Preventing and Responding to Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Guidance for SOAS students and staff

Launched in 2015, revised in 2019

1. Introduction

At SOAS we believe that that all students and staff have the right to study and work in an environment in which they are respected for the contributions they make, free from any form of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), abuse or harassment. We recognise that sexual and gender-based violence is a problem that affects all of society, including the higher education sector, and we are committed to being at the forefront of the campaign to address this. Our ultimate aim is to promote safer campuses for all.

This guidance outlines initiatives intended to reduce the likelihood of incidents occurring on our campus and sets out practical steps for support and action.

1.1 Why is this guidance needed?

Sexual harassment and assault is rife in universities. The first national study by the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2010 found that:

- 68% of women students reported one or more kinds of sexual harassment on campus during their time as a student
- 16% experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting
- 14% of female students in the UK have experienced a serious physical or sexual assault while a student at university
- 12% have been stalked
- Over 10% were a victim of serious physical violence
Similar findings emerge from two further, more recent surveys, the Revolt Sexual Assault Survey and the Brook survey on sexual harassment and violence in universities.

Universities throughout the UK are grappling with the challenge of addressing these findings and ensuring a safe, supportive environment on their campuses. A key body for all universities, Universities UK, has made tackling sexual and gender violence a priority.

SOAS believes that no student should have to experience any form of violence and harassment at university. Nor should any member of staff. We stand committed to addressing these issues as part of our broader commitment to our values.

1. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, ‘sexual and gender-based violence’ (referred to in this document as SGBV) includes incidents of sexual assault and rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment and stalking. SOAS recognises that this can occur in all relationships and situations, regardless of age, disability, economic status, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender reassignment, marital status and sexual orientation. As such, SOAS understands that all people, including men in heterosexual and same sex relationships, may experience SGBV. It also recognises that while the majority of perpetrators are heterosexual men, women may also perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence, whether in heterosexual or same sex relationships.

2. Initiatives to raise awareness and reduce the likelihood of incidents

2.1 Challenging Complicit Cultures

SOAS recognises the need to challenge any tacit or explicit acceptance of sexual and gender-based violence. It is, therefore, committed to raising awareness and to empowering students and staff to recognise abuse and intervene.

2.2 Training for students

As part of the commitment to preventing sexual and gender-based violence, SOAS will facilitate “Enough is Enough” workshops for all students as part of their induction process and will provide tailored training materials for the Student Society officers. These resources will ensure an understanding of what
is appropriate behaviour and help to prevent sexual coercion in a university setting.

2.3 Training for staff

Diversity and Inclusion training delivered on a mandatory basis as part of staff induction will include preventing and responding to SGBV, and ensuring that all staff are aware of the School’s policies on harassment and relationships. In addition, key staff such as Academic Advisors, Anti-Harassment Contacts and the Student Advice and Wellbeing team, will receive training on handling disclosures of sexual and gender-based violence, and on the best ways to support students and staff. Internal publicity will help to ensure that all existing staff are aware of the School's approach as set out in this Guidance.

2.4 Working with the Students’ Union and the Campus Trades Unions

SOAS recognises that it must work closely with the Students’ Union and campus trade unions in order to ensure all students and staff understand what acceptable behaviour is at the School. Joint working on this issue will also help promote a better understanding of the causes and initiatives to reduce incidents.

2.5 Monitoring

SOAS will monitor reports of SGBV occurring on campus and in campus residences and regularly report on this as part of the annual Equality and Diversity report to the Board of Trustees. This data will be used to inform a review of the effectiveness of procedures and practices as set out in this document. An reporting system, “Report and Support”, will be used to monitor incidences as well as to provide a mechanism for students and staff to seek support.

3. Taking Action

SOAS recognises that there are many barriers to reporting SGBV and will adopt a supportive approach as outlined in this guidance.

A student making a complaint of SGBV will be offered the support of the Student Advice and Wellbeing Team. If required, support will be provided on a ‘fast-track’ basis to avoid delay.
We will take appropriate formal or informal action in line with the wishes of those who bring the complaint and as deemed appropriate in the circumstances in each reported case. If a complainant chooses not to refer the matter to the police, the School’s own disciplinary procedures may be used. The Student Disciplinary Procedure includes sanctions up to and including expulsion from the School. The Staff Misconduct Procedure includes the categories of gross or serious misconduct, and sanctions include a first and final warning, a period of suspension without pay and dismissal.

SOAS disciplinary procedures adopt the rules of natural justice, which confer on the person accused the right to know the case against them; the right to be given an opportunity to defend themselves; and the right for the case to be considered by an impartial arbiter. A student facing such an allegation can make use of the support services offered by the Student Advice and Wellbeing Team. Staff facing such an allegation can ask for support from HR or their union. The fact that the allegation is or has been the subject of criminal proceedings or a police investigation shall not prevent SOAS from conducting its own investigation. However, any internal action may be deferred pending police investigation or prosecution.

The School reserves the right to involve the police at any time where it considers it appropriate to do so (e.g. if someone is at imminent risk of violence), but will seek the consent of the victim in the first instance.

4. Guidance for support in the event of an assault

To provide immediate safety and support:

First and foremost be led by the person you’re supporting and their choices.

- If it is not an emergency situation, find a safe and quiet place where you will not be overheard or interrupted
- Inform a colleague if you are alone with a student
- Ask whether the person would prefer to speak to someone of a different gender
- Assist the person in contacting a friend if this is what they want
- Allow the person to talk and do not anticipate what the incident involved. Do not pressure them to disclose particular information
- Adopt a non-judgemental approach, people will react in very different ways to an assault
Assume nothing and only do that to which the person consents. Advise on the preservation of forensic evidence and any other further possible evidence (e.g. photos, text messages or email trails). Any clothes that have been removed, or bed sheets or used condoms should be placed in separate clean paper bags with a note of when this was done.

If the person is still at risk from the attacker, or if they have an injury that requires medical attention you should consider the situation to be an emergency and contact security staff and call 999 for an ambulance and the police. Although you should seek it, you do not need the person’s consent in these circumstances.

Given the diversity of its student body, SOAS recognises the need to support international students who are more likely to be away from support networks. Some students will have particular cultural or faith-based customs that are important to them. Therefore, it is particularly important in such circumstances to avoid making assumptions and to listen to what the student wants to happen.

Students should also be reassured that complaints of sexual violence will not undermine their academic career, nor risk their visa being withdrawn. Alleged perpetrators will also not have their visas withdrawn as part of an internal investigation by SOAS.

In taking a disclosure of sexual assault, observe the following guidance:

- Allow the person to talk, make brief notes including date and time, tell them that is what you’re doing and why
- Remember that you are not conducting an investigation, do not question or make any assumptions about what you are being told
- Show the person what you have written and ask them to confirm that it is correct.
- Retain your notes with strict adherence to SOAS standards of confidentiality
- Stop taking notes and immediately contact the police if the person states that they would like to report to the police
- If the person decides not to refer the incident to the police, you should provide them with a list of alternative agencies that can offer them support (see below).
It is essential that any person providing support after an assault respects the confidentiality of the individual and information provided. Any notes made and records taken must be locked in a safe and secure place and in accordance with the SOAS Data Protection Policy: https://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/dpa/policy/

If the person wishes to report to the police, they or you can call campus security on 555 (internal phone) or phone the police directly on 999 in an emergency or 101 (non-emergency).

Advise the person that if they contact the police, they will be assigned a Sexual Offences Investigative Trained Officer (SOIT), who will support and guide them through every stage, including the investigation and going to court. Explain that the process will involve taking an initial statement. If the assault has just taken place or has taken place within three days, a forensic medical examination will be offered to gather evidence. Advise the person that they can opt out of the reporting process at any point. This guide to reporting to the police provides helpful further information.

The Havens in Paddington, Whitechapel or Camberwell offer support with initial assessments, forensic medical examination and follow-up care such as counselling, tests and treatments, and people may expect to be referred here after reporting to the police. Advise them that they can access these services directly up to 12 months after a sexual assault, with or without police involvement, by calling 0203 299 6900 (24hrs emergency) or 020 3299 1599 Monday to Friday (not emergency).

Student Advice and Wellbeing offers additional support from a sexual violence support worker (RASASC) an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) (Survivors UK) and Sexual Harrassment Advisor (London Black Womens Project) who will provide care, support and information in a sensitive and compassionate manner, and can help refer people to local support services. Students can request any of the above and book this via svsw@soas.ac.uk and do not need to leave any details other than their first name.

International students should be made aware that they can access emergency services at the nearest A&E Department and that Camden Safety Net can provide an interpreter if required.

The following services will offer support regardless of whether any form of formal or informal action is pursued:
• Survivors Gateway is an umbrella organisation for support services
https://survivorsgateway.london/
• Rape Crisis National helpline on 0808 802 9999 (12 pm – 2.30 pm, 7 pm – 9.30 pm weekdays) and 020 3299 6900 (available 24 hours a day) for emotional support and to talk through options. They can also provide information on specialist male survivor services.

• Camden Safety Net on 020 7974 2526 (office hours only) are independent of the Police and provide services to the victims of sexual and domestic abuse of all genders and sexualities who live, work or study in the London Borough of Camden. This includes all SOAS students and staff regardless of where they live. Camden Safety Net provides holistic and local support including Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advisors (IDSVAs) who can give advice and support, and refer to other agencies. They also have interpreters as needed.

• Victim Support: 0845 30 30 900 (9am – 9pm weekdays, 9am – 7pm weekends).

• The Samaritans: available 24hrs a day to support people through any trauma including sexual assault. 08457 909090

• Refuge: 0808 2000 247 (24 hour domestic violence helpline)

• The Rights of Women Helpline: (legal advice for women) Textphone: 020 74902562

• Survivors UK (male survivor organisation): https://www.survivorsuk.org/

• Crossroads Women’s Centre (Camden):
http://www.crossroadswomen.net/

• Women’s Aid: (domestic violence support ):
http://www.womensaid.org.uk/ or call 0808 2000 247

• GALOP (London’s LGBT anti-violence & abuse charity):
http://www.galop.org.uk
● Broken Rainbow: http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk/help/helpline or call 0845 260 5560

● Press for Change: http://www.pfc.org.uk/ Legal advice for trans people

● National stalking helpline: http://www.stalkinghelpline.org/ 0808 802 0300 09:30 – 16:00 Weekdays (except Wed 13:00 – 16:00)

Acknowledgements

This guidance was developed by the SOAS Diversity and Inclusion Manager in 2015 in consultation with students, staff, and other SOAS stakeholders. It was updated by the Culture@SOAS initiative in March 2019, in consultation with the Diversity and Inclusion team, Student Advice and Wellbeing, HR, the Students’ Union, UNISON and UCU, and with advice from Vicki Baars.

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If you require this guidance in an alternative format, please contact the SOAS Diversity Office by email at Diversity@soas.ac.uk or by phone on +44 (0)20 7898 4957/4958