

Student Sex Work Toolkit for Staff in Higher Education

The aims of this toolkit are to outline:

- An overview of student sex work and key issues this group face
- The legal status of sex work in the UK
- How to offer appropriate support to student sex workers
- Relevant local and national support services for sex workers in the UK

Methodology

This toolkit was produced drawing on existing research such as The Student Sex Work Project (2015), the Student Sex Work Brief (2018) and Beyond the Gaze (2017). The Student Sex Work project was a three-year long research project led by Swansea University that culminated in 2015. It aimed to promote awareness and understanding of student sex work, with a view to improving university mechanisms to support this often socially isolated group.

The project utilized an online survey, as well as inviting student sex workers to join the project team as peer researchers. Conducted mainly across Wales, but also including the UK, The Student Sex Work Project had 6,773 responses from students and academic staff to their online survey highlighting the need to HE institutions to specifically include student sex work within policy development, the needs of students involved and the availability or development of non-judgmental support.¹

The Student Sex Work Brief (2018) was also consulted. Produced by NUS LGBT+ campaign in conjunction with the English Collective of Prostitutes and the Sex Worker

¹ The Student Sex Work Project (2015) - <https://www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk/>

² Student Sex Worker Briefing (2018) - <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/student-sex-worker-briefing-2018>

³ Beyond the Gaze - <https://www.beyond-the-gaze.com/briefings/>

Advocacy and Resistance Movement, it used a student survey to gather information.² This survey was used to determine the demographic makeup of student sex workers in the UK, and the difficulties they face.

Finally, Beyond the Gaze (2017), the largest online research project ever conducted within the UK highlighting the diverse nature of the sex industry, was referred to.³ This corroborated other reports which outlined the demographic makeup of student sex workers in the UK and the difficulties that they experienced.

These three academically rigorous sources together paint a reliable picture of the situation of student sex workers in the UK and have informed this toolkit.

What is sex work?

Sex work is the exchange of sexual services, both involving direct physical contact and indirect sexual stimulation, for money or goods. Sex work is an umbrella term which includes web cam performers, actors and actresses in pornography, dancers in strip clubs, escorts, sugar babies, dominatrixes, phone-sex operators, as well as those selling sex indoor and outside premises.

In the UK, the number of students engaged in sex work is most likely to be increasing owing to the rising cost of tuition fees and associated living expenses. According to The Student Sex Work Project, 5% of students have worked in the sex industry and 20% have considered it.¹

Who are student sex workers?

Research conducted in 2018 by the NUS LGBT+ Campaign in conjunction with the English Collective of Prostitutes and Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement, highlighted that a large proportion of student sex workers were from marginalised backgrounds or vulnerable. 71% identified as women and 17 % as non-binary. Over 70% identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Queer with over half describing themselves

as having a disability; 14% were international students.² These figures were corroborated by the largest online research project conducted within the UK, *Beyond the Gaze* (2017).³

Why do students enter the sex industry?

Student sex workers are motivated by the possibility of funding their studies with flexible working hours, as well avoiding debt. Some are also driven by the “anticipated pleasure” they think the industry can bring.¹

What difficulties do student sex workers face?

Student sex workers experience isolation and discrimination owing to the stigmatized nature of sex work. Some student sex workers report having to keep their work a secret to avoid negative judgment from friends, family, and professional bodies like the university.¹ Fear of violence is also a concern for student sex workers.

‘Morality clauses’ in tenancy agreements mean that sex workers can face eviction. This can lead to not getting a deposit back, inability to get references, and homelessness. If a student is evicted from their halls, it can be put on their accommodation record, which can prevent them from having accommodation in the future and can even be accessed by different departments at the university.² In the worst case, student sex workers can be permanently expelled. This has far reaching ramifications for a student’s ability to get an education.²

Legality of sex work

There are four different legal models pertaining to sex work.

- Firstly, there is **criminalisation**, where the buyer and seller of sex are subject to criminal sanctions.

- Secondly, **partial criminalisation**, where the buyer is criminalised, but the seller is decriminalised. This model, often referred to as the Nordic model or sex buyers' law is the most numerically popular model in the world amongst governments and policy makers. It may sound appealing, but it undermines the safety of sex workers and exposes them to violence.
- Thirdly, **legalisation** means that sex work is legal if it takes place in accordance with government-imposed conditions. In countries where selling sex has been legalised, many who work in the industry have found themselves worse off.
- Finally, **decriminalisation** is a removal of all sex work specific laws, which means that people who work in the sex industry can access the same labour rights and protections as those in other occupations. This model is advocated for by all sex-worker led groups globally, and by high profile human rights organisation such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation. It is the legal framework which best upholds the rights of sex workers to health, safety, and dignity. Under decriminalisation, trafficking and violence against sex workers remains illegal.

In England, the law pertaining to sex work is not straightforward; the buying and selling of sex is legal, but many associated activities are criminalised. Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Policing and Crime Act 2009 the following main activities are criminalised:⁴

- Soliciting. Selling sex or attempting to sell sex on a street or public place
- Kerb-Crawling with the intention of buying sexual services
- Brothel Keeping. It is an offence to incite 'prostitution' or control it for personal gain by 'managing a brothel'. Crucially, this also relates to sex workers sharing a premise for safety, which can incur a 7-year custodial sentence

TSSWP identified that when University staff thought that a student sex worker had

broken the law (whether they were familiar with the legislation surrounding sex work or not), then that perception whether right or wrong, would impact on their response to the student. So understanding the legality of sex work and not jumping to a conclusion is vitally important so that University services and Student Unions respond fairly and appropriately to meet the needs of the student.

The table below illustrates the main professions that exist within the sex industry, and whether they are legal or not within the UK.

Legality of the Sex Industry UK		
Activity	Illegal	Legal
Independent sex work/Escorting (i.e. working lone)		x
Sharing premises with another sex worker	x	
Selling sexual services in a brothel		x
Operating/managing a brothel/Arranging the purchase of sex	x	
Soliciting for sex on the street	x	
Webcamming (performances streamed online)		x
Lap Dancing/Pole Dancing		x
Professional Dominatrix/Submissive		x
Sex chat phone lines		x
Stripping		x
Glamour modelling		x
Butler in the Buff		x
Selling underwear online for sexual gratification		x
Sugaring (being a paid companion for a sugar daddy)		x
Working in the porn industry		x

**Information taken from <http://www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk/>

⁴Release (Drugs, The Law & Human Rights) – Sex Workers and the Law (2017)

[file:///C:/Users/gayno/OneDrive/Documents/Student%20Sex%20Work%20Project/SEX_WORKERS & THE LAW 2017.pdf](file:///C:/Users/gayno/OneDrive/Documents/Student%20Sex%20Work%20Project/SEX_WORKERS_%20THE_LAW_2017.pdf)

Offering Support

A recent survey detailing experiences of student sex workers reported that less than 15% of respondents thought their institutions or students' union were providing sufficient and appropriate support.² Outlined below is some practical guidance for academic staff on how best to support student sex workers.

Do:

- Treat *all* students with respect. Disclosures and discussions regarding sex work will only happen if there is a trusting relationship.
- Let students speak about their experiences and needs at their own pace.
- Do ask appropriate and relevant questions but do not probe unnecessarily about their work.
- Ensure the student is safe within their work. Is it possible to offer guidance in the form of strategies they can employ?
- Expect their involvement in sex work to be hidden due to the risk of stigma and judgement.
- Gain consent from any individual before sharing information unless serious safeguarding issues are present.
- Offer practical solution-oriented guidance. For example, students may want advice on how to balance their professional work and studies.
- Ensure you are aware of relevant referral services.
- Be aware of specific terminology and legal context of the sex industry within the UK.
- Ensure colleagues are aware of appropriate, factual information regarding the sex industry to combat stigma.

Don't:

- Break the confidence of students regarding sex work involvement.
- Write information about specific student sex workers in files, discuss their occupations in broader student related staff meetings, raise this in front of other people.
- Inform the police unless the student has specifically asked for help doing this.
- Make assumptions regarding involvement or motivations. Each person should be treated as an individual with varying needs.
- Ask details about their sex work unless the student has asked for specific help regarding this.
- Listen to myths regarding sex work. Staff should seek-out factual and reliable information.
- Discipline someone for being a sex worker. This includes course suspension and expulsion.
- Make assumptions about drug involvement, or the student's personal life.
- Assume the student wants to leave sex work
- Patronise students when discussing their involvement in the industry.

Appropriate, non-judgemental services are crucial for providing support when student sex workers need it. This will help to ensure the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of students involved in this industry. Below are the main national and regional support services for sex workers across the UK.

Training Available

Free Online Modules <http://tsswp.co.uk/>

This online training course has been developed by The Student Sex Work Project (TSSWP) at Swansea University and aims to raise awareness about stigma and its negative impact on students engaged in the sex industry. The training has been developed in collaboration with student sex workers. You can read more about TSSWP at www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk

Key Services

National Services

National Ugly Mugs (NUM)

National Ugly Mugs (for all things sex work) admin@uglymugs.org

Reporting scheme to help protect people involved in Sex Work from violent and abusive individuals. Their mission is to end violence against sex workers.

uglymugs.org/um/

Student Sex Work Project

Aims to generate new learning regarding student sex work and highlight the need for policy, guidance and training. www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk/

SWARM (Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement)

A collective founded and led by sex workers who campaign for the rights and safety of all who sell sexual services. www.swarmcollective.org/

SCOT-PEP

A sex worker-led charity that advocates for the safety, rights and health of everyone who sells sex in Scotland. www.scot-pep.org.uk/

ECP (English Collective of Prostitutes)

An organisation of sex workers working on the street and in premises with a national network throughout the UK. <https://prostitutescollective.net/>

SAAFE (Support and advice for Escorts)

A collective of independent escorts offering advice and support to all adult industry performers. <https://saafe.info>

Pineapple Support Society

Free and subsidized emotional support and professional therapy for adult industry performers. pineapplesupport.org/about-pineapple-support

Revenge Porn Helpline

A UK service supporting adults (aged 18+) who are experiencing intimate image abuse, also known as, revenge porn. <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/>

Regional Services

North East

A Way Out - Outreach & Prevention Charity offering services to women work on the street, families and young people. <https://www.awayout.co.uk/>

Changing Lives GAP & MAP Project – National Charity supporting men and women exchanging and selling sex in various environments across the Northumbria area.

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/>

Arch North East - Rape crisis service that offer a specialist service to support people involved in the sex industry who have experienced rape or sexual assault.

<https://www.archnortheast.org/>

Yorkshire & North Lincs

Basis Yorkshire - Charity who supports indoor and street sex workers who identify as women, and young people who are sexually exploited. <https://basisyorkshire.org.uk/>

North West

The Men's Room - Offer outreach & support to marginalised young men engaged in sex work or at risk of exploitation. <https://mroom.co.uk/>

Red Umbrella Project - A service to combat instances of violence and crimes committed against anyone in the sex industry .

<https://www.changing-lives.org.uk/services/>

West Midlands

Jasmine House - Leicester based charity working with female survivors of sexual abuse, sexual violence and rape. <https://www.jasminehouse.org.uk/>

The Annex - Project within Loughborough supporting sex workers with drop-ins and basic needs.

<https://www.falconsupportservices.org.uk/the-annex>

Leicester Sexual Health - Providing a range of clinical sexual health services for commercial sex workers.

<https://leicestersexualhealth.nhs.uk/leicester-sexual-health/csw>

Leicester Student's Union - Offering support to all student's including those who sell sexual services.

<https://www.leicesterunion.com/voice/campaigns/current/studentsexwork/>

SAFE - A sexual health service for people who work, have worked or may start working in the commercial sex industry across Birmingham and Solihull.

<https://umbrellahealth.co.uk/our-services/safe>

Nottingham – POW - specific support project for sex workers reaching out to students

<http://pow-advice.org.uk/students/>

London

Open Doors – A free and confidential advice service in East London for people working within the sex industry. <https://www.opendoors.nhs.uk/>

Clinic S - All East Sexual Health, Advice and Support - a free and confidential service to women, men, trans* and gender non-binary individuals, working in the sex or adult entertainment industry. <https://www.alleast.nhs.uk/clinic-s>

Revenge Porn Helpline – service supporting adults (aged 18+) who are experiencing intimate image abuse, also known as revenge porn. <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/>

United Voices of the World - a union with a contingent for strippers and sex workers. Representing sex workers and lobbying for better working conditions and worker status. <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/strippers>

Sussex

Yada – The Esther Project – a discreet and confidential service for all self-identifying women who sell or exchange sex in the coastal West Sussex area. <https://www.esthersproject.org/>