

Dr Anna Bull  
Senior Lecturer in Sociology,  
School of Education and Sociology,  
University of Portsmouth  
St George's St, Portsmouth PO1 2HY  
[anna.bull@port.ac.uk](mailto:anna.bull@port.ac.uk)

**Study Title:** Examining institutional responses to sexual misconduct: Higher education after #MeToo

**Ethics Committee Ref No:** 17/18:09

We are inviting you to participate in a research project examining student and staff experiences of sexual misconduct by staff at UK higher education institutions. The research team consists of Anna Bull, a senior lecturer in sociology at The University of Portsmouth, and Erin Shannon, a senior research associate at the University of Portsmouth, and this research is being carried out in conjunction with The 1752 Group, a not-for-profit research and lobby group working to address staff sexual misconduct in higher education. You can read more about The 1752 Group at [www.1752group.com](http://www.1752group.com).

This information sheet should be read together with the consent form associated with this study (Version 3, April 2021).

### **The study**

This study aims to understand staff and students' experiences of institutional responses to complaints of sexual violence, harassment, or misconduct in English higher education. To investigate this topic, we will carry out semi-structured interviews with staff and students who made or attempted to make complaints about these instances of violence. We use the term 'sexual misconduct' to include sexualised comments/sexual harassment, sexual assault, forms of sexual coercion or control, or a consensual sexual relationship that has led to negative outcomes for the student. Don't worry if you are not sure whether what you have experienced is sexual misconduct; we would still like to speak to you.

This research builds on recent large-scale surveys in the US and Australia, as well as media reports in the UK, which suggest that sexual misconduct is an unaddressed issue in higher education that contributes to gender inequality. By giving participants time and space to narrate their experience in their own words, this study will shed light on patterns of staff sexual misconduct and student sexual harassment and violence; barriers to reporting; and students' experience of institutional responses to reports. The study has been granted ethical approval by the University of Portsmouth's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences ethics committee.

### **The interview process**

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be interviewed by Dr Erin Shannon, Senior Research Associate on the project, over Zoom. You and Erin will agree a maximum amount of time for the interview in advance. This will allow you to plan for some support after the interview, if you wish to, and we hope this will also help to make the process more manageable for you. Erin will ask you about the effects that your experience of sexual misconduct has had on your academic studies as well as your life more generally. She will also ask about what would make you feel comfortable and safe to report your experience to your institution; or if you did report it, how the institution responded. There is no need to talk about your actual experiences of misconduct, unless you wish to.

Due to legal and ethical concerns, it is extremely important that you do not name the perpetrator or institution during the interview, as it is possible (although unlikely) that legal authorities will request

the research data. If you do disclose identifying details Erin will be obliged to stop the interview. Instead, she will ask you to describe your experiences without giving any details that might identify the perpetrator or institution.

In order to make the interview as safe as possible for you, you can choose where it takes place, whether it is recorded or not, and you can talk about as much or as little of your experience as you are comfortable with. You are very welcome to take a break or stop the interview at any point, and the interview will be a non-judgemental space. We have included information about support and advice services below. Due to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines, all interviews will take place over Zoom; we can discuss any issues around data security or other concerns you may have.

The interview will be audio recorded if you are happy with this. If you prefer not to be audio recorded, then Erin will take notes during the interview. After the interview, she will send you a copy of the transcript or notes from your interview via a password protected file over email, so that you can check over what you said and amend anything.

You are welcome to bring someone with you to the interview for support if you would like. If you think that you may find it upsetting to talk through your experience, then you may wish to arrange for a friend or family member to meet you at the end of the interview.

### **Who can participate?**

In order to be eligible to participate in this study, you need to have been studying or working at an English higher education institution when you experienced (or think you may have experienced) sexual harassment, violence, or misconduct from higher education staff or students. The staff member(s) can be any gender, employed at the institution you were enrolled at or another, and can be academic, professional, contract or temporarily employed staff. You must have made or attempted to report this experience to your higher education institution, and this (attempted) report must have been made any time from January 2017 until now.

It doesn't matter whether you are still a student or not, or still working at the same institution if you are or were a staff member, but you must be over 18 years old. We would like to speak to people of all gender identities and sexualities.

### **Risks and benefits of participation**

There is no direct advantage to you for participating in the research. However, you may wish to participate in order to use your experience to feed into recommendations for the higher education sector in dealing with this issue (see below).

The risk of participating is that it may be difficult for you to talk about experiences that may have been very distressing. You will have as much control and choice as you need over the interview process in order to minimise any distress it may cause. However, if you think that participating in this research might adversely affect your mental health, then please do not volunteer to participate.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

We know that confidentiality and anonymity are extremely important concerns for many people who have experienced sexual misconduct from university staff or students. All identifying details will be anonymised in this research. This includes your name and any other details that might make you identifiable such as names of conferences or place names. After the interview, we will discuss which details you would like to be removed to ensure that you cannot be identified.

This research will not disclose publicly the name of any university staff member or student and we would also ask you not to name any perpetrators of sexual misconduct, or specific information

relating to incidents (eg dates, times) during your interview. This is because if Erin, the interviewer, receives specific disclosures she would have an ethical duty of care as a researcher to report this to avoid risk of further harm to yourself or others.

Your details will be kept confidential. The in-app option for recording interviews on Zoom will also be used. Recordings are saved directly from Zoom to the interviewer's computer. Immediately after the interview, audio recordings will be uploaded to Google Drive, stored in a secure folder under a pseudonym, and all recordings will be deleted from the interviewer's computer. It will be securely sent to a third party for transcription. After this, Erin will go through the transcript and remove any identifying features, and the audio recording will be destroyed. Your name and contact details will be stored separately to the transcript and will be kept confidential between Erin and myself.

The original consent forms will be retained securely by the researcher for 30 years from completion of the study. Paper records may be scanned and originals destroyed. If you prefer not to put your name on a consent form, you may give verbal consent on the audio recording using your chosen pseudonym.

### **Publishing and disseminating the research**

Your interview will form part of the data for peer-reviewed academic journal articles and we may also use this data in talks given to people working in the university sector and at academic conferences. We may use anonymised quotes from your interview as part of this.

### **Support and advice services**

It is possible that this interview will be distressing for you as you may choose to recount experiences that have been difficult. If this is the case, I would recommend the following support and advice services:

- **For women:** Rape Crisis national helpline. You can call anonymously and confidentially to discuss any experience of sexual harassment or sexual violence.  
  
12:00-14:30 and 19:00-21:30 every day of the year  
  
Monday to Friday 15:00-17:30  
  
Phone number 0808 802 9999
- Some local Rape Crisis centres offer free counselling or other support services. You can find your local Rape Crisis centre here: <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/centres.php>
- **For women and men:** Safeline ([www.safeline.org.uk](http://www.safeline.org.uk)) is on 0808 800 5005. They also offer support via text message or online chat
- **For all genders:** The Survivors' Trust also have information about local centres that offer counselling and other support services, including advocacy. You can find your local centre here: <http://thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support/>
- You may also wish to seek counselling or support from your university's counselling or wellbeing service

If you are a student and you would like practical advice on taking forward a complaint of sexual misconduct within your university, you can contact:

- Student Advice Centre at your local Students' Union. These are full-time, trained advisors that can help with a range of issues. They should be familiar with the complaints process at

your university. You can also talk to a welfare officer, women's officer or postgraduate students' office at your students' union.

- If you feel your university has not adequately handled your report of sexual misconduct, you can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education:

You can phone the Casework Support Team at the OIA for an initial discussion on **0118 959 9813 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)** or send a query [via their website](#)

See the OIAHE website for guidance on how to make a complaint:

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>

[If you are a staff member and](#) you would like practical advice on taking forward a complaint of sexual misconduct within your university:

- Your local UCU/Unison branch can advise and support you through making a complaint, if you are a member. If you do not feel comfortable approaching your local branch you may wish to go directly to your regional union office.
- The Rights of Women sexual harassment at work helpline give free employment legal advice to women in England and Wales experiencing sexual harassment at work. See further information at: <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-advice/sexual-harassment-at-work-law/>

### **Funding for this study**

This study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

### **Consent form**

You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating that you agree to take part in this research. If you change your mind about your participation at any point up until August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, you can email Erin on [erin.shannon@port.ac.uk](mailto:erin.shannon@port.ac.uk) to say that you wish to withdraw from the research. It is important that you feel comfortable and safe about your participation in this research, so if you decide that you wish to withdraw, I can assure you that it is perfectly fine for you to do so. If you withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed immediately.

### **Complaints**

If you feel unhappy with the way this research has been carried out, or feel that it has not been carried out in an ethical manner, you may wish to raise this with Erin or Anna ([anna.bull@port.ac.uk](mailto:anna.bull@port.ac.uk)) via email, or you may contact the Head of the School of Education and Sociology, Dr Catherine Carroll-Meehan on [catherine.carroll-meehan@port.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.carroll-meehan@port.ac.uk).

If your complaint is not dealt with adequately by Dr Carroll-Meehan, you can also contact the University of Portsmouth's Complaints team on 02392 843642 or by email at [complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk)

### **Thank you!**

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you would like participate, please email Erin to set up an interview on [erin.shannon@port.ac.uk](mailto:erin.shannon@port.ac.uk).

## CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Examining institutional responses to sexual misconduct: Higher education after #MeToo

**Name and Contact Details of Researcher:** Dr Anna Bull, [anna.bull@port.ac.uk](mailto:anna.bull@port.ac.uk); Dr Erin Shannon, [erin.shannon@port.ac.uk](mailto:erin.shannon@port.ac.uk).

**Ethics Committee Reference Number:** 17/18:09

This consent form should be read together with the information sheet associated with this study.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated April 2021 (version 3) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until August 30, 2021 by emailing [erin.shannon@port.ac.uk](mailto:erin.shannon@port.ac.uk) without giving any reason.
3. I consent for my interview to be audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research and the recording will be destroyed. The transcript will be stored securely at The University of Portsmouth for ten years.
4. I understand that data collected during this study, *could* be requested by legal authorities, for example through a court subpoena, in which case I will be informed by the researcher via the email address below. I give my permission for any authority, with a legal right of access, to view my data. Any promises of confidentiality provided by the researcher will be respected. As detailed in the information sheet, any audio recordings that contain identifying details will be destroyed immediately after transcription.
5. I understand that the results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings or academic conferences, and may be provided to research funder, the Economic and Social Research Council. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated in this way.
6. I consent to verbatim quotes being used in publications where the researcher deems there is no risk that I will be identified.
7. Limits to confidentiality: I understand that whatever I say in the interview is confidential unless I tell the researcher that I am in immediate danger of serious harm. If that happens, the researcher will raise this with me during the interview and tell me about what could happen if I continue to talk about it and explore how I would prefer to deal with the situation. The researcher will encourage me to seek support from my GP, my university's counselling service, and/or specialist sexual violence organisations to help me make the situation safer. If the researcher feels unsure that I will go and get support, they will talk to me about what they need to do and what might happen next. In an extreme case where you are at serious risk, and you choose not to seek help/advice the researcher has a duty to disclose this to the relevant agencies.
8. I agree to take part in the above study.

### Method of consent:

You can choose to either give verbal consent on the audio recording, or sign your name below.

**Name of Participant:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

**Name of Person taking Consent:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

**Email address:**