



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 faced by this group
- 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 within the UK

Knowledge Background

This toolkit draws on existing academic research, practical knowledge of service provision for sex workers, as well as the lived experiences of sex workers. The toolkit has been contributed to by a range of individuals with experience of student sex work, as well as practitioners who have supported them. Research consulted for this project includes the Student Sex Work Brief (2018)¹, which was produced by NUS LGBT+ campaign in conjunction with the English Collective of Prostitutes and the Sex Worker Advocacy Resistance movement; Beyond the Gaze (2017)², which is the largest online research project ever conducted within the UK, and The Student Sex Work Project (2015)³ which despite its limitations provides us with a baseline of knowledge as it was the first research project of its kind conducted in the UK.

In addition to academic research, the lived experiences of sex workers have been invaluable to the creation of this toolkit. We recognize the importance of highlighting the voices of sex workers, who have previously been denied access to the processes of knowledge production regarding their own work and lives. As well as the testimonies of sex workers themselves, the practical knowledge of people involved with service provision for sex workers has also been used to create this toolkit. Examples of these groups include National Ugly Mugs, the Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement, the English Collective of Prostitutes and Umbrella Lane.

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 due to the rising cost of tuition fees and associated living expenses. According to The Student Sex Work Project in 2015, 5% of students have worked in the sex industry and 20% have considered it³. We surmise this is now likely to be higher.

Terminology

In this toolkit we have chosen to use the term 'sex work'. However, we are aware that some students will not identify with this language. This is because for some people sex work is only used to describe the direct provision of sex. Even students whose work involves commercial sex, may still not identify themselves as a sex worker. Having said this, the term 'sex worker' is often considered a less stigmatising alternative to other words like 'prostitute'; therefore, it is often the preferred term. It is important for staff to be mindful and intentional with language. If you are unsure of how someone identifies or how they wish to be referred to, ask.

Who are student sex workers?

A large proportion of student sex workers are from marginalised backgrounds from groups such as LGBTQ, people with disabilities or migrants/international students. Marginalised people are over-represented in the sex industry because they usually have less access to resources and other types of employment due to social inequality. For example, the gendered nature of austerity means that women are disproportionately impoverished. Moreover, disabled people are far more likely to be destitute than non-disabled people, and so on.

Why do students enter the sex industry?

Students enter the sex industry to pay living costs, including rent and food and maintain their quality of life. Significantly, students are also motivated by the need to fund studies and avoid ending their study period with a large amount of debt. There are numerous reasons why students find themselves in a position where they need money. Some students have caring responsibilities such as supporting children or other family members. Students with disabilities may work in the sex industry because other jobs do not accommodate their needs. International students with work restrictions may find the sex industry an easy way to get cash in hand. In addition to these examples, many other jobs simply do not pay enough for students to sustain themselves. Sex work allows for flexible working hours and has earning potential which usually exceeds that of other employment options available to students.

An additional consideration is that online adult platforms and subscription sites are increasingly targeting students during fresher's week to sign up to have a profile on types of platforms that enable older people to meet/date younger people. Particularly for international students, it may not be entirely clear what these sites are about, or what is involved in these meetings, leading to some individuals being distressed and unknowingly engaging in activities they would rather not. We are very aware that the language of 'sex work' is less likely to be one which students adopt, as identities are fluid and 'sex work' in people's mind can often mean only direct sex. Hence for staff, it maybe that sex work is taking place, but students are not using that language.

What difficulties do student sex workers face?

Student sex workers experience isolation and discrimination owing to the stigmatised nature of sex work. Some student sex workers report having to keep their work secret to avoid negative judgment from friends, family, and professional bodies like the university. Fear of abuse/violence is also a concern for student sex workers, both at the hands of the police and clients.

'Morality clauses' in tenancy agreements mean that student sex workers can face eviction if the landlord thinks they are acting immorally. This can lead to not getting a deposit back, inability to get references, and homelessness. If a student is evicted from a halls of residence, this can be put on their accommodation record, which can prevent them from obtaining accommodation in the future and could even be accessed by other university departments¹. In the worst-case scenario, student sex workers can be permanently expelled because they are seen to be 'bringing the university into disrepute'. This has far reaching ramifications for a student's ability to obtain an education.

Legality of sex work (UK)

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. Significantly, when sex workers are criminalised, they do not feel able to report instances of violence to the police. This pushes sex work underground and violates the human rights of sex workers.
- 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 among governments and policy makers. It may sound appealing, but it undermines the safety of sex workers and exposes them to violence.
- Thirdly, **legalisation/regulated** means that sex work is legal if it takes place in accordance with strict 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, meaning 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 and Wales, the law pertaining to the sex industry 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 – it is an offence for a person to persistently loiter for the purpose of or solicit (selling or attempting to sell sex) on a street or public place - if enforced, possible fine or ESO (Engagement and Support Order)
- 'Kerb-Crawling' with the intention of soliciting sexual services from a person – fine
- 'Brothel Keeping' means that sex workers can be prosecuted if more than one person is selling sex from a premise - fine or up to 7 years in prison
- Other offences like controlling, inciting and causing prostitution can be used against anyone who associates with a sex worker. For example, if a sex worker is driven to an appointment by a friend, this friend is subject to criminal sanctions.

Further details regarding the law within England and Wales can be found within the booklet Sex Workers and the Law (2017) link below:

<https://www.release.org.uk/publications/sex-workers-and-law-booklet>

In Scotland, the laws around sex work are relatively similar to those in England and Wales but slightly different acts/sanctions for example:

Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 *

Section 46(1) states that anyone, who loiters, solicits or importunes in a public place for the purposes of prostitution shall be guilty of an offence and liable to be fined up to £500. The fine is imposed on offence; the person is only found guilty if the fine is not paid.

Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007 *

This Act makes it illegal for anyone, male or female, to loiter or solicit in a 'relevant place' for the purposes of "obtaining the services of a person engaged in prostitution". Conviction of an offence under this act is punishable by a fine of up to £1000

Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 – (s.11) *

The law regarding sex work in indoor establishments, whether licensed or unlicensed saunas or flats, is governed by this act. Similar to England and Wales it illegal to run a brothel, i.e. more than one person working together or to 'exercise control, direction or influence' over a 'prostitute' – the latter carrying up to 2 years in prison.

It is illegal for a man (but not a woman) to knowingly live in whole or in part on money earned through prostitution. This extends to living with or being 'habitually' in the company of someone selling sex, if he knows what they do for a living. It can carry up to 2 years' imprisonment (this could affect students if they share a flat with a male friend and help out financially for example or have a boyfriend who could be accused of living off immoral earnings).

*The laws on indoor and outdoor working within Scotland are further explained in the SCOTPEP toolkit - <http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/sex-workers-toolkit/law>

Scottish policy defines sex work as commercial sexual exploitation; (Safer Lives: Changed Lives, Scottish Government, 2009; p7.) *and* (Equally Safe, Scottish Government, 2014, 2018), this policy is similar to the VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) policy within the UK. So, whilst policing balances public and community safety (i.e. public nuisance) concerns they are also expected to exercise discretionary policing when it comes to sex workers themselves. This also extends to discretionary sentencing decisions by the courts who report their approach as being focused on those 'who force others into prostitution, exploit, abuse and harm them' (CPS, 2019).

Further detail regarding Scottish policy and the CPS approach can be found on the links below:

https://www.parliament.scot/S4_MembersBills/2015-09-3_Prostitution_Law_Reform_Bill_consultation_-_final.pdf

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/prostitution-and-exploitation-prostitution>

In Northern Ireland, the sex industry is governed by the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. The act makes it illegal to pay for sex adhering to the sex buyers' law or 'Nordic' model.

- Paying for sexual services of a person (indoor or outdoor) – fine and/or up to 1 year in prison

- Controlling for inciting prostitution – up to 7 years in prison
- Brothel Keeping – manages or assists in the management of a brothel can carry a sentence of up to 7 years imprisonment (this applies to people working together)

Further explanation regarding the NI law can be found on the link below:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2008/1769/part/5>

The table below illustrates the main professions that exist within the sex industry and their legalities relating to law in England and Wales.

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

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

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 support¹. 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 questions but do not probe unnecessarily about their work.
- Expect their involvement in sex work to be hidden due to the risk of stigma/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 how to signpost students following a harm reduction approach to sex work.
- 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.
- Be aware of misconceptions around sex work to avoid perpetuating them.
- Accept that sex workers have agency and are the experts in their own lives.
- Challenge university policy which allows sex workers to be expelled for 'bringing the university into disrepute'.

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, or raise this in front of other people.
- Involve the police, even if this is done with the best intentions. The police are often involved in the harassment, arrest and deportation of sex workers.
- Make assumptions regarding involvement or motivations. Each person should be treated as an individual with varying needs.
- Ask details about their work unless the student has asked for specific help regarding this.
- Make assumptions about drug involvement, or the student's personal life.
- Assume the student wants to leave the sex industry.
- Try to 'save' student sex workers - always prioritise a harm reduction approach.

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://tsswpat.co.uk/>

This online training course has been developed by The Student Sex Work Project 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.

Most local and national services listed below also offer awareness raising/educational sessions regarding the sex industry. They can be contacted on the links below.

Key Services

National Services

Support for Student Sex Workers

An organisation run by former and current sex workers offering support to individuals involved in all aspects of the sex industry. <http://www.supportforstudentsexworkers.org/>

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)

A network of current and former sex workers, as well as allies, advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work, safety, and for financial alternatives so no one has to work in the sex industry because they have no other choice. <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/> Links regarding specific support for student sex workers: <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/how-can-we-help/who-can-we-help/sex-workers/> ; <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/how-can-we-help/other-help-and-support/online-privacy-tips-for-sex-workers> ; <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/resources/university-student-advice/>

Regional Services

North East

A Way Out - Outreach & Prevention Charity offering services to women selling sexual services on the street. <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/>

North East Sex Work Forum – a collective of agencies and academics dedicated to informing policy, improving service development and reducing stigma for people involved in all aspects of the sex industry across the North East and beyond. www.neswf.co.uk ; specific page for student sex workers: <https://www.neswf.co.uk/resources>.

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>

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

SWOP Sussex (Sex Worker's Outreach Project) – for women who live or work in the sex industry in Sussex. <https://www.oasisproject.org.uk/swop-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/>