

Continuing Conversation on Campus Safety
Sept. 21, 2016

Students and Colleagues,

Last Monday, in a meeting with the University Senate, we began the necessary dialogue about how we find additional ways to safeguard our students and each other by doing everything we can to prevent sexual assault and harassment.

The most pressing issue before us is the welfare of victim survivors – students, faculty or staff – who have been subjected to sexual violence and harassment. Our data shows that only one out of five student victim survivors is able to bring themselves to report an incidence of sexual assault.

Why don't 80 percent of them report – the desire for privacy, the overwhelming feeling of shame, retribution, or the understandable desire to forget.

And they fear the long-term repercussions of coming forward for their personal lives and their professional careers.

Under Title IX, our legal responsibility to victim survivors is clear:

- Stop the harassment
- Remedy the effects on the victim survivor
- Prevent the harassment from recurring

We are fulfilling these responsibilities through the dedicated and professional work of our Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Center, our Office of Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity, our Police Department, and our Office of Student and Academic Life. We all should take justifiable pride in their hard work in this wrenching environment.

But there is more to do. Together, as faculty, staff, and administrators, we have a window of opportunity to enact reforms to our system that will better protect our students, staff, faculty, and visitors. In doing so, we can help lead on a critical issue confronting institutions of higher learning across the country.

Over the next few months, working with faculty and staff leaders, including the University and Staff senates – and gathering input from across our campus and with our Board of Trustees – we aim to reach a consensus for action around three points:

- Training for graduate students and their mentors to help everyone understand the appropriate dynamics of that critical relationship better. The Provost already has begun examining options for how best to implement this initiative.
- Requiring anyone who is interested in joining our faculty to complete a questionnaire regarding their past relating to sexual misconduct and research misconduct. Today, for example, there is a higher standard in the Southeastern Conference for the acceptance of transfer student-athletes at an institution in this area than there is for the hiring of faculty. That's unacceptable.

- Establishing a specific and timely process for reviewing the appropriateness of faculty continuing in tenured and other faculty positions when there are clear examples of sexual misconduct. Tenure is an essential mechanism for ensuring academic and research freedom. But academic freedom is not at risk in these cases; the welfare of our students and other victims is. Due process for both the accused and the accuser is critically important in all cases, but we should be diligent in reviewing the propriety of someone remaining a member of our community.

We can take steps to address these gaps. We believe these common-sense reforms can be done in a spirit of collaboration.

As we move forward, we will be seeking input from across the campus while working to keep our campus informed as we make progress toward creating a safer and more inclusive campus community.

Thank you for your commitment to making that community a reality for everyone who calls UK home.

Eli Capilouto
President