

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service

Annual Report 2020-21



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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 was resourced by 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 are grateful for 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.

The nature of the work and appointments is different to other SWSS provision, with appointments typically 90 minutes with follow up work. The Service undertakes a significant amount of multi-agency work, safety and risk management, media response, and awareness/training alongside student casework.

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 2020-21

The Service saw a 21% increase in demand in a challenging year that saw the continuation of pandemic lockdowns and regular revelations in the media and sector in relation to sexual violence. The increased demand was not matched with increased resource, further stretching the limited staffing resource. This pressure has continued to negatively impact wait times for appointments and service improvements and developments have been stopped in order to maintain the quality of student facing support.

Demand returned to a shape more similar to that of the first year of operation in 2018-19, and avoiding a pre-lockdown spike that was observed last year. The time to offer an appointment has reduced slightly but is still far longer than we would like. The University and Colleges have agreed funding for an additional 1FTE from 2021-22, although growth of demand and complexity means this will likely be insufficient in the shorter term.

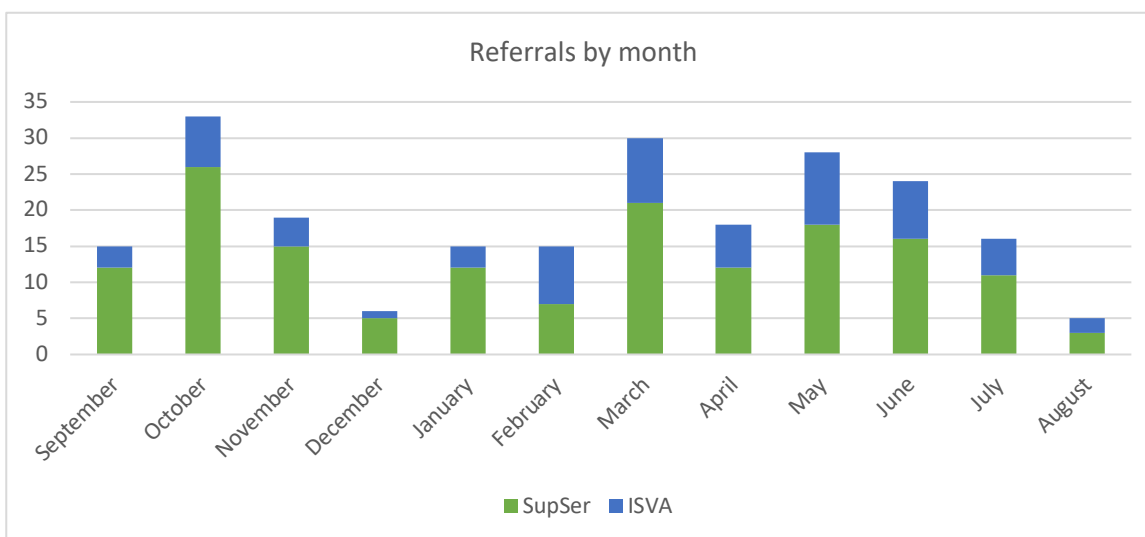
General report information & terminology

The report covers the period of 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021. We refer to parties as the 'reporting student' and the 'accused student', intentionally avoiding 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.

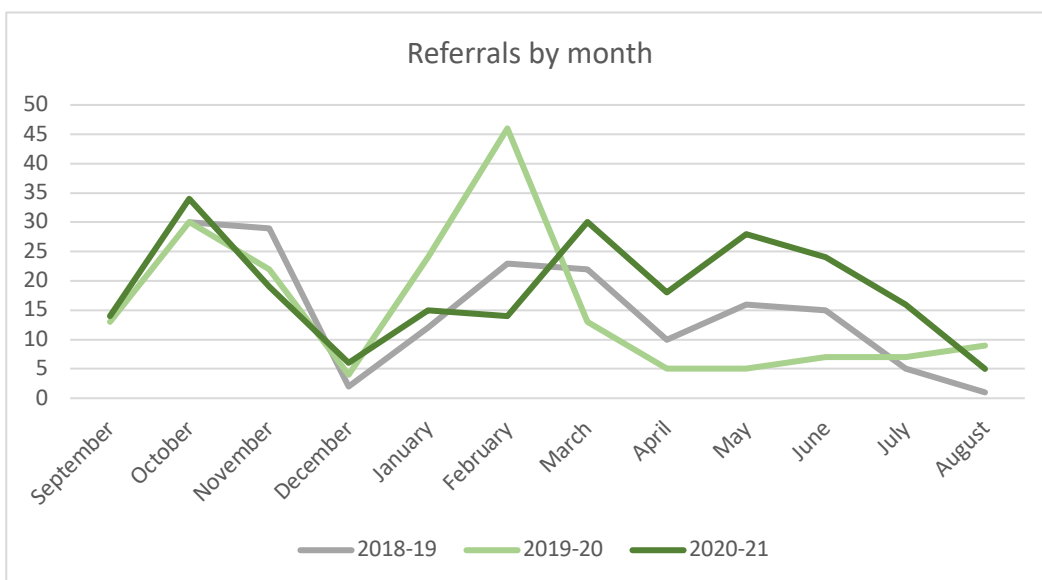
The data presented on referrals and appointments has been changed for this year, with demographics related only to students who have had an appointment. Data related to accused student support has been removed and is presented as a separate report, reflecting the separation of the provision.

Accused demand has been separated out for the annual report for 2020-21 but figures are still counted in referrals. The reporting will be changed for 2021-22 to reflect the different strands of student casework.

Referrals



The Service received 224 referrals in 2019-20, a 21% increase on the previous year.



Demand returned to a shape more in similar to that of first year of operation (2018-19), avoiding a pre-lockdown spike that was observed last year. Bar the spike in demand observed each year in October, coinciding with Fresher’s Week cases are broadly distributed across each of the academic terms.

Of the 224 referrals 158 (70.5%) were received by the Service and 66 (29.5%) 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 provision fills for the collegiate university). The Service and the ISVA do cross refer cases to ensure that students receive the most relevant and useful support.

The majority of referrals were from students themselves (76.3%), with professional referrals (counsellors, welfare teams, and GPs) remaining at 18.3%.

21 referrals (9.4%) came from students who had been accused, which is now a separate work stream and reported separately.

Referrals outcomes

Referral outcomes (Support Service)

Appointment offered	110	70.1%
Onward referral to ISVA	8	5.1%
Moved to accused support	21	13.4%
Email advice only	10	6.4%
No appt - Staff/External	2	1.3%
No appt - Alumni	2	1.3%
No appt - Non-Ox	2	1.3%
No appt - Not SV	2	1.3%

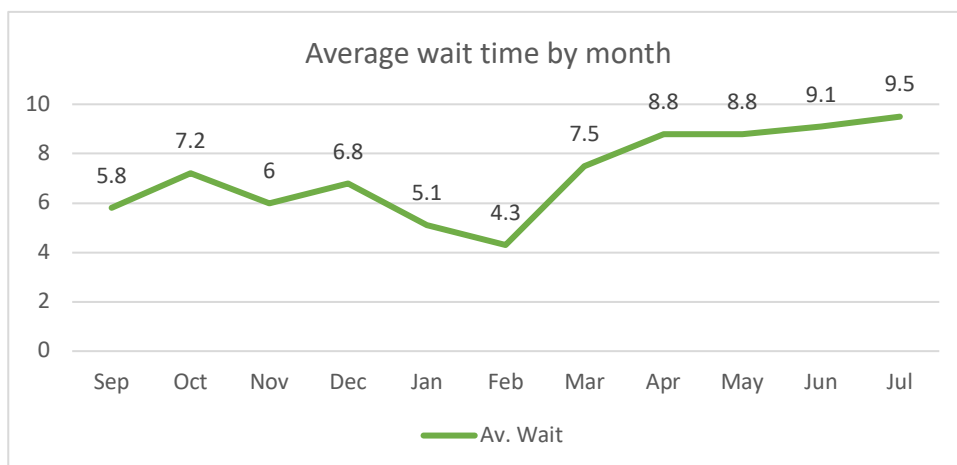
The table shows where referrals received went onto, and excludes the ISVA figures. The Service also had requests for support from alumni, staff, and non-Oxford students. These were signposted to an appropriate external agency. A further 10 students received initial advice by e-mail but did not seek a formal appointment.

Attendance

There was an increase in the number of students who made an appointment but did not attend (DNA) in 2020-21, with the overall rate doubling to 13.4% (21) of all offered initial appointments compared to the previous year. Whilst there is the expectation that the DNA rate may be in higher in sexual violence support work this is higher than ideal and has an impact on the ability of the team to see students in a timely fashion.

Wait times

Students waited on average 7.6 working days for an appointment, similar to the previous year. The availability of the supporting advisors has been impacted by pandemic demands and home working, and has shown the limitations of non-specific resource for the service.



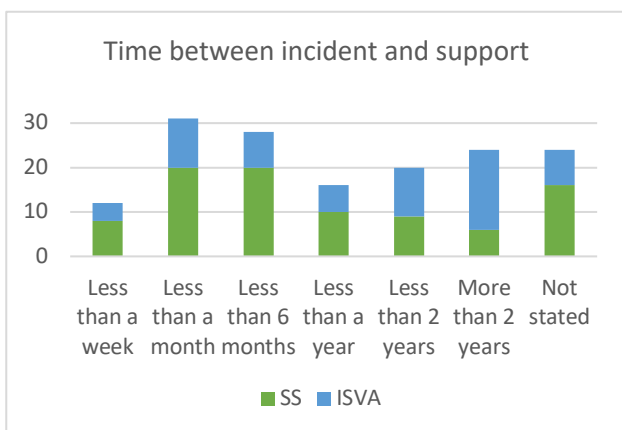
Wait times by month show increasing waits from March. This would coincide with the increase in referrals at the same time, likely related to exams, and the difficulty in finding a convenient time to meet with students in this period. These figures are indicative given relatively small numbers contributing to the average.

Cases remain prioritised in order that urgent cases are seen quickly, and we would like to be able to see students within 2 working days as a standard, with delays being an additional barrier for students.

Whilst many students are okay with a wait for an appointment, some do find it difficult and the Service does receive complaints from students and colleges on waiting times.

Timescales for seeking support

People affected by sexual violence can take a very long time to seek support. We have continued to see a trend towards disclosing incidents earlier perhaps due to the regularity of sexual violence being discussed in the media.



Appointments

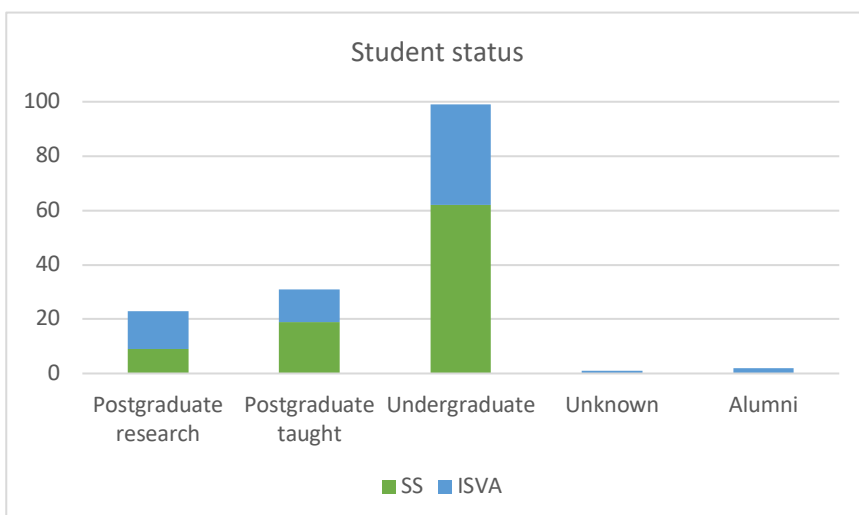
The average number of appointments in 2020-21 was 1.43. Most students seeking support have a single appointment (76%) with a follow up email. The provision is open ended so students can come back, and for more complex and risky cases students have more appointments offered.

The Service would like to offer more follow up appointments and to explore offering emotional support work, but there is insufficient resources to allow this at present.

Students demographics

Demographics of appointments

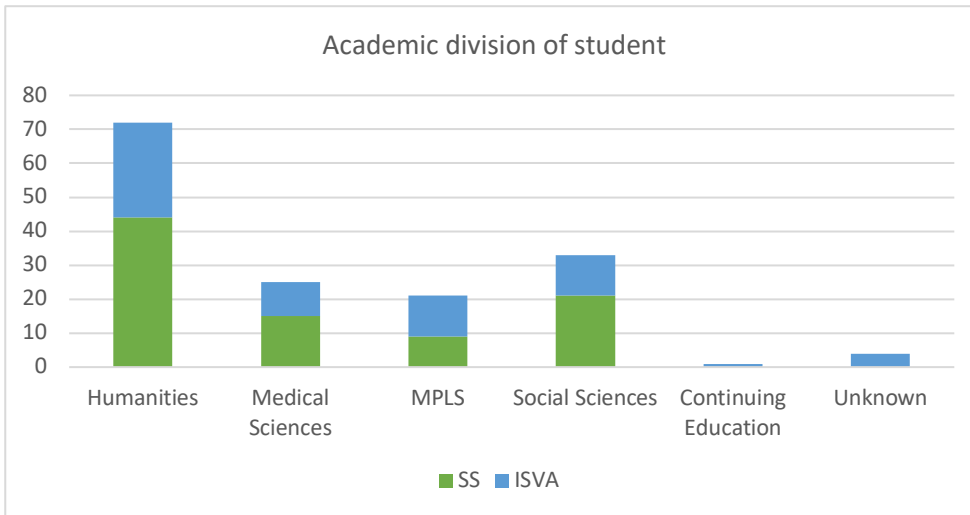
The data shows the core demographics of students who had an appointment with the Service.



63% of those seen in the service were undergraduates. Demand amongst PGTs has increased compared to previous years.

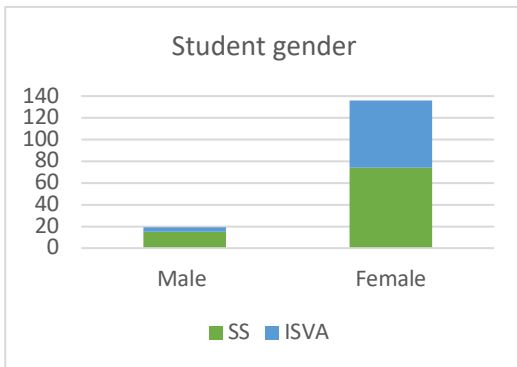
The divisional distribution is broadly in line with that seen in other student welfare services at Oxford, where students engaging in humanities subjects tend to have a higher engagement with welfare provision.

The Service has seen a reduction in the number of students in STEM subjects seeking support, as a group generally under-represented in welfare provision.



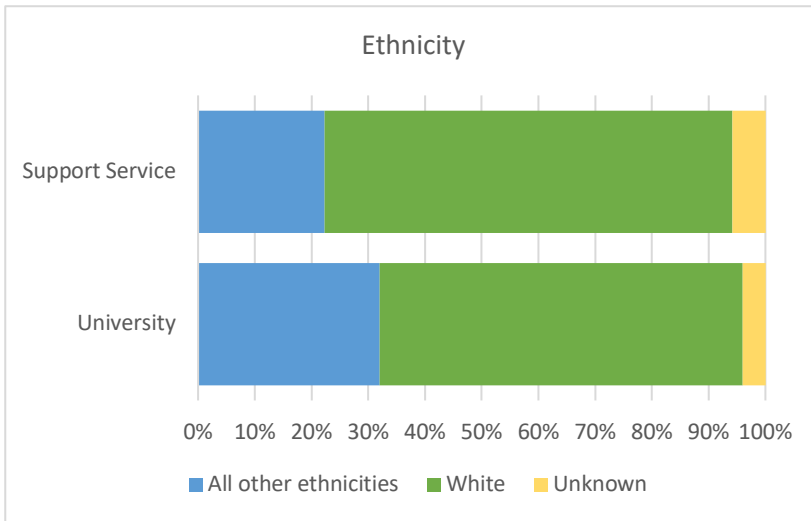
Like other sexual violence support services, most service users are female.

There is a need in future reporting to move away from binary gender terminology towards a more inclusive gender identity approach.



Ethnicity

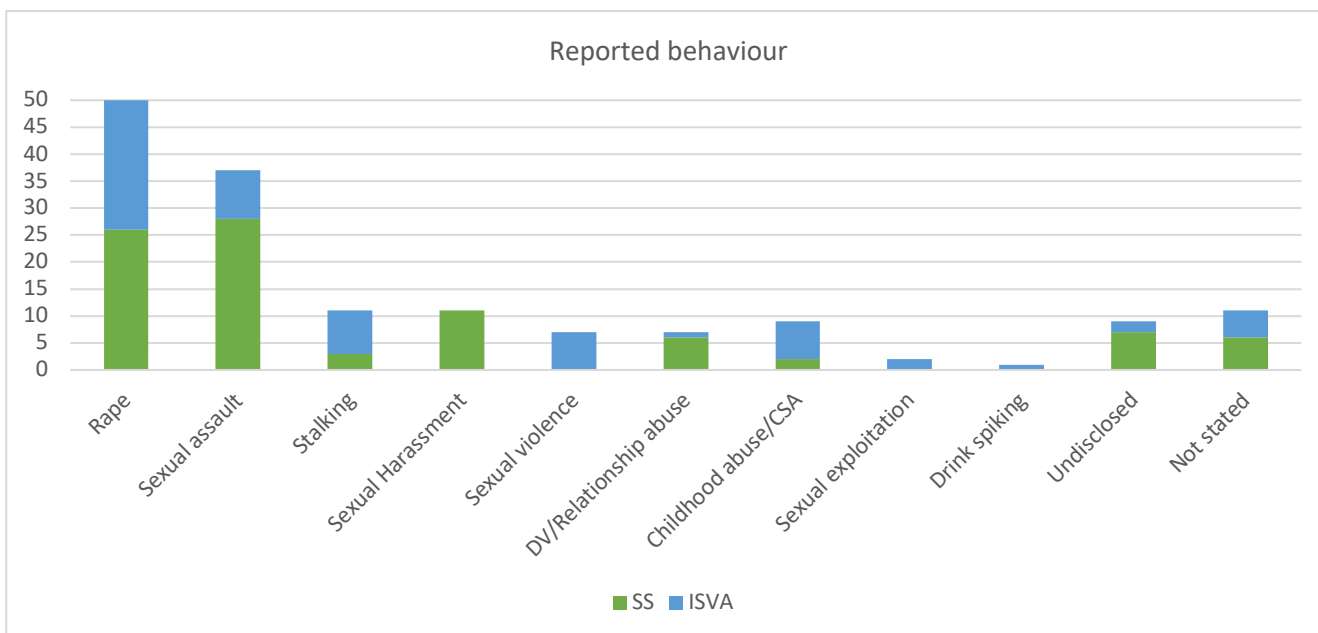
The ethnicity breakdown for the Support Service (excluding the ISVA data) is shown below. Due to relatively small numbers we have combined all other ethnic groups in order to make a comparison with the university proportions.



The data suggests there is some inequality in access, and that the Service needs to do more to understand and remove barriers for students from all backgrounds.

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 many cases related to rape or sexual assault. Cases that are undisclosed or not stated evidence that there remains a difficulty in naming or speaking about an incident of this nature.

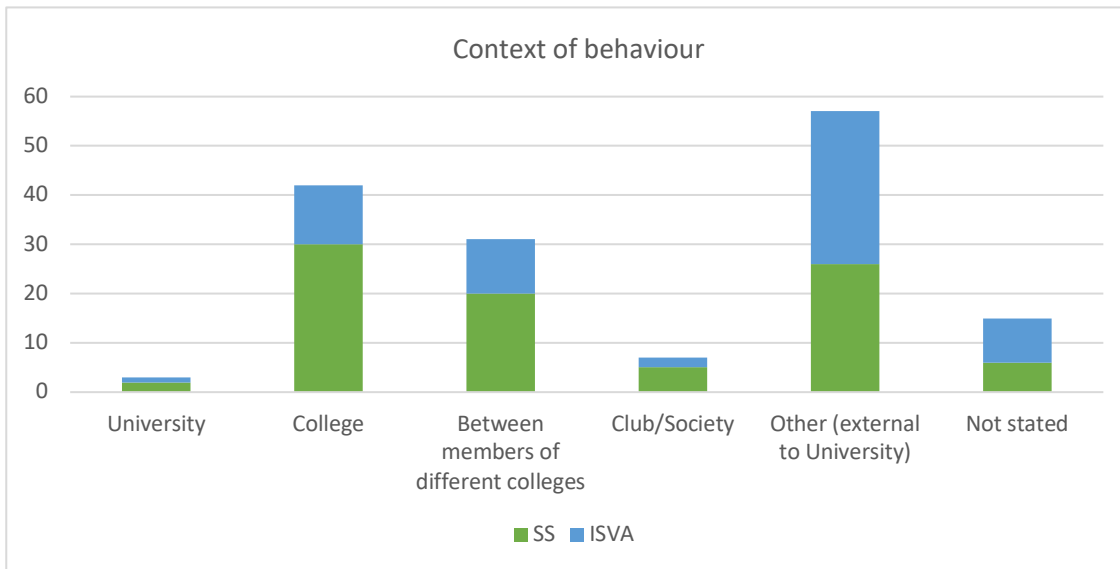
Rape and sexual assault remain the most common behaviour reported, accounting for over half of all cases (56%), with sexual harassment (unwanted and inappropriate comments or behaviours with sexual elements) accounting for 7% of the caseload. Serious sexual crimes (a measure used by the police encompassing rape, sexual assault and stalking) account for 67.6% of the casework, an increase on last year.

Compared to national prevalence data the Service sees a higher proportion of sexual violence cases compared to sexual harassment cases. This likely indicates that students affected by sexual harassment are not seeking support as readily as those wanting support for sexual violence.

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. Risk management continues to be an issue for the Service with complex and risky cases requiring considerably more advisor time to manage and mitigate risks.

Context

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



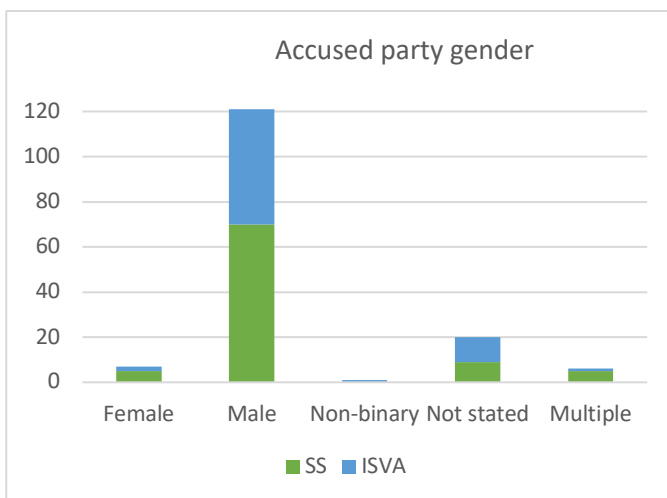
The Service supports students who report historic cases and those that happened outside of the Oxford context (where the other party is not a university member) which increases the potential number of users.

Over half of the cases (53.5%) are within the university context, that is relates to a college, department, or club/society. A little over a third (36.8%) are external the university. In terms of potential internal complaint options this means 27% of cases are only reportable to a college and 24.5% to the Proctors Office. There was a reduction in the number of university context cases which are typically linked to university staff.

Other students are identified as the accused party in 50% of all cases, University staff in 2%, College staff in 2% and non-university members in 34% of cases.

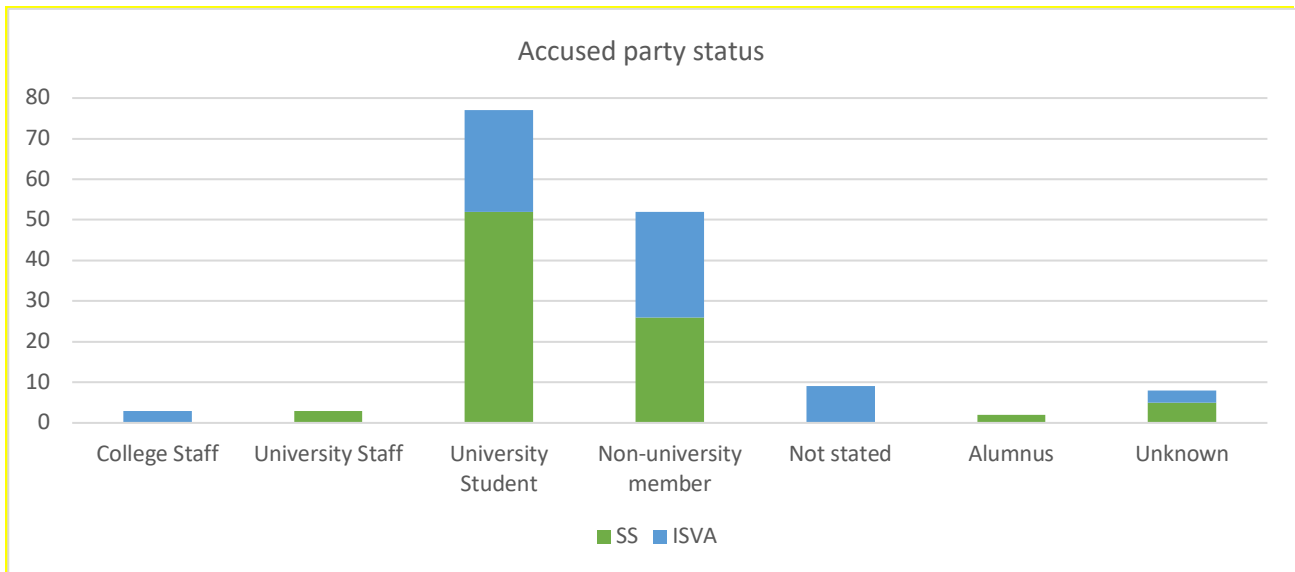
Accused party

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 (50%), remain the largest accused group followed by non-university members (34%).

Non-university members in this context may mean members of the public, Brookes students, or persons related to sexual violence or childhood abuse



Complaints & Outcomes

Recording complaints and outcomes is included for the first time in 2020-21, although it is not a complete data set due to figures being collated from the middle of the academic year.

Criminal justice cases

Criminal justice outcomes reflect the work of the ISVA in-year related to reports to the police. This can be very long term work, with the time from reporting to court outcome typically in excess of 2 years.

Not reported	44	67.7%
Active CJS case	9	13.8%
Reported, complete - Police NFA	5	7.7%
Reported, complete - CPS NFA	0	
Reported, complete - Guilty	2	3.1%
Reported, complete - Not guilty	0	
Reported, unknown	2	3.1%
Reported, withdrawn	0	
Not stated	4	6.2%

The proportion of students reporting to the police is broadly in line with historic data, and likely higher than the current trends. Engagement with criminal justice routes remains low due to tiny conviction rates for serious sexual offences, long timescales, and lack of trust in the police following the murder of Sarah Everard.

Proctor and college cases

Not reported	15	9.7%
Active college case	10	6.5%
Complaint advised - Proctors	17	11.0%
Complaint advised - college	16	10.3%
Complaint advised - HR	1	0.6%
Complaint advised - external	9	5.8%
College completed - NFA	1	0.6%
College completed - Upheld	1	0.6%
College completed - Not upheld	1	0.6%
Active Proctors case	2	1.3%
Proctors completed - NFA	5	3.2%
Proctors completed - Upheld	1	0.6%
Proctors completed - Not upheld	0	
Not applicable	31	20.0%
Not stated	45	29.0%

The Service gives detailed advice on the relevant complaint route and will support a student through a complaint process.

Forward Plan

Opportunities

Data and feedback, along with the capacity to monitor workload has been a difficulty in a small service. In 2020-21 the service will be switching over to a full case management system which will allow appointment tracking, improved reporting options, and online access points for the Service.

The Service will also increase its staff resource with the inclusion of a full-time Specialist Caseworker, and the recruitment of additional Specialist Advisors, who support the work alongside substantive roles in the collegiate university.

We would like to offer enhanced support for students, both by expanding emotional support work and through the development of therapeutic workshops and groups with the Counselling Service. Both of these provisions are in great demand

Emerging issues and challenges

As reported last year, it remains difficult to support students who wish to pursue any sort of formal resolution, with significant barriers (both internally and externally) and limited options. The criminal justice route is protracted and most cases are not taken forward. Within the University the current *Guidance on Serious Criminal Conduct* and the use of the University Context remain barriers to students who wish to make a formal complaint. Some students face similar barriers in Colleges.

Staffing the Service was a significant challenge in 2020-21, this remaining unchanged since January 2019. Whilst a new caseworker is joining the team for 2021-22, the increased demand for appointments means that more staff resource will likely be needed soon.

Sexual violence has seen an increased media profile in the past few years, which has generated additional work across the institution to respond to. The need to input into this often in short timeframes does directly distract from providing support to students.

Pete Mandeville, Service Lead, Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service
