BECOMING A ZERO TOLERANCE UNION:
Ending sexual harassment in your union
INTRODUCTION - WHY ZERO TOLERANCE?

The zero tolerance campaign has been launched as a direct result of the Hidden Marks report, published by the NUS Women’s Campaign in March 2010. The Hidden Marks report showed that 68% of women students have experienced sexual harassment whilst at university or college.

The Hidden Marks report demonstrated that not only is sexual harassment at epidemic levels in our institutions, but also that a culture of acceptability has developed around it. Sexual harassment occurs daily, but institutions and students’ unions often play no role in challenging it. Women have come to expect to be sexually harassed on a night out in their students’ union, and are expected to deal with it themselves rather than reporting it to anyone in the union.

The zero tolerance campaign aims to tackle the high levels of sexual harassment in our institutions, and aims to end the culture of acceptability that leaves such behaviour unchallenged. The zero tolerance campaign has been established to give unions a framework within which to deal with sexual harassment.

The principle behind the campaign is simple: tell your students what constitutes sexual harassment, explain that it isn’t tolerated, and establish clear reporting pathways for students to complain. It is a simple culture change that has a massive impact on the lives of students.

You will read later on in this briefing the experiences of Goldsmiths and Cardiff Students’ Unions, who have already implemented the zero tolerance policy in their unions. Their experiences show that with very little effort you can practically eliminate sexual harassment in your unions. NUS has also fully adopted the policy for all of our events.

By implementing the Zero Tolerance policy you will very quickly have a massive impact on ensuring your union is a safe space for all of your students. You will be tackling an issue which affects over two thirds of the women at your institution. You will be sending a clear message that your Union will not tolerate any form of sexual harassment.

This guide contains all you need to become a Zero Tolerance union. If you have any questions at all about adopting a Zero Tolerance policy don’t hesitate to get in touch - olivia.bailey@nus.org.uk.

WHAT DID HIDDEN MARKS TELL US ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

The Hidden Marks report revealed that 68% of women students have experienced verbal or physical sexual harassment whilst at university or college. The key sexual harassments findings from the report can be read below. A full breakdown of the results can be read in the Hidden Marks report, which can be downloaded here - http://www.nus.org.uk/en/News/News/1-in-7-women-students-is-a-victim-of-sexual-assault-or-violence/.
Verbal sexual harassment

The survey found that women students were very likely to experience low-level verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment whilst at university or college. We asked respondents to tell us whether they had ever been subject to any of the following behaviour on campus:

- **Someone making sexual comments that made them feel uncomfortable**
- **Someone wolf whistling, catcalling or making sexual noises at them**
- **Someone asking them questions about their sex or romantic life when it was clearly none of their business**
- **Someone asking them questions about their sexuality when it was clearly none of their business**

65 per cent of respondents to this question reported that they had experienced one or more of these behaviours during their time as a student, with a total of 3833 incidents being reported by 1210 respondents in this category. This behaviour was most likely to happen in and around college or university buildings (53 per cent of total reported incidents). Just under one third of incidents reported in this category happened in a students’ union or at a students’ union event, with 16 per cent of the incidents occurring in a learning environment such as a lecture theatre or library.

Physical harassment on and off campus

We asked respondents whether they had ever been subject to any of the following behaviours on campus:

- **Someone exposing their sexual organs to them when they did not agree**
- **Someone groping, pinching or smacking their bottom when they did not agree to them doing so**
- **Someone groping, pinching or touching their breasts when they did not agree to them doing so**
- **Someone lifting up their skirt in public without them agreeing**

34 per cent of respondents to this question had experienced one or more of these behaviours during their time as a student.

In this section students were most likely to report that they have had their bottom groped, pinched or smacked in a students’ union or at a union event (19 per cent), with 14 per cent reporting this happening in and around their institution. Six per cent stated that their breasts have been touched without their consent in a students’ union, and a further five per cent reported this happening to them in their institution. Six per cent have been ‘flashed’ at in and around their institutional buildings.

We also asked students whether they had been subject to unwanted sexual contact (unwanted kissing, molesting or touching including through clothes) whilst they have been a student, but not necessarily on campus. 16 per cent of respondents said that this had happened to them during the course of their student experience so far.

Women students seemed particularly concerned about the persistent harassment they faced in clubs and pubs. Here are some quotes from respondents to the Hidden Marks survey that illustrate this:

“Almost every time me and my friends go out to a club you can guarantee that one of us will have some kind of violence or unwanted attention forced on us by drunk men. Normally they will just rub themselves up against you or make sexual comments, but there have been more serious incidents. Once one of my friends was dancing and a man just came up behind her and grabbed her crotch. She was obviously really upset and we left. Another time a man called another of my friends a slag and threatened to spit on her because she accidentally bumped into him and his drink spilt.”

“I have been followed around in one of my campus bars even though I told the guy I was uninterested... he finally stopped when he forced a kiss on me (with tongue) when I was coming out of the bathroom which my friend witnessed and yelled at him for.”

“I have been repeatedly groped/smacked on my bottom on several occasions whilst in student clubs and bars, and when I have confronted the men they have either seemed shocked/embarrassed that I didn’t like receiving this kind of attention or have found it funny that I have been unhappy.”
SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Hidden Marks report also revealed that one in seven women students have experienced serious physical or sexual violence while a student at their current institution. Research - and common sense - shows that sexual harassment sits on the scale that leads to serious sexual and physical assault. This may seem a simple point to make, but it is an important one. Sexual harassment stems from the belief of some people that they can do or say to someone something which they do not have permission to do, and which disempowers their target. To use an example, pinching someone’s bottom as they head to the bar for a drink is a statement by the perpetrator that they feel they have a right to touch someone’s body without permission. It is also designed to embarrass the victim and make them feel uncomfortable. It disempowers them. As some of the posters produced by the women’s campaign say this year: If you think of a woman as an object, it makes it easier to treat her like one.

This is one of the reasons that implementing a zero tolerance policy in your union is so important. By tackling sexual harassment you will also be tackling more serious violence and assault, and you will be creating a culture where women feel more in control of their rights over their own bodies. Seeing sexual harassment in a wider context of violence is important in order to become a zero tolerance union.

DEFINING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

There is no legal definition of sexual harassment. This is because a range of different laws cover different aspects of sexual harassment. A full explanation of the law relating to sexual harassment can be read in the ‘law’ section of the Hidden Marks website – www.hiddenmarks.org.uk.

For the purposes of the Hidden Marks report, we drew up a definition of sexual harassment. This was written using definitions used by a range of different parties, and has been accepted by experts to be an appropriate definition. NUS uses the definition at all of our events. The definition drawn up for Hidden Marks is the definition that we are also using for the Zero Tolerance campaign.

The defining characteristics of sexual harassment are that it is unwanted, persistent and of a sexual nature. Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Unwanted sexual comments (including comments about your body or private life)
- Unwelcome sexual invitations, innuendoes, and offensive gestures
- Wolf whistling, catcalling or offensive sexual noises
- Groping, pinching or smacking of your body, such as your bottom or breasts
- Having your skirt or top lifted without agreeing
- Someone exposing their sexual organs to you without consent

This simple definition is key to becoming a zero tolerance union. By publicising this definition widely you will make clear to students the kinds of behaviour that are deemed unacceptable, and you will help students understand that they do not have to put up with those kinds of behaviours.

A poster advertising the zero tolerance policy at Cardiff Students’ Union

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE ZERO TOLERANCE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

The NUS Women’s campaign will be accrediting zero tolerance unions. This will mean that you will be awarded a logo, and that we will provide you with graphic images and limited printed materials to help
you with the campaign. The ‘how to become a zero tolerance union’ section will provide you with further guidance on how to achieve this.

The easiest way to imagine a zero tolerance policy in your union is this: If someone gets too drunk or starts a fight in your Union bar, your bar staff or security will stop them and speak to them, ask them to leave and often your disciplinary processes will kick in. Adopting a zero tolerance policy simply means that sexual harassment becomes an issue which is dealt with in a similar way. If someone experiences sexual harassment, and it is witnessed or reported, the perpetrator will be dealt with by your Union staff. Having a zero tolerance policy means that sexual harassment becomes one of the behaviours that is not tolerated in your union and at your events.

Having a zero tolerance policy also means more than just practical policies at your events – it is about culture too. By adopting a zero tolerance policy you will also:

- **Empower your students to understand the rights they have over their own bodies**
- **Raise awareness of the fact that sexual harassment is not just ‘banter’ or ‘part of an average night on the pull’ but sits on a scale of abusive and violent behaviours towards women** - and thus influence your students’ behaviour throughout the rest of their lives
- **Be leading the way in your local community.** Local press will be interested, and you could very easily use your policy to pressure bars and clubs in your local area to start challenging sexual harassment. Students’ Unions can be the agents of change
- **Help tackle the wider issue of violence against women students.** Many of the trial unions have used their Zero Tolerance policy as a platform for a wider campaign around violence against women students. The NUS Women’s Campaign can help you if you would like to do this by providing advice and a series of resources, for example materials to advertise the www.hiddenmarks.org.uk website, established by the campaign, to provide information for students experiencing violence

It is also very likely that zero tolerance will become a key plank of both Best Bar None, and the Students’ Union Evaluation Award. By implementing a zero tolerance policy at your union now, you will be leading the way in the student movement. As you may be aware, NUS also recently fully adopted the zero tolerance policy for all NUS events.

It is important to remember that the zero tolerance policy is not prescriptive. Every Union is different, and you will all implement the policy in slightly different ways. You will see from the case studies later in this guide that Cardiff and Goldsmiths both took different, but equally successful, approaches to implementing the policy.

![A screenshot of the Students Against Sexual Harassment website at Sussex SU](image)

**WHAT ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT TOWARDS MEN AND OTHER HATE CRIMES?**

A question that has reoccurred during sessions and discussions on the zero tolerance policy, as well as in the trial unions, is about whether the zero tolerance protects men from the behaviours that constitute sexual harassment. The simple answer to this is yes. All publicity materials produced by the NUS Women’s Campaign use gender neutral language. The zero tolerance policy is designed to protect all students from everyone who perpetrates sexual harassment.

Obviously, this campaign is being run by the NUS Women’s Campaign for very specific reasons. Sexual harassment predominantly affects women students, and is symptomatic of the wider sexism and discrimination faced by women students in our institutions. While the NUS Women’s Campaign believes that the sexual harassment of men does not happen very frequently, and that the impact on male students is often very different to the impact on women, we firmly believe it would not be right to exclude men from this policy. We also believe that same sex sexual harassment, where that occurs, must also be tackled.
It is also important to state here that many of your students will experience harassment and intimidation for other reasons – for being LGBT, black or disabled, for example. Your Zero Tolerance policy can and should also help prevent such harassment. For further information on hate crimes in students’ union please visit www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/welfare/crime/.

HOW DO WE BECOME A ZERO TOLERANCE UNION?

As explained earlier, the NUS Women’s Campaign will be accrediting zero tolerance unions. This is to ensure that basic standards are met in unions claiming to have zero tolerance policies.

In order to be awarded your zero tolerance logo and official accreditation you must submit a report outlining how you have considered and will meet the steps in the Checklist provided later in this guide. This report does not need to exceed four sides of A4. You should also be prepared to speak to the National Women’s Officer on the phone if she has any questions. If you have any questions at all about what to write in your report, get in touch with the National Women’s Officer.

Once the National Women’s Officer is satisfied you have considered the recommendations in the Checklist, she will give you accreditation. This will then mean that you are provided with a range of different graphics and materials to help your campaign. You will also be able to seek advice from the National Women’s Officer and the NUS Women’s Committee at any point on how best to proceed with your campaign. More information about what you can expect from NUS once you’ve been accredited can be found later in this guide in the ‘what to expect from NUS’ section. Your logo, awarded once you have been accredited, will look something like this:

CHECKLIST: HOW TO BECOME A ZERO TOLERANCE UNION

The politics

You should demonstrate that you have considered the political implications of implementing a zero tolerance policy in your union. Have you:

- Got buy in from your executive team? Is everyone committed to implementing the policy? Do you need to run a discussion session or similar in order to ensure everyone understands what the policy would mean?
- Got buy in from senior staff in your union as well as from your marketing and commercial services teams? It is important that you discuss the policy with them to ensure that they will help you carry it out
- Discussed the issue in your student council or at a meeting with students? Or discussed the policy in another forum? Or are you planning to? It is important to talk to students about the policy and why you are doing it

Your Events and Commercial Services

The most visible arena for your zero tolerance policy will be your bar and at students’ union events, especially where alcohol is present. Have you:

- Got a plan for training staff who will be working at the events? How will you ensure that staff fully understand the zero tolerance policy? How will you ensure they know how to deal with complaints about sexual harassment?
- Identified a clear path for those who wish to complain about sexual harassment? How will they identify the staff they should complain to? What happens once they have submitted the complaint? Have you developed relationships with local police to ensure their support for your work, and to make the process for reporting serious crimes easier?
Got a plan for making participants at your event aware that the zero tolerance policy is in place? Will you be using the NUS toilet door posters and hand stamps for event entry? How will you ensure that everyone at the event understands what sexual harassment is and understands that it is unacceptable?

Implementing the policy across the union

Having a zero tolerance policy is not just about commercial services and union events – it is about the culture in your union too. Have you:

- Got a plan to ensure everyone understands that the union has a zero tolerance policy? Are you going to put posters up or write about it on your website? Have you got any other ideas to ensure that everyone understands the policy?

- Got a plan to engage with your sports clubs and societies? Perhaps you might want to go and talk to different societies to explain that the policy applies to them, and to answer any questions

- Considered whether you have any events or practices which might encourage sexual harassment? Events like 'pimps 'n' hos' or 'tarts and vicars' nights in your union just encourage the kinds of behaviour we are endeavouring to stop

- Considered how you can use the policy as a launch pad for raising awareness about violence against women students? Have you advertised the www.hiddenmarks.org.uk website? What services do you provide for students who are experiencing violence?

Communicating with your students

It isn’t just about ensuring that students understand the zero tolerance policy, it is also about ensuring that students understand the reasons behind the policy. Have you:

- Considered holding discussion events or forums to talk about the zero tolerance policy?

- Considered writing an article for your student newspaper on the policy?

Reforming your Students’ Union structures

It is important that you don’t promise students zero tolerance if your disciplinary processes and structures can’t deliver it. Have you:

- Got a plan for reviewing your current disciplinary and complaints procedures to ensure that they fit with the zero tolerance policy? Have you also considered whether your procedures are accessible to those who have experienced sexual harassment (or more serious sexual violence or physical assault)?

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM NUS?

The NUS Women’s Campaign is here to help you make this policy a success. The National Women’s Officer, and the NUS Women’s Committee, are available to answer any questions you have and are also able to come to your institution to discuss the policy with students or staff.

The NUS Women’s Campaign is also able to provide every successfully accredited Union with limited free personalised promotional materials for the campaign. We will also provide you with graphic design support, as well as graphic images for use in your union. We can also order specific materials for you centrally. We will also provide you with your own personalised logo once you have achieved accreditation.

Materials available are as follows:

- A4 back of toilet door posters

- Stickers, which read:
  - [Union] has zero tolerance to sexual harassment
  - My Body Not Yours
  - Report Sexual Harassment to me

- T-Shirts, blue with [Union] has zero tolerance logo printed on the front

- Ink stamps, of the [Union] has zero tolerance logo

We are here to help, so just contact the National Women’s Officer with any questions or queries you may have.
CASE STUDIES

A number of unions have piloted the Zero Tolerance project over the first term. Goldsmiths and Cardiff Unions both had the policy fully in place for freshers’ weeks. You can read their evaluation of the implementation of the campaign below.

Could you outline the steps you took to make your union zero tolerance?

Cardiff: We liaised with NUS on marketing and the specific direction of where we wanted this campaign to go and how we thought students would react to it and the best way to approach it. We decided to run the campaign as an awareness campaign, rather than as something gimmicky as the issue needed this to make full impact. In house marketing designed behind bar posters for us, outlining inappropriate behaviour, targeted at both men and women. NUS provided us with back of door posters, and ink stamps for club entry. We also produced badges produced for all security and bar staff to wear during club nights, wrote an article in the student paper and delivered a team brief to all members of staff explaining the policy. All policies and complaints procedures were checked and agreed that all avenues were covered. We met with South Wales Police to explain the campaign and make sure they supported it, which they did, and we are now working with them to progress the campaign and get a full idea of what the campaign was potentially influencing in terms of crime figures.

Goldsmiths: We made Zero Tolerance part of our Union policy and made sure that it became part of all of our staff training (bar staff, shop staff, office staff, security guards, office staff etc). We also put a description of the Zero Tolerance Policy on our website and in our freshers guide (which was sent out to all new students). We are also reviewing our disciplinary and complaints procedures so that they best support victims of harassment. We got students on board through different societies and clubs which meant more positive word of mouth.

What problems did you face, and how did you overcome them?

Cardiff: Problems we faced were surrounding the immaturity of some of the students in terms of their reaction to it. Some students were a little concerned that the message of the stickers were designed to make women seem like victims. Other problem was making sure that all staff understood what the campaign was about – on this we were hampered by the size of the organisation rather than the lack of want and support.

Goldsmiths: We of course faced the problem of “Why do we need this?”, which we answered using the Hidden Marks report. We found that by openly addressing the issue during training, we were able to answer questions directly which led to more staff being on board. By holding open meetings where the issue could be discussed, we found that we had less opposition in enforcing it. There have been comments that the policy is “too harsh” but no one has attempted to go against it yet so it must be doing some good!

What impact did the policy have on your freshers week?

Cardiff: It showed the freshers that Cardiff SU was a safe environment where they would be taken seriously if any matter was to arise surrounding sexual harassment, contacts were given for more information to be obtained from. It also hopefully subtly made people question previous behaviour and change it.

Goldsmiths: A good one, we created a safe place for students to go out and have fun. We reinforced the message through the NUS printed materials and stickers by making sure they were highly visible.

Why is the zero tolerance policy important do you think?

Cardiff: To show students that we care and do not allow inappropriate behaviour from either sex in our venue night or day. Sexual harassment is a wide and ranging issue encompassing many aspects, its important to be able to explain this and deliver something concrete to students in a cloudy area.
Goldsmiths: Everyone has the right to exist without being sexualised. Being turned into an object when you’re trying to live your life is degrading and frustrating. When you combine this with the results of the Hidden Marks, it is easy to see that sexual harassment is a serious issue affecting a high proportion of women. I don’t know anyone who hasn’t experienced it at some point, and who doesn’t feel angry and frustrated by it.

What is the one piece of advice you’d give to other student unions who are adopting a zero tolerance policy?

Cardiff: Make sure you give it full attention and explore as many avenues as possible when delivering it and make sure that everyone understands exactly the aims and objectives to the campaign, as from my experience it raised lots of questions that I thought were obvious and had explained.

Goldsmiths: Take time to talk it out. You’ll probably meet a lot of resistance and this will require a lot of explaining. Have a solid argument and go through it with people, answering their concerns over the policy. Talk to different groups of students, go and speak to your sports teams as well as your feminist society. Try to explain the material in digestible, personalised chunks.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

Cardiff: The campaign worked really well here, getting support from the police was really heart warming and progressive, without sounding silly!!

Goldsmiths: Take it seriously. Trying to change opinions that people have been brought up with is hard work and you need to stick to your guns. We allowed a level of discretion for the staff dealing with a complaint but the general attitude is that if someone acts inappropriately, they are to be removed from the building with a warning.

MODEL ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

Below is a model policy which you should change and adapt based on your audience. It is not always necessary to pass a motion through your council in order to implement zero tolerance, because it should fall within the remit of your equal opportunities policy. However, getting political backing for the campaign will be very useful in order to gather support and raise awareness for the campaign.

This Union notes

1. The Hidden Marks report, published in March 2010 by the NUS Women’s Campaign, revealed that 68% of women students have experienced sexual harassment while a student at their current institution. Many women students reported experiencing persistent harassment in pubs and club nights of the type held at many unions, and reported that this kind of behaviour was seen as normal at such an event.

2. That the NUS’ definition of sexual harassment is as follows:

The defining characteristics of sexual harassment are that it is unwanted, persistent and of a sexual nature. Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Unwanted sexual comments (including comments about your body or private life)
- Unwelcome sexual invitations, innuendoes, and offensive gestures
- Wolf whistling, catcalling or offensive sexual noises
- Groping, pinching or smacking of your body, such as your bottom or breasts
- Having your skirt or top lifted without agreeing
- Someone exposing their sexual organs to you without consent

3. The zero tolerance to sexual harassment campaign has been established by the NUS Women’s Campaign. The zero tolerance campaign aims to help unions create an environment where all students can enjoy time in their union without persistent and unwanted attention of a sexual nature

4. That a number of students’ unions including Cardiff and Goldsmiths have already successfully implemented a zero tolerance policy In their Union

This Union believes

1. That no student at this institution should be forced to just ‘put up’ with sexual harassment, and that action must be taken to ensure all students are able to enjoy the union without experiencing sexual harassment

2. That sexual harassment should not be tolerated by the union, and those who commit acts of sexual harassment should be stopped and disciplined for their actions

This Union resolves

1. To adopt a ‘zero tolerance to sexual
harassment’ policy, and to work with the NUS Women’s Campaign nationally in the implementation of this

2. To use the NUS definition of sexual harassment in the zero tolerance campaign

3. To be adopt the below plan of action for the implementation of the zero tolerance policy in our union:

[Adapt a version of the report you send in to the National Women’s Officer and submit this to your Union Council or exec]

Get in touch with the National Women’s Officer if you have any questions about this model policy.

GET IN TOUCH AND LEAD THE WAY FOR WOMEN IN YOUR UNION

Please get in touch with any questions at all that you have about the zero tolerance campaign.

Email – Olivia.bailey@nus.org.uk
women@nus.org.uk

Phone – Olivia’s mobile: 07855 041861
NUS switchboard: 0871 2218221

You can find out more about the NUS Women’s Campaign by going to – www.nusconnect.org.uk/womens.

Goldsmiths students at a meeting to discuss the Zero Tolerance policy. With assorted Zero Tolerance materials provided by NUS.