

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service

Annual Report 2019-20



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Service Overview

The Support Service, established in October 2018, exists to support Oxford University students who have been affected by sexual violence in any way, regardless of where the incident(s) happen or who was involved. The Service operates an empowerment model, advising students on their options and supporting them to make their own choices.

The Service has two full time members of staff, the Service Lead and an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) seconded from Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC). A further five Specialist Advisors work with the Service, offering time alongside their substantive roles in the collegiate University. The total staffing provision is about 2.5 FTE.

The Service is jointly funded by the university and the college, each providing 50% of the costs to fund the two full time staff members. We grateful the ongoing support from colleges for both the financial contribution and in referring students for support.

Students receive an individually tailored response (in person/online) to their needs from a Specialist Advisor or the ISVA and students have a choice of the gender of their advisor as well as other characteristics. The Service does not advocate that students take a particular course of action

In addition to support for students, the Service Lead is available for no-names consultation and to give advice to colleges and welfare staff. As awareness of sexual violence increases, and more cases are reported, demand for anonymous advice has been increasing.

Service Developments in 2019-20

The Service saw a 12% increase in demand compared to 2018-19, in what was a challenging year.

The Service received two awards in 2019-20, with the Service “Highly Commended” in the 2019 LimeLight awards in December 2019, and Service Lead Pete Mandeville winning the Outstanding Achievement award. The Service was described by the judges as ‘sector leading’.

The Service was awarded additional funding from the University which was ringfenced for student support (arising from the MT19 UCU strike action) which, in of the circumstances the pandemic, was used to purchase a pilot of [Consent Matters](#), an online consent programme for Michaelmas term 2020 as many face to face consent workshops will not be running.

In line with most other welfare services, the Service moved to online working in March 2020, delivering sessions via secure video call and telephone. The pandemic did suppress demand initially, largely due to students returning to the family home, an environment in which it can be difficult to have private conversations about welfare issues, including sexual violence.

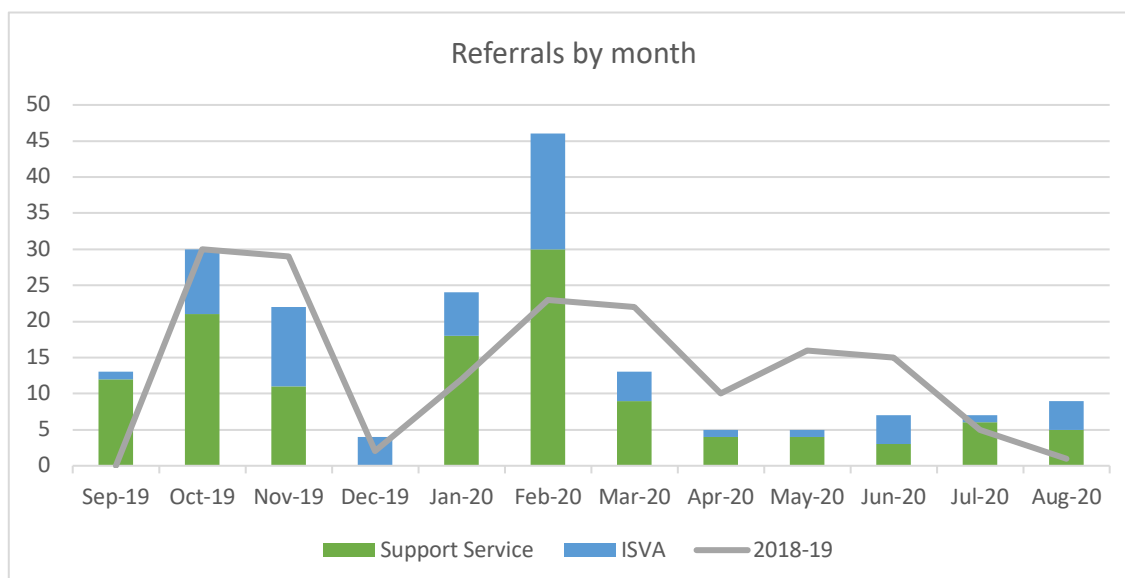
Prior to the pandemic the Service was showing strong and increasing demand which has stretched the limited staffing resource, negatively impacting wait times for appointments and the capacity to deliver service improvements and development.

General report information & terminology

The report covers the period of 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020. We refer to parties as the ‘reporting student’ and the ‘accused student’, intentionally avoid the labels of victim and perpetrator. This is to ensure that we work non-judgementally with students and allow students themselves to define their experiences.

Referrals

The Service received 187 referrals in 2019-20, a 12% increase on the previous year. The overall increase was surprising given the significant drop in referrals over Trinity term due to the impact of the pandemic. The chart below shows the drop in referrals compared to the previous year, along with a significant spike in demand in January and February, which may relate to pre-lockdown demand.



Of the 187 referrals 125 were received by the Service and 62 were direct referrals to the ISVA. The ISVA is best placed to support students who are considering reporting to the police, or have done so already, as her expertise is in the criminal justice system (a key gap that this Service fills for the collegiate university). Mid-year a few cases were redirected from the ISVA to a Specialist Advisor, as the latter team is better placed to support students who are not involved in criminal proceedings, or who are considering a complaint to the Proctors / their College.

The majority of referrals were from students themselves, although an increasing number were professional referrals (18.2%) coming from counsellors, welfare teams, and GPs.

12 referrals came from students who had been accused, which is now a separate workstream, accounting for 6.4% of the work.

Attendance and Wait times

A small number of students (9) failed to attend their initial scheduled appointment with an advisor, giving a did not attend (DNA) rate of 7% for the Service, which is felt to be broadly in line with that seen by the ISVA, and a reduction on the previous year. A further 7 students received initial advice by e-mail but did not seek a formal appointment. A very small number of students are waiting until face to face appointments are reinstated before working with the Service.

Cases are prioritised to see more urgent cases quickly, but the average waiting time for an appointment (from initial contact to meeting with an Advisor) was 8 working days in 2019-20. We would like to be able to see students within 2 working days as a standard, with delays being an additional barrier for students.

The Service operates all year round, but a significant constraint is staff time as the Advisor Team offers their time alongside a substantive role within the collegiate university. The pandemic has reduced the staff time available to the Service and, as in other parts of the University, exacerbated issues of burnout and workplace stress. This had had an impact on the timely delivery of the work with students.

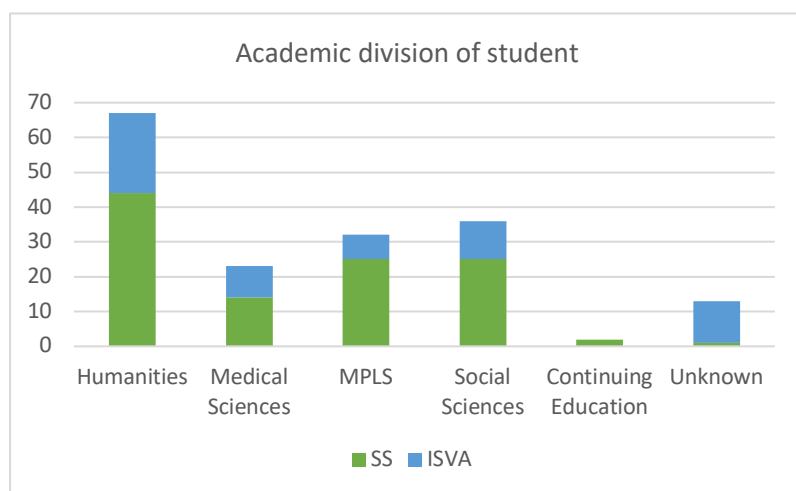
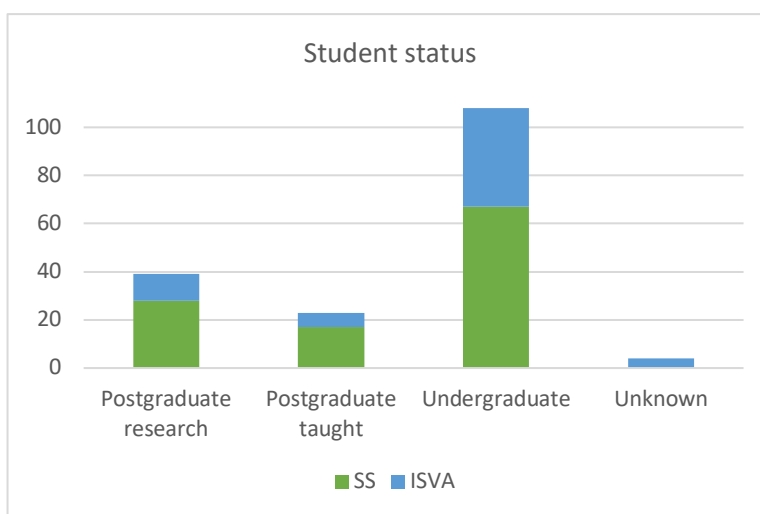
Students reporting

Demographics of referrals

The data shows the core demographics of reporting students who were referred to the service (175 non-accused students).

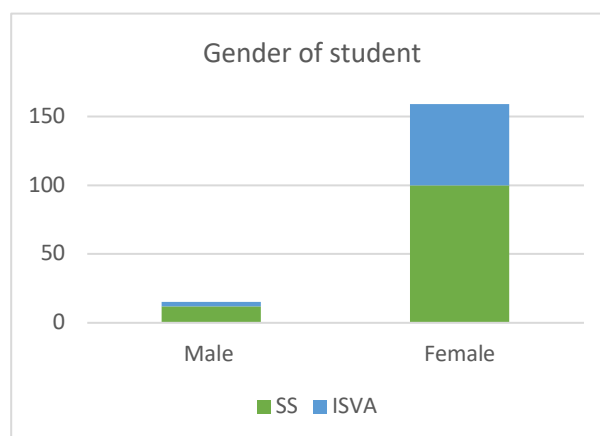
Two thirds of those seen in the service were undergraduates, with nearly twice as many PGRs seen compared to PGTs.

There is a distinction in the distribution between the ISVA and the Service staff, with the ISVA seeing proportionally more UG and PGTs, and the service team seeing far more PGRs. PGR cases tend to be more complex and have higher rates of suspected relationship abuse.



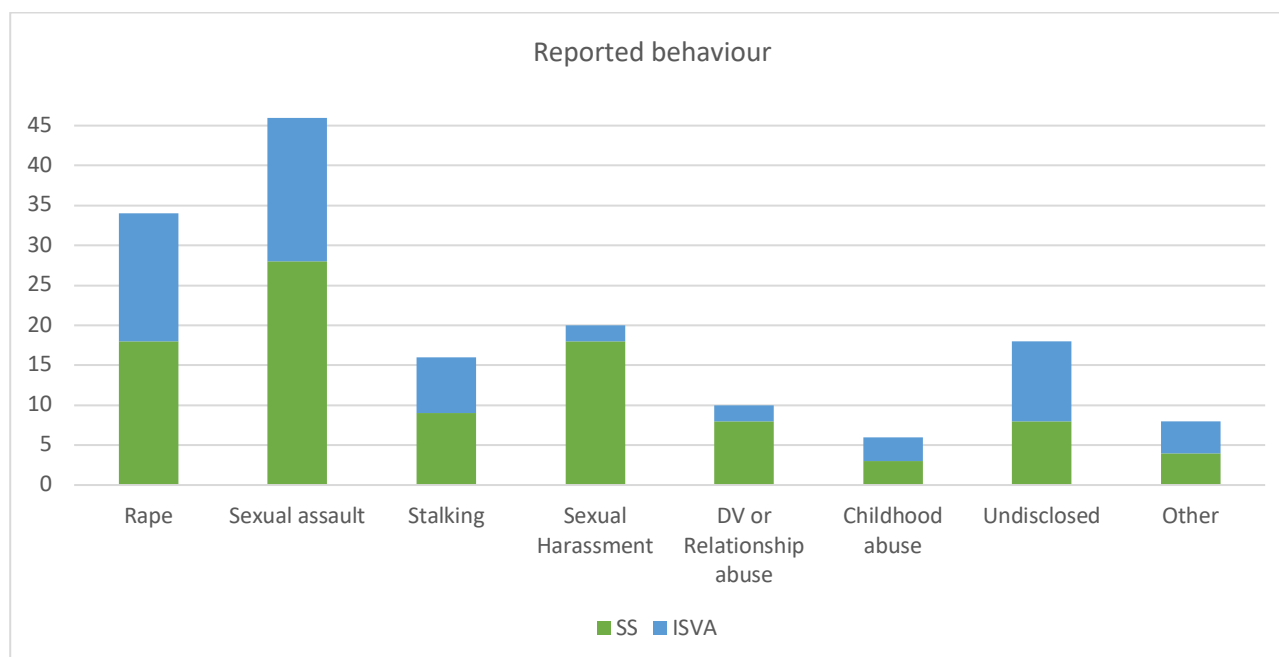
The divisional distribution is broadly in line with that seen in other student welfare services at Oxford, where students engaging in humanities subjects tend to have a higher engagement with welfare provision. The 19-20 data is similar to the previous year but with a slight decrease in Social Sciences students and a slight increase in MPLS students.

Like other sexual violence support services, most service users are female. The number of male students accessing the service has increased slightly, as have students from within the LGBTQ+ community. The Service is available to every student regardless of gender, age or sexual orientation, but further targeted work to reduce the potential barriers might encourage more students to access the service. These could include targeted advertising to LGBTQ+ groups or working with student campaign groups to build credibility and trust.



Reported Behaviour

The Service encourages students to label their experiences themselves and this is what is recorded (it is not a legal definition or judgement). Where multiple behaviours are recorded the most significant is captured in the data.



The data presents a similar picture to last year with an increase in reports of sexual assault, largely due to better data collection reducing the 'unknown' category and the breadth of incidents that are incorporated under the umbrella term 'sexual violence'. We have also begun to capture undisclosed cases to reflect where students are unable or reluctant to share what has happened. The 2019-20 data also shows a more appropriate work distribution for ISVA, focused on rape and sexual assault that may take a criminal justice route.

Rape and sexual assault remain the most common behaviour reported, accounting for half of all cases (50.6%), with sexual harassment (unwanted and inappropriate comments or behaviours with sexual elements) accounting for 12.7% of the caseload. Serious sexual crimes (a measure used by the police encompassing rape, sexual assault and stalking) account for 60.8% of the casework.

The Service has seen an increase in the number of high-risk cases where there is a potential threat to life. These cases typically include stalking, coercive-control behaviours, and the use of weapons. We have worked increasingly closely with University Security Services, the police, and specialist agencies to ensure that students are safe. Some cases have resulted in criminal convictions against accused parties or civil court injunctions.

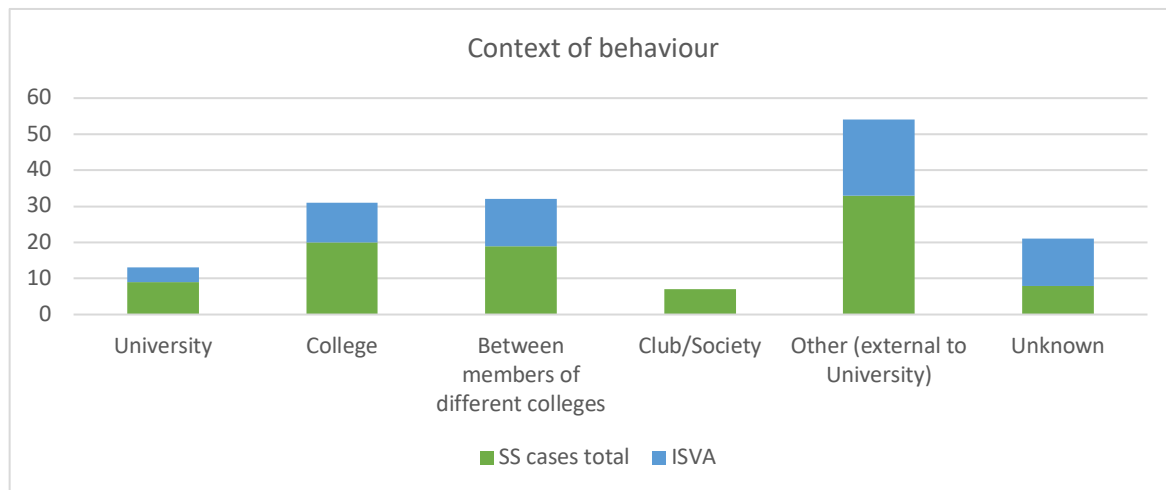
We are seeing a divergence in cases based on student status, with undergraduates more likely to report rape or sexual assault (54.2% of UG case) and postgraduates likely to report stalking (20.7% of PGR cases) and relationship abuse (10.3% of PGR cases).

Risk management is an emerging issue for the Service with complex and risky cases taking considerably longer to manage.

Context

The context allows us to understand where an incident took place and the relationship with the collegiate university.

The Service supports students who report historic cases and those that happened outside of the Oxford context (where the other party is not a university member) which increases the potential number of users. Historic cases (anything prior to the student's time at Oxford) account for nearly 20% of the cases where this information was recorded, although many of these relate to instances just prior to coming (aged 16-18). Only 3.8% of cases in 2019-20 related to childhood abuse.



Most cases involve two (or more) students either in the same college or at Oxford but in in different colleges. 'University context' here covers cases involving departmental academic staff or a departmental context (eg. PGR research groups). The unknown context will largely be down to the reporting student not knowing the other party or choosing not to disclose this information.

For Support Service cases other students are identified as the accused party in 84.2% of all cases, with 7.9% cases relating to college staff.

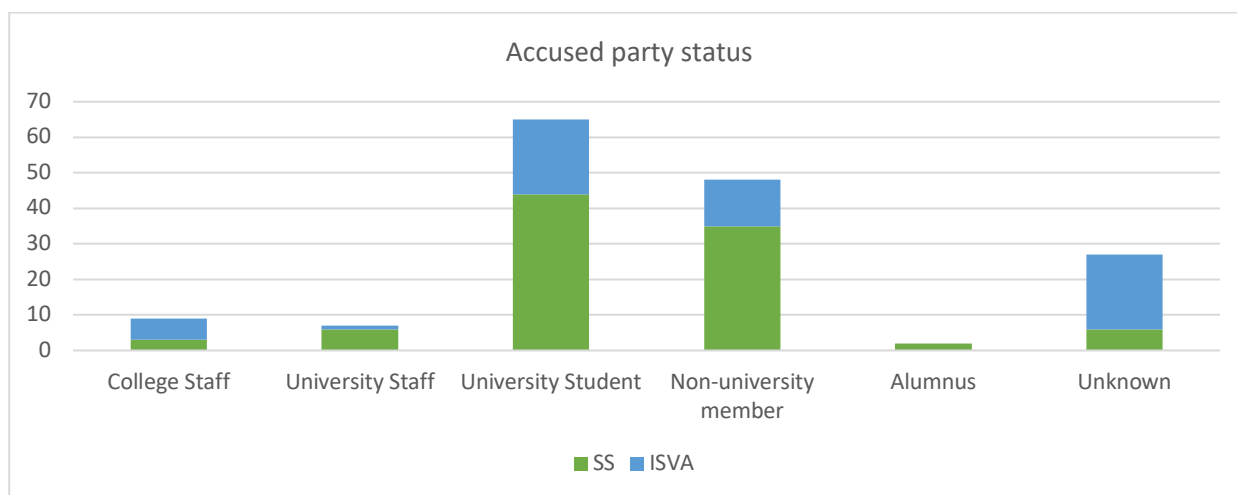
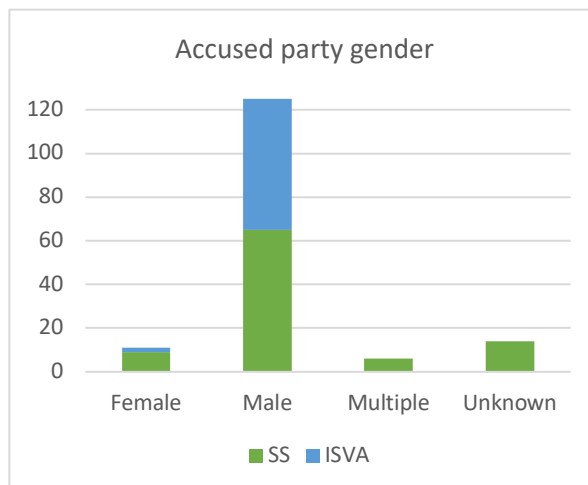
The distribution of cases is not uniform across colleges however, with a few colleges providing a higher proportion of students seeking support, and some colleges from which no students at all have sought support.

Accused party

In line with the experience of other service providers the vast majority of accused persons are male.

We also record whether the accused party has a university status as a student, member of staff or as an alumnus, our point of measure being when the incident occurred. The majority of identified accused parties are Oxford students (41.1%), with non-university members (30.4%) and unknown (17.1%) the next largest groups. Staff across the collegiate university account for 10.1% of accused parties, a slight increase from the previous year.

Non-university members in this context may mean members of the public or Brookes students. Unknown typically signals historic reports of sexual violence or childhood abuse, or where the student does not wish to disclose this information.

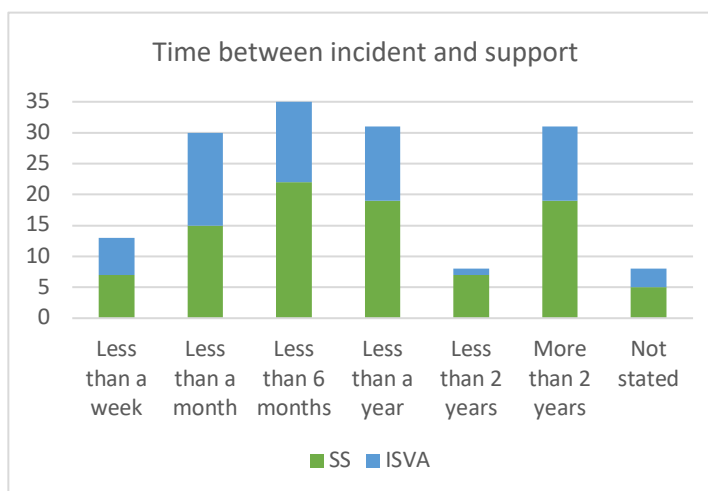


The reports made against staff in 2019-20 all related to sexual harassment or unwanted sexual advances, involving PGs.

Timescales for seeking support

People affected by sexual violence can take a very long time to seek support. We tend to see students either six months or a year after an incident has happened, with the anniversary of the event being a significant trigger. However, we saw a trend towards disclosing incidents earlier compared to the previous years' data.

Compared to 2018-19 we are seeing an increasing number of students shortly after an incident (around 1- 2 months) as well as advising on very recent cases (less than 5 days).



Accused student support

The service also supports students who have been accused of sexual harassment or violence. This work has now been separated out for 2020-21 with a separate referral route and a specialist advisor working solely with accused students. This was necessary to avoid conflicts of interest within the service and to ensure that survivors could feel the service was supportive of them. This was also pushed for by It Happens Here (IHH), a campaign group of Oxford SU.

This work forms a central part of the university's duty of care to all of our students, and accused students receive the same level of service as reporting students, with a focus on how to keep all parties safe, and explaining the University / college disciplinary procedures (most accused students seek support once a complaint has been made against them).

The service received 12 referrals for support.

Trends

Trends are difficult to ascertain in 2019-20 given the very different nature of the academic year. Michaelmas term was busy as in previous years, but demand reduced in Trinity term and steadily increased over the summer. Students are seeking support earlier than in 2018-19.

In line with previous years, students seen in the Service report incidents which occurred in or around fresher's weeks and around Christmas bops or post-exam Celebrations. The vast majority do not want to engage with the police. Instead reporting students seek university-led investigation (which they want to be conducted very quickly), with the preferred outcome as often 'education' for the accused student and a change in their behaviour.

Reporting students want the incident to be formally acknowledged somehow but are equally concerned that the narrative of the incident is not widely shared, especially in their College.

The Service continues to see childhood sexual abuse cases, some of which have generated statutory safeguarding referrals for younger siblings this year. It has also seen some risky and complex coercive intimate relationships. These cases are particularly time consuming as the risks must be carefully managed with other agencies due to the potential for serious and significant harm.

Feedback

Due to the pandemic we did not undertake a survey of service users as in the previous year. Earlier feedback highlighted waiting times, and we have been disappointed not to make progress on this issue in 2019-20 due to increased demand and lack of resources. We are also aware that we need to increase advertising of the service within colleges. In 2019-20 we did however improve the provision of follow up appointments with students (to check on progress and assess if further support was needed) and have refreshed the Service's webpages.

Forward Plan

Areas of growth

As the Service expands we are looking at ways to work more effectively and to reduce barriers to access, although the current resources limit what can be achieved. In 2021 the focus will be on:

- strengthening the administration of the Service
- exploring data systems that can better manage and report on appointments
- developing feedback mechanisms.
- online referral route for students and staff.
- Collaborating on student consent workshops (currently managed by Oxford SU)
- policy development and sector engagement, particularly on work with UUK and developing guidance on the duty of care working with accused students.

The impact of the pandemic has limited our strategic work and engagement with the police and local agencies, however the casework itself has led to greater engagement with front line police teams and specialist agencies. Moving forward with both areas of work will be of value to our students and the wider city.

Emerging issues and challenges

It is increasingly difficult to support students who wish to pursue any sort of formal resolution. There are significant barriers (both internally and externally) and options are limited. The criminal justice route is protracted and most cases are not taken forward (classified as No Further Action by the police). Within the University the current *Guidance on Serious Criminal Conduct* and the use of the University Context are barriers to students who wish to make a formal complaint. Some students face similar barriers in Colleges.

Staffing the Service has continued to be a significant challenge in 2019-20 even with the pandemic suppressing demand for a brief period. The pandemic also meant the Service had reduced time available from the Specialist Advisors holding other substantive roles as these roles had increased demands placed upon them.

The Office for Students (OFS) Consultation on harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education is due to re-start in 2021. The OFS may change its regulatory framework as a result of the consultation, which could have many implications for the university, including a requirement to change existing policy.

Pete Mandeville

Service Lead, Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service