about the sense of security and safety enjoyed by students in what should be considered their “home” and the duty of care that universities have in ensuring safe spaces for student wellbeing. The survey has gathered several suggestions from survivors themselves on measures that could enhance safety in the community.

Displaying posters on sexual misconduct guidelines and the penalties it attracts, making sure women students share a kitchen with at least one other woman student, ensuring that the perpetrator is moved to a different residence when a complaint is made against them – have all been specific measures in reference to halls of residence proposed by survivors themselves.

It is important to ensure that these measures are delivered in a way that is protective rather than

punitive; therefore, it is necessary to reassure survivors that they will not be forced to relocate if they make a complaint about another student’s or staff member’s behavior. Due regard should also be given for the complainant’s safety and wellbeing regarding decisions around relocating the other party.

Union bars have been identified as a top venue for sexual misconduct by **91** survivors and **369** overall respondents respectively. **60.7%** and **65.0%** of those who reported the Union bars as a top venue for sexual harassment and violence respectively, were women. **44.3%** of BAME survivors and **51.6%** of disabled survivors named it as a venue where they were targeted. This is something that Imperial College Union takes incredibly seriously, and the Union is prioritizing measures to raise awareness about sexual misconduct within these settings specifically. Given this, preventative measures are already being considered and implemented by the team to prevent sexual misconduct at these venues.

Some actions being considered/implemented include:

1.

Providing appropriate training for casual and permanent staff and reviewing tender negotiations with security firms to ensure that operatives are well trained.

2.

Displaying clear messages on penalties and prosecution related to sexual misconduct.

3.

Running awareness campaigns such as ‘Ask for Angela’ and a campaign against drink spiking for those who may need immediate support.

A broader review of how the Union can make their venues the safest possible for members is being undertaken - this will include student consultation and regular reviews. This year, the Union Bars have implemented the ‘Ask for Angela’ campaign, access to free drink covers, specific training for bar staff

on how to use drink testing strips and respond to suspected incidences of spiking, dedicated first aid provision during ticketed night events, mandatory bag searches, written guidance for security on how to interact with and signpost vulnerable students and active bystander training for Union bar staff.

Perpetrators of Sexual Misconduct

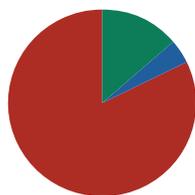
The Survey asked respondents who said 'yes' to a personal experience of sexual misconduct while at Imperial to identify the category of person who perpetrated the conduct. An overwhelming majority of respondents have identified fellow students as perpetrators. Their responses have been represented below, separately for sexual harassment and sexual violence respectively.



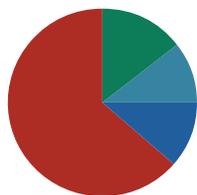
An overwhelming majority of respondents have identified fellow students as perpetrators.

Chart 1: Perpetrators for Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

Sexual Harassment



Sexual Violence



- A fellow student
- A member of academic staff at Imperial
- A member of non-academic staff at Imperial
- A member of the public (but in an Imperial setting)

Several respondents criticised the mishandling of complaints and inconclusive outcomes of investigations.

In many cases, proceedings are seen by students to be drawn out and exhausting.

Students identified consent training as a possible preventative measure, as well as clear guidelines on appropriate behaviour and sexual misconduct. Imperial College does not currently have any standardised consent training for students in place and nothing that is mandated for all students. Although students have online access to the policy on sexual misconduct³ and disciplinary procedures, several respondents of the survey have complained of mishandling of complaints and the inconclusive nature of outcomes of investigations where formal complaints have been made. In many cases, proceedings are seen by students to be drawn out and exhausting.

Secondary research on the wider situation across other UK universities demonstrates that the problems are prevalent at sector level too. Survivors across universities have stated that investigations are drawn out and secretive, and the outcome of the investigation is not made available to them. They also complain of universities being negligent and making them feel 'worthless' and prioritising money (fees) and reputation over concern for students⁴.

In May 2021 women from 15 Universities signed a letter calling for mandatory policy dealing with sexual assault allegations in higher education. A recent study by John Edmunds and Eva Tutchell, authors of *Unsafe Spaces*⁵, found that there are at least **50,000** sexual assaults at Universities each year and while Universities UK claims that all Universities have policies and practices in place, a Freedom of Information request at **102** Universities revealed that only 9 Universities had satisfactory safeguarding policies for dealing with sexual assault⁶.

³ imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/secretariat/college-governance/charters/ordinances/students/

⁴ www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-57174251

⁵ www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/9781789730593

⁶ www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-57174251

The ICU survey also highlights a concerning proportion of academic and non-academic staff being identified as perpetrators of sexual violence. A large majority of survivors who have identified academic staff as perpetrators have mentioned off campus settings as the most common venue. When asked whether they sought support from College or Union services following their experience, **51.2%** of survivors responded with the option “I did not seek support from anyone at Imperial”.

These findings necessitate crucial conversations on the power imbalance between academic staff and students and possible abuse of such power by perpetrators involved. It is disheartening that

51.2% of survivors of violence responded with the
“ **I did not seek support from anyone at Imperial** ”



Data from a 2018 survey conducted by NUS and The 1752 Group

In the context of Imperial College, matters of staff misconduct are concerning. This is not only because the majority of staff perpetrators are academic staff who are likely to have power over students’ academic success, wellbeing, and career prospects, but also because the disciplinary proceedings conducted for staff complaints are distinct⁸ from those where a student is accused. Additionally, the standards of confidentiality and procedures followed at Imperial often do not provide survivors with a clear indication of the outcome of their complaint. With academic staff presumed to have power over student academic and career outcomes, it is arguably a lapse to allow for outcomes of investigations to be kept undisclosed to the complainant. A complainant may see this as dehumanising, and it does not foster a sense of justice or closure for them. Against this backdrop, **Imperial should ensure that their employment and operational and**

disciplinary guidelines reflect the seriousness of these offences, taking steps to ensure that staff are well-trained around the issue, and that the University accepts its own vicarious liability in making the best possible efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the first place.

Where students are subjected to sexual violence by members of the public within Imperial settings, it would be useful to evaluate the settings where such interactions happen. It may be an opportunity to re-examine the safeguards currently adopted and ensure that guidelines for interactions with members of the public within College settings are laid out and followed by all stakeholders. Equally, making sure that students have a clear understanding of individual positive actions to protect themselves and a knowledge of the support services available to them in emergency situations is crucial.

⁷ www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/03/sexual-misconduct-by-uk-university-staff-is-rife-research-finds

⁸ www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/hr/public/policies/harassmentbullying/Sexual-Misconduct-Procedure-for-Staff.pdf

Reporting and Investigation of Misconduct and Support services at Imperial College

Imperial College has a Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Violence Policy⁹, a version of which is available online for viewing. A copy of its disciplinary procedures relating to staff and a separate one for students' disciplinary procedure¹⁰ is also available online.

The Sexual Misconduct Survey 2021 reports that **30.8%** of participants experienced sexual harassment and **15.0%** experienced sexual violence. To provide support for such survivors of sexual misconduct, the College currently has several support services available. These include:

- I. Sexual Violence Liaison Officers (SVLOs)
- II. The Advice Centre at Imperial College Union
- III. Wellbeing Advisers
- IV. The Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service

Despite the plethora of support services, this survey reveals that only **18.7%** of survivors sought help from these or any other support services at Imperial for sexual misconduct. A Freedom of Information request filed by the current Deputy President (Welfare) at Imperial College Union in

June 2021 revealed that during the previous five academic years 2016/17 to 2020/2021, there were only 10 formal complaints of harassment, assault or sexual misconduct made against students enrolled at the College. A significant number of participants as well as survivors did not know where to seek support or did not believe serious action would be taken by the College where a report was made.

In the following section, this report seeks to examine the policies, procedures and reporting mechanisms and quality of investigations which may indicate the reasons behind such low rates of complaints regarding sexual misconduct despite a comparatively higher rate of incidence within the Imperial community.



A significant number of participants as well as survivors did not know where to seek support or did not believe serious action would be taken by the College where a report was made.

⁹ www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/hr/public/policies/harassmentbullying/Sexual-Harassment-Sexual-Misconduct-and-Sexual-Violence-Policy.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/secretariat/public/college-governance/charters-statutes-ordinances-regulations/ordinances/Ordinance-E2-Nov-2020.pdf>

A. Reporting and Procedure

Report and Support¹¹ is the online tool that Imperial College utilises to encourage reporting of sexual misconduct within its members. The tool provides the option to report anonymously or be in contact with someone regarding the incident. It requires the person reporting to provide details of the incident such as where and when it took place, names of people involved, types of behaviour or actions that took place, how the incident made the reporting person feel and its impact on their work, any injuries they suffered and whether or not they received treatment for it and anything they have done in response to the incident. There is also the option to report in person to a Harassment Support Contact or a Sexual Violence Liaison Officer.

E2: Student Disciplinary Procedure makes the distinction between a “disclosure” and a “report.” The purpose of a disclosure is to provide wellbeing advice and support to the student, regardless of whether or not the student decides to make a report. A disclosure could be anonymous (eg via the Report and Support tool); however, a report cannot be made anonymously. The student disciplinary procedure will only be put into effect once a report is made, and the responding party must be made aware of the identity of the reporting party after this occurs. College provides guidance to both parties on how to respect confidentiality around the report, and the accompanying Student Disciplinary Procedure (Ordinance E2). Guidelines state that any deliberate breaches around confidentiality from either party may be treated as a separate disciplinary offence. The Ordinance E2 states that partial or complete restrictions of access to the College and its services may be implemented for the purposes of safeguarding the reporting party at the discretion of the Provost or their nominee following a risk assessment; however, there is no clarification on how this risk assessment is made, and there are currently no specific guidelines on how to safeguard vulnerable students after a report is made.

Ordinance E2 prohibits any legal professionals to

accompany either party in any investigation, but in the absence of at least one legal professional on the disciplinary panel itself, it is not clear how the fairness of policy and procedure at the investigation is maintained.

RECOMMENDATION

Imperial College Union recommends that every sexual misconduct investigation panel set up by the University or the Union itself includes a legal professional, entrusted with upholding fairness of procedures and outcomes.

In the context of sexual misconduct involving staff, the staff procedures¹² clearly mandate confidentiality regarding the parties and outcome. However, it fails to mention the timeframe within which investigations would be concluded or any other commitment towards ensuring a fair hearing except for a broad overarching statement that ‘the College will prioritise safety, dignity, privacy, fairness and due process’. This apparent prioritising of confidentiality over fairness and quality of procedure seems inappropriate in the context of staff sexual misconduct especially when contextualised against the spate of increasing overuse of non-disclosure agreements¹³ by universities for all subject matters that they consider ‘internal matters’ or harmful for their reputation. Although, we have no evidence to suggest that Imperial College has or intends to use non-disclosure agreements (‘NDA’s) in sexual misconduct cases, NDA’s in their most extreme forms are increasingly being used by universities to silence sexual assault victims. They include prohibitions on any discussion with anyone about how the concerned University dealt with the matter and threatening expulsion for the complainant. To guard against such unethical practices and commodification of dignity and bodily integrity, we argue for an explicit commitment by Imperial College to never use non-disclosure agreements for any matter dealing with sexual misconduct by either staff or students or both.

¹¹ <https://report-and-support.imperial.ac.uk/>

RECOMMENDATION

Imperial College must make an explicit commitment to never use non-disclosure agreements for any matter dealing with sexual misconduct by either staff or students or both.

This also makes out a strong case for the College to reveal the outcome (as opposed to identity of parties) of each investigation and an urgent need for establishing protocols for processing data under the appropriate lawful basis for sexual misconduct cases.

We also recommend that in ascertaining what constitutes general misconduct, the College refrain from it being linked to behaviour which brings the College into disrepute, when such behaviour is related to a sexual misconduct case.

Currently, the definition of general misconduct includes 'behaviour which brings the college into disrepute'. This clause in its association with bringing disrepute to the College provides a wide berth to the College to call into question any behaviour by complainants of sexual misconduct, especially where such behaviour is legal but viewed as bringing disrepute to the College (eg. when complainants of sexual misconduct publicly complain about procedural inadequacies in investigations or discuss their personal experience of sexual misconduct with third parties). Such actions could amount to 'behaviour which brings disrepute to College' and therefore may be condemned as 'misconduct' under the current definition.

RECOMMENDATION

Imperial College must reveal the outcome (as opposed to identity of parties) of each investigation and urgently establish protocols for processing data under the appropriate lawful basis for sexual misconduct cases.

B. Availability of Support

The survey asked survivors for feedback on the quality of support they received. The highest percentage of participants said that the support they received from personal tutors/supervisors made them feel 'very supported' and although very few students approached the Union Advice Centre and Student representatives/ Sabbatical Officers, a significant proportion of those who did, felt 'not supported at all'.

In response to this feedback, the Union Officer Trustees have decided to:

- I. Set up a working group to evaluate the nature of existing services**
- II. Conduct focus groups with students to understand their needs for support**
- III. Most recently, the Advice Centre has seen a significant expansion in members and a commitment towards training each of them to provide quality support to students. ICU and the College are also writing an MOU to establish which department offers support and when.**

These findings also necessitate conversations on whether personal tutors/supervisors who seem to be providing the most successful support system, could be equipped with more training and consulted on what more could be done to make the College a place where survivors feel empowered and protected. An evaluation is also needed into the impact of SVLOs whose ability to help has been rated very poorly by survivors. This also requires a reflection on the training provided to SVLOs and their ability to provide specialist support as well as make recommendations for safeguarding. Feedback from survivors for SVLOs has requested ensuring they all provide the same information rather than differing opinions.

RECOMMENDATION

Personal tutors/supervisors who seem to be providing the most successful support system should be equipped with more training and consulted on what more could be done to make the College a place where survivors feel empowered and protected.

¹² www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/hr/public/policies/harassmentbullying/Sexual-Misconduct-Procedure-for-Staff.pdf

¹³ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51447615

C. Barriers to Reporting: Awareness and Quality of Support Services

A crucial section of the survey asked participants questions about the barriers to reporting or barriers against seeking support i.e. responses that help us understand what makes students least likely to report sexual misconduct or seek support when such unfortunate incidents occur. These responses shed light on the awareness and availability of support as well as the quality of

services provided.

On the question 'Did you seek support from any of the following University or Union services in relation to your experience?', a significant majority chose 'I did not seek support from anyone at Imperial'. Their response was followed up by the question 'Why did you not seek support services?' and the distribution of responses from that has been provided below:

Table 7: Reasons for not seeking support from anyone at Imperial (Sexual Harassment)

Reason	% of respondents
Did not think there would be any action taken	28.8%
Did not feel like I needed support	23.7%
Did not think I'd be believed	11.5%
Did not know who I could talk to	11.2%
Felt embarrassed, ashamed, or that it would be too emotionally difficult	10.9%
Fear of retaliation/about personal safety	5.8%
Other	4.7%
I sought support outside of Imperial	3.4%

Table 8: Reasons for not seeking support (Sexual Violence)

Reason	% of respondents
Did not think there would be any action taken	24.5%
Felt embarrassed, ashamed, or that it would be too emotionally difficult	18.9%
Did not know who I could talk to	15.1%
Did not think I'd be believed	14.5%
Fear of retaliation/about personal safety	9.4%
Did not feel like I needed support	8.2%
I sought support outside of Imperial	5.0%
Other	4.4%

It is revealing that a significant proportion of sexual violence survivors said they 'Did not know who I could talk to;' this indicates a need for clearer and more visible signposting for survivors and is also supported by several of the free response comments. **Most notably, the highest percentage of survivors of both sexual harassment and sexual violence responded that they 'did not think there would be any action taken.'**

Survivors don't trust the College to take effective action, they don't know where to report it and they fear that the process would be unproductive.

There appears to be a lack of faith in Imperial's ability to take action to provide redressal in matters of sexual misconduct and this pervasive belief indicates a need for a change in culture within the institution in how sexual misconduct reports

are handled or addressed. This lack of faith in institutional measures is shown by the following comment made by one participant:

“ Imperial has a reputation of hushing up anything that could impact their reputation as an academic institute. Acknowledging harassment would mean acknowledging they are not perfect - that's never going to happen, especially when it's easier to brush it off. ”

The survey also indicates that the perception of the larger student body with regard to reporting also reflects the concerns highlighted by survivors - they don't trust the College to take effective action, they don't know where to report it and they fear that the process would be unproductive.

RECOMMENDATION

Despite having several support services on campus, this response indicates a need for awareness initiatives to be launched both by the University as well as Imperial College Union to ensure that students understand the various sources of support that are available to them. The Union also recommends the following actions for the College to undertake:

- I. A thorough review of procedures utilised for sexual misconduct investigations**
- II. An emphasis on arriving at fair and definite outcomes that are shared with the parties involved**
- III. Prompt action in all reported matters**

It is interesting that whereas many students felt well supported by their personal tutors/supervisors, they felt these individuals were the least able to help i.e. they did not have adequate powers to support students. Additionally, SVLOs have been rated as not being able to help at all, which is unfortunate for specialist officers provided with training to deal with sexual violence within the Imperial community. This could indicate that the

College should equip the people most likely to be approached by students with the powers needed to make survivors feel protected. In either case, it is recommended that **a thorough evaluation of which staff are the best placed and what powers must be given to those offering support services must be undertaken towards enhancing the quality of support provided to students.**

Recommendations for tackling Sexual Misconduct

The survey was able to gather valuable information on students' perception of sexual misconduct and the measures they deem necessary to prevent and address incidences of sexual misconduct within the Imperial community. Most of these suggestions could be categorised into either preventative or redressal measures and they follow the broad areas of discontent that were expressed by participants in the survey. We have highlighted some of the recommendations below:

A. Preventative Measures

1. Training

1.1. Survivors have proposed that Imperial College should introduce mandatory consent training for freshers – and Imperial has already committed to it beginning Spring 2022.

2. Awareness and Information

2.1. Imperial College and ICU should both take active steps to create more awareness and information about sexual misconduct in the first place.

2.2. Clear messages on what might constitute sexual harassment or sexual violence and the penalties involved should be placed in prominent areas in the form of notices/posters.

2.3. Both Imperial College and ICU should place specific emphasis on awareness messages at their venues serving alcohol to students and around college buildings and halls of residence.

3. Reforming the culture within the Imperial community on sexual misconduct

3.1. Imperial College and ICU must work together to destigmatise conversations around sexual misconduct as opposed to a 'don't-ask don't tell attitude'.

3.2. Imperial College should encourage members to engage with each other on complex issues of consent and respect.

3.3. Imperial College and ICU should encourage reporting of incidence and discourage perpetuation of toxic stereotypes that foster a negative environment of distrust and victimhood.

B. Redressal Measures

4. Clear Communication on reporting, penalties and procedures

4.1. The College should undertake clear communication to all members on how to report sexual misconduct and the penalties and procedures it attracts.

4.2. The College should also create more awareness on the existence of the Report and Support tool.

5. Specially trained officers to support all survivors

- 5.1. The College must focus on holistic support for all survivors, including those who choose not to initiate a disciplinary complaint procedure.
- 5.2. The College should implement specific support for survivors during and after a complaint.
- 5.3. A College-level urgent review of SVLO training and increased signposting to their support services is necessary.
- 5.4. The College should also provide training for personal tutors and supervisors as the survey indicates that they are most often approached by survivors.
- 5.5. Imperial College Union has committed to revamping the Advice Centre services through expansion of the number of advisors available and ensuring appropriate training for them, as well as writing an MOU with the College to establish who should support students on what issue.

6. Adequate mental health support for survivors (and perpetrators) and quick access to counselling

- 6.1. The College should provide adequate and quality mental health support for survivors and perpetrators as a means of redressal and healing from trauma.
- 6.2. Where learning and residential environments become unsafe for members, the College should provide adequate counselling and appropriate safeguarding measures to assist all those whose wellbeing is affected.
- 6.3. Direct referral to mental health services from Imperial-provided mental health support should be available for all members involved.

7. Encourage reporting and data collection

- 7.1. Members have strongly urged Imperial College to actively encourage the reporting of incidents by survivors.
- 7.2. The College and the Union should make best efforts to regularly collect and share data and track incidence of sexual misconduct.
- 7.3. Anonymised data should be utilised for periodic evaluation of services for students as well as published as a means of increasing transparency and trust among members.

8. Reform attitude and response towards cases of sexual misconduct

- 8.1. Imperial College should refrain from attitudes of disbelief and dismissal of accounts where sexual misconduct is reported.
- 8.2. The College should refrain from directly or indirectly pressurising students to withdraw complaints or focus on consequences on reputation rather than student welfare.
- 8.3. Following this recurring concern throughout several survey responses, the ICU and Deputy President Welfare would urge the College for the following:
 - a. publishing outcomes of investigations without revealing identities of parties
 - b. having legal experts on disciplinary and investigative panels related to sexual misconduct
 - c. implementing mandatory consent training for students
 - d. ensuring that the College does not utilise non-disclosure agreements in any cases related to sexual misconduct.

Conclusion

As we write this report, we at ICU are aware of the rapidly transforming policy environment within the space of sexual misconduct in higher education. Incidence is rampant among campuses around the UK and a recent complaint by a Balliol College student at Oxford University grabbed headlines for the hostile and dismissive treatment of the victim during an investigation into alleged sexual misconduct by another student. Balliol College has only garnered negative publicity owing to their shameful attitude towards the incident and has now been forced to appoint a QC to rectify their negligence in handling the case. Unethical practices of prioritizing reputation and fees over student welfare, using non-disclosure agreements to silence dissenters or complainants have also been key allegations made against universities. However, not everything spells doom and failure to act for student welfare.

At Imperial, we understand that the College has decided to launch consent training for all students starting 2022/2023 academic year and the soft launch for it is scheduled for Spring term of 2022 for the wider student body.

The Office for Students (OfS) as a regulator has set out its statement of expectations¹⁴ which outlines the practical steps that are expected of Universities and Colleges in tackling harassment and sexual misconduct. The statement would serve as a yardstick of university performance and OfS claims that it would take the next year to examine how Universities have responded, eventually considering options for connecting the statement directly to their conditions for registration.

Meanwhile, the BBC reports that the government said it was "unacceptable" to use NDAs for student complaints and it is legislating to stop such agreements being misused across all areas of society. This should come as a relief to the student community that has seen since 2016, 45 universities paying out a total of £1.3 million, with payments ranging from £250 to £40,000 on gagging orders. Most recently, Universities UK, in partnership with the charity Against Violence and Abuse, and NUS has just published a toolkit¹⁵ and peer-to-peer advice for vice chancellors aiming to tackle sexual misconduct at campuses. It includes advice and insights, examples of promising practice, and practical steps senior leaders can take.

So overall, we are glad to witness a shift in the tide, with most Universities adopting a positive and open attitude to reforming their cultures and regulators and lawmakers utilizing their political will to crack down on inaction and negligence in protecting student welfare above everything else. Through this report the Imperial College Union attempts to make a beginning in highlighting areas of improvement and its pledge to continue to work in collaboration with student communities and the College to prioritize student welfare and representation.

We hope to be able to engage in further research on the experience of sexual misconduct among BAME, disabled, postgraduate and international students in future editions of our report. Methodologically, we would include focus groups as a part of that endeavor and provide opportunities for student feedback on recommendations implemented from this report by Imperial College and the Imperial College Union.

¹⁴ [Statement of expectations - Office for Students](#)

¹⁵ <https://avaproject.org.uk/combatmisconduct-launches/>