

Findings from a survey of University and College Union female members on the subject of sexual harassment in the workplace

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25 January 2016

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Executive Summary

1. Following a motion submitted to the University and College Union (UCU) annual Congress in May 2014, UCU undertook a survey of its women members on the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace. The survey was administered on-line using Survey Monkey, and ran from April to May 2015.
2. The survey contained 16 questions (both closed and open), and sought information about a range of issues related to respondents' experiences of, responses to, and awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace.

About the respondents

3. The analysis was based on 1,953 responses. All but three of the respondents were women. Half the respondents (50%) were in the 41-55 age bracket, while a quarter (26%) were aged 31-40.
4. Most respondents (81%) were members of teaching or research staff, while 18% were administrative staff. In addition, 79% were employed in higher education, 80% were employed on permanent contracts, and 74% worked full-time. Respondents included both those with lengthy periods of service in post-secondary education as well as those who were more recently employed.

Experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace

5. Altogether 1,046 respondents (54% of the total 1,953) reported personal experience of some form of sexual harassment at work.
6. The most common form of sexual harassment (experienced by 57%) was in relation to unwelcome or derogatory comments about their appearance or clothing. This was followed by leering and suggestive gestures and remarks (42%) and physical contact such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching (38%). The least common forms of sexual harassment were in relation to offensive comments via social media (experienced by 9%) and sexual assault (2%).

Person(s) responsible for sexual harassment

7. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported having been sexually harassed by a colleague, while just over a quarter (27%) by a student. Respondents were least likely to have been sexually harassed by a member of the public in their workplace.

Frequency of sexual harassment

8. Half of respondents reported that their experience of sexual harassment was a one-off incident, and half reported that it was a series of incidents over a longer period. Nine percent of respondents said that their experience of sexual harassment was still ongoing.

Effects of sexual harassment in the workplace

9. The main effects of sexual harassment were in relation to its impact on relationships with colleagues, loss of confidence and self-esteem, anxiety, and irritability.
10. In addition, respondents often wrote in comments describing a range of other effects of sexual harassment, including anger and embarrassment. However, others said that the experience had had *no* effect on them and / or that they had tackled the issue assertively.
11. Occasionally, respondents cited serious effects on their mental health (including the development of PTSD and anorexia). Others talked about making significant changes to their own behaviour, for example, changing their routines to avoid a particular individual, working from home as much as possible, and changing the way they dressed or the colour of their hair.

Respondents' efforts to seek help

12. Among those who reported sexual harassment, around half (47%) said that they had spoken to someone about their concerns – usually a colleague or line manager. Relatively smaller proportions said they spoke to a union representative, HR / personnel officer or another manager.
13. For some respondents, coming forward was an empowering experience, while in complete contrast, others found it disempowering.
14. When asked how they felt about raising their concerns, respondents often talked about their anxiety at becoming involved in a process of reporting such behaviour, whether formally or informally. A fear of the potential consequences was generally given as the main reason for their anxiety, with some highlighting worries about job security or professional standing, and about their future relationship with colleagues. Respondents also often expressed a lack of faith in the procedural system.
15. In contrast to these experiences, some respondents said they felt 'fine', 'ok' and 'confident' about raising their concerns. For these individuals, their experiences of sharing their concerns led to helpful and supportive discussions, and resulted in them feeling 'relieved', 'reassured' or 'justified'.

Actions that were taken

16. Among those who raised their concerns about sexual harassment, action was taken in less than half of the cases (40%). In cases where action was taken, 80% of respondents reported that the situation improved.
17. The actions taken by, or on behalf of respondents included: formal disciplinary proceedings against the perpetrator; employment tribunals; informal / private discussions with the perpetrator (often undertaken by a manager); the requirement for the perpetrator to apologise or attend 'equality and diversity training'; the removal of the perpetrator from the respondent's course assessment committee; changes in office sharing arrangements; and changes in job responsibilities.

18. Some respondents were told they were over-reacting and advised 'not to make a fuss'. Within this group, some said that action was only taken after they insisted.

Respondents' experiences of seeking help from the union

19. Most respondents (89%) said they had not contacted the union in relation to their experience of sexual harassment. Among the small numbers who had, there were divided views about the helpfulness of the union.
20. Respondents gave several reasons for *not* involving the union. These included that: the respondent was not a member at the time; there was no union representation at their organisation; the respondent did not think the matter was serious enough; the respondent lacked confidence in how the union might deal with the issue, including in relation to confidentiality; or the respondent was concerned about the possible consequences (e.g. for ongoing work relationships and career prospects).

Awareness of others experiencing sexual harassment at work

21. Respondents were asked if they had witnessed or were aware of others having experienced sexual assault at work. A majority (57%) said no, and 42% said yes. Among those who said yes, some noted that they were *aware* of sexual harassment happening (through rumour or hearsay), but had not witnessed it. Among those who said 'no', the point was repeatedly made that sexual harassment is relatively uncommon nowadays. However respondents reiterated that they were both aware of and had frequently witnessed gender-related discrimination and bullying of others (both staff and students) in their organisation

Organisational policies on sexual harassment

22. The survey included a question which asked about the respondents' awareness of their own organisation's sexual harassment policy. The phrasing of this question was ambiguous, and thus, the responses are similarly ambiguous. However, it is probable that around 75% of respondents worked in an organisation with a sexual harassment policy.
23. Among those who reported that their organisation had a policy, two points were often made. First, some expressed the view that the policy was ineffective, or that it was merely 'words on paper' and 'not enforced'. Second, others commented that their organisation's policy on sexual harassment was part of a wider policy on 'Bullying and Harassment' or 'Dignity at Work'.

Experiences of non-sexual, gender-related harassment in the workplace

24. Fifty-eight (58) of the respondents to this survey said they had *not* experienced sexual harassment but had experienced more general harassment or bullying which they believed was gender-related. This behaviour was often described as 'sexism' or 'sexual discrimination'. The most common perpetrators were colleagues, followed by line managers, then other managers and – less often – students.

The union's role in addressing sexual harassment

25. Respondents were asked if there was anything more they would like the union to do about sexual harassment in the workplace.

26. Respondents made a range of suggestions. Those mentioned most often were to: (i) raise awareness of the issue; (ii) provide support to people suffering from sexual harassment; (iii) take action to ensure that all workplaces have policies on sexual harassment, and that that policy is monitored; and (iv) provide training to staff and managers in recognising and responding to sexual harassment.
27. The point was also made that sexual harassment is 'not just about women', but that younger men can also be victims of sexual harassment by older women. Moreover, men in this position often have no support whatsoever, and are stigmatised for complaining. Respondents also thought that men in this position probably need a different *kind* of support than women.
28. Within the wider theme of awareness raising, respondents also frequently called for greater efforts in raising awareness about (and tackling) sexism / discrimination against women in general. Respondents repeatedly commented that sexual harassment is now relatively rare in the workplace. However, sexual discrimination and bullying were still very common. Respondents called for the union to do much more to tackle *these* issues.

Conclusion

29. The findings of this survey indicates that sexual harassment was relatively prevalent among those who took part. Although this finding is striking, it is important to be aware of two limitations in the data:
 - First, the survey did not specify a time period in the initial question about people's experiences of sexual harassment. Thus, it is not clear how long ago respondents' experiences of sexual harassment occurred – unless they chose to share that information in their free text comments. And indeed, respondents *did* frequently say that their experiences were years (or decades) ago, or that they had occurred in a previous post, but never in their current post.
 - Second, although the response to this survey is a relatively large one, it cannot, be considered to be representative of the experience of the wider population of UCU members. Those who took part in this survey were self-selected, and it is highly likely that they chose to participate simply *because* they had had previous experience of sexual or gender-related harassment in their workplace.
30. For these reasons, the findings from this survey cannot be treated as indicative of the actual prevalence of sexual harassment among UCU members. Rather, their value is in identifying: (a) the nature of sexual harassment that women in educational organisations are most likely to experience; (b) the people whom they are likely to feel comfortable in approaching to ask for help; (c) which kind of action / assistance to be effective; and (d) what further work the union could do to support women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.
31. The findings of this survey have also indicated that there may be benefit in UCU undertaking further research among its members in relation to non-sexual (gender-related) harassment and bullying in the workplace.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents findings from a survey carried out by the University and College Union (UCU) among its women members on the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace. The survey was undertaken following a motion submitted to the UCU annual Congress in May 2014, which called on UCU to gather data specifically in relation to women experiencing sexual harassment in their workplace.
- 1.2 The survey was developed by the UCU Equality and Participation section. The analysis was carried out by an independent researcher, Dawn Griesbach (Griesbach & Associates).

About the survey

- 1.3 The survey was administered on-line using Survey Monkey between April and May 2015. All women members of UCU were contacted by email and invited to take part. In addition, the survey was advertised in a weekly email bulletin to all members, in a circular to all UCU branches and in the union's equality networks.
- 1.4 The survey contained 16 questions, including both closed (tick-box) questions and open questions (inviting free text responses), and sought information about:
 - Respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, age) and their workplace (further education, higher education, etc.)
 - Personal experience of sexual harassment in the workplace, and the nature of that harassment
 - Whether they spoke to anyone about their experience of sexual harassment (such as a manager, human resources officer, union representative or colleague), whether any action, and what the effect of that action was
 - If they had **not** reported their concerns to the union, the reasons for this
 - Awareness of others experiencing sexual harassment at work
 - Awareness of college / university policy on sexual harassment at work
 - What, if anything, the union could do in relation to sexual harassment in the workplace.
- 1.5 A copy of the survey questionnaire is included at Annex 1.
- 1.6 Note that the first main question in the survey asked respondents if they had personally experienced sexual harassment. No time period was stipulated within the question, and therefore respondents often identified incidents which had taken place years (or decades) previously. Some also identified multiple incidents of sexual harassment involving different individuals from different organisations throughout their working lives.

About the analysis

- 1.7 Frequency analysis was carried out on the responses to all closed questions. Qualitative analysis was undertaken on the responses to open questions to identify the main themes and the range of views expressed in respondents' comments.
- 1.8 Comparative analysis was undertaken in relation to a subset of the questions to identify differences in the experiences of those working in higher and further education. However, as the survey did not involve a randomly constructed sample, no attempt was made to measure the statistical significance of these differences.
- 1.9 The survey also included responses from individuals employed in adult and community education, prison education, and other sectors. However, fewer than six respondents within any of these groups reported experience of sexual harassment, and therefore, given the small numbers involved, these responses were not included in the comparative analysis.
- 1.10 Responses to the first main question in the survey (about people's experiences of sexual harassment) indicated that a sub-group of respondents had no personal experience of sexual harassment. Rather, this group reported personal experience of bullying and harassment of a non-sexual nature (often described by respondents as sexism or gender-related discrimination). This group generally completed the entire survey, but their responses related to their experience of non-sexual harassment. For this reason, a separate analysis was carried out on these responses, and the findings from this sub-analysis are reported at the end of each section.

2. About the respondents

2.1 This section presents information about the respondents to the survey.

Number of respondents

2.2 Altogether, 2,367 respondents entered the survey and answered one or more questions. However, 414 individuals answered only the first few questions (about the respondent's job and / or demographic characteristics), and did not answer any of the substantive questions in the survey. These 414 records have been excluded from the analysis.

2.3 Thus, the analysis was based on 1,953 responses. Note that not all respondents replied to every question, and therefore the total number of respondents shown in the tables throughout this report varies.

Demographic characteristics

Gender and age of respondents

2.4 Nearly all of the respondents identified themselves as female. However, three respondents identified themselves as men. Half the respondents (50%) were in the 41-55 age bracket, while a quarter (26%) were aged 31-40. (See Tables 2.1 and 2.2.)

Table 2.1: Gender of respondents

Gender*	n	%
Female	1,940	100%
Male	3	0.2%
Total (base)	1,943	100%

* Female includes male-to-female transsexual women. Male includes female-to-male transsexual men.

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

Table 2.2: Age of respondents

Age	n	%
18-30	100	5%
31-40	497	26%
41-55	967	50%
56-65	345	18%
66 and over	33	2%
Total (base)	1,942	100%

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

2.5 Information about other equalities characteristics of the respondents (sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity) is presented in Annex 2 of this report.

Information about respondents' jobs

Job title

- 2.6 Respondents were asked for information about their job title, which educational sector they worked in, whether they were on a fixed term or permanent contract, full-time or part-time, and how long they have worked in education.
- 2.7 Table 2.3 below categorises the information given by respondents about their job titles. It shows that most respondents (81%) were members of teaching or research staff. Of these, over a third (36%) were senior members of staff (i.e. heads of department, professors, senior lecturers, etc.) Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents were administrative staff. Respondents also included 10 individuals who identified themselves as 'retired'.

Table 2.3: Respondents' job role

Job role	n	%
Teaching / research staff	869	45%
Senior academic / research staff	709	36%
Administrative staff	302	16%
Senior administrative staff	48	2%
Retired	10	1%
Other*	10	1%
Total (base)	1,948	100%

* Other includes 'PhD students' and 'doctors'. Note, however, that if a PhD student also stated that they had a role in teaching (e.g. 'tutor', 'lecturer') or research (e.g. 'research fellow', 'research associate'), they have been categorised with the teaching / research staff.

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

Educational sector

- 2.8 Respondents were asked which educational sector they worked in – i.e. further education, higher education, adult and community education, prison education, or other – with the option to tick more than one choice.
- 2.9 Most respondents (79%) said were employed in higher education. (See Table 2.4.) In addition, a further 2% worked in **both** higher and further education. Two percent (2%) of respondents were employed in adult and community education. Around two-fifths of these (n=19) said they were also employed in higher or further education, or both. Similarly, 1% of respondents were employed in prison education and two of these individuals were also employed in further and higher education respectively.

Table 2.4: Respondents' educational sector

Educational sector	n	%
Higher education*	1,581	81%
Further education*	361	19%
Adult and community education	46	2%
Prison education	11	1%
Other**	10	1%
Base	1,946	

* Includes 2% who said they worked across both higher and further education.

** 'Other' includes research, a charitable organisation, and a degree awarding body.

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one option.

Contract type

2.10 Most respondents (80%) said that they were employed on permanent contracts. The remaining 20% reported being on fixed-term contracts. Three-quarters (74%) worked full-time. (See Tables 2.5 and 2.6.)

Table 2.5: Respondents' contract type (permanent or fixed-term)

Contract type	n	%
Permanent	1,544	80%
Fixed-term	384	20%
Total (base)	1,928	100%

Table 2.5: Respondents' contract type (full-time or part-time)

Contract type	n	%
full-time	1,436	74%
part-time	482	25%
retired	25	1%
Total (base)	1,943	100%

Length of time in education

2.11 Respondents were asked how long they had worked in education. Table 2.6 shows that the survey attracted a good spread of responses, both from those who have had lengthy periods of service in education, as well as from more recent staff.

Table 2.6: Respondents' length of time working in education

Length of time	n	%
0-5 years	241	12%
5-10 years	370	19%
10-15 years	452	23%
15-20 years	326	17%
20-25 years	257	13%
25 + years	303	16%
Total (base)	1,949	100%

3. Experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace

- 3.1 This section discusses respondents' reported experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. The survey asked a series of questions to ascertain the nature of any sexual harassment experienced by respondents. Specifically, respondents were asked (in a closed question) if they had ever *personally* experienced any of the following (with the option of ticking more than one response):
- Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and/or demands for sexual favours
 - Unwanted or derogatory comments about appearances or clothing
 - Leering and suggestive gestures and remarks
 - Offensive material being displayed, such as pornographic pictures, page three type pin-ups or calendars (including electronic form such as computer screen savers or such material being circulated by email)
 - Physical contact such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching
 - Sexual assault
 - Offensive feedback/comments via social media
- 3.2 Respondents were also asked (in an open question) whether they had experienced any other forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, and if so, to briefly describe what happened.
- 3.3 Altogether, 1,014 respondents reported having experienced one or more of the forms of sexual harassment listed above. In addition, a further 62 individuals replied to the open question to describe other forms of sexual harassment which they had experienced at work. Around half of these individuals (32) said they had also experienced one or more of the forms of sexual harassment listed above; however, 30 individuals had not. If these additional 30 respondents are added to 1,014, it gives a total of 1,046 respondents (54% the total 1,953 who took part in the survey) who reported personal experience of some form of sexual harassment at work.
- 3.4 Table 3.1 below shows that the most common form of sexual harassment (experienced by 57% of respondents) was in relation to unwelcome or derogatory comments about their appearance or clothing. This was followed by leering and suggestive gestures and remarks (42%) and physical contact (38%).
- 3.5 The least common forms of sexual harassment experienced by respondents were in relation to offensive comments via social media (9%), and sexual assault (2%).

Table 3.1: Respondents' experiences of sexual harassment

Type of harassment	n	%
Unwelcome or derogatory comments about appearances or clothing	581	57%
Leering and suggestive gestures and remarks	423	42%
Physical contact	388	38%
Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and/or demands for sexual favours	267	26%
Offensive material displayed, such as pornographic pictures, page three type pin-ups, etc.	199	20%
Offensive comments via social media	88	9%
Sexual assault	22	2%
Base*	1,014	

* The total shown here is the total number of respondents who replied to the closed questions, not the total number of respondents who reported personal experience of sexual harassment.

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

3.6 Table 3.2 below shows the number of respondents who reported experiences of sexual harassment, by education sector. The table shows a comparison between respondents employed in further education and higher education.

Table 3.2: Respondents' experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, by sector of employment (base=989)

Type of harassment	Higher education		Further education		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unwelcome or derogatory comments about appearances or clothing	442	57%	102	56%	544	57%
Leering and suggestive gestures and remarks	312	40%	86	47%	398	42%
Physical contact	304	39%	56	20%	360	38%
Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and/or demands for sexual favours	217	28%	34	19%	251	26%
Offensive material displayed, such as pornographic pictures, page three type pin-ups, etc.	144	19%	37	17%	181	19%
Offensive comments via social media	76	10%	9	5%	85	9%
Sexual assault	20	3%	*	*	20	2%
Base	776		182		958	

* Fewer than 6 respondents reported experience of this type of harassment.

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

- 3.7 Altogether, 958 respondents in higher and further education reported personal experience of one or more of the forms of sexual harassment listed in the survey. This is half (50%, 958 out of 1,900) of all respondents working in higher and further education.
- 3.8 Respondents working in higher education were more likely than those working in further education to report experiences of unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours (28% vs 19%), physical contact (39% vs 20%) and offensive comments via social media (10% vs 5%). On the other hand, those working in further education were more likely than those in higher education to report experiences of leering and suggestive gestures and remarks (47% vs 40%).
- 3.9 In addition to those who reported the forms of sexual harassment described above, a further 348 individuals submitted comments to the open question asking if respondents had experienced any other form of sexual harassment. However, around half of those who commented simply stated that they had not personally experienced sexual harassment (or had not experienced any of the forms of harassment listed in the survey). In some cases, respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment 'in a previous job' but never at the university or college; or they had experienced harassment from someone outside their organisation when travelling on work-related business – for example, when conducting fieldwork, or attending a conference – but not in their own workplace.
- 3.10 However, just over a quarter of these 348 respondents (n=98) said *either* they had not experienced sexual harassment but had experienced more general harassment or bullying which they believed was gender-related, *or* that they had experienced this type of non-sexual harassment *in addition* to their experience of sexual harassment. Respondents described this behaviour variously as 'sexism', 'sexual discrimination' 'misogynistic aggression', 'patronising attitudes and remarks' or 'lack of respect'. Respondents frequently described scenarios where their male colleagues had talked over them in meetings, made derogatory comments about their skills or abilities, commented on or inquired about their plans to have children or to return to work after having had children, and asked them to make the tea or act as secretary for meetings.
- 3.11 Some also used the space provided by this question to state that they had not personally experienced sexual harassment at work, but they were aware of others (including colleagues or students) having experienced it. (These types of comments will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 of this report.)
- 3.12 Slightly less than a fifth – 62 of the 348 respondents who made comments at this question – described situations in which they had personally experienced other

forms of sexual harassment at work. Some said that these incidents had occurred a number of years ago (when the respondent was much younger). They ranged from relatively mild flirting and banter, to offensive jokes and comments about sexual activity made in the respondent's presence, repeated invitations to go out for a drink or a date (despite previous invitations having been declined), to serious incidents in which colleagues or students had exposed themselves to the respondent. One respondent stated that she had on one occasion been threatened with rape. The following quotes illustrate the range of situations described by respondents.

'Having to listen to leering / sexist comments from [a colleague] about female students in the class we were teaching.' (Post-doctoral research associate, higher education, 31-40 years old)

'Comments of sexual nature in Module Evaluation Questionnaires (in more than one year). Note that these are anonymous.' (Senior lecturer, higher education, 41-55 years old)

'Twelve students with the knowledge of four members of staff took me to a local public house and subjected me to an obscene stripper. This was supposed to be an end of academic year "gift". I tried so hard to take it on "the chin" but the students had videoed the incident and began to circulate the video around the campus....' (Lecturer, further education, 56-65 years old)

'Male colleague unzipping trousers to show me his penis under the table while sitting around a table with a number of other colleagues.' (Senior research fellow, higher education, 41-55 years old)

'Called to a one-to-one meeting with a man who had an erection.' (Lecturer, further education, 56-65 years old)

Responsible person(s)

3.13 Respondents were asked whether the person responsible for their experience of sexual harassment was:

- Their line manager
- Another manager
- A colleague
- A student
- A member of the public

- 3.14 In addition, an open question invited respondents to state if some person, other than one of those listed above, had been responsible.
- 3.15 Of the (1,046) respondents who had reported personal experience of sexual harassment, 999 provided information (in the closed question) about the person responsible. In addition, 83 made further comments (in the open question). Most of these comments simply provided further details about the line manager, other manager, colleague, student or member of the public the respondent identified in the closed question. However, forty (40) respondents identified other individuals (ranging from cleaners, porters and contractors / builders working in the department, to professors and heads of research centres) who had sexually harassed them.
- 3.16 Table 3.3 below shows that two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported having been sexually harassed by a colleague, while just over a quarter (27%) by a student. Respondents were least likely to have been sexually harassed by a member of the public in their workplace. In some cases, it was clear from their responses that respondents had been harassed by multiple individuals, or by different individuals at different times in their lives.

Table 3.3: Person responsible for sexual harassment of respondent

	n	%
Colleague	689	66%
Student	280	27%
Line manager	206	20%
Other manager	161	16%
Member of the public	54	5%
Base	1,041	

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

Table 3.4 below provides a comparison between respondents working in further and higher education. These findings indicate that respondents in higher education were more likely than those in further education to report being sexually harassed by a line manager (23% vs 12%), while those in further education were more likely than those in higher education to report being sexually harassed by a student (39% vs 24%).

Table 3.4: Person responsible for sexual harassment of respondent, by sector of employment (base=972)

Type of harassment	Higher education		Further education		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Colleague	531	70%	123	67%	654	69%
Student	185	24%	72	39%	257	28%
Line manager	172	23%	23	12%	195	20%
Other manager	124	16%	24	13%	148	16%
Member of the public	46	6%	6	3%	52	5%
Base	758		185		943	

* Fewer than 6 respondents in this category reported having been sexually assaulted by a line manager or a member of the public.

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

Those responsible for non-sexual harassment and bullying

3.17 It was noted in paragraph 3.10 above that some respondents had commented in relation to the previous question that they had not experienced sexual harassment per se, but rather more general harassment or bullying which they believed was gender-related. Among this relatively small group (n=58), the most common perpetrators of this behaviour were colleagues, followed by line managers, then other managers and – less often – students. None of this group reported being bullied or harassed by members of the public.

Frequency of sexual harassment

3.18 The survey asked respondents how long their experience of sexual harassment lasted, i.e. whether it was:

- A one-off incident
- A series of incidents over a longer period
- Ongoing

3.19 Respondents could tick more than one of the options, and a space was provided after the question for respondents to enter comments about the frequency of the harassment they experienced.

3.20 Among the 1,046 who had reported personal experience of sexual harassment at work, 993 responded to this question by ticking one or more of the three options. A further 42 respondents did not tick *any* of the boxes provided, but made comments in response to the open question (discussed below).

3.21 Table 3.5 shows that around half of respondents (49%) reported that their experience of sexual harassment was a one-off incident, and half (47%) reported that it was a series of incidents over a longer period. Nine percent (9%) of respondents stated that their experience of sexual harassment was still ongoing.

Table 3.5: Frequency of harassment among respondents who reported personal experience of sexual harassment

	n	%
One-off incident	490	49%
Series of incidents over a longer period	468	47%
Ongoing	86	9%
Base	993	

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

3.22 Fifty-one (51) respondents ticked multiple boxes in response to this question. Around three-fifths of this group ticked both 'one-off incident' and 'series of incidents over a longer period', indicating that the individual had more than one experience of sexual harassment over different lengths of time.

Respondents' comments on the frequency of harassment

3.23 Altogether, 75 respondents made comments in relation to the open question on this topic. In 33 cases, the respondent had also ticked one of the boxes above, and used the open question to provide further detail. These comments often highlighted that the incident(s) took place some time ago, or were time-limited, as illustrated by these quotes:

'A few one-off incidents over some decades' (Head of research centre, higher education, 56-65 years old)

'In my first year teaching at college, a particular group of males' (Lecturer, further education, 41-55 years old)

'Lasting approximately one hour' (Lecturer, further education, 56-65 years old)

'More than one, though, different perpetrators, all some time ago, 1980s' (Associate lecturer, higher education, over 66 years old)

'Once a week for four weeks' (Lecturer, higher education, 31-40 years old)

- 3.24 One respondent, who had reported experience of sexual assault, commented that 'the worst incident' was a one-off because she left the job. It is not clear, however, whether she left the job *because* of the incident, or because her job had come to an end.
- 3.25 As noted in paragraph 3.20 above, 42 respondents made comments, but did not tick any of the boxes in the closed part of this question. These comments similarly tended to focus on the historic nature of the incidents and illustrated the difficulty, for some respondents, of categorising 'occasional' sexual harassment in terms of 'a one-off incident', 'a series of incidents', or an 'ongoing incident'. For example:

'Just occasional comments' (Senior lecturer, higher education, 31-40 years old)

'Twice' (Lecturer, further education, 41-55 years old)

'1 year' (Lecturer, higher education, 31-40 years old)

'On occasions, walking along corridors' (Learning support assistant, further education, 41-55 years old)

'A series of incidents over a short period. Some time ago now.' (Reader, higher education, 41-55 years old)

Frequency of non-sexual harassment and bullying

- 3.26 Among those respondents who said they had not personally experienced sexual harassment, but had experienced other forms of harassment or bullying, 51 replied to this question. The pattern of responses was similar to those above: around two-fifths said their experience of harassment or bullying was a one-off incident, and two-fifths said their experience was a series of incidents over a period of time. Fewer said it was an ongoing incident.

4. The effects of sexual harassment in the workplace

4.1 The survey included a series of questions about the effects of sexual harassment on the respondents who had experienced it. This chapter reports on these findings. Specifically, respondents were asked (in a series of closed questions) whether the harassment had affected them in any of the following ways (with the option of ticking more than one):

- Loss of confidence and self-esteem
- Depression
- Fear of going to work
- Anxiety
- Loss of sleep
- Time off work
- Loss of appetite
- Irritability
- Impact on relationship with colleagues

4.2 There was a space at the end of these questions for respondents to say whether the harassment had affected them in any other way. This was followed by an open question inviting further comments about how their experience had affected them.

4.3 Of the total 1,046 respondents who had reported personal experiences of sexual harassment, 749 replied to one or more of the closed questions. The results are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: How respondents' experience(s) of sexual harassment affected them

	n	%
Impact on relationship with colleagues	361	48%
Anxiety	315	42%
Loss of confidence and self-esteem	314	42%
Irritability	321	42%
Loss of sleep	139	19%
Fear of going to work	121	16%
Depression	82	11%
Time off work	38	5%
Loss of appetite	27	4%
Base	749	

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

- 4.4 The main effect identified by respondents was in relation to relationships with colleagues (48%). In addition, loss of confidence and self-esteem, anxiety and irritability were also identified as effects of sexual harassment by a large proportion of this group (42% in each case). The *least* common effects were in relation to loss of appetite (4%) and time off work (5%).
- 4.5 Table 4.2 below shows how these effects compared between those in higher education and those in further education.

Table 4.2: How respondents' experiences of sexual harassment affected them, by sector of employment

Type of harassment	Higher education		Further education		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Impact on relationship with colleagues	283	50%	59	43%	342	49%
Irritability	239	42%	62	45%	301	43%
Anxiety	241	42%	52	38%	293	42%
Loss of confidence and self-esteem	234	41%	59	43%	293	42%
Loss of sleep	107	19%	23	17%	130	19%
Fear of going to work	94	17%	15	11%	109	16%
Depression	64	11%	11	8%	75	10%
Time off work	30	5%	*	*	30	4%
Loss of appetite	23	4%	*	*	23	3%
Base	569		137		706	

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

- 4.6 The overall pattern of response among those in higher and further education is similar, although respondents in higher education were slightly more likely than those in further education to say that their experience of sexual harassment had had an impact on their relationship with colleagues, had made them afraid of going to work, and had led to depression.

Other effects of sexual harassment

- 4.7 Altogether, 347 respondents wrote in comments to identify 'other' effects of the experience of being sexually harassed. Respondents often described a range of emotions. The most common were:

- Anger (including annoyance, irritation, outrage or contempt) and
- Embarrassment (including feeling uncomfortable or humiliated)

- 4.8 However, respondents also frequently said that the experience had had *no* effect on them and / or that they had tackled the issue assertively. In some cases, the

respondents' efforts to address the issue had a positive outcome (and had therefore boosted their confidence). However, others believed their assertiveness may have cost them a job, or a good reference from a manager. Some respondents had attempted to seek support from managers (i.e. where the harassment involved students or other colleagues), but were disappointed not to receive it.

4.9 Less often, respondents said that the experience of sexual harassment made them feel:

- Abused
- Disgusted or repulsed
- Insulted
- Oppressed or powerless
- Surprised or shocked
- Stressed
- Undermined

4.10 Occasionally, respondents cited serious effects on their mental health (including the development of PTSD and anorexia). Others talked about making significant changes to their own behaviour, for example, changing their routines to avoid a particular individual, working from home as much as possible, and changing the way they dressed or the colour of their hair.

4.11 A few respondents spoke of serious impacts on other relationships (including their relationship with their spouse), or their career, which resulted in them:

- Leaving a job or turning down a promotion to avoid working with a particular person
- Being unable to obtain a job that they wanted because of an incident with a line manager
- Giving up their PhD research and a planned career as an academic

4.12 Some older respondents commented that sexual harassment was much more common (and generally 'accepted') in the 1970s and 80s, but that, in their view, such behaviour is less tolerated, and therefore much less common nowadays.

Respondents' other comments about how their experience affected them

4.13 Among those who had personal experience of sexual harassment, 242 offered more extensive comments on how the experience had affected them. As this open question was the first in the survey that allowed for lengthier comments, respondents often provided further details about the nature of the harassment (in some cases, multiple instances of harassment), and the person (or people) involved.

Within this context, respondents then went on to describe the impact of the harassment on them.

- 4.14 These impacts largely echo the points discussed above. Respondents identified impacts in relation to mental health and wellbeing, with severe anxiety being the effect highlighted most frequently. Specifically, younger respondents were anxious about the impact of sexual harassment (or their attempts to challenge it) on their career progression and the renewal of short-term contracts. They also discussed the discomfort they felt in having to continue to work with or regularly meet the person who they believed was harassing them.
- 4.15 These types of effects appeared to be less common among older women who were more established in their careers. However, older women also sometimes believed that they had been held back from promotion opportunities because of an event which had taken place many years ago.

'I think my rejection [of a sexual advance] has impeded my career progression; still a SL [senior lecturer] after 36 years at my university.'
(Senior lecturer, further education, 56-65 years old)

- 4.16 Examples were also given of how anxiety caused by a single one-off incident could grow into something larger and lead to self-doubt. The following quote illustrates the protracted internal debate and self-examination that a single anonymous note set off in one respondent.

*'An anonymous note was left in my office which read, "Call me if you want [phone number]. I want to have sex with you. XXX Top secrets." I was fairly certain it was left by one of the builders working in my department.... I reported it to my Head of Department who took it very seriously and spoke to the person in charge of the building work. There were no further incidents. It didn't hugely affect me, but I did feel quite shaken when I found the note, particularly because it was left inside my office (which only I use), and because of the wording. I did worry a lot about whether I should report it and whether I was over-reacting (two male colleagues I told thought it was; my partner – also a male colleague – was very supportive). What I wanted was for him to understand why this behaviour was a problem and why someone like me might find it threatening / creepy. And I wasn't convinced (and am still not) that reporting it would necessarily get that message across. This also meant I spent a lot of the week it happened trying to articulate in my head **why** it was a problem, as I felt I needed to justify my complaint (even to myself), and I also kept questioning whether my negative reaction was just me being racist / classist as a white middle class*

academic receiving a proposition from an Eastern European building – cue endless though experiments about how I would react if I received a similar note from one of my academic colleagues – or what would be an acceptable way for this person to express an interest in me.’ (Lecturer, higher education, 31-40 years old)

- 4.17 Sometimes respondents responded robustly and assertively, by challenging a behaviour or a comment made by a male colleague or student at the point at which it occurred. However, others identified the way in which sexual harassment can develop slowly from a friendly relationship which appears to be initially benign. These quotes illustrate this latter issue.

‘An elderly retired academic and I used to have nice small chats when I helped him. He then started to stop me and hold my hand and invite me to Italy (he wasn't Italian just working there for a few weeks each year). Then one day he came to my office, told me about his new book and he would always mention my teeth (they are a bit wonky but he said he liked them) and then this time he went to touch my teeth. This was a step too far. I was polite but my reaction made it clear that I wasn't happy. He never came to my office afterwards.’ (Subject advisor, higher education, 31-40 years old)

‘A long time ago I was very severely assaulted by a work colleague outside the workplace in the context of what I thought was a friendship / mild flirtation. That did have a bigger effect.’ (Head of research centre, higher education, 56-65 years old)

- 4.18 Others pointed out that international nature of many university and college communities creates an added difficulty in defining and responding to certain behaviours or comments as sexual harassment, because of cross-cultural differences in personal space and male-female norms of interaction.

Impact of sexual harassment on men

- 4.19 It was noted in Chapter 2 that three of the respondents to this survey were men. One of these men described the serious impact for him of sexual harassment by older women in his workplace over a period of 18 months just after he began his first job – and the impossibility, for him, of coming forward to report this.

‘I was newly graduated and starting my first job. I worked in an office with 3 women all of whom were in their forties. Initially they were pleasant and welcoming but within 4 months they had begun their harassment. Highly intimate and personal details of their marriages,

husbands, sex lives, anatomies, gynaecological problems were all loudly discussed and my opinions and thoughts were asked for. They knew I found it all excruciatingly embarrassing. They then started to make comments about my physical appearance and observations about me of an explicit sexual nature. Several times they all at different times groped me, both my rear and groin. On one severe occasion almost at the end of my time there they, together, pulled down my trousers and underwear and, in my opinion, sexually assaulted me. Throughout my time there one of them serially would expose her breasts and on one occasion lifted her skirt. They also passed between them magazines which showed naked and near naked men. I have never told anyone about this and only do so now because this is anonymous. Also, I want to make the point that men too can be and are victims of female abusers and it is even more difficult for men to come forward and admit these awful things had been done to them.’ (Administrator, higher education, male, 41-55 years old)

Effects on respondents of non-sexual harassment and bullying

- 4.20 Among respondents who said they did not have personal experience of sexual harassment, but instead reported experiences of non-sexual harassment and bullying, the main impact of this behaviour was to make them angry, annoyed, irritated or frustrated. Less often, respondents expressed feelings of fear, anxiety, distress or depression.
- 4.21 Two individuals in this group said they left their jobs as a result of being bullied at work. Two others expressed concern about their prospects for promotion. One respondent said that her experience of being harassed at work had ‘destroyed her working life’, while another said she was planning to request a year’s leave of absence to ‘try and regain some confidence and reduce anxiety’.

5. Respondents' efforts to seek help

- 5.1 This section presents findings in relation to two questions from the survey. The first (a series of closed questions) asked respondents if they had spoken to anyone about their concerns, specifically:
- Their line manager
 - Another manager
 - Human resources / Personnel
 - Union representative
 - Colleagues
- 5.2 Respondents could tick more than one option, and space was also provided to include information about anyone else they had spoken to about their concerns.
- 5.3 The second question (an open question) asked respondents how they felt about raising their concern.

Individuals from whom respondents sought help

- 5.4 Among those (1,046) who reported personal experience of sexual harassment, 494 (47%) indicated that they had spoken to someone about their concerns. Table 5.1 below shows that most respondents spoke to colleagues (65%), followed by their line manager (39%). Relatively smaller proportions of respondents said they spoke to a union representative, HR / personnel, or another manager.
- 5.5 It is perhaps worth noting that most of those who spoke to a union representative or to HR / personnel also spoke to someone else as well.

Table 5.1: Persons respondents spoke to about their concerns relating to sexual harassment

	n	%
Colleagues	322	65%
Line manager	191	39%
Other manager	83	17%
HR / personnel	78	16%
Union representative	69	14%
Base	494	

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

5.6 Table 5.2 shows a comparison among respondents in higher education and further education in relation to those who sought assistance from a line manager or colleagues. Numbers in the other three categories (HR / personnel, union representative or other manager) are too small to enable meaningful comparison. The table shows that the pattern of seeking support from certain individuals was broadly similar between respondents in higher and further education.

Table 5.2: Persons respondents spoke to about their concerns relating to sexual harassment, by sector

Type of harassment	Higher education		Further education		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Line manager	138	38%	37	40%	175	39%
Colleagues	236	64%	62	67%	298	65%
Base*	368		93		461	

* Note that the total shown here is the number of respondents who replied to the closed questions. Percentages total more than 100% because respondents could tick more than one response.

Other persons respondents spoke to about their concerns

5.7 Ninety-three (93) respondents also entered information about other people whom they had spoken to about their concerns. In around half of these cases, this other person was the only person the respondent spoke to. Those mentioned most frequently were:

- Friends outside of work
- Family members (including husbands)
- Heads of department or other senior figure within the organisation

5.8 Less often, respondents said they spoke to:

- Their GP or other NHS professional
- The police, or security at the organisation
- The Student Union
- A sexual harassment officer / dignity at work officer within the organisation
- The IT Department (regarding the way in which college computers were being used to send anonymous / threatening messages).

5.9 In some cases, respondents said that they spoke directly to the individual concerned. In other cases, respondents said that they did *not* speak to certain individuals (for example, the head of department or line manager) because that individual was already aware of the issue and had done nothing to address it.

How respondents felt about raising their concern

- 5.10 Altogether, 463 respondents provided comments in response to the open question, 'How did you feel about raising your concern?' A variety of views were expressed.
- 5.11 For some respondents, coming forward was an empowering experience. However, in complete contrast, others found it disempowering.
- 5.12 The most common theme in these comments was the clear expression of respondents' anxiety at becoming involved in a process of reporting such behaviour, whether by making a formal complaint or in a more informal way, by speaking with colleagues. Respondents frequently used words such as 'worried', 'insecure', 'stressful', 'vulnerable', 'frightened', 'nervous' and 'isolated' to describe their feelings in raising their concern.
- 5.13 A fear of the potential consequences of raising a concern was generally given as the main reason for their anxiety, with some highlighting worries about job security or professional standing, and about their future relationship with colleagues.
- 5.14 Others described a fear that their concerns would either not be addressed, that they would not be believed and even might be made to feel that they had caused the harassment, or that they could be leaving themselves open to further incidents of similar abuse.
- 5.15 Respondents also often emphasised a lack of faith in the procedural system to explain why they were either cautious or reluctant about raising their concern. Some said that they preferred to discuss their concern with close colleagues rather than with line managers due to 'a lack of evidence', fear of bullying, managers' vested interests or not wanting to 'appear weak'. Others expressed disappointment about the way their concern had been handled when they *did* raise it, or they felt 'ignored' or 'unprotected' by a system of reporting which was described as 'futile'. In some cases, respondents said that the response they received after raising a concern had actually led them to experience hitherto unfelt guilt or a sense of blame. Moreover, the response from management made them begin to view their concerns as either unreasonable, silly / stupid or an over-reaction.
- 5.16 In contrast to these experiences, another frequent response to the question involved the use of descriptions such as 'fine', 'ok', 'unconcerned' and 'confident'. Those who used these terms appeared to be most open in terms of their attitude towards revealing their experiences, albeit sometimes informally. They also generally shared a camaraderie and a feeling of safety-in-numbers with work colleagues who were aware of the behaviour of particular individuals. For these respondents, their experiences of sharing their concerns led to helpful and

supportive discussions, and resulted in them feeling relieved, reassured and/or hopeful, or feeling justified in raising their concerns.

- 5.17 Within this group, respondents sometimes expressed the view that incident of sexual harassment was something that was unwanted but had to be reluctantly accepted as 'part of the job', and in contrast to those who were worried about potential ramifications, this group saw themselves as 'doing the right thing' in coming forward. Some even saw raising a concern in terms of a feminist act and regarded this as at least as important as the way it was handled.
- 5.18 Another common theme in respondents' comments was a feeling of 'embarrassment'. Some also said they felt 'humiliated' or 'ashamed' about raising a concern. This group felt this way because they found it demeaning as professionals to be discussing what they perceived as personal matters with colleagues.
- 5.19 Less often, respondents said they had feelings of inadequacy, incompetence or naivety in coming forward. Others chose to use words such as 'uncomfortable', 'awkward', 'uneasy' or 'difficult' in describing their raising of a concern. These individuals generally saw their reporting of the incident as a potential conflict of interest for senior management in that popular staff members or students were sometimes responsible for the incident.
- 5.20 Other emotions identified by respondents were anger, annoyance and frustration. It was felt by this group that mechanisms to prevent the sexual harassment taking place should have been routinely put in place at an early stage. Their anger was directed as much at senior management as at the perpetrators. This was especially so among those who had been subjected to repeat instances of harassment.

Actions that were taken

- 5.21 The survey asked respondents five questions about whether any action was taken and whether that action led to an improved situation in relation to their experience of sexual harassment:
- Was action was taken? (Yes / No)
 - What action was taken? (Open question)
 - If action was taken, did the situation improve? (Yes / No)
 - Was the union helpful? (Yes / No / Not applicable)
 - If you did not report it to the union, why was this? (Open question)
- 5.22 Tables 5.3 and 5.4 below show the findings from the first and third question above. The results show that for this group of respondents, action was taken in only 40% of

cases (Table 5.3). However, where action *was* taken, the situation generally improved (80% reported improvement) (Table 5.4).

Table 5.3: Was action taken?

	n	%
Yes	224	40%
No	341	60%
Total (base)	565	100%

Table 5.4: If action was taken, did the situation improve?

	n	%
Yes	170	80%
No	43	20%
Total (base)	213	100%

The actions that were taken

5.23 Among those (224) who said that action was taken, 187 provided further information about the nature of that action.

5.24 In some cases, respondents directly addressed the issue with the perpetrator themselves. However, in most cases, action was taken on behalf of the respondent by others. These actions varied, and included:

- Formal disciplinary proceedings against the perpetrator (including student disciplinary proceedings)
- Employment tribunals
- Informal / private discussions with the perpetrator (often undertaken by a manager, head of department or HR)
- Mediation
- The requirement for the perpetrator to apologise (verbally or in writing) or to attend ‘equality and diversity training’
- The removal of the perpetrator from the complainant’s course assessment committee
- The removal of offensive or sexually explicit pictures / posters
- Changes in office sharing arrangements
- Changes in job responsibilities (usually to enable the complainant to move to a different job or role).

5.25 Less often, actions included:

- The dismissal (or failure to renew a contract) of the perpetrator
- The offer of legal support by the college / university

5.26 Some respondents said they were told they were over-reacting or they were advised 'not to make a fuss'. Within this group, some said that action was only taken after they insisted.

5.27 The quotes below illustrate the range of experiences described by respondents:

"I made sure that I did not have to be in close proximity alone with the person involved, by making a request that my research monitoring was done by somebody else. This request was kindly received and tactfully dealt with by the colleague to whom I made the request." (Senior lecturer, higher education, 31-40 years old)

"The man was asked to leave and escorted from the premises by the police." (Tutor, Adult and community education, 41-55 years old)

"The student concerned was guided towards joining a colleague's class the following year." (Senior lecturer, higher education, 56-65 years old)

"The incident with my line manager was dealt with very professionally, and a senior colleague spoke to him to ask him to change his behaviour." (Director of professional services, higher education, 41-55 years old)

"Initially, my line manager's response suggested he did not think the remarks made were an issue. However, I was insistent and as there were a large number of witnesses my line manager spoke to the manager responsible and asked him to apologise, which he did." (Lecturer, further education, 18-30 years old)

"None. Advised not to complain or my contract would not be renewed." (Professor, higher education, 56-65 years old)

Experiences of seeking help from the union

5.28 In relation to the question about the helpfulness of the union, most respondents (89%) had not contacted the union (Table 5.5). Among the small numbers who had, there were divided views on the result, with 7% saying that the union was helpful and 4% saying that it was not.

Table 5.5: Was the union helpful?

	n	%
Yes	39	7%
No	24	4%
Not applicable	490	89%
Total (base)	553	100%

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

5.29 Respondents gave several reasons for *not* involving the union, as described below.

Respondent was not a member of the union

5.30 Respondents who were not in the union were frequently on temporary contracts (or were post-graduate students) at the time of the incident and thought that, since they were not union members, they could not formally raise the matter with the union. This group offered little further explanation for their view other than to say they were glad to leave the job shortly afterwards. Included with this group were those who said there was no union representation at their organisation at the time.

Respondent did not think the matter was serious enough, or that it was not a union matter

5.31 Another common reason given for not approaching the union was that respondents 'did not feel it was serious enough', that it was 'insignificant', 'trivial', 'a one-off' or 'a minor incident'. Those who said this did not think that the issue warranted union involvement. Others within this group dealt with the matter immediately and directly themselves, or said the matter was dealt with successfully at a departmental level. Some suggested that if the issue had not been dealt satisfactorily at a lower level, only then would they have considered raising it with the union.

5.32 Some respondents commented that they recognised the incident was not intended to be offensive, that it was considered by the respondent or by others to be 'banter'. In these cases, the respondent said they had been unconcerned, and / or did not feel it necessary to take the matter personally. However, in some cases, older respondents, in particular, said they had not realised at the time that what happened to them constituted sexual harassment as it had taken place many years earlier when attitudes were different.

Respondent lacked confidence in how their local branch might deal with the issue

5.33 Another group of respondents said they did not discuss the matter with the union because they felt a lack of confidence in their local union branch. Reasons for this included: a perception that the local branch was male-dominated (and thus their complaint would not be taken seriously, that it would be dismissed, or that they would not be believed); a lack of union presence in the workplace; concerns about

confidentiality; and complex reporting processes. Some saw the union as an impersonal organisation that they were unable to relate to. There were also occasional incidents where the perpetrator was, in fact, a union representative, or where the respondent had a previous negative experience in asking for support from the union.

Fear about the consequences of raising a complaint

5.34 While some respondents cited a general lack of confidence within themselves about raising the matter with the union, others said they were concerned about 'causing trouble' for themselves or (occasionally) for their organisation. There were several issues raised by this group.

5.35 Some felt embarrassed by the thought of having the matter discussed publicly. Others were concerned they would not be believed and so were wary of entering into a situation where they had no one (and a lack of other formal evidence) to corroborate their claims. Some described feelings of 'insecurity' or 'self-doubt' and said they preferred to wait and see if the harassment continued before seeking union advice, particularly in situations where working relations were generally considered to be good.

5.36 Others were concerned that their working relationships with colleagues would be damaged, or that their career prospects could be jeopardised if they went to the union, particularly where the incident involved a line manager or other senior manager.

5.37 Respondents also were concerned about being stigmatised or labelled as a 'trouble-maker' or an 'hysterical woman', or they were afraid of being ridiculed. Related to this was a reluctance to disturb the status quo or 'rock the boat'.

Other reasons

5.38 Other reasons, mentioned infrequently, were that:

- The respondent was concerned about the implications for the perpetrator of raising a complaint, for example, where the individual was seen to be a vulnerable adult.
- The respondent was new in the job, or worked only part-time.
- The respondent did not know the identity of the perpetrator (because the harassment was carried out anonymously).
- The perpetrator was a student.

5.39 The following quotes illustrate some of the points made by respondents in their comments:

'Am a relatively new union member after many years in a school based union. Couldn't decide how severe the incidents were and whether I was making too big a deal out of them.' (Course subject leader, higher education, 31-40 years old)

'I dealt with the situation myself by having a word with my colleague to let him know that this behaviour was not acceptable.' (Lecturer, further education, 41-55 years old)

'I have experienced a number of isolated incidents from different staff and I felt able to deal with them directly myself. If the situation was ongoing or the perpetrator was senior to me/in some position of power over me I would have been likely to report it.' (Learning advisor, further education, 31-40 years old)

Experiences of seeking help for non-sexual harassment and bullying

- 5.40 Among those who reported non-sexual harassment and bullying, but not personal experience of sexual harassment, responses to this set of questions largely echoed those above. Those who spoke to someone about their concern were more likely to have spoken to other colleagues or a line manager, and less likely to have spoken to HR / Personnel, the union or another manager. It was rare for any in this group to say that they had tackled the issue directly with the person concerned.
- 5.41 Those who had raised their concern with someone else reported similar feelings to those above: fear / anxiety, discomfort and anger. However, there were also some in this group who also felt a sense of futility in raising their concern. Less often, respondents said they felt 'comfortable' or 'justified', and took confidence from having a supportive line manager.
- 5.42 Regarding the actions taken, respondents mentioned investigations that were undertaken, and formal meetings that took place. However, in the (few) cases where the respondents discussed the outcomes of these actions, there were divided views about whether the outcomes were satisfactory.
- 5.43 Among those who approached the union, the most common view was that the local branch was 'supportive' but 'ineffective'. Among those who had *not* approached the union, the main reason was that the respondent had not thought the incident was serious enough to warrant union intervention. Less often, respondents said they did not approach the union because they did not think the union would be able to help.

6. Awareness of others experiencing sexual harassment

- 6.1 This section discusses findings from the survey regarding respondents' wider awareness of sexual harassment. Respondents were asked: 'Have you witnessed or are you aware of others having experienced sexual assault?'
- 6.2 Although this question was posed as a yes / no question, respondents were given a space to type in their reply, rather than a tick-box (yes / no) choice.
- 6.3 In total, 1,532 respondents entered a comment. Of these, 740 typed the single word 'No', and 437 typed the single word 'Yes'. Most of the remaining 355 responses began with either 'yes' or 'no', followed by a short statement containing further information. Where respondents' comments were clear, they have been categorised as 'yes' or 'no'. Where the comments were not clear, they have been categorised as 'unclear'. In general, the 'unclear' responses did not answer the question. The results, shown in Table 6.1 below, indicate that a majority of respondents had neither witnessed nor were aware of others in their organisation experiencing sexual harassment.

Table 6.1: Have you witnessed or are you aware of others having experienced sexual assault?

	n	%
No	875	57%
Yes	642	42%
Unclear	15	1%
Total (base)	1,532	100%

- 6.4 Among those whose responses were categorised as 'yes', some clarified that they were *aware* of sexual harassment happening, but had not witnessed it. Others said that they were not aware of sexual harassment being either experienced or perpetrated by staff at their university / college, but that they were aware (or had witnessed it) among students. Still others said that they were aware of it 'only by hearsay', or 'through rumours', but were not aware of action being taken against any individuals in relation to sexual harassment.
- 6.5 Among those whose responses were categorised as 'no', the point was repeatedly made that sexual harassment is relatively uncommon; however respondents reiterated that they were both aware of and had frequently witnessed sexual discrimination and bullying of others (both staff and students) in their organisation.

7. Organisational policies on sexual harassment

- 7.1 The penultimate question in the survey sought information from respondents about whether they were aware of their own organisation's policy on sexual harassment. The question asked was: 'Do you know if your college/university has a sexual harassment policy?'
- 7.2 Although this question was posed as a yes / no question, respondents were given a space to type in their answer, rather than a tick-box (yes / no) choice. Moreover, the question itself was slightly ambiguous and was clearly interpreted in different ways by different respondents. For example, some respondents answered the 'Do you know...?' aspect of the question, while others addressed the underlying question, 'Does your college / university have a policy?' It is therefore unclear whether a 'No' response to this question means, 'No, I do not know if my college / university has a policy', or whether it means, 'No, my college / university does not have a policy.' Similarly, it is not clear whether a 'Yes' response means, 'Yes, I *do* know if my college / university has a policy', or whether it means, 'Yes, my college / university *does* have a policy.'
- 7.3 Some respondents were clearly aware of the ambiguity of the question and attempted to make their responses clear, by stating, for example, 'Yes, I know, and yes, it does', or 'No, I am not sure.'
- 7.4 However, a large proportion of the responses are unclear, and thus, the findings from this question – shown in Table 7.1 below – need to be treated with caution.
- 7.5 In total, 1,684 respondents wrote in a reply to this question. However, 830 replies contained the single word, 'Yes', and 202 contained the single word, 'No'. These 1,032 responses are shown separately in Table 7.1. The remaining 652 responses were almost all very short statements which have been categorised as follows:
- **College / university has policy** (25% of responses). This category includes clear statements such as: 'Yes, it does'; 'It does'; 'It has'; and statements which begin with 'Yes', then go on to make a comment about the policy. It also includes less confident but generally affirmative statements such as: 'Is assume it does'; 'It probably does'; 'I think so'; 'Probably, but I have never read it'; 'It must have'.
 - **Does not know** (11% of responses). This category includes the following types of statements: 'Don't know'; 'Unsure'; 'Unaware'; 'No idea' and 'Don't know, but... [I think so' / 'I imagine so' / 'I assume so' / 'I suspect there is one]'. It also includes statements which begin with 'No' and include a follow up comment which makes it clear that the respondent does not know whether their

organisation has a policy. For example: ‘No, but it wouldn’t be hard to find out’, or ‘No, it has never been relevant for me to find out’.

- **College / university does not have a policy** (1% of responses). This category includes clear statements such as: ‘No, it doesn’t’ or ‘Not a specific one’, and it also includes some ambiguous comments, for example: ‘No, but there is an equality and diversity policy’. Such statements suggest that the issue of sexual harassment may be covered as part of another policy, but the respondent appears to believe that there is no specific policy on sexual harassment.
- **Unclear response** (18% of responses). This category includes statements which are ambiguous. For example: ‘Probably. No’; ‘No. It should’. This category also includes statements which do not answer the question: ‘A policy would not stop this kind of thing happening’; ‘What is the point of policies anyway’.
- **Yes, respondent knows whether there is a policy, but does not say whether there is one or not** (<1% of responses). This very small category includes comments from just two respondents. In both cases, the respondent states, ‘Yes, I do.’

7.6 See Table 7.1 below. If the single word ‘yes’ responses are taken to mean that the respondent’s college / university has a sexual harassment policy, then nearly 75% of respondents work in an organisation with a sexual harassment policy, and are clearly aware of that policy. If the single word ‘no’ responses are taken to mean that the respondent does not know whether their organisation has a policy, then most of the remaining quarter of respondents were unaware of their organisation’s policy on sexual harassment.

Table 7.1: Do you know if your college / university has a sexual harassment policy?

	n	%
Yes (single word response, ambiguous)	832	49%
No (single word response, ambiguous)	206	12%
College / university has policy	424	25%
Does not know	193	11%
College / university does not have policy	9	1%
Unclear response	18	1%
Yes, respondent knows, but does not state whether or not there is a policy	2	0%
Total (base)	1,684	100%

* Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

7.7 Among those who reported that their organisation had a policy, there were two key themes in the comments made about this policy. First, some expressed the view that the policy was ineffective, or that it was merely ‘words on paper’ and ‘not

enforced'. Second, other respondents commented that their policy on sexual harassment was part of a wider policy on 'Bullying and Harassment' or 'Dignity at Work'.

- 7.8 A few respondents spoke positively about their organisation's policy, describing it as 'a very strong policy' and said that they had attended training in relation to sexual harassment. A few others identified themselves as one of the 'harassment advisors' for their organisation.

8. The union's role in addressing sexual harassment

- 8.1 The final question in the survey asked respondents if there was anything more they would like the union to do about sexual harassment in the workplace. This section presents respondents' suggestions.
- 8.2 Altogether, 980 respondents made comments in response to this question. However, 235 of these comments contained the single word 'No' and 10 contained the single word 'Yes', without further comment. In addition, 26 contained statements such as 'Not sure', 'I don't know' or 'I can't think of anything' and 20 included similarly short comments such as 'not at the moment', 'not at present', 'not really' or 'not that I can think of'.
- 8.3 The main themes from the remaining 689 responses are discussed below. Among these respondents, there was a perception that the union could 'really step up', be more 'pro-active' and get more involved in tackling this issue and the wider issue of sexual discrimination. Some respondents emphasised the urgency of the matter, pointing out that 'women are leaving academia because of their experiences as students and junior academics'.

Raise awareness

- 8.4 One of the main suggestions was that the union should 'raise awareness'. While some respondents simply made that statement without further elaboration, others suggested that awareness could be raised about:
- What sexual harassment is and the forms it can take – so that people recognise it when it occurs, and so that it is taken seriously
 - The impact of sexual harassment
 - The role of students as harassers
 - Sexual harassment policies and reporting procedures
 - The support available for people who have experienced sexual harassment
- 8.5 The point was made that because the union's casework in relation to sexual harassment is confidential (as it should be), it is difficult for people to see how prevalent it is.
- 8.6 Others suggested individuals whose awareness needs to be raised. These included:
- Men (including middle-aged male academics)

- Students
- Employers
- Managers / senior staff
- Younger staff (including younger administrative staff), in particular, who may be more likely to face sexual harassment than older staff
- Individuals who may be subject to sexual harassment, so that they feel encouraged to speak up, and know where to go for support

8.7 Some respondents suggested the forms that awareness raising might take, including:

- A poster campaign
- A media campaign
- Training
- A leaflet detailing rights, definitions and where to go for support
- A website

8.8 There was some suggestions that the union should publish the findings of the current survey, as a way of raising awareness.

Sexual harassment is not 'just about women'

8.9 Another issue which some respondents frequently highlighted was that sexual harassment is 'not just about women', but that younger men can also be victims of sexual harassment by older women. Moreover, men in this position often have no support whatsoever, and are stigmatised for complaining. The point was also made that men in this position probably need a different *kind* of support than women.

Raise awareness of sexism / gender discrimination

8.10 Within the wider theme of awareness raising, respondents frequently called for greater efforts in raising awareness about (and tackling) sexism / discrimination against women in general. Respondents repeatedly commented that sexual harassment was now relatively rare in the workplace. However, sexual discrimination and bullying were still very common. Respondents called for the union to do much more to tackle *these* issues.

8.11 Specifically, there were suggestions that more could be done to highlight the attitudes, assumptions and subtle ways that women can be undermined in the workplace (an example often raised was in relation to commenting on women's clothing and appearances). There was a view that rude, disrespectful, condescending and 'laddish' behaviour by men was generally tolerated in further and higher education, since department heads and other senior academics are

more likely to be men than women. It was suggested that the union could raise awareness of how people can be more 'inclusive'.

8.12 The point was made that a 'gender audit' of academic staff and senior appointments would clearly highlight the systematic gender bias that continues to exist and to be accepted in further and higher education. The point was also made that until there are sufficient women in management roles in universities and colleges, it will continue to be difficult for women to report cases of harassment (and bullying).

Provide support to people suffering from sexual harassment

8.13 Another frequently-made suggestion was that the union should (continue) to support anyone suffering from sexual harassment in the workplace. This may include a need to support a member of staff who takes a grievance to senior management, or who contacts the police.

8.14 The point was made that the union may have a conflict in its support role, in that it may end up representing both the person bringing a complaint about harassment *and* the person having the case brought against them and going through disciplinary procedures. Moreover, current procedures (which the union supports) make it very difficult to prove a case against a member of staff who is sexually harassing someone else, thus making it nearly impossible to remove an offender from a position of power.

8.15 A related point was that current harassment reporting procedures require that a (usually) junior member of staff waive their anonymity to report a senior member of staff (who may have the ability to affect their future career), and to attend a hearing or tribunal where they must confront the perpetrator. It was suggested that the union could usefully look at revising these procedures to provide greater protection to complainants, since current procedures presented a barrier to people in coming forward (specifically related to fear about the impact on their careers of raising a complaint).

8.16 Some respondents saw 'support' in terms of:

- 'Listen' to the person affected, and treat the complainant with sensitivity and respect, rather than relying on a strict adherence to 'procedure'
- Providing confidential practical advice
- Requiring that fair investigations take place
- Providing legal advice and support groups / dedicated counsellors to those affected

- Demanding sanctions, or ongoing supervision, for perpetrators of sexual harassment
- Ensuring that there are women within the union committee in each institution that other women could approach for help

8.17 In relation to the latter point, some respondents expressed appreciation for the work of their local union branch. However, others commented that their local branch is largely dominated by men, had a 'boys' club culture', or was too friendly with the hierarchy in their organisation, all of which undermined their confidence in the union.

Policies and training

8.18 Some respondents thought the union could do more to push for workplaces to have policies on sexual harassment if they do not already have one and, where they do have one, the union should ensure that the policy is closely monitored.

8.19 Others suggested that training was needed to remind both staff and line managers about the policies that exist. There were frequent suggestions that training should not only be offered in this area but should be mandatory, just as training is offered in the areas of IT security, and health and safety at work. It was noted that male senior managers are often resistant to attending gender awareness training.

8.20 Occasionally, respondents raised particular areas where policies were needed, for example, in relation to harassment of academic staff by students, and in the area of (consenting) sexual relationships between lecturers and students. This latter behaviour was seen to be very prevalent and largely accepted within further and higher education. There were calls for the union to work together with NUS (National Union of Students) to define a code of appropriate conduct for academic staff and students.

8.21 Specific guidance in relation to dealing with sexual harassment / assault when conducting fieldwork was also thought to be needed.

8.22 Others wanted the union to work with employers to 'review and re-write sexual harassment policies and procedures' – to make them more enforceable. There was also a suggestion that it ought to be possible to make 'group claims' against particular individuals who are repeated perpetrators of inappropriate conduct.

8.23 Some saw HR / personnel departments as part of the problem and thought that the union could usefully help to provide training to HR staff about this issue, and ensure that HR staff follow correct procedures.

Other suggestions

8.24 A wide range of other suggestions were made less often – sometimes by just one or two people. Examples include:

- Tackle the ‘unaccountable’ status of senior management
- Ensure that student feedback forms containing offensive remarks are not passed on to the lecturer
- Undertake research to measure of the prevalence of sexual harassment
- Establish a ‘register of complaints’ where there is a reporting threshold – if more than one person complains about a particular individual
- The routine inclusion of questions about sexual harassment and discrimination in annual staff surveys
- Provide other types of training, such as training in self-defence.

Comments about the survey

8.25 As this was the final question in the survey, respondents sometimes used this space to comment on the survey itself. Some respondents expressed appreciation for being invited to take part in the survey and suggested that similar surveys could be carried out more frequently. One individual commented: ‘This is the first time in years that I have ever been asked my opinion, so more of this is good.’

8.26 However, there were more frequent critical comments about the structure and possible ‘bias’ inherent in the survey. Some respondents noted that the survey was not designed to capture the views of people who had not experienced sexual harassment, and there were concerns that this perceived bias would limit the value of the findings. The point was made repeatedly that general sexual discrimination and bullying were far more prevalent within academic organisations than sexual harassment, and respondents felt a sense of disappointment that these issues were not addressed in the survey.

9. Discussion

- 9.1 This survey was undertaken among women members of the University and College Union (UCU), although the respondents also included a very small number of men. Compared to many member surveys undertaken by UCU, this particular survey received an unexpectedly large response.
- 9.2 The findings indicate that, among this sample of union members, experience of sexual harassment was prevalent – with over half (54%) of the 1,953 respondents saying they had personally experienced some form of sexual harassment in their workplace.
- 9.3 Although this finding is rather striking, it is important to be aware of two limitations in the data:
- First, the survey did not specify a time period in the initial question about sexual harassment, and therefore, there is no way of knowing how long ago (or recent) respondents' experiences of sexual harassment occurred – unless they chose to share that information in their free text comments. And indeed, respondents *did* frequently say that their experiences were years (or decades) ago, or that they had occurred in a previous post, but never in their current post.
 - Second, although the response to this survey is a relatively large one, it cannot be considered to be representative of the experience of the wider population of women working in further and higher education. Those who took part in this survey were self-selected, and it is highly likely that they chose to participate simply *because* they had had previous experience of sexual or gender-related harassment in their workplace.
- 9.4 For these reasons, the findings presented in the tables throughout this report cannot be treated as indicative of the prevalence of sexual harassment among UCU members. Rather, their value is in identifying: (a) the nature of sexual harassment that women in educational organisations are most likely to experience; (b) the people whom they are likely to feel comfortable in approaching to ask for help; (c) which kind of action / assistance to be effective; and (d) what further work the union could do to support women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.
- 9.5 The findings of this survey also indicated that there may be benefit in UCU undertaking further research among its members in relation to non-sexual (gender-related) harassment and bullying in the workplace. This issue was raised repeatedly by the respondents to this survey (including by those who had historic experience of sexual harassment). Although the respondents to this survey believed that sexual

harassment in the workplace is a serious issue and should not be tolerated, by and large, the view was that it was relatively rare nowadays. Whereas, sexism and gender-related bullying (not only by men of women, but also by women of men) was very common. Moreover, its impacts (because of its greater prevalence) were often just as devastating for those on the receiving end of it.

Annex 1: Survey questionnaire

Introductory questions

1. **What is your job title?**

2. **What sector do you work in?**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Further education | <input type="checkbox"/> Prison education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher education | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult and community education | |

3. **Are you employed on a fixed-term or a permanent contract?**

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed-term | <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|

4. **Do you work full-time or part-time?**

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time | |

5. **How long have you worked in education?**

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-15 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20-25 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 15-20 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 25+ years |

6. **How would you describe your gender?**

- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female (including male-to-female trans woman) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male (including female-to male trans man) |

7. **Do you consider yourself a disabled person?**

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

8. **How would you describe your ethnicity?**

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or British Asian – Pakistani |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or British Asian – Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or British Black – African | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ethnic group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or British Black – Caribbean | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed – White and Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or British Black – Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed – White and Black African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or British Asian – Bangladeshi | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed – White and Black Caribbean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or British Asian – Indian | |

Main questions

1. Have you personally experienced any of the following in the workplace?

- Unwelcome sexual advances, propositions and / or demands for sexual favours
- Unwanted or derogatory comments about appearances or clothing
- Leering and suggestive gestures and remarks
- Offensive material being displayed, such as pornographic pictures, page three type pin-ups or calendars (including electronic form such as computer screen savers or such material being circulated by email)
- Physical contact such as the invasion of personal space and unnecessary touching
- Sexual assault
- Offensive feedback / comments via social media
- Other (please state)

2. Was the person(s) responsible?

- Your line manager
- Another manager
- A colleague
- A student
- A member of the public
- Other (please state)

3. How long did it go on for?

- It was a one-off incident
- A series of incidents over a longer period
- Ongoing

4. How did it affect you?

- Loss of confidence and self esteem
- Depression
- Fear of going to work
- Anxiety
- Loss of sleep
- Time off work
- Loss of appetite
- Irritability
- Impact on relationship with colleagues
- Other (please state)

5. Comments / further details

6. Did you speak to anyone about your concerns?

- Yes
- No

7. If yes, who with?

- Line manager
- Other manager
- Human resources / personnel
- Union representative
- Colleagues
- Other (please state)

8. **How did you feel about raising your concern?**

9. **Was action taken?**

Yes

No

10. **If yes, what action was taken?**

11. **If action was taken, did the situation improve?**

Yes

No

12. **Was the union helpful?**

Yes

No

Not applicable

Comments

13. **If you did not report it to the union, why was this?**

14. **Have you witnessed or are you aware of others having experienced sexual harassment?**

15. **Do you know if your college / university has a sexual harassment policy?**

16. **Is there anything more you would like the union to do in the workplace about sexual harassment?**

Annex 2: Equalities characteristics of respondents

Sexual orientation

Table A1.1: Sexual orientation of respondents

	n	%
Heterosexual	1,695	6%
Bisexual	115	89%
Lesbian or gay	80	4%
Other*	7	0.4%
Total (base)	1,897	100%

* Other includes: asexual and celibate. Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

Disability

Table A1.2: Whether respondents consider themselves disabled

	n	%
No	1,746	92%
Yes	53	8%
Total (base)	1,899	100%

Ethnicity of respondents

Table A1.3: Ethnicity of respondents

	n	%
White	1,810	94%
Asian	37	2%
Mixed ethnicity*	31	2%
Black	16	1%
Chinese	10	1%
Other**	23	1%
Total (base)	1,927	100%

* Mixed includes: White and Asian, White and Black African, White and Black Caribbean, White and Middle Eastern

** Other includes: Arabic, East Asian not Chinese, Latin American, British Roma, Aemitic, North African, Jewish