

# It Happens Here Report

## Context

1. Between January and May 2022, the NUSU It Happens Here Society ran a ‘#Do Better Newcastle University’ campaign, which included a survey of current Newcastle University students about their experiences of sexual violence, reporting and support (see Appendix 1 for images from the campaign). This campaign aimed to improve policies and procedures around sexual violence, as well as improving support services for students. The survey received 409 responses and the data was analysed by the It Happens Here Society’s Peer Support Officer for 2021/22, with further analysis of the survey data undertaken by Mady Baugh, NUSU President, 2022/23 (see Appendix 2).
2. The survey found that 76.2% of respondents reported that they have been, or know someone who has been, sexually assaulted whilst at Newcastle University and that, moreover, 60.5% of respondents stated that they or the person they knew did not report their assault. Of those surveyed, 13.2% stated that they had reported their experience of sexual violence to the University. When asked to explain why they did not report, respondents recurrently stated that they:
  - did not know how to report;
  - did not feel safe;
  - did not feel that they would be believed;
  - felt that they did not have enough evidence to report;
  - thought that nothing would happen if they reported;
  - feared their perpetrator;
  - were embarrassed or felt it was their own fault.
3. The survey free text comments point towards a feeling of being let down by the University and other sources of support, a desire for better teaching to help prevention, better training to improve support, a change in the culture and a more thorough follow up from wellbeing services. A selection of these responses are included in the appendices. We strongly urge this selection to be read as hundreds of survivors have trusted in us to share their experiences on this platform, to give them a voice and to urge for change. Some examples of responder testimonies include:

*‘The Uni needs to show that by reporting sexual assault, things can actually change, because so many people don’t report it because they know it goes unpunished for perpetrators’*

*‘[I want to] see the university themselves saying #DoBetter not just leaving it to other students to fix their problems, in the end they’re getting paid and we’re doing all the hard work to create a safe institution*

*‘Multiple women I know have been victims of sexual violence at the hands of a man on the medical course. He has been allowed to continue on, studying medicine. One of the female students who was attacked by him suffered psychological damage as a result of this traumatic experience and therefore did not complete a module. She filled out a pec form and reported her sexual abuser to*

*university. She faced the same academic sanction for not completing a module as her abuser faced for being a rapist.'*

4. The free text responses also include suggestions for improving existing forms of support. Suggestions these include:

*'A physical office/ walk in space to go for face-to-face support reporting things.'*

*'Staff are regularly the first point of contact for many students and they need to acknowledge their responsibility in the overall wellbeing of a students academic and non-academic life in university. Directing each incident to the wellbeing service is just not good enough.'*

5. The It Happens Here Society's findings reflect a wider national picture. A 2018 survey of 4,491 students across 152 UK Higher Education Institutions found that 67% of respondents had experienced either sexual harassment or assault at university.<sup>1</sup> 70% of all female respondents stated that they had experienced sexual violence, with 48% experiencing sexual assault specifically. Moreover, 8% of female respondents reported having been raped while at university. Of those who had experienced sexual assault or harassment, only 6% reported their experience to their university, with 29% stating that they did not report because they did not know how to and 35% because they felt too ashamed. Only 2% of those who had experienced sexual assault or harassment 'felt both able to report it to their university and were then satisfied with the reporting process'.
6. In March 2022, Mady Baugh was elected NUSU President 2022/23 on a [manifesto](#) pledging to 'proactively tackle sexual violence, spiking and discrimination'. Addressing the issues identified in the It Happens Here Society's report findings forms a key part of this focus.

## Current Practice

7. With these findings and concerns in mind, we welcome the recent launch of Newcastle University's Survivor Support Service, and the inclusive, trauma-informed, and non-judgmental tone of its digital and printed communications. Going forward, we believe that all University communications regarding sexual misconduct and violence should follow this approach.
8. In our conversations around reporting and furthering support available to student survivors, University staff have been interested and open to receiving feedback and exploring ways to change and enhance current provision. In October 2022, we met with colleagues from Student Progress, who provided us with a comprehensive overview of the University's current disciplinary procedures and sexual misconduct investigation protocol. From our consultation, it is our understanding that the purpose of the Disciplinary Panel is solely to investigate whether University codes of conduct have been breached, and therefore that the composition of its membership is based on seniority and procedural knowledge, rather than expertise around sexual misconduct. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education states in its [Good Practice Framework](#) that 'the cultural mix or diversity of the panel may be a relevant consideration in some disciplinary cases'.
9. It is also recognised that, despite Reporters engaging with the disciplinary process in order to secure a 'No Contact' sanction, it is impossible for the University to enforce this sanction fully. In addition, if the

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<sup>1</sup> Student Room/Revolt Sexual Assault survey of 4,491 students and recent graduates across 153 UK institutions between December 2017 and February 2018.

Disciplinary Panel cannot establish evidence to substantiate a Student Reporter's complaint, a Student Responder being investigated for rape may receive a final warning or no sanction. While potential sanctions for student sexual misconduct offences vary in severity from university to university, we have identified a small number of Russell Group universities claim to take a stricter approach than Newcastle. At [Manchester](#) and [LSE](#), for example, rape is met with either suspension or expulsion. At [Oxford](#), by contrast, attempted rape is met with suspension or expulsion whereas rape and non-consensual sexual acts are met with expulsion.

10. In line with Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidance, Student Reporters and Responders at Newcastle participating in Disciplinary Hearings at Newcastle can be accompanied by an external legal professional who may make a statement on their behalf at the Hearing itself. We note that other universities do not allow this and are concerned that this option may benefit Student Responders from more socioeconomically privileged backgrounds, particularly given the Office for Students' [expectation](#) that 'both the reporting and responding parties having equitable access to appropriate support [...] for the duration of any investigation'.

### **What we would like to see**

11. We would like to see that the University further commits to making sexual violence prevention and survivor support a strategic priority, specifically by:
  - a. In-person student sexual violence and consent training as mandatory (with an opt-out for survivors) and ongoing.
  - b. Student Progress review their approach to Disciplinary Panels to ensure that they are survivor centric.
  - c. That the University support the introduction of a 24/7 in-person crisis space for survivors of sexual violence, to be based in the Phillip Robinson Library.
  - d. More proactive support for survivors and sexual violence prevention. This could include the further resourcing of Survivor Support Workers. Or, short of this, the University makes the SVLO role a paid position.
  - e. That student-facing University roles are encouraged to nominate staff to complete SVLO or other signposting training.

### **Action requested**

12. Members of the Changing the Culture Working Group are asked to provide feedback on the above proposals.

### **Next Steps**

13. Following the discussion at Changing the Culture, we will take an updated report to Executive Board for consideration.

The It Happens Here Society

Elizabeth Marriage - It Happens Here Peer Support Officer and LGBTQ+ rep 2021/22

Niamh Lord – It Happens Here Member 2021/22

Katelyn Quintans – It Happens Here Member 2021/22

Abigail Hardcastle – It Happens Here President 2022/23

Mady Baugh (It Happens Here President 2020-2022; NUSU President, 2022/23)

Joe Barton (NUSU Representation & Research Coordinator, 2022/23)

7<sup>th</sup> November 2022

## References

The Student Room/Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018. [\*Students' experience of sexual violence.\*](#)

## Appendices

### 1. Images from the #DoBetterNewcastleUniversity campaign





## 2. Summary of Findings from the It Happens Here Report

The purpose of this report is twofold 1) to discover the prevalence of sexual violence and spiking among Newcastle University students 2) to highlight areas of improvement to be considered. These findings focus on five key areas of concern:

- The volume of students affected by sexual violence and spiking
- The gap between those affected by sexual violence and those reporting
- An institutional culture that discourages reporting due to lack of perceived action and consequence for the reported party
- A need for more thorough training and education across the university for both students and staff

This survey has 409 anonymous responses. The questions we asked were as follows:

- Stage of Course
- Gender Identity
- Have you or someone you know been sexually assaulted whilst at Newcastle University?
- Have you or someone you know been spiked whilst at Newcastle University?
- Did you/ they report the sexual violence and/or spiking to the University / Police / Other?
- Did you/ they know how to report any incident of sexual violence?
- What were the reasons you/ they didn't report it? (i.e., didn't feel safe/ didn't know how)
- If you know of a perpetrator, which subject/department were they from?

- Have you or do you know someone who had a sexual encounter with a staff member?
- How has your experience been with the Uni Well-Being team if you have reported an incident/ sought support?
- How has your experience been with Student Progress, who handle disciplinary procedures, if sexual misconduct has been reported?
- Any further comments about what the University should be doing to address these issues, or experiences you wish to share

We phrased the question in this way so that survivors who may not wish to identify as such, or who may not recognise that they are a survivor, felt able to access and contribute to our questions. This created the possibility of duplication within the data (i.e. friends responding on behalf of a survivor who may have completed the survey themselves). Nevertheless, those who spoke to us during our on campus listening sessions were survivors. In addition, given the circulation of this survey among different liberation groups, many of those will have completed the survey answering for themselves. Moreover, the large volume of free text responses also points towards a high proportion of survivors directly answering this survey.

### **The Data:**

Out of the 409 responses collected:

- 83.4% were Undergraduate
- 5.4% were Postgraduate Taught
- 1% were Postgraduate Research
- 7.6% were Alumni
- 2% were Staff Members
- 0.7% were other

### **Gender Identity:**

- 84.84% (347 / 409) identified as Female
- 0.73% (3 / 409) identified as Gender Fluid
- 1.47% (9 / 409) identified as non-Binary
- 0.24% (1 / 409) identified as Transmasculine
- 11.98% (49 / 409) identified as Male

### **The prevalence of spiking and sexual assaults within Newcastle University**

- 76.2% of respondents have been, or know someone who has been, sexually assaulted whilst at Newcastle University
- 80.1% of respondents have been, or know someone who has been, spiked whilst at Newcastle University

### **When asked if they or the person they knew reported their assault or spiking to the police or university:**

- 60.5% of respondents said they did not report.
- 13.2% reported sexual violence to the University
- 7.8% reported sexual violence to the police
- 5.1% reported spiking to the university
- 14.7% reported spiking to the police



**When asked if they or the person they know knew how to report any incident of sexual violence:**

- Only 28.7% said yes.
- 37% said they/them didn't know how.

**When asked reasons for not reporting (this question had 270 responses and was not required to answer), reoccurring answers included:**

Believed nothing would be done if they reported it

- Did not know how
- Did not feel safe to
- Did not feel that they would be believed
- Did not feel they would be taken seriously
- Felt that they did not have enough evidence to report
- Lack of support
- They were embarrassed or felt it was their own fault
- Didn't believe it was worth reporting as it is very common and a part of university life

A selection of the answers:

*"Didn't know how/Didn't think the uni would be interested anyway unless it is literally in a lecture theatre or uni building"*

*"Safety implications in terms of the perpetrator finding out about the report"*

*"Didn't feel important enough / wasn't the unis problem"*

*"Didn't know how, victim blaming, not worth the hassle, not support along the way, more trouble than it's worth, nothing would come of it"*

*"After confiding in a member of staff, they were made to feel ashamed of what occurred"*

*"Discouraged by the handling of other reports of sexual violence by the university. Didn't feel comfortable going forward to the police due to my anxiety that I wouldn't be believed as I had no physical evidence. I wasn't aware of any of the support available from the university (e.g., student well-being) as it was never introduced to me."*

*"Felt nothing would be done and would be too emotionally difficult of a process to go through"*

The survey found that while the perpetrators were spread widely across many faculties within the university, medicine was disproportionately signposted as a department in which sexual violence is a problem.

**When asked which subject department the perpetrator (if known) was from we had 162 responses.**

- 41 responses were medicine
- 4 were computer science
- 10 were Engineering
- Although it was not the response we asked for, the rugby team were mentioned twice
- All other departments mentioned were only mentioned once

## Identifying Prevalence of Staff Student Relationships

The data from this section shows that 28 respondents had been in or knew a student who had had a sexual encounter with a staff member. This relationship has an unacceptable power balance which allows for manipulation of the student.

Of these respondents:

- 3 are postgraduates
- 4 are staff members
- 5 are alumni
- 14 are undergraduates
- and 1 is other

## Evaluating Student Services: Wellbeing and Student Progress

Based on the survey's data and student testimonies, those at Newcastle University feel dissatisfied with the services in place to help them deal with incidences of spiking and sexual assault. The most noted positive was within student wellbeing, but the largest percentage still rated this poor.

Of those whom this question was applicable (107 people out of 409), when asked about their experience with student wellbeing:

- 38.32% rated it poor
- 25.23% responded satisfactory
- 24.3% good
- 12.15% excellent

When the same question was posed to about student progress, of those whom this question was applicable: (43 out of 409):

- 72.1% rated it poor
- 16.3% rated it satisfactory
- 9.3% rated it good
- Just one person at 2.3% rated it excellent

It is clear through the lack of respondents who were applicable to answer this question that students do not pursue reporting sexual violence or spiking. This simply reinforces the free text responses given around key reasons for not reporting.

## Testimonies

Students were asked to share experiences regarding the wellbeing department, student progress, the process of reporting an incident, a sexual encounter with a staff member or anything else they felt was relevant. Here is a selection of 14 from the 89 responses. We strongly encourage you to read the rest in the appendix:

*"I reported my assault to the disciplinary team. Initially they were really good in having meetings about the incident and got an outcome of the investigation really quickly. However, they didn't tell me the outcome of the investigation therefore I was unwarranted of the sanctions upon the perpetrator. Only a few months after the investigation when*

*I was in therapy, they told me all the information from the investigation which brought up all the trauma again and my mental health really suffered as a result. The wellbeing team on the other hand were really supportive and referred me to Rape Crisis Tyneside."*

*"One staff member that at the time I thought took it seriously was reported for serious offences himself. He said he would take the issue to safeguarding but I said no because I was scared of the consequences. I chose instead to report to another tutor. Essentially what happened was he gave the perpetrator a slap on the wrist and told him not to do it again. A while later he was seen to banter on with the perpetrator on social media. I was not taken seriously."*

*"Reported a student that was stalking other girls on the course and was known to own knives. Told a girl that he owned a gun and had tried to shoot himself before and kept making advances to get us to go round to his flat and messaging us non-stop. When I confronted him, he threatened to kill himself and attempted to gaslight me into none of it ever happening. He told me I would be removed from the university as he had reported me for essentially lying about his behaviour. I informed the transition officer of my course and my tutor and both of them looked at screenshots I had of the messages between us and agreed he was being threatening and manipulative. Wellbeing was informed and they mainly focused on how they could support him, not the victims of his actions. When I tried to formally report him with another course mate, we were told he would find out our names. This was obviously not an option as he already stalked girls so knew where they lived, and also was being threatening. We then closed the report because of this and haven't been supported since. All I've been told is they would keep an eye on him. He attends university as normal and has received no repercussions from his actions. If anything, they've treated me and the other victims worse than him. I'm so angry about it all and no one will give me options. Now I don't even feel safe."*

*"Reported sexual assault incident via the website hoping to talk to someone. Emailed back and forth with an SVLO to decide on a date to meet but after deciding this they never got back as to what room we'd meet in and if the meeting was confirmed. Have been put off reaching out again because I don't want this to be another hard experience and its dragging it on so I'd rather ignore it (not good)."*

*"A friend who was sexually assaulted by someone on their course reported. Some staff didn't know how to handle it and left them feeling vulnerable. One or two fantastic lecturers stepped in and gave good support, but overall staff did not have the adequate training to deal with the situation."*

*"Multiple women I know have been victims of sexual violence at the hands of a man on the medical course. He has been allowed to continue on, studying medicine. One of the female students who was attacked by him suffered psychological damage as a result of this traumatic experience and therefore did not complete a module. She filled out a pec form and reported her sexual abuser to university. She faced the same academic sanction for not completing a module as her abuser faced for being a rapist. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. THIS IS DISGUSTING BEHAVIOUR FROM THE UNIVERSITY. As a survivor of sexual assault, myself, I do not feel safe at this university."*

*"The well-being department refer you to another specialised service, this is good but it also means that the university don't seem to care enough to have funded well-trained sexual violence services within the university. sexual violence will probably impact every single person who attends university whether in their own experience or through the experience of a friend/someone they know and the university aren't using their money to recognise the impact this has on the people who attend their university."*

*"I reported my sexual assault to the department of Medicine, who were supportive at the start. However, despite the fact there were (even sober) witnesses who came forward to give evidence, and other girls who came forward as victims of the same perpetrator, the university became focused on how much alcohol I'd drunk, what I had been wearing etc. I felt like the assault was my fault, and that I was wasting their time as it was obvious, they didn't believe me. Their whole aim was to protect the image of the university, rather than supporting any victims of SA. I*

*tried to make them see my point of view that nobody would want to be treated by a doctor who had done this to me, but I was brushed off and made to feel like I was overreacting. They told me that if it had happened "later in the degree" they would take more serious action, but that at the moment "everyone is just settling in". One of the worst experiences of my life which still deeply affects me on the daily."*

*"I am a member of staff, and this is with regard to students who have disclosed sexual violence to me, sometimes by another student and in other cases by a person who is not affiliated with the university. With regard to student wellbeing, there is not always sufficient and timely support available to students who have experienced sexual violence. The charitable sector waiting lists are long and can be difficult for students to access because their permanent address may not be where the university is located. In relation to student progress, in some cases there has not been enough action taken where there is a police investigation ongoing. This puts the victim (and potentially others) at risk. In cases where there has been a disciplinary finding of misconduct and where this has not led to expulsion, there is not clear and sufficient guidelines on the impact of the outcome. For instance, should a student found to have breached the regulations with regard to sexual misconduct be allowed to represent the university at prestigious events, or take part in extra-curricular/volunteering/pro-bono work, especially if this is with young or vulnerable people."*

*"I got in contact with the kings gate mental health team for my issue. They were super lovely...but setting up a meeting was a nightmare. There's no easy way to make an appointment. I filled out the form for a friend...and it took an hour to find online. These are terrible when the last thing you want to do is fill in forms. Kings gate wellbeing team is brilliant, getting in touch to make a meeting is horrible, hidden and secret almost?"*

*"When I sought counselling, they instead told me to look at meditations on a website and nothing else."*

*"I genuinely believe the university and police were more interested in keeping crime statistics low and student safety reports good."*

*"Was told my issues were too 'complicated' for them to deal with (after bearing my soul for an hour and crying to a complete stranger to then have her assess me as 'too complex.')*

*"The well-being team understood they did not have the right skill set to support me with the incident therefore they referred me to an external charity. As soon as they referred me elsewhere they broke contact and I stopped hearing from them. I reported my incident through student progress disciplinary team they did a full detailed investigation however wasn't a great outcome. I felt there was not much sympathy and they were withholding information to me about the details of the event as I could not recall them at the time. Withholding that information took a toll on my healing process as I had to process the fact that I was never going to know what actually happened to me the night I was sexually assaulted. Yet I had a meeting with them a few months after the initial investigation and they decided to tell me his side of the story without any trigger warning or any regard for my well-being as I was in the process of therapy."*

**Any further comments about what the University should be doing to address these issues, or experiences you wish to share. We received 107 responses to this in total.** This is a selection of them:

*"Need to have compulsory lectures or online learning about sexual harassment, what to do to support someone through it, and explicitly state what sexual harassment is so there are less blurred lines. For perpetrators they need to have consequences for their actions as too often they get away with it & the individual who has been harmed gets no closure."*

*"Please train your staff to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, domestic violence and if possible have them mental health trained. Please issue awareness training to students to help them understand what the above terms mean and how to help someone in need."*

*"The university should be providing more comprehensive and longer-term support for survivors while also referring to secondary charities."*

*"Make wellbeing support present at meetings where reporting takes place. Make wellbeing staff the ones asking for the account."*

*"Educating all students about consent, contraception & how this relates to consent, drugs & sex, sex positive education - all inclusive of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC. Educating student on how to support someone who has been sexually assaulted. Education on how to prevent sexual violence and be an active ally if you witness sexual violence or r\*pe culture."*

*"Stop silencing victims and actually give perpetrators some form of consequence, instead of allowing them to finish their degree and moving into jobs looking after the most vulnerable in society."*

*"There should be harsh punishments for those who perpetrate sexual assault, especially if proven, I feel like it would be less normal if people could be asked to leave their courses for it."*

*"Mandatory consent, misogyny and sexual violence workshops during freshers every year. Immediate expulsion for any students committing sexual assault so they understand their actions have actual consequences. This would be the bare minimum they could do to help address these issues."*

*"The uni need to show that by reporting sexual assault, things can actually change, because so many people don't report it because they know it goes unpunished for perpetrators."*

*"See the university themselves saying #DoBetter not just leaving it to other students to fix their problems, in the end they're getting paid and we're doing all the hard work to create a safe institution."*

*"Educating everyone on how to prevent and what to do in the event of a sexual assault or spiking, especially freshers. students are the most likely group of victims and yet universities aren't warning or educating them."*

*"They need to stop focusing on trying to protect their image so much, as brushing off victims is having the opposite effect."*

*"Should educate us on How to spot it when in public, what to do if you see it happen."*

*"A physical office/ walk in space to go for face to face support reporting things?"*

*"Some kind of anon chat function to talk about these things with a professional could be useful? Sometimes formal reporting/ scheduled appointments can seem very overwhelming as a first step of reporting so an anon chat function could be a good first step where you might be advised to escalate higher."*

*"If you don't feel comfortable reporting it I think there should be a female led support of some form at university, or a way to have someone to speak to without constantly being encouraged to report it which is often an invasive process. I wish there had of been a support group or something. It shouldn't have taken that many people getting spiked for there to be outrage and there was still barely any support."*

*"The uni should make it easier for students to know how to report these things"*

*"Do more on the ground work with listening to survivors and our poor university experiences rather than doing PR tick box exercises."*

*“more money for wellbeing services is needed.”*

*“I was personally very apprehensive about my PEC form being accepted as this incident happened on the Saturday and I had coursework due on the following Friday. Whilst the PEC was accepted quickly and was a massive relief at the time, I think it would be helpful if it was drummed into students that should they be going through something like sexual assault, they won't have to worry about being penalised for needing absences/extensions. Not a massive issue I know but this would have been really good piece of mind for me at the time!”*

*“I think issues need to be tackled through various campaigns. These campaigns need to be made visible on campus as opposed to just Instagram post in although they are acknowledged, they don't really enact change for the better.”*

*“Uni to be more vocal on sexual assault and violence, information on how to report and advice on seeking support”*

*“Have more niche training to help survivors. Consent classes should be made compulsory for everyone including all staff and students.”*

*“I think having more communication and maybe trying (if possible with staff numbers) to open more slots where students can book one to one appointments in person”*

*“give sexual violence campaigns and space more funding and a louder voice, invite IHH to fresher events, make sure people know there is a space which they can access if they do feel lonely and need someone to talk to”*

*“Staff are regularly the first point of contact for many students and they need to acknowledge their responsibility in the overall wellbeing of a students academic and non-academic life in university. Directing each incident to the wellbeing service is just not good enough. If a student feels safe to disclose crimes of this nature to staff or indeed pastoral care workers situated in department that they know will be capable of managing the situation with the care needed then it is very likely more incidents will be reported and more students will have the confidence to go out and access counselling facilities that are already in place and the wellbeing service can then be better integrated into each department rather than this one for all service it now appears to be.”*

*“I think there needs to be education about to do when you realise a friend has sexually assaulted someone. It is a difficult position I have seen many people in and most people don't know how to deal with it both in the moment and also after. “*

*“The fit for practice hearings should be done on the same process as student progress. There needs to be more emphasis on teaching the process for reporting and on creating faith in the system. As it is students feel they're not cared about”*

*“Compulsory module on something like consent where info is also offered about what to do if someone is assaulted, the process of reporting, what are peoples options. Hardly anybody knows, and only really and rarely sometimes get the full picture when they do go through sexual violence or spiking. Taking allegations seriously by removing perpetrators from campus. Clearer information about sv, but also sex positivity as so many don't understand what this is and how to have an empowering and safe sex life. Ban staff + student relationships. Actually target the cause of these issues and take a stronger stance - it only gives the uni good publicity. Provide more specialist support for students. More funding for IHH as they're doing what the uni is not. For the uni not to shy away from the fact that these issues do happen and to loudly state what they're doing about it.”*

