



## **Tougher sanctions for Universities that fail to tackle the growing problem of sexual misconduct and harassment.**

The Office for Students (OfS) today released their 'statement of expectations' covering the processes, policies and systems they expect providers to have in place and proposals for sanctions on Universities who fail to tackle harassment and sexual misconduct.

**Significantly the proposals expect providers to *investigate* complaints made in relation to any of its registered students and that “the investigation process should be demonstrably fair, independent, and free from any reasonable perception of bias”, and that “all panel members should be appropriately trained in handling complaints of this nature and be independent from the investigatory process and specific case being considered”.**

The OfS have an expectation of “an approach which ensures that staff respond *appropriately and consistently* to a disclosure about harassment and sexual misconduct”.

Universities and colleges which fail to comply with the proposed standards, which are currently being debated, could be fined up to £500,000 or two per cent of their income - whichever figure is higher.

In particularly serious cases of lack of compliance with the proposals, their registration with the OfS could be revoked, meaning they would no longer be able to access public funds, such as tuition fee loans for their students.

The proposals are a result of OFS investigations into the growing number of cases being reported on campuses.

The OfS's chief executive, Nicola Dandridge, said: "We continue to hear accounts of students experiencing harassment, sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct”.

"Too often students say they are not getting the support they need if they suffer this unacceptable behaviour, and that reporting systems are not clear or effective.

“We need to do more for the students who are still being let down by ineffective procedures and inadequate support..... Our proposed statement of expectations sets out the basis of fair, clear and robust processes that we expect all higher education providers to have in place to respond effectively to harassment and sexual misconduct. Where we see evidence of serious failings, we have the regulatory powers to intervene”.

The OfS says there are "widespread reports of harassment and sexual misconduct which are not being adequately addressed by providers”.

It adds that "there is evidence of a lack of consistent and effective systems, policies and procedures in place to respond to reports of such incidents.”

Reported incidents of rape, sexual assault and harassment at UK universities have trebled in three years, from 476 allegations in 2016 to 1,436 in 2019, a BBC investigation previously revealed.

Universities minister Chris Skidmore said: "I am urging all university leaders to prioritise a zero-tolerance culture to all harassment and sexual assault by doing all they can to support students and improve the systems for reporting incidents."

The proposals put forward by the OFS come months after they advised Universities should hire specialist staff to investigate hate crimes and sexual harassment against their students.

The team at Intersol Global have been working as externally independent suppliers in this sector since the Pensions guidance was published in 2016, supporting investigation training and conducting the most serious, complex, and high-risk investigations on their behalf.

*Intersol support the sector with an end-to-end investigation case management solution that delivers **investigation process that is demonstrably fair, independent, and free from any reasonable perception of bias, ensuring fair and reliable outcomes for ALL HE and college stakeholders.***

*Initial analysis of over 25 high-stakes serious discipline misconduct investigations indicate that they are completed in half the time and for half the cost, taking no account of financial and reputational damage penalties that often also result.*

Summarising the outcomes of engaging Intersol to support investigation case management the Serious Incident Officer from Keele University said:

- Our investigations are well planned and more rigorous
- Our record-keeping is clearer and more auditable
- The investigative techniques we have learned have yielded more detailed interview data, leading to more robust decision making at Discipline Committee
- Where cases have been unusually complex, we have employed the services of Intersol to support the investigation, especially in conducting investigative interviews

We have always found Intersol to be accessible and supportive, especially when a new or unusual scenario raises new questions; Intersol have always been willing to talk to us about any issues and remain an important source of external expertise as we continue to develop our work in this area.

**If you would like to understand more about the experience and services offered by Intersol please contact them at [info@intersolglobal.com](mailto:info@intersolglobal.com) and see their website at <https://www.intersolglobal.com>**

