



Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service

Annual Report 2021-22



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General report information & terminology

The report covers the period of 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022. We refer to parties as the ‘reporting student’ and the ‘accused student’ intentionally to 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.

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.

Students receive an individually tailored response (in person/online) to their needs from a Specialist Caseworker or the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (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 Student Welfare Support Service (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.

Staffing

The Service was resourced by three full time members of staff, an increase of 1 FTE compared to the previous year, and comprises the Service Lead, Specialist Caseworker, and an ISVA seconded from Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre (OSARCC).

A further eight Specialist Advisors work with the Service, offering time alongside their substantive roles in the collegiate University. This provision was also increase in 2021-22 following increased demand since the service inception. The total staffing provision is about 3.8 FTE.

The Service is jointly funded by the university and the college, each providing 50% of the costs to fund the paid staff members. We grateful for the ongoing support from colleges for both the financial contribution and in referring students for support. We are also incredibly grateful for departments and colleges that release the time of the Specialist Advisors, who are not financially supported and without whom students would not be seen in a timely fashion.

Service Developments in 2021-22

Following a number of years of steady growth, the staff resource of the team was increased in 2021-22. This included funding for an additional 1FTE Specialist Caseworker post and the identification of three additional Specialist Advisors who support the work alongside substantive roles in the collegiate university. These colleagues were trained in-house (4 days) over the long vacation 2021 as the training available in the sector is not suitable and comes at significant cost.

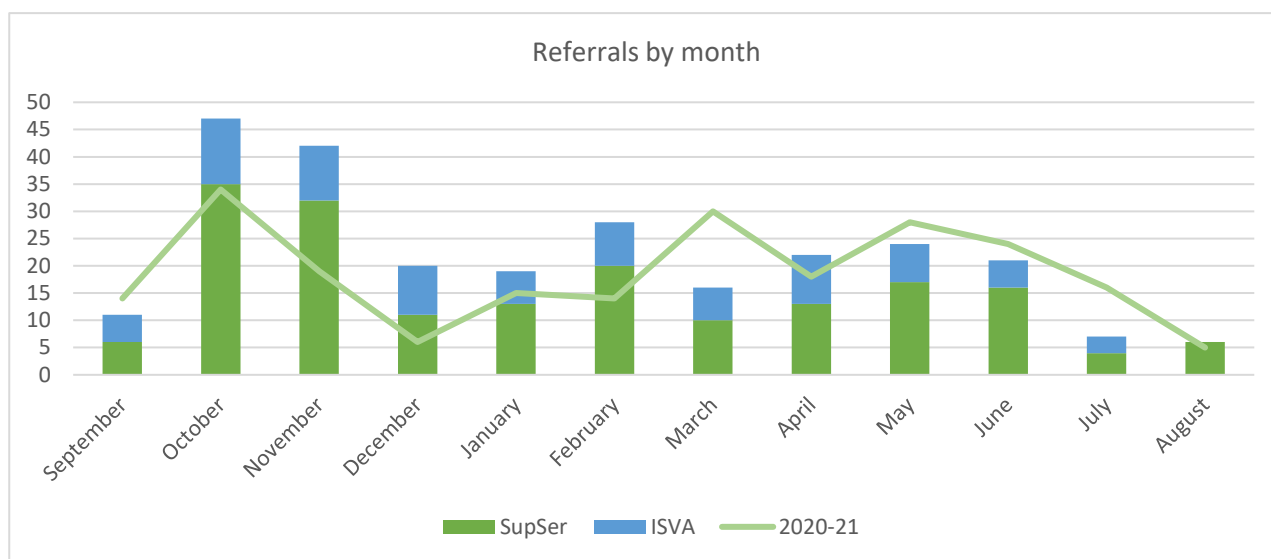
Overall the Service saw a 18% in demand compared to the previous year in another challenging year that saw further revelations in the media, both locally and nationally. As students returned to a pre-pandemic approach to teaching and learning, the Service saw an exceptionally busy Michaelmas Term, with demand over 60% higher than in 2020-21. Whilst this was managed with the additional staffing, a more normal distribution of cases in Hilary and Trinity meant that provision was not completely overwhelmed. The demand in Michaelmas is felt to relate to pent up demand from the pandemic period.

With the additional staff resources the Service has managed to develop and implement a new clinical CMS (coming online in 2022-23), developed a specialist training workshops for college welfare teams, and engaged in a full review of consent training across the institution, with a pilot scheme planned for Michaelmas 2022.

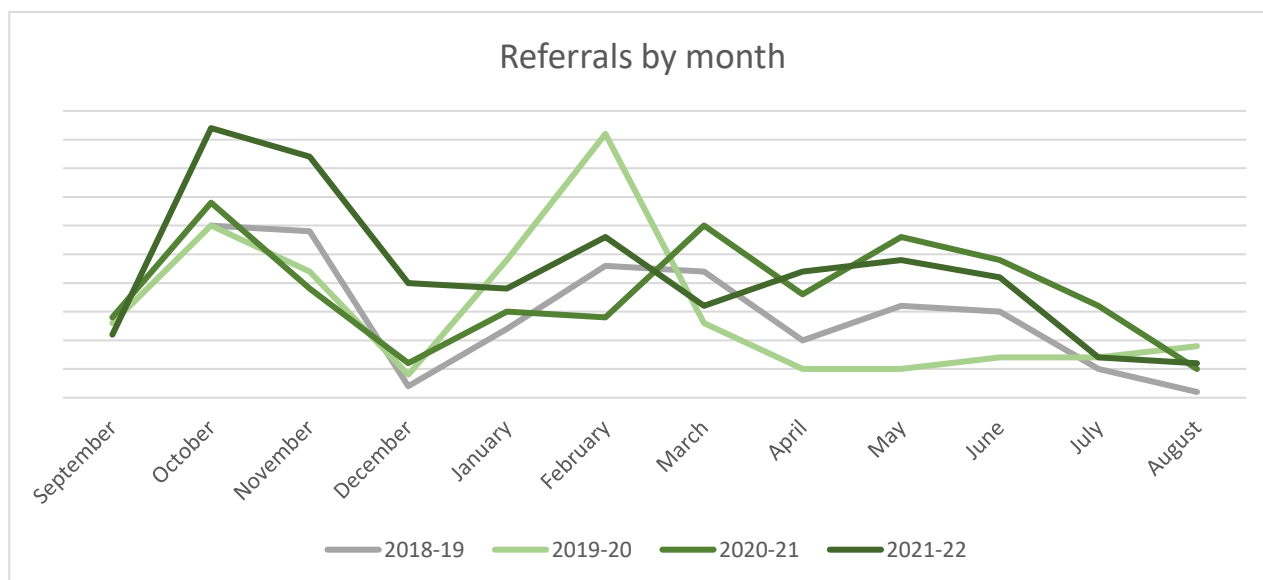
Outside of the university we have been engaged in work with the local safety partnership and contributing to the delivery of Home Office funding to protect women and girls in the night time economy. We have also had opportunity to speak at conference showcasing our service model and the issues of sexual harassment in academia in the UK and Europe.

Referrals

The Service received 263 referrals in 2021-22, a 17.9% increase on the previous year. Growth has been at high pace for a few years



Growth in referrals has been notable for a consecutive number of years. Demand in 2021-22 was significantly higher in Michaelmas 2021, with an increase of 64.4% referrals than the previous year. This carried into Hilary term and left a backlog of cases. The new full-time caseworker who began in October and the additional of three new advisors (who support the work alongside a substantive role) did allow us to mitigate much of this unexpected demand.



Bar the notable increase over Michaelmas Term the flow of referrals is broadly similar to previous years, noting the odd pre-lockdown spike that was observed in February 2020. October, coinciding with Fresher's Week, and November remain the busiest periods with remaining cases distributed across each of the academic terms.

Of the 263 referrals 183 (69.6%) were received by the Service and 80 (30.4%) were direct referrals to the ISVA, similar to previous years. 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 (61.7%), with professional referrals (counsellors, welfare teams, and GPs) making up 32.2%. This is a notable shift from previous years towards referrals from professionals perhaps suggesting that the enhanced training available has a positive impact on getting students to support.

Referrals outcomes

Referral outcomes (Support Service)

Appointment offered	157	85.8%
Email advice only	4	4.8%
No appt - student choice	16	8.7%
No appt - Alumni	2	1.0%
No appt - Non-Ox	1	0.5%
No appt - Not SV	3	1.6%

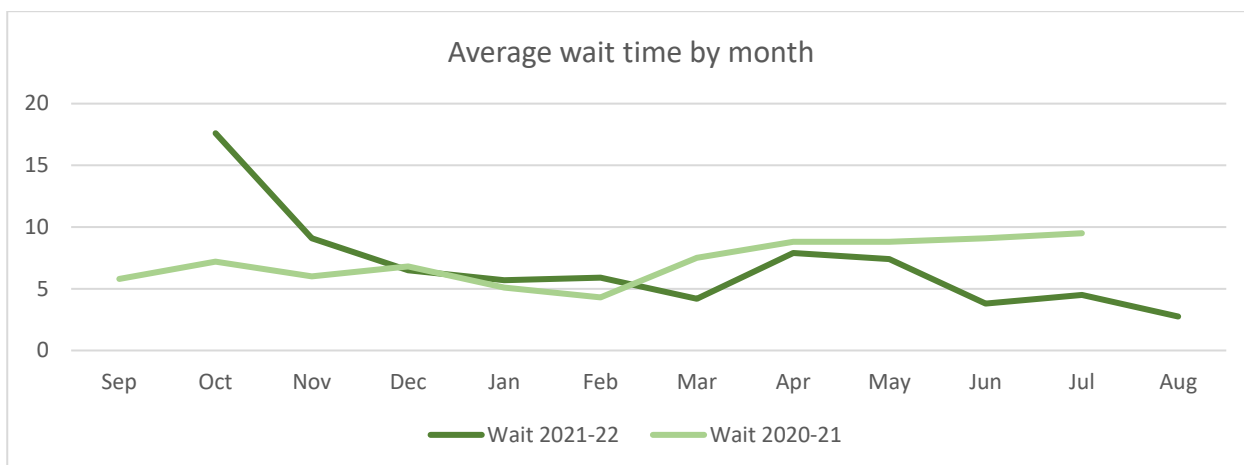
The table shows where referrals received went onto, and excludes the ISVA figures. The Service also had requests for support from alumni, staff, and non-Oxford students. These were signposted to an appropriate external agency. A greater proportion of referrals were converted into an appointment, 85.8% in 2021-22 up from 70.1% in the previous year. We also observed an increase in requests for support from friends of affected students, wanting information to support them. In these cases we provided guidance on referring and boundaries on support.

Attendance

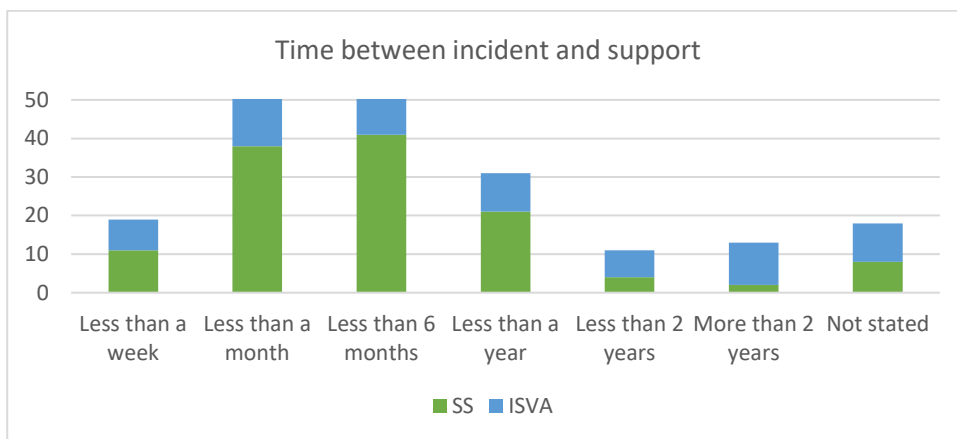
There was a small increase in the number of students attending initial appointments, with the did not attend (DNA) rate dropping to 10.4%. The attendance at initial appointments was 89.6%.

Wait times

Students waited on average 8.9 working days for an appointment, up on the previous year, although this is a misleading figure. The average wait is skewed by the notable spike in cases during October and November and as new team members were deployed. The time between the student's first contact and first appointment is not the most indicative metric as practically students are not necessarily immediately available due to lectures and tutorials, and the nature of the sexual violence work is such that a period of time between reaching out for support and speaking to someone can be helpful.



Wait times by month show the longer wait period in Michaelmas due to the significant spike in numbers, and with careful allocation and case management we were able to bring this down below 5 days. 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, subject to student availability.



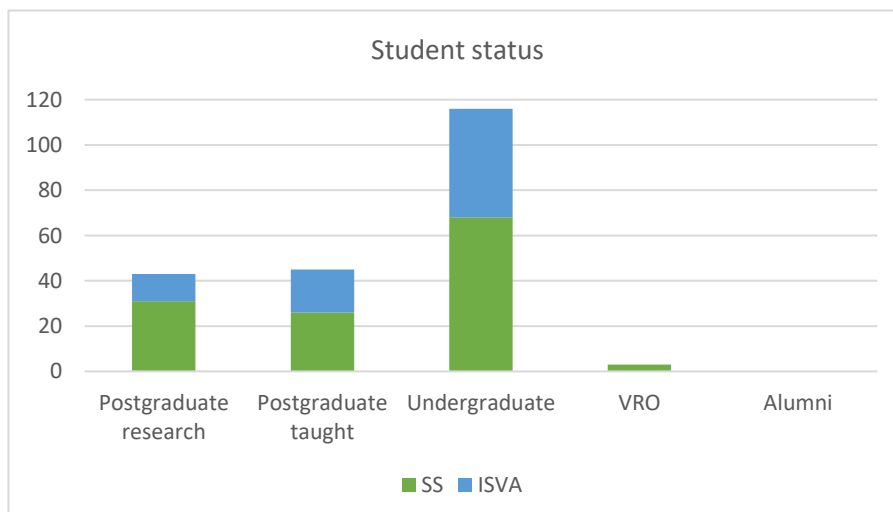
Students demographics

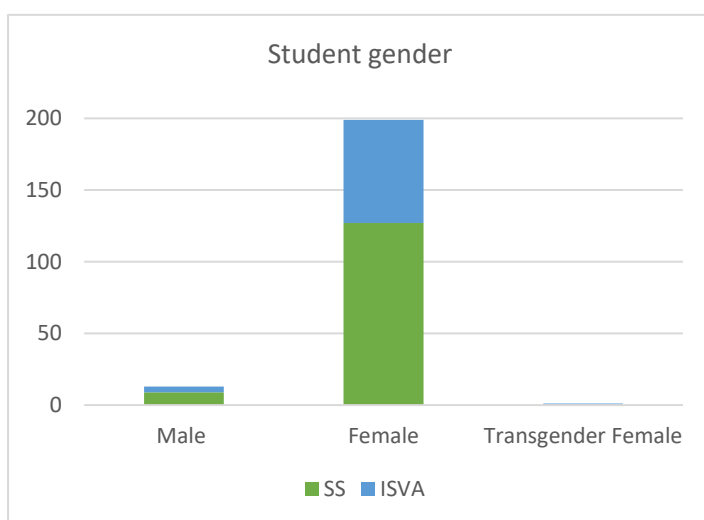
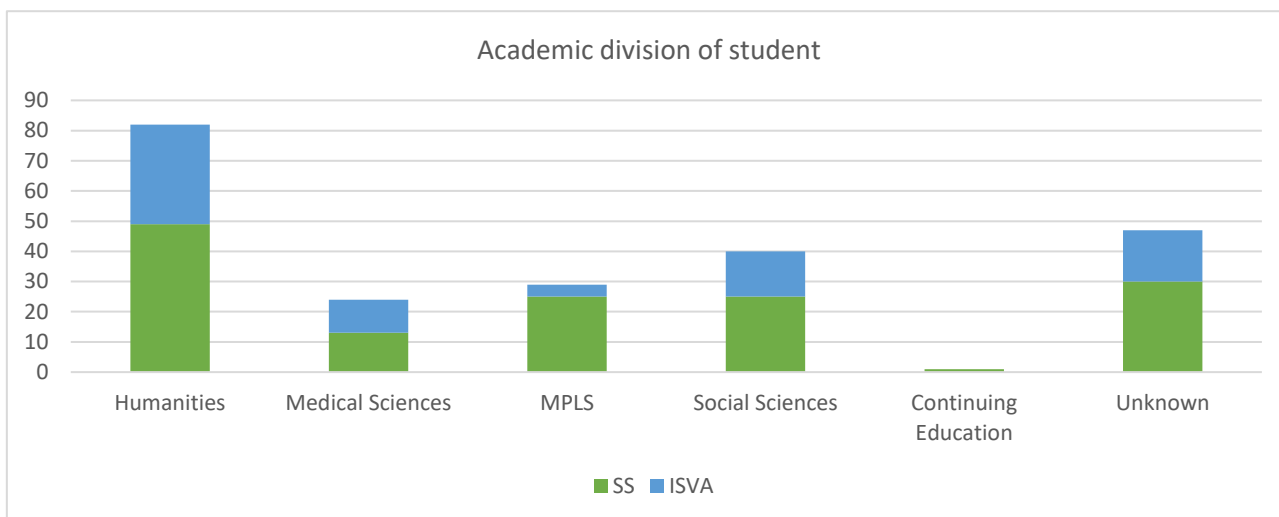
Demographics of appointments

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

56% of those seen in the service were undergraduates, with demand amongst postgraduates increasing relative 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 distribution is similar to that seen in previous years.

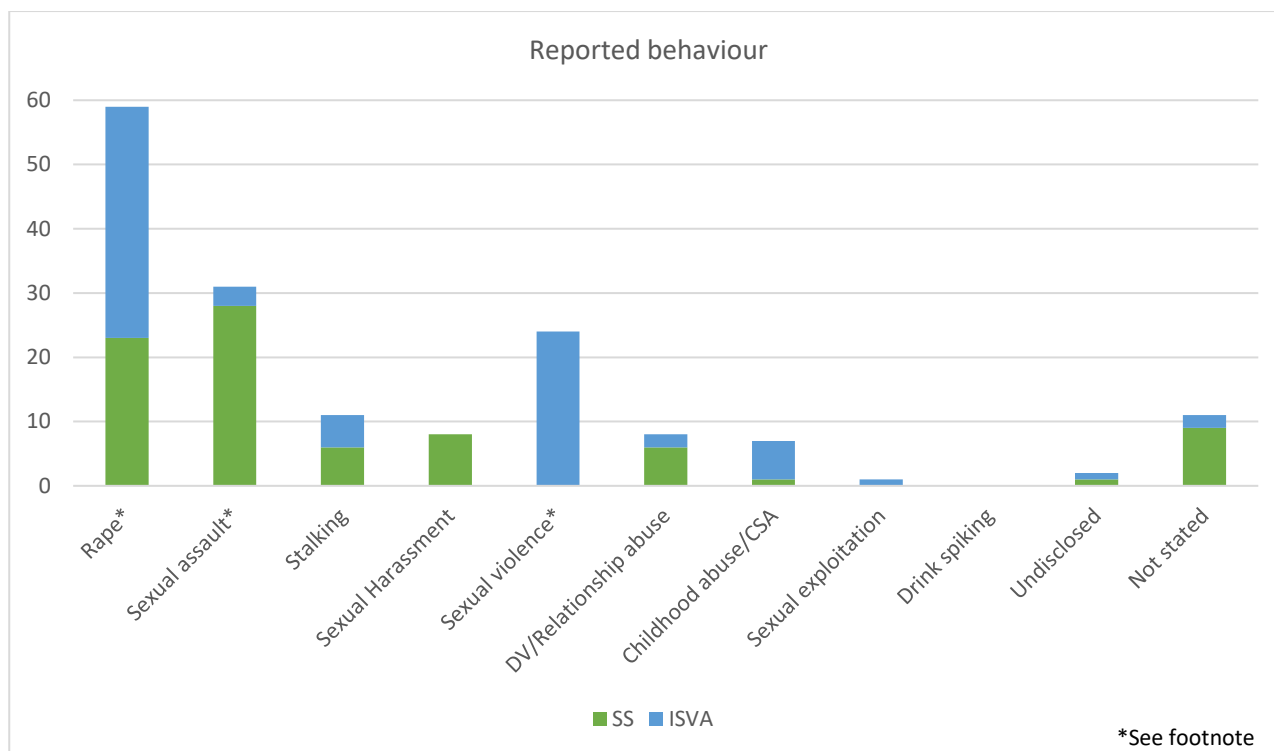




Like other sexual violence support services, most service users identify as female, and there is now a small proportion of students who identify as transgender accessing the service. This is encouraging given the higher incidence of sexual violence targeted at transgender individuals.

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, the primary change being more cases measured as sexual violence (a broader term¹) than 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 commonly behaviour reported, accounting for over half of all cases (54%), with sexual harassment (unwanted inappropriate comments or harassing behaviours with sexual elements) accounting for only 5% of the caseload. Serious sexual crimes (a measure used by the police encompassing rape, sexual assault and stalking) account for 75% of the casework, a further increase on previous years.

The national prevalence of sexual harassment and violence would suggest the university sees a greater proportion of serious sexual violence cases compared to sexual harassment cases. This suggests that students affected by sexual harassment are not reaching out for support, perhaps because these are not seen as being as important or serious or perhaps because of cultures of tolerance towards sexual harassment.

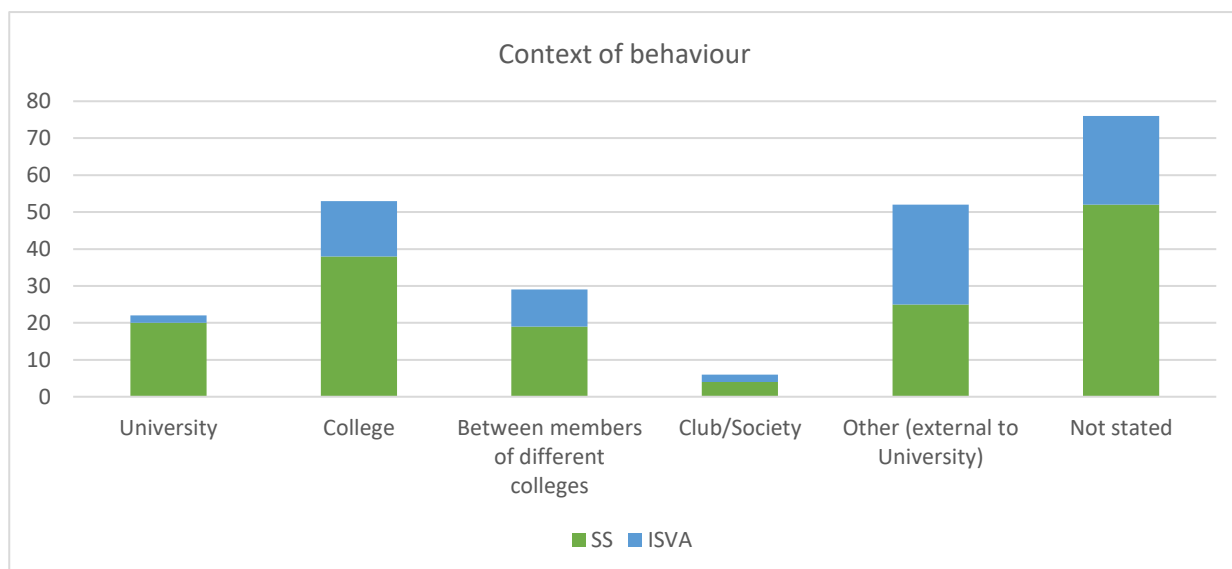
The Service continues to see an increase in the number of high-risk cases, often around domestic/relationship abuse, coercion-control, and stalking. These cases requiring considerably more time and input to mitigate the risks with support from Security Services, the police, and other specialist agencies.

¹ Rape and sexual assault are both legal terms but also widely used to describe experiences, even if not meeting the legal definition. Sexual violence is a broader term that encompasses serious sexual offences including rape and sexual assault. These are reported separately as they capture the language used by the student not whether a criminal offence has been committed.

We have expertise within the team in this area of work and would like to develop further support and training within the institution.

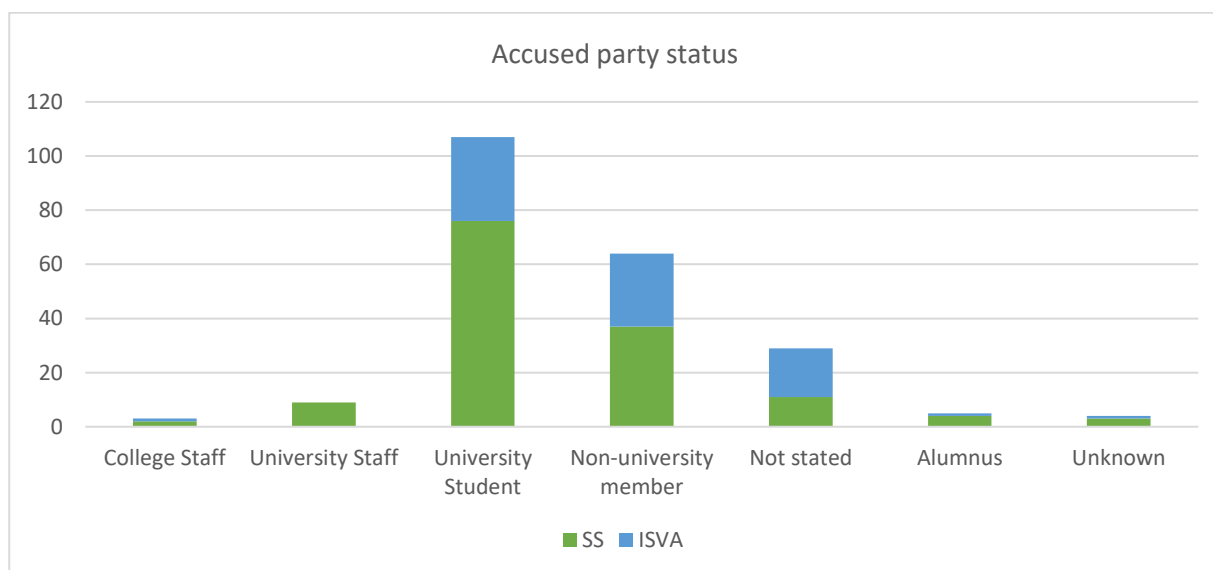
Context

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



Whilst nearly half of the cases (46.2%) are within the collegiate university context, and a fifth (21.8%) external a third of cases did not report the context which makes comparison with previous years difficult. In absolute figures we can observe a significant increase in university context cases (departmental based), this raising from 3 in 2020-21 to 22 in 2021-22. This is set against a drop in 2020-21 likely indicative of the pandemic and reduced interaction within departments.

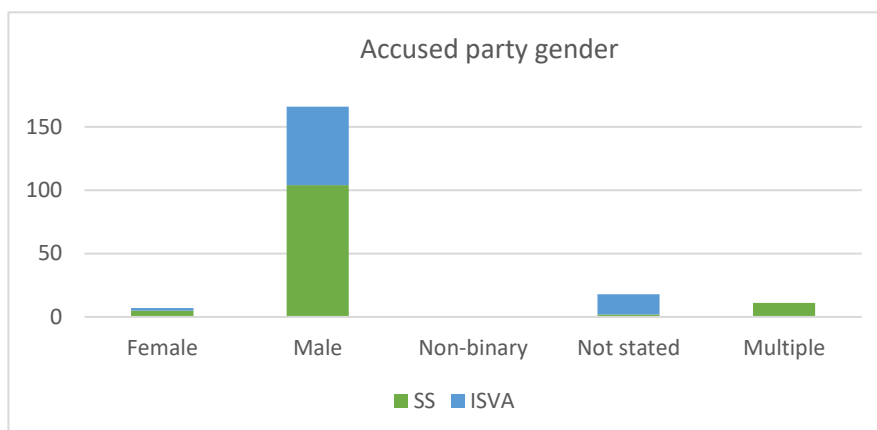
Based on the status of the accused party, these university context cases likely relate to student-student matters rather than student-staff.



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

Accused party

In line with the experience of other service providers the overwhelming majority of accused persons are identified as male.



Complaints & Outcomes

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	54	68.4%
Active CJS case	14	17.7%
Reported, complete - Police NFA	2	2.5%
Reported, complete - CPS NFA	0	0.0%
Reported, complete - Guilty	1	1.3%
Reported, complete - Not guilty	0	0.0%
Reported, unknown	3	3.8%
Reported, withdrawn	3	3.8%
Not stated	2	2.5%

The proportion of students reporting to the police has reduced slightly and engagement with criminal justice routes remains low due to tiny conviction rates for serious sexual offences, long timescales, and continued lack of trust in the police.

Proctor and College cases

Not reported	18	8.5%
Active college case	11	5.2%
Eligible complaint to Proctors	22	10.4%
Eligible complaint to college	14	6.6%
Eligible complaint to HR	5	2.4%
Eligible complaint to external	0	0.0%
College completed - NFA	0	0.0%
College completed - Upheld	3	1.4%
College completed - Not upheld	2	0.9%

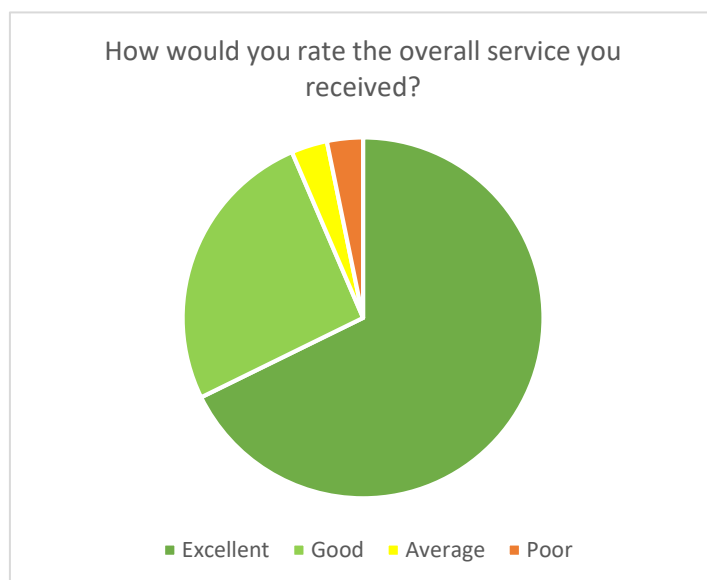
Active Proctors case	4	1.9%
Proctors completed - NFA	1	0.5%
Proctors completed - Upheld	1	0.5%
Proctors completed - Not upheld	0	0.0%
Not applicable	30	14.2%
Not stated	100	47.4%

The Service can give detailed advice on the relevant complaint route and will support a student through a complaint process, but the choice of making a complaint is for the student alone and many do not want to make a complaint. The eligible complaint measure shows the number of students who have sought information on complaints and been advised on the appropriate route, but this is not indicative of complaints then made. Eligible complaints to external covers complaints that can be made to other organisations or other universities.

Whilst there were a similar number of single college context cases (investigated by the colleges) compared to university and across college cases (remit of the Proctors) more students were interested in the Proctor disciplinary options than college options

Feedback

Student feedback was incorporated more tightly into workflows in 2021-22 to ensure timely feedback from students accessing the service



Overall feedback for the Service was hugely positive, and indicating that the provision is about right for student need.

93.5% of students attending the Service agreed or strongly agreed that they got the support they wanted, and 100% said they felt listened to and believed, one of the core tenets of the provision.

The nature of the provision being tailored to the student need should naturally create positive feedback, however the level of positive feedback is an encouragement.

84% of students found the waiting time for their appointment manageable or easily manageable. Of those who found the wait difficult only one student reported a poor service, the others good or excellent. This group all sought support during Michaelmas 2021, where the backlog of cases and delays in setting up a first appointment clearly at fault.

Qualitative feedback from students highlighted the strengths of the service as safe environment where they felt listened to and heard, with the team compassionate, non-judgemental, and helpful. Areas for improvement were noted by students as reducing the waiting time for appointments and comments around the disjointed nature of university and college disciplinary processes.

Forward Plan

Opportunities

The new case management system has been built and implemented, with the first full year use being in 2022-23. This will significantly improve the quality and quantity of data and reporting, speciality allowing appointment tracking, and an online access for the Service speeding up access.

The review of consent training was completed in 2022-23 and a pilot scheme with three colleges set for Michaelmas 2022. This will be reviewed and proposals for a wider rollout shared in Hilary 2023 ahead of the 2023-24 academic year.

The Service would like to further develop support and training around domestic and relationship abuse as a specific workstream within the support offer. A combination of higher proportion of these cases, their inherently risky nature, and expertise within the team suggest this would be a worthwhile development.

The Service has also been discussing collaboration with the Counselling Service to offer specialist therapeutic groups and support for student survivors. Whilst this provision does exist in the community wait times are often six months and provision not tailored to student needs. The first of these collaborations will come into effect in 2022-23.

There is also scope, although not resource, to increase the provision of emotional support work, and to develop specialist support provision for racial harassment and violence.

Emerging issues and challenges

As reported in previous years, 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. This is a changing provision with the OfS proposals on the regulation of sexual misconduct investigations. These changes, expected in 2023 will put more complaints within the institutional scope will likely increase service demands

Staffing the Service remains a significant concern. Whilst a new caseworker is joining the team for 2021-22, the impact of this has been tempered with the loss of Specialist Advisor time as substantive roles claw back offered time. It is anticipated that some of the team will need to withdraw support in the next academic year. The recruitment of Specialist Advisors alongside substantive posts has been exhausted as a model meaning that staffing capacity will need to be increased by more conventional recruitment.

If we do lose Specialist Advisors in the next academic this will likely impact our ability to deliver consent workshops and training as planned, and lead to increased waiting times for students seeking support.

Pete Mandeville

Service Lead, Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service