

***Protecting students from harassment and sexual assault:
A human-centred design approach***

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1.0 Summary

Student harassment and sexual assault are key concerns for universities. The impact that such incidents have on student victims can be significant – and can have consequences for a university’s reputation. Female students are particularly at risk during nights out, where unsafe routes home increase vulnerability and alcohol may fuel risky, transgressive and/or abusive behaviour.

Design researchers at the University of Salford (UK) have developed a Code of Practice and accreditation scheme to improve student safety, security and wellbeing in higher education. *ProtectED* (www.Protect-ED.org) was developed through a human-centred design research and innovation process. Investigations highlighted the need for universities to adopt a more ‘joined-up’ approach to tackling student harassment, as incidents may occur on and off campus as well as online, and students may be targeted for a wide variety of reasons, including their gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

In 2017, *ProtectED* launched as a not-for-profit membership organisation and accreditation scheme. *ProtectED* supports member universities in tackling harassment and sexual assault as part of a wider programme of measures to ensure their students’ safety, security and wellbeing. To this end, *ProtectED* promotes partnership working at all levels of an institution – both internally and externally – and uses aggregated and anonymised member data to inform service improvement across the *ProtectED* membership.

This paper firstly describes the research and development of *ProtectED*, and its approach to tackling student safety, security and wellbeing. Secondly, this paper presents *ProtectED* Instrument 3 on student harassment and sexual assault, giving examples of good practice in this area. This paper contributes to a wider body of literature on the practices, policies and initiatives for improving practice and raising

standards in the higher education sector and enhancing the student experience (The Drinkaware programme, 2016, 2018; Equality Challenge Unit, 2015 – Athena SWAN; NUS, 2011; NUS Alcohol Impact, 2018; Revolt, 2018; The 1752 Group, 2017, 2018; Universities UK, 2016, 2018;). The paper concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) seeking to tackle student harassment and sexual assault.

2.0 Introduction

Harassment and sexual assault are key concerns for universities due to the serious psychological (Rape Crisis, 27.08.2018) and academic impact that such incidents can have on student victims, and the consequential damage to an institution's reputation. The risks for a female student from a male student or acquaintance on a night out are well-documented. The NUS *Hidden Marks* report found that 81 percent of victims of serious sexual assault knew their attacker, compared to 53 percent of women subjected to less serious forms of sexual assault (NUS, 2011a – 2nd Edition). It is becoming increasingly apparent that staff-to-student sexual misconduct is also an issue for universities. As recent findings show, over 40 percent of students have experienced sexualised behaviour from staff (NUS, 2018). This is set against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement, which has seen the mainstream media highlight the problems facing women not just at university, but across many different sectors.

There are a number of initiatives and practices to prevent and mitigate the impact of harassment and sexual assault, but the higher education sector has yet to implement a consistent and effective approach.

Researchers at the University of Salford (UK) have developed the *ProtectED* Code of Practice and accreditation scheme to improve student safety, security and wellbeing in higher education. *ProtectED* has been established as a membership organisation and is recruiting Founder Member institutions who will be supported by the *ProtectED* team to tackle harassment and sexual assault as part of a wider programme of measures designed to raise standards in student safety, security and wellbeing and improve the student experience.

3.0 Background to ProtectED

ProtectED is the first membership organisation and national accreditation scheme to assess student safety, security and wellbeing at

UK universities. Launched in February 2017, the *ProtectED* Code of Practice is the first higher education guidance document to take a comprehensive view across the student experience. Structured in five parts, the *ProtectED* Code of Practice consists of a central section entitled “Core Institutional Safety & Security” – what might be considered ‘traditional’ university security – together with four issue-focused ‘instruments’.

- Instrument 1: Student wellbeing & mental health
- Instrument 2: International students
- Instrument 3: Student harassment & sexual assault
- Instrument 4: Student night out

The *ProtectED* Code of Practice is designed with an extensible structure to enable the scheme to continue to develop, as well as to respond to emerging issues. In 2019, the *ProtectED* team will begin research on Instrument 5, around student living, accommodation and housing.

The *ProtectED* Code of Practice identifies minimum requirements relating to university policies, processes and practice. It draws on expert recommendations and existing good practice guidance, and is illustrated with relevant case studies from the higher education sector.

Partnership working is at the heart of efforts to address student safety, security and wellbeing. *ProtectED* members are encouraged to work across internal departments, as well as to collaborate with external agencies – including local authorities, police and health services. Collaborative working of this kind is enabled by the establishment of a *ProtectED* Safety & Wellbeing Partnership (PSWP) (see Figure 1).

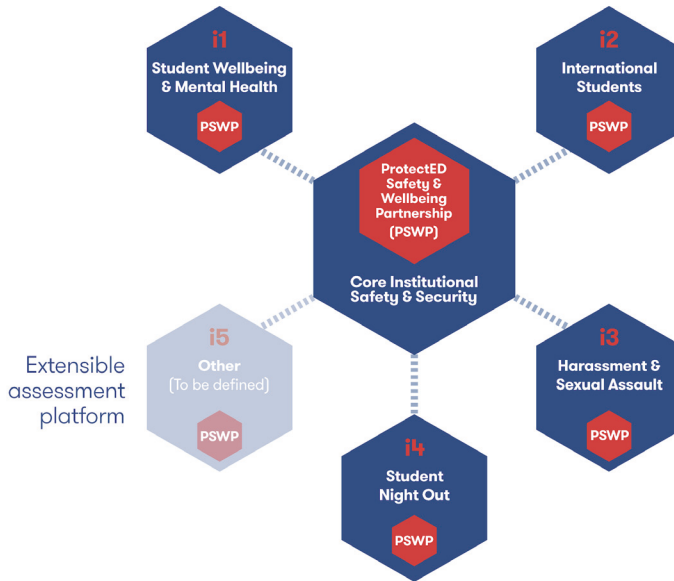


Figure 1. *The ProtectED structure, centred around the PSWP*

The Code Practice is available for download in PDF format from the *ProtectED* website (www.protect-ed.org). The option to submit for *ProtectED* Accreditation is only available to *ProtectED* member universities. Such member institutions are required to sign up to the *ProtectED* Principles (see Figure 2) and pay an annual membership fee. This membership fee covers the financial costs of delivering the accreditation process and enables *ProtectED* staff to support member institutions in improving standards.

The ProtectED Principles

1. Students cannot reach their full potential when impeded by issues affecting their safety, security and wellbeing.
2. Higher education institutions have a duty to develop and implement appropriate policies, processes and procedures that support student safety, security and wellbeing.
3. Ensuring the safety, security and wellbeing of students requires a ‘joined-up’ approach across the student experience – partnership working is essential.
4. The importance of all higher education staff and students in nurturing a positive, caring and inclusive learning environment for all students in the institution.
5. Effectively tackling issues of student safety, security and wellbeing requires well-founded intelligence.

Figure 2. The ProtectED Principles

As they work towards accreditation, *ProtectED* member institutions are supported by the *ProtectED* team and given access to members-only support materials – including Self-Assessment Workbook Guides relating to each area of the Code of Practice. The Workbook Guides provide advice and clarification on meeting the criteria outlined in the Code of Practice, and explain how an institution should evidence this in their application for accreditation.

ProtectED Member institutions will be provided insights into ‘what works and why’ when addressing key student welfare issues, obtained from analysis of aggregated and anonymised data derived from universities going through the *ProtectED* accreditation process. Member institutions can also access the *ProtectED* Exchange; a knowledge sharing platform on the *ProtectED* website that includes a directory of university case studies to support student safety, security and wellbeing. It is also a live forum where member institutions can share ideas, experiences and expertise to better support their students.

4.0 The design and development of ProtectED

The idea for *ProtectED* came from security practitioners working in the higher education sector. This was developed into a Code of Practice and accreditation scheme through a process of creative design research involving:

- Problem framing
- Establishing an Advisory Board
- Action research – including identification of issues/themes
- Concept generation, development and prototyping.

4.1 Problem framing

In early 2014, the *Design Against Crime Solution Centre* at the University of Salford was approached by the institution's Head of Security, Trevor Jones, and the Director of K7 Compliance Ltd., Brian Nuttall, a security auditor. The security practitioners wanted to discuss their concerns about security across the education sector, and present their thoughts on a possible way forward. This involved a standard for university security oriented towards security managers, which drew on the Security Industry Authority's (SIA) Approved Contractor Scheme.

The *Design Against Crime Solution Centre* offers a distinctive approach, considering 'design' as relating not only to the form of physical products and environments, but also to the creative formulation of research concepts, methods and analyses. The *Solution Centre's* mission is:

To apply rigorous social science research and innovative 'design thinking' to crime, security and related social challenges, to deliver human-centred, design-led solutions that reduce victimisation, improve wellbeing and meet the needs of stakeholders.

Over the past fifteen years, the *Solution Centre* has developed and utilised design research methods to address problems related to crime, insecurity and wellbeing (Davey and Wootton, 2014, 2016, 2017; Davey; Wootton and Davey, 2016).

The researchers proposed extending the original concept to consider the student experience related to safety, security and wellbeing – both on and off-campus. The new concept was branded *ProtectED*.

A research plan was developed with the aim of understanding existing fragmentation of practice across the sector, and also – in view of its human-centred design perspective – exploring potential solutions. Importantly, *ProtectED* is designed to respond to the 'problem context' – working from a clear understanding of the issues, circumstances and context related to higher education in the UK that are preventing students from reaching their potential. A Research Fellow was recruited by the Solution Centre to undertake the research.

The process of design and development is summarised below – see Figure 3, *ProtectED Development Timeline*.

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Activity</i>
PROJECT SET UP	
2014	Security practitioners (B. Nuttall, K7 Compliance & T. Jones, University of Salford) approach the <i>Design Against Crime Solution Centre</i> ; to discuss their idea for a university sector security standard
2014	Solution Centre proposes extension of initial security concept to address student safety, security and wellbeing. Design concept for <i>ProtectED</i> brand developed
2015–to date	Community of Interest event held for HE sector professional bodies and relevant external agencies to validate concept and input into research and development plans. Attendees agree to establish <i>ProtectED</i> Advisory Board.
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT	
2015	Solution Centre conducts research into HE student safety, security and wellbeing, exploring perspectives of different HE stakeholder groups: (i) HE security practitioners; (ii) student support services; and (iii) students
2015–16	Research findings analysed to identify major issues and themes. Results summarised in a series of reports
2016–17	Solution Centre develops initial structure and format for <i>ProtectED</i> Code of Practice, working with practitioners and Advisory Board to develop and validate content for “Core Institutional Security” and four <i>ProtectED</i> Instruments
2016	<i>ProtectED</i> Code of Practice, assessment process and Verification Visit prototyped with two universities
From 2016	Communications Manager employed to support stakeholder engagement, edit <i>ProtectED</i> blog, communicate via social media and publish articles in the HE and national press.
From 2016	Development and refinement of <i>ProtectED</i> membership and accreditation model
IMPLEMENTATION / RECRUITMENT OF MEMBERS	
Nov 2017	Appointment of <i>ProtectED</i> Patron–Baroness Ruth Henig CBE
March 2018	House of Lords event (19.03.18) and campaign to recruit twelve <i>ProtectED</i> Founder Member institutions
July–Nov 2018	Spin-out of <i>ProtectED</i> as not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC)

Figure 3. *ProtectED* development timeline

4.2 Establishing an Advisory Board

A Community of Interest event was held for higher education sector professional bodies and relevant external agencies to validate the *ProtectED* concept and provide input into research and development plans. Attendees agreed to participate in the *ProtectED* Advisory Board.

Advisory Board members represent organisations central to the delivery and improvement of higher education and cover the different issues related to the student experience, including: the Security Industry Authority (SIA); Association of University Chief Security Officers (AUCSO); International Professional Security Association; British Council; Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE); University Mental Health Advisors Network (UMHAN); Greater Manchester Police (GMP); Police Association of Higher Education Liaison Officers (PAHELO); College & University Business Officers (CUBO); the British Security Industry Association (BSIA); National Landlords Association; and Endsleigh Insurance.

4.3 Action research

To better understand the main safety, security and wellbeing issues facing universities, empirical research was conducted in 2015. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

4.3.1 Quantitative data

Survey data was collected using an online survey. Participants were recruited through links with professional bodies in the sector and the National Union of Students, as shown in Figure 4.

Survey target	Participants	Survey content
HE security professionals	47 HEI Security Managers	Role of security manager
	15 Police Higher Education Liaison Officers	Role of police higher education liaison officer
Student support representatives	19 Students' Union Sabbatical Officers	Role of Student Union Sabbatical Officer and issues facing students
Students	Around 800 student respondents	Crime victimisation, mental health issues and reporting / support

Figure 4. Survey participants

4.3.2 Qualitative data

Focus groups were conducted with:

- Those responsible for higher education institution safety and security – university security managers and police officers working with higher education institutions
- Students' Union officers providing support to students in relation to issues of safety and wellbeing.

Focus group participants were recruited with the support of three professional bodies: (i) Association of University Chief Security Officers (AUCSO); (ii) Police Association of Higher Education Liaison Officers (PAHELO); and (iii) the National Union of Students (NUS). More details regarding focus group participants are provided in Figure 5, below.

Focus group participants	Number of participants	Number of focus groups (across England)
Security practitioners	21 HEI Security Managers 21 Police Higher Education Liaison Officers	6 focus groups (plus 2 interviews of those unable to attend a focus group)
Student representatives	19 Students' Union Sabbatical Officers	5 focus groups

Figure 5. Focus group participants

Focus group question routes were developed for each group, following a semi-structured format (Marselle, 2016).

4.3.3 Identification of themes

Issues or themes relevant to student safety, security and wellbeing were identified from a frequency analysis and content analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data (Marselle, 2016). Six issues / themes were identified:

1. University security – crime and incident data; police higher education liaison officer role; partnership working
2. Student wellbeing and mental health
3. International students
4. Harassment and sexual assault

5. Late night economy and travel off campus
6. Living off campus and student accommodation

4.4 Concept generation, development and prototyping

In collaboration with K7 Compliance Ltd. and the Salford Security Manager, the *ProtectED* researchers refined the Core Institutional Safety and Security component of the Code of Practice – which draws on the Security Industry Authority Approved Contractor Scheme published in 2012. Informed by the research findings, the structure and format for the Code of Practice and accreditation scheme was designed. The scheme’s design included resources – referred to as ‘instruments’ – to enable universities to review their capacity to address specific issues. Instruments were developed to address issues 2 to 5 emerging from the research. The criteria and examples presented in the Code of Practice were identified from existing publications and guidance materials.

The structure of the Code of Practice and its content was reviewed by the Advisory Board, and revisions made based on their feedback. In February 2016, the *ProtectED* accreditation process was prototyped with two UK universities. After further revision, the final *ProtectED* Code of Practice was formally launched February 2017.

The next section presents the instrument to tackle Student Harassment and Sexual Assault.

5.0 Harassment & Sexual Assault

As mentioned above, *ProtectED* instruments were developed in response to action research with university security managers, police officers, students and student representatives.

5.1 Research findings

Community safety, safe routes home at night, harassment, stalking and sexual assault were considered priorities by Student Union Sabbatical Officers – who provide support to students and were able to represent their concerns. Security managers said that sector priorities included: drugs or legal highs; alcohol and vulnerability due to alcohol. Sexual assault was identified as being a high-impact problem for the sector. Focus group participants pointed out that incidents of harassment might relate to gender, ethnicity or sexuali-

ty, and that harassment via the Internet was increasingly a problem (Marselle, 2016).

Focus group participants identified that a university failing to deal sensitively and effectively with incidents of harassment and sexual assault can result in a victim dropping out of their course (Marselle, 2016).

However, problems of harassment and sexual assault in the UK higher education sector are not new. In 2011, a National Union of Students (NUS) report found that 68 percent of female students had experienced verbal or physical sexual harassment. In addition, the scale of the problem was starting to be highlighted by the media. In 2015, a Telegraph headline stated: “*One in three UK female students sexually assaulted or abused on campus*” (Goldhill & Bingham, 2015).

Research also highlighted links to the late night economy, as harassment and sexual assault often occur during a student night out. An online survey found that 54 percent of female students and 15 percent of male students had been sexually harassed on a night out (The Drinkaware Trust, 2016).

While some security managers were primarily concerned about problems that occurred on campus, others said that their responsibility extended to student safety and security off-campus – when in the city centre, during a student night out, or when travelling home to their accommodation. In some universities, security managers are prepared to organise transport for students that are at risk of victimisation:

“You know, our CCTV at night is watching students that are drunk. You’re vulnerable... and part of our role is to make sure they get home safe – And if it means sending the van, that’s exactly what we’d do.”

(Security Manager, Focus Group participant)

According to security managers, incidents of harassment and sexual assault have the greatest impact on the victim and wider implications for the institution. Media coverage of a university admitting to even tackling such incidents may damage its reputation – a point discussed in a focus group:

“If the University publicly acknowledged the problem, then – unless every University does it – it makes it look like there’s a specific issue with [University X] and their sexual harassment

problem. And I think they think it will impact on prospective students. I don't think it does. I personally think that I'd rather the University... put their hands up and be like, 'This is an issue – we're tackling it!'"

(Security Manager, Focus Group participant)

Unfortunately, the majority of incidents never come to the attention of relevant authorities – therefore limiting opportunities to support the victim or deal with the perpetrator. A *ProtectED* survey of students administered in 2016 via the National Union of Students (NUS) member database revealed that 90 percent of respondents who experienced sexual harassment did not report the incident to the police; and 86 percent did not inform their university (Davey, Wootton and Marselle, 2016).

5.2 ProtectED approach to student harassment & sexual assault

The Solution Centre developed a conceptual model to help communicate the *ProtectED* approach to harassment and sexual assault, as well as structure the specific measures and criteria in an effective way. The focus of Instrument 3 is on *preventing* harassment and sexual assault, and on promoting reporting options and support services should an incident occur. The Student Harassment and Sexual Assault instrument is divided into six sections (see Figure 6).

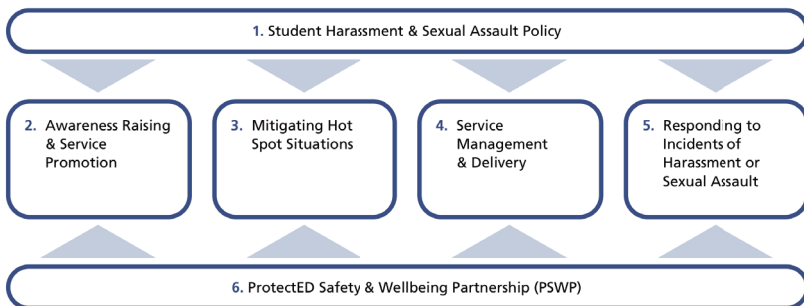


Figure 6. Structure of *ProtectED Instrument 3: Student Harassment & Sexual Assault*

Section 1, ‘Student Harassment and Sexual Assault Policy’ and Section 6, ‘*ProtectED* Safety & Wellbeing Partnership (PSWP)’, provide the foundation and support for activities in Sections 2 to 5.

Section 2 of the Instrument focuses on raising awareness of the problem of harassment and sexual assault and providing information about relevant support services. Section 3 continues the prevention focus by concentrating on mitigating hot-spot situations and locations in and around the university campus.

Section 4 of the Instrument, ‘Service Management and Delivery’ – focuses on ensuring that support is available to students who need it. Section 5 specifically addresses the HEI’s response to incidents of harassment or sexual assault.

The criteria, guidelines and examples were identified from a review of published literature and existing guidelines and practical case study examples – including NUS, 2011; Universities UK, 2016, 2018; The Drinkaware programme, 2016, 2018; Equality Challenge Unit, Athena SWAN, 2015.

5.3 Criteria: Harassment and Sexual Assault

In Section 1, the Student Harassment and Sexual Assault instrument requires member universities to have a formal written policy on harassment and sexual assault, including an equality and diversity policy. The policy should extend to coverage of harassment and bullying via email, social media, Internet, etc.–i.e. cyberbullying. The UK government universities minister, Sam Gyimah, recently emphasised the impact of social media and cyberbullying on the mental wellbeing of young people, and the need for social media companies to take their duty of care to users seriously (Turner, 2018).

Formal written procedures covering harassment and sexual assault are recommended in the NUS’ (2011) ‘*Hidden Marks*’ report and the University UK (2016) ‘*Changing the Culture*’ report.

ProtectED expects universities to go beyond simply having a formal policy, and to embed appropriate behaviour into everyday practices. As explained in Section 2 of the instrument, this involves the institution promoting initiatives to raise awareness of harassment and sexual assault and promote relevant services. Students should be made aware of standards of behaviour that are expected, and disciplinary sanctions in cases where a student fails to maintain such standards. Students also need to be clear on what behaviour constitutes sexual harassment, as the fear that their experience is “not serious enough” is a barrier to reporting and seeking support. *ProtectED* members are expected

to run sexual consent workshops for new students, as well as provide training in the appropriate use of social media. Universities UK (2016) advocates that standards of behaviour should be communicated and enforced through a partnership agreement between the student and their university or through a code of practice. Importantly, universities are also expected to provide training for students' friends on how to respond effectively if a friend tells them about an experience of sexual assault, such as the Student Minds 'Look After Your Mate' workshop.

In addition, universities must take a 'whole institution' approach to disseminating information and providing training to raise awareness of problems of bullying, harassment and sexual assault, which can take different forms, including: organising events that celebrate diversity and encourage integration; running campaigns that communicate a zero-tolerance message; and educating the university population on what constitutes hate crime and harassment. Training on how to respond to a report of harassment or sexual assault is particularly relevant for staff responsible for supporting students or providing pastoral care.

'We Get It' campaign – Zero Tolerance to Bullying and Sexual Harassment

The University of Manchester and their Students' Union have launched a campaign of zero tolerance towards any form of bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination that occurs on or off campus – including in bars, nightclubs, halls of residence, public transport and online.

The campaign encourages reporting of harassment and for the victim to talk confidently to a trained Harassment Advisor, as well as access support services. To show support for the campaign, staff and students are invited to sign an online pledge against sexual harassment of any kind: "Manchester gets it – harassment isn't acceptable", as well as wear a We Get It wristband to show their support.

The campaign was runner-up in the 2015 NUS Awards.

[SOURCE: University of Manchester Students' Union website (accessed 3 May 2018), <https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/wegetit>]

HEIs or Student Unions in the UK run 'Active Bystander Workshops' whereby individuals learn techniques to challenge harassment. Such workshops train someone who observes unacceptable behaviour – a bystander – to act or challenge that behaviour (Vidler, 2018).

Section 3 of the Instrument focuses on mitigating hot spot situations – specific geographic areas and locations where crime and insecurity tend to be concentrated. For example, venues frequented by students – especially during the first few weeks of the first year, or in social spaces and events. The Revolt Sexual Assault survey (2018) found that 23 percent of incidents of sexual assault or harassment took place in university social spaces and 24 percent at social events.

ProtectED expects universities and students' union venues to sign a zero-tolerance pledge in relation to hate crime, harassment and sexual assault, and to engage off-campus venues that are frequented by students in this initiative. Venue staff should be trained to recognise and address harassment, and to assist vulnerable adults – for example, to intervene if a heavily intoxicated woman is approached and escorted from the venue by a male student, acquaintance or stranger.

Section 4 of the instrument, 'Service Management and Delivery', seeks to assess whether an institution provides, widely promotes and encourages the use of support services for victims of harassment or sexual assault – as well as alleged perpetrators. The institution must provide adequate support for all those involved, especially for the reporting student and the alleged student perpetrator, as well as handle alleged student misconduct that may also constitute a criminal offence (Universities UK, 2016, p. 6).

If hate is directed towards a student on the grounds of his or her religious beliefs, *ProtectED* universities must offer accessible ways for students to report such behaviour. Harassment and sexual assault services must also be adequately resourced and available out of hours.

Incidents need to be recorded and collated in a centralised recording system, to ensure institutions can track the nature and prevalence of harassment in the university community. Universities are encouraged to provide an anonymous online form where students can create a secure, time-stamped record of their report. This is to make the process as accessible and user-friendly as possible. The university is also required to develop working links with the police to allow students to easily report a harassment or a hate incident. In order to understand the level of unreported incidents of harassment and sexual assault, universities are expected to conduct regular victimisation surveys of students.

Technology to support victims of sexual assault and harassment – an innovative good practice example

The Callisto App lets a victim report a sexual assault anonymously – and alerts the victim if someone has previously named the same perpetrator. The App facilitates the saving of a time-stamped written record of harassment or sexual assault.

Under the Callisto system, a victim inputs the identity of the perpetrator(s) under the precondition that, if a match is found, a Callisto Counsellor will reach out to each victim individually. The Callisto Counsellor advises each victim on the options available following a match, including formally reporting the perpetrator – if this is the right route for them.

The Callisto website reports that an estimated 20 percent of women, 7 percent of men, and 24 percent of trans and gender nonconforming students are sexually assaulted during their college career. It is important to note that an estimated 90 percent of sexual assaults are committed by repeat perpetrators – and the assailant is, in most cases, known to the victim.

Less than 10 percent of victims report to their university or the police. Callisto encourages reporting, and leads to harassment or sexual assault being reported faster – over average, after 4 months rather than 11 months.

[SOURCE: Callisto website (accessed 08.05.18) Tech to combat sexual assault & harassment. <https://www.projectcallisto.org>]

Section 5 of the instrument covers ‘Responding to Incidents of Harassment or Sexual Assault’. Following an incident, *ProtectED* requires universities to have support measures in place for the victim. This could include a dedicated counsellor or support officer. Such support services must be clearly promoted to students, ideally during awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns.

As part of *ProtectED*’s student safety measures, a campus safety audit must be conducted – preferably on an annual basis. This needs to include student input so as to allow the university to clearly understand which areas of the campus students feel are particularly unsafe, and the types of problems that they face. This process should inform campus improvement plans, which might include, for example, additional lighting, CCTV or security patrols.

Section 6 of the instrument refers to the *ProtectED* Safety and Well-being Partnership (PSWP). Universities are asked to establish a *ProtectED* Safety and Wellbeing Partnership (PSWP) comprising internal university staff and external groups such as the police, local council, NHS representatives and relevant charities, agencies and experts. This group should meet regularly and have information sharing agreements in place to help them to collectively direct their knowledge and resources in their efforts to tackle all forms of harassment and support student victims and to ensure an efficient, effective response, following a disclosure from a student.

Finally, *ProtectED* member institutions are required to share data they collect on student safety and wellbeing with *ProtectED*. This data is anonymised, aggregated and analysed to create a more reliable evidence base to work from when tackling these important student experience issues. Such research will also help generate a more accurate picture of student safety, security and wellbeing issues across the HE sector, where the problems lie, and what solutions are effective. Ultimately, this research will benefit *ProtectED* member institutions and the university experience of their students.

6.0 Conclusion and discussion

The recommendations and requirements addressing student harassment and sexual assault contained in *ProtectED* Instrument 3 draw on existing published guidelines, good practice recommendations and expert advice – rather than being invented by *ProtectED*. The difference between *ProtectED* and other approaches to tackling harassment and sexual assault lies in how the guidance is implemented and presented. In relation to *ProtectED*, member universities must address student harassment and sexual assault as part of a comprehensive programme of measures dealing with student safety, security and wellbeing issues.

ProtectED members are supported to work towards *ProtectED* accreditation through: access to detailed Workbook Guides on each aspect of *ProtectED*; the provision of case study examples; access to peer-support via the *ProtectED* Exchange members online forum; consultation with experts in the *ProtectED* team. In this way, *ProtectED* offers universities a practical and sustainable approach to tackling student harassment and sexual assault, as well as other issues facing their students.

6.1 Public awareness of the problem – a driver for change

Media coverage of student victimisation results in reputational damage for the institution, while publicised incidents at one university can impact negatively on neighbouring universities.

In recent years, UK universities have increasingly come under the media spotlight regarding a range of student security and welfare problems – much to the unease of university leaders. A campaign by The Guardian newspaper gathered over 100 accounts of staff-to-student sexual harassment, reportedly revealing “a hidden pattern” of abuse in the HE sector (Weale and Batty, 2016a). Controversially, in some cases institutions ask the victim to sign a Non-disclosure Agreement (Weale and Batty, 2016b).

In 2017, a number of newspapers reported “Sexual harassment, at epidemic levels in UK universities” (Batty, Weale and Bannock, 2017a).

Media reports suggest UK universities are not doing enough to address sexual violence, and need to do more – a point echoed both by campaigners and politicians (Weale & Bannock, 2017; Weale & Batty, 2017b). For example, a report in December 2017 suggested that 39 percent of UK universities do not provide any staff training around sexual misconduct and of those that do, this training is optional. Such reports have seen UK institutions accused of “*complacency over sexual misconduct.*” (Batty, Bengtsson and Weale, 2017).

Universities are also being accused of lacking a strategic approach to safety and security problems facing students and failing to support victims (Winrow, 2017). It is argued that this contributes to the minority of students who actually report harassment “feeling inferior and degraded” (Weale and Bannock, 2017).

6.2 Improving the student experience

UK universities compete to attract fee-paying students from the UK, European Union and internationally. Improving student safety, security and wellbeing enables institutions to improve the ‘student experience’ they provide, and attract, recruit and retain students. Ensuring a positive student experience has become a focus for UK universities, with institutions seeking to ensure satisfaction across all aspects of student life: on campus and off; academic and social.

“Supporting and enhancing the student experience throughout the student lifecycle (from first contact through to becoming alumni) is critical to the success in higher education today for both the student and the institution.”

(Student Experience Website,
<http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com>).

6.3 Active leadership

The organisation *Universities UK* is the collective voice for higher education in the UK, comprising vice-chancellors and principals of 136 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Universities UK 2018b).

In March 2018, Universities UK published the “*Changing the Culture: One year on*” report, reflecting on progress made in the HE sector since 2016 to address sexual misconduct, hate crime and harassment affecting university students. The report highlights that “significant but variable progress” has been made, and that more needs to be done. As discussed earlier, addressing the widely varying standard of student support in UK universities was a primary motivation for the development of *ProtectED*.

The Universities UK 2018 report identifies “active senior leadership in this area” as being vital to progress. *ProtectED* recognises the importance of senior leadership in enabling the ‘whole institution approach’ required to effectively address student safety, security and wellbeing (Universities UK, 2018a). For this reason, *ProtectED* membership requires a letter of commitment from the institutional lead (Vice Chancellor, Principal or equivalent) to adopt the principles of *ProtectED* within their policies, structures and processes.

The sharing of good practice is also identified in the report as having contributed to progress made (Universities UK, 2018a). *ProtectED* membership aims to create a community of universities, focused on collaborative working as they implement the good practice recommendations contained within the *ProtectED* Code of Practice. Members are supported in this by the *ProtectED* Exchange online forum and case examples provided within the *ProtectED* Workbook Guides.

6.4 Incident reporting and recording

Experience suggests that incident reporting and recording presents a number of challenges for UK universities – particularly in relation to sensitive issues such as harassment and sexual assault. Universities UK reports that centralised systems and processes for the collection and recording of data on sexual misconduct, hate crime and hate-based harassment remain underdeveloped across the sector (Universities UK, 2018).

Universities that introduce better policies and practices to tackle harassment and sexual assault tend to experience an increase in students reporting incidents – either to the university or the police. This risks deterring improvement action by universities as media reports of increased incident numbers may be misinterpreted as evidence of increased problems (Dixon, 2018; Weale, 2018). Thus, increased incident reporting should be seen as a step forward in identifying and responding to harassment and sexual assault. However, even when journalists attempt to correct the misunderstanding, news headlines about harassment and sexual assault carry potential risk to an institution’s reputation.

For example, one 2018 newspaper headline read: “University of Cambridge admits significant sexual misconduct problem: Institution receives 173 complaints of improper behaviour in nine months” (Weale, 2018). The article went on to state that the University of Cambridge recorded the most incidents compared to other institutions, only later mentioning that Cambridge is one of only a handful of institutions to introduce anonymous reporting for students – and the first to report any results. While the article does point out that a high number of reports was to be expected due to the anonymous nature of the reporting system, anyone scanning the headlines and opening paragraphs would have been hard pressed to view the report as a good news story on improving university practice.

University of Cambridge Anonymous Reporting System

On its website, the University of Cambridge offers a form to enable anyone who is or has been a student, staff or visitor to the University to anonymously report harassment, hate crime and sexual misconduct. The University provides such a system because people may find it difficult or will not want to report this type of behaviour.

The University of Cambridge does not offer direct advice or investigate a matter reported through the anonymous reporting tool. An individual can formally report an incident to the College, University, or the Police.

The University provides a Counselling service that includes a full-time specialist support worker for those who have experienced sexual violence.

[SOURCE: System accessed via student complaints section of the University of Cambridge website – <https://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/anonymous-reporting-harassment-hate-crime-sexual-misconduct>]

6.5 Transferability of ProtectED

ProtectED was developed to improve practice in UK universities across a number of student issues, including student harassment and sexual assault. Problems of harassment and sexual assault are certainly not limited to higher education in the UK, however. They exist across a number of different but related contexts, including Further Education and even the school sector. Furthermore, higher education institutions in other countries are also experiencing problems of student harassment and sexual assault (see for example: Baumgartner and McAdon, 2017; Bedi, 2015; South China Morning Post, 2017). Transplanting *ProtectED* to such different contexts is possible – the principles on which it is based remain true and the means by which accreditation is delivered are practicable. Specific indicators may need to be added or amended, but the potential benefits to students of improved and more effective institutional practice are substantial.

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Content

<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Erich Marks</i> Welcome to Our Annual Prevention Survey in Prevention- Eager Times – 2017 German Congress on Crime Prevention in Hanover	9
<i>Wiebke Steffen</i> Opening of the 22 nd German Congress on Crime Prevention in Hanover on 19 June 2017	19
<i>Wielant Machleidt</i> Integration as Cultural Adolescence! A new perspective on integration	23
<i>Dorota Habrat</i> The assessment of the model of criminal corporate liability in Poland	33
<i>Anika Holterhof and Johannes de Haan</i> Participatory and community-oriented crime prevention	45
<i>Tao-Hsin Tung, Ching-Chi Chi, Yan-Ru Chen, Chia-Hsien Hsu, Sheng-Ang Shen</i> Effectiveness of Community Treatment on Reducing Recidivism Rate for Child Molesters: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials	55
<i>Catrin Trautmann</i> International findings of Countering Violent Extremism	71
<i>Andrew B. Wootton, Caroline L. Davey and Lucy Winrow</i> Protecting students from harassment and sexual assault: A human-centred design approach	79
<i>Programme of the 11th Annual International Forum</i>	107
<i>Authors</i>	111