

A reflection on EUSA sexual harassment campaigns

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I am a fourth-year German and Linguistics student who was elected as Women's Liberation Convenor for Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) for the academic year 2016/17. My work involves representing women and non-binary students on issues affecting them as students who experience gender-based discrimination at the University and in wider society. This includes everything from organising demonstrations against street-based sexual harassment and sexual violence, running workshops and film screenings, and consulting on policy which impacts women and non-binary students – for instance, policy around issues of gender-based violence such as sexual violence and abuse.

Sometimes you can forget that things have come a long way in the space of a few years. Changes can be small, and they can take so much energy and time to make, that you forget that any change was actually made, and that the positive effects were actually felt. Within an old and well-established academic institution like the University of Edinburgh (UoE), it can sometimes feel like change is impossible – but in some aspects we've come a long way since 2013, when Edinburgh University Students' Association conducted a survey which found that a third of respondents had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their time at Edinburgh.

The past few years have seen sexual violence at universities in the UK become a much more visible issue, one which

many people – women, survivors of sexual harassment and abuse, students, academics, union staff – have been working to combat all over the country. At Edinburgh this has been no different, although we still have work to do.

Since 2014, there have been several campaigns run at UoE and through the Students' Association to tackle the high amount of sexual harassment and sexual violence on our campuses and that people face during their university lives. The core three are the 2014 Students' Association Monsters campaign, the 2015 Students' Association Consent campaign jointly run with Sexpression Edinburgh, and the 2016 No One Asks For It (NOAFI) campaign jointly run by UoE, the Students' Association and Edinburgh University Sports Union (EUSU).

In this piece, I want to discuss my views of the merits of these campaigns, where we are at now, and the challenges we faced and continue to face in fighting sexual harassment and sexual violence in the context of academia.

The first campaign, coming out of the Students' Association's sexual harassment survey, was mostly a marketing one, centred around a set of cartoon monsters with the slogan, "Have you seen this monster?" It was designed to call attention to less obvious harassment, like unwanted grinding in clubs, and stalking, and it encouraged students to report incidents. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that it was effective in highlighting issues, raising awareness and encouraging people to come forward about any problems.

This is positive – considering that lack of awareness about what counts as problematic behaviour has been part of the issue for as long as rape culture has existed, it's important to have marketing campaigns which try to reverse this. "Consent", for example, just hasn't been talked about in UK schools until very recently. The year this campaign was launched was also a particularly key year for fighting rape culture and lad culture at Edinburgh. Eve Livingston,

the then-Vice President Societies and Activities, was also running a series of talks and workshops on these topics in the light of veterinary school students making rape jokes at women students and the news which came to light of the extremely disgusting misogyny, transphobia and threats of violence against women propagated by the now long-gone Edinburgh chapter of the DKE (Delta Kappa Epsilon) fraternity.

The Monsters campaign and other coinciding work also attempted to highlight reporting procedures and other sources of support you could turn to, like Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre. However, changing attitudes and behaviours regarding sexual violence is a slow process – undoing patriarchy is a lifelong task, after all, and while the Monsters campaign had its successes, more work was unfortunately needed to reach more students.

In 2014 we saw the resurgence of the Edinburgh branch of student-led sex and relationships education (SRE) charity Sexpression on campus and their work both in schools around Edinburgh and among UoE students on raising awareness about consent and prevention of sexual harassment and abuse. The group was asked by the Students' Association to help out with another campaign, starting in 2015, which involved some marketing and also the presence of a fortnightly stall at Big Cheese, Potterrow's big Saturday student club night, where Sexpression volunteers would chat to students about consent and related issues, as well as giving out freebies (including free condoms, temporary tattoos and badges) with one of three slogans on them – "The way I dress is not a yes," "You can't always get what you want," or "It's not me. It's you". The stalls have been hugely successful so far and are in their second year of existence as of 2016.

This campaign had less of a focus on reporting forms of harassment and more on education, especially at grassroots level. Rather than being a poster campaign alone, it also involved direct face-to-face