

Briefing note on *The Intervention Initiative*, an evidence-based bystander programme commissioned by Public Health England for the prevention of sexual violence and domestic abuse in UK university settings.

Dr Rachel Fenton and Dr Helen Mott, University of the West of England¹

The growing body of evidence from UK universities adds to the international evidence base documenting that universities are significant sites for violence against women. UK universities are increasingly motivated to seek effective long-term solutions and are coming under increasing scrutiny and pressure to react.

It is important that universities are supported to respond in accordance with theoretically sound evidence-based principles of prevention. Bystander intervention programmes such as *The Intervention Initiative* meet these criteria. Programmes that are not evidence-based have been shown to have the potential to be harmful and are unlikely to produce any meaningful, lasting attitudinal or behavioural change. The process of achieving behaviour change is complex, encompassing multiple levels or stages and requiring time.

Under US law, educational institutions have an affirmative duty to prevent sexual violence against their students. Since 2012, the US Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women has specifically required the inclusion of evidence-based *bystander programmes* in university prevention planning as a condition of obtaining funding.

Against this backdrop, in 2013 Public Health England commissioned the University of the West of England to undertake a review of the literature, identifying the strongest evidence and best practice from which to then develop a public health intervention toolkit specifically for the prevention of sexual coercion and domestic violence in university and higher education settings. The product of this research is *The Intervention Initiative* programme and toolkit, available at <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/interventioninitiative>.

The Intervention Initiative is a bystander intervention programme which is completed in 8 hours of facilitated group learning. It is freely available online for all universities, containing all the materials needed for implementation such as facilitator notes and guidance, PowerPoint slides and handouts. It is inclusive, designed for all students in all universities and can be customised by universities to reflect their institutional

¹ Senior Lecturer in Law and Research Fellow, respectively. The information in this briefing is taken in part from Fenton, R.A., Mott, H.L., McCartan, K. and Rumney, P.N.S. (2015) *Public Health England review of evidence for bystander intervention to prevent sexual and domestic violence in universities*. London: Public Health England and Bristol: University of the West of England, forthcoming. Available on request.

identity without the need to replicate the extensive research and development phase necessary for any effective prevention programme. The programme can be placed within a timetable or curriculum or offered to student opinion leaders. There are demonstrable additional positive benefits for students from participating in this programme. These relate to graduate employability, the student experience and education for sustainable development.



The Intervention Initiative has been tested at UWE in a controlled evaluation with all first year law students, placed within the curriculum. In their [feedback](#), the students rated all aspects of the course, from content and delivery to self-reported learning outcomes to personal development, as good to excellent. Preliminary quantitative data analysis indicates effectiveness.

The work programme at UWE incorporating *The Intervention Initiative* has been supported across government by the Home Office and BIS and forms part of the government's most recent Action Plan to End Violence Against Women. Ministers wrote to all Vice Chancellors of English Universities in March 2015 to signpost them to The Intervention Initiative.

The work programme also includes a [strategy document](#) for university prevention and response. This strategy document illustrates the importance of a visible institutional culture against violence and abuse of which one key component is an evidence-based prevention programme, for the creation of community level cultural change.

For further information please contact Dr Rachel Fenton at Rachel.Fenton@uwe.ac.uk