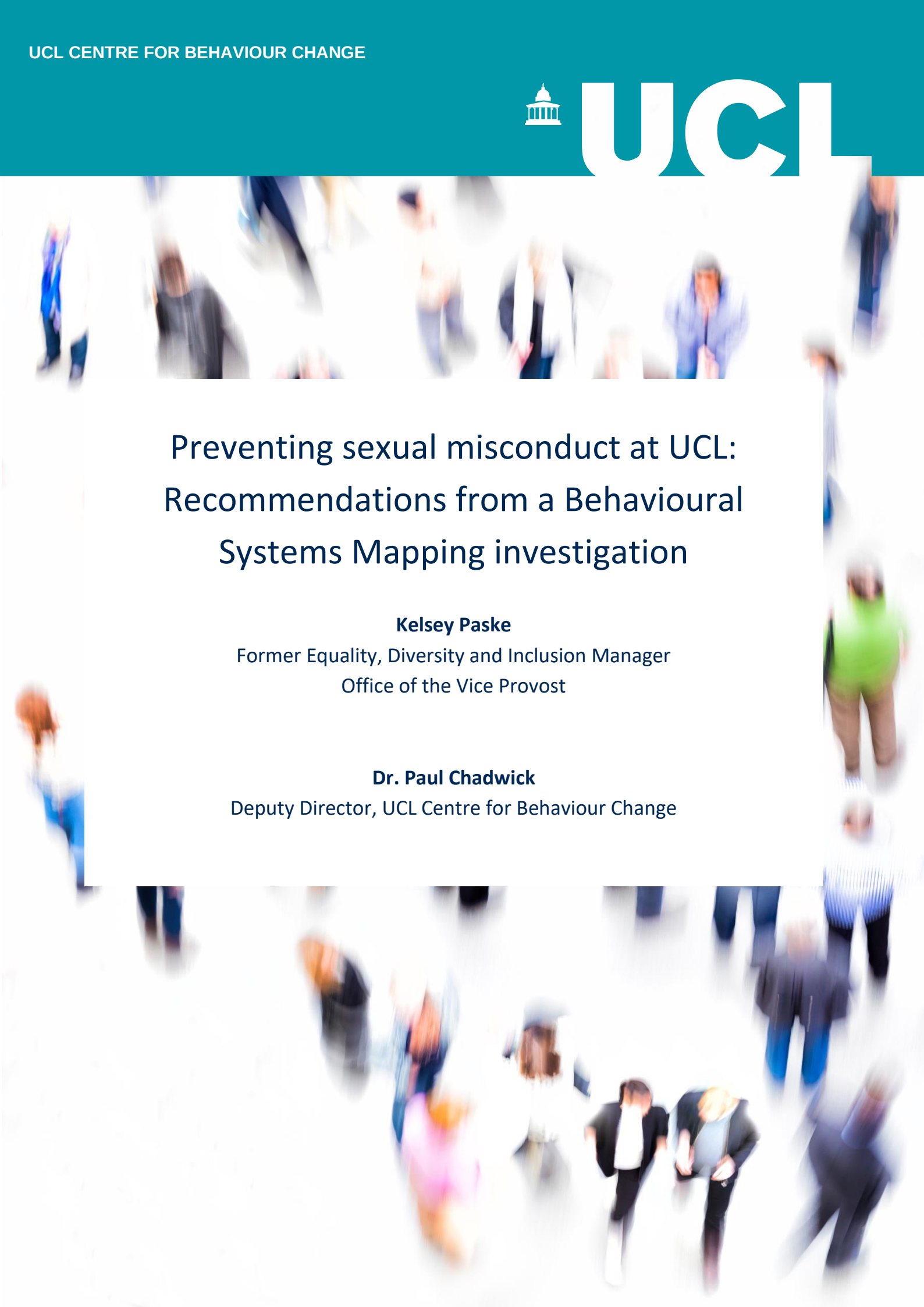


A large, blurred image of a crowd of people in motion, serving as the background for the entire page. The people are wearing various casual and business-casual clothing, and their movement is captured with a long exposure, creating a sense of a busy, dynamic environment.

Preventing sexual misconduct at UCL: Recommendations from a Behavioural Systems Mapping investigation

Kelsey Paske

Former Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager
Office of the Vice Provost

Dr. Paul Chadwick

Deputy Director, UCL Centre for Behaviour Change



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Introduction

In recent years the issue of sexual misconduct within Higher Education Institutions has been foregrounded by several reports documenting this as a normative experience for students, particularly for women. Whilst the magnitude of the problem is not yet definitively known, research conducted in the past ten years has provided an indication of the frequency and impact of sexual misconduct on individuals and university communities. Early work on the issue focussed on documenting the experience of student-to-student sexual misconduct. In 2010, the NUS Report *Hidden Marks* was influential in uncovering the scope of women students' experiences of sexual harassment in higher education in the UK. A further NUS report in 2014 on 'lad culture' found that 37% of women and 12% of men surveyed had faced unwanted sexual advances at university from other students. These reports highlighted the pervasive culture of sexism within UK universities that enable such high levels of sexual misconduct on campus. In response to these reports Universities UK published *Changing the culture* which provided a call to action for higher education institutions to address gender-based violence and hate-crime for students, along with recommendations on how to achieve this (2016).

Staff to student sexual misconduct

Whilst the 2010 and 2014 NUS reports focussed primarily on sexual misconduct within the student community, staff to student sexual misconduct is also a significant problem. The Power in the Academy report produced by the NUS Women's Campaign and 1752 Group provided detailed insights into the experience of staff to student sexual misconduct in higher education (2018). 41% of current or past student respondents to an online survey reported having experienced at least one instance of sexualised behaviour from staff, with 1 in 8 current students reported that they had experienced being touched by a staff member in a way that made them feel uncomfortable. More recently, Brook and Dig-In (2019) conducted a survey of UK students on sexual misconduct and found that 56% of respondents had experienced sexualised behaviour from university staff including touching, explicit messages, catcalling, sexual assault, and rape. In the majority of cases, staff to student sexual misconduct is carried out by academic rather than professional services staff, with the highest rates being reported

by PhD students and LGBTQ students. When the gender of the perpetrator of sexual misconduct is disclosed, the vast majority of cases are perpetrated by men (61%) although there is still a significant number of cases perpetrated by female academics (13.5%) (National Union of Students & The 1752 Group, 2018). The problem of sexual misconduct in the workplace is not unique to academia with the Trade Union Congress reporting that 52% of women said they had experienced sexual harassment at work (2016). It is clear that within universities and wider society the burdens associated with sexual misconduct fall primarily on women, with the majority of perpetrators being men. Thus, any understanding and response to the issue of staff-student sexual misconduct needs to be contextualised in the terms of the wider culture that enables such a gendered patterning of abusive behaviour.

Impact of sexual misconduct

Being subjected to sexual misconduct has wide ranging implications for an individual's personal and professional lives. Of those who experienced sexual misconduct, a fifth of women reported losing confidence in themselves, and marginally under a fifth experienced a mental health problem (Bull & Rye, 2018). Behavioural responses to being subjected to sexual misconduct in an educational setting include skipping lectures, tutorials, and supervision to avoid the perpetrator, as well as changing programmes or universities, and withdrawing from education itself. Compared to men, women are far more likely to respond to sexual misconduct in ways that could compromise their education and future career opportunities, potentially contributing to and widening the gender pay and achievement gaps that remain in UK society (National Union of Students & The 1752 Group, 2018).

Preventing sexual misconduct within UCL

In response to internal challenges and broader sector awareness of the issue of sexual misconduct, the then UCL President and Provost Professor Michael Arthur convened an internal conference in July 2017 and established a dedicated strategy group to review and make recommendations to change the institutions existing policies and practices. This led to the appointment of a full-time permanent post to oversee and implement key strategic changes. Such changes include the launch of Report +

Support and the Full Stop campaign, expansion of training to address bullying and harassment, use of external investigators and specialist support for students and staff, and policy changes to provide clear and consistent standards of behaviour for members of the UCL community to prevent abuses of power including the [Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy](#) and the [Personal Relationships policy](#).

Since the term 'sexual misconduct' refers to a continuum of behaviours the strategy group wanted to draw on the latest research into behaviour change science to understand why such behaviours happen, and how behaviour change science could play a key role in preventing them from occurring. UCL Centre for Behaviour Change, a world-leading institution on the science and practice of behaviour change, was approached to provide consultancy to support the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team in using frameworks and methods from behavioural science to understand and make recommendations for interventions to prevent sexual misconduct within UCL.

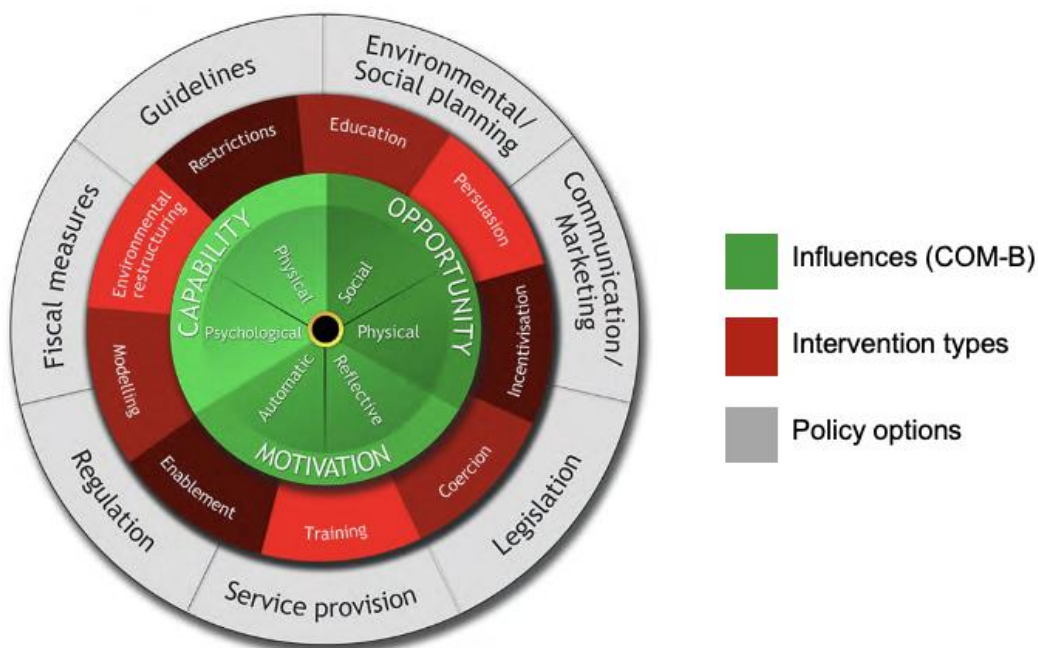
Using behaviour change science to understand and prevent sexual misconduct

Behaviour change is a relatively new and evolving discipline which brings together expertise from across disciplines to understand behaviour in context and how to change it. The Behaviour Change Wheel framework (BCW) is a flexible method for understanding behaviour and developing interventions to bring about change in the conditions influencing its expression. It was developed from an extensive review of behavioural science frameworks from many disciplines and sectors (Michie et al., 2011; Michie et al., 2014), bringing together their best features. Figure 1 shows the Behaviour Change Wheel with the green inner hub representing the major influences on behaviour, the red circle showing the range of types of intervention, and the grey outer circle showing possible policy options that support those interventions. The BCW has been used to address issues such as: domestic water use (Addo, et al., 2018), physical activity in school children (Martin & Murtagh, 2015), reducing sitting time in desk-based office workers (O'Connell et al., 2015), promoting independent living in older adults (Direito et al., 2017), supporting parents to reduce provision of unhealthy foods to

children (Johnson et al., 2018), and reducing workplace energy use (Staddon et al., 2016). It has also been used to address gender-based violence within low- and middle-income countries (Chadwick et al., 2020). More details of the Behaviour Change Wheel can be found at www.behaviourchangewheel.com.

Figure 1.

The Behaviour Change Wheel



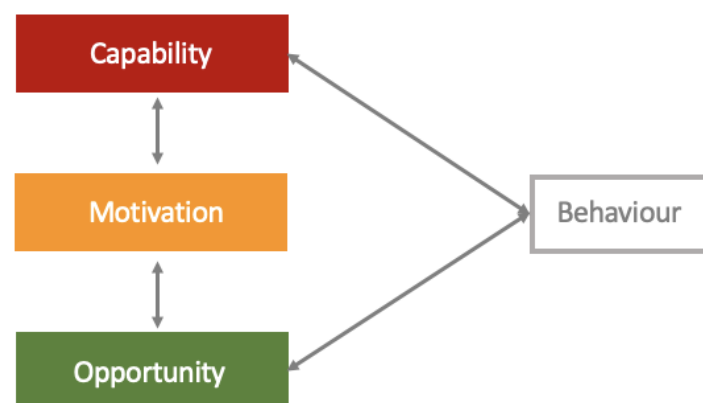
The COM-B Model

At the Centre of the BCW framework is the COM-B Model (Figure 2) which outlines the necessary conditions for any behaviour to be performed. It recognises that for any behaviour to happen people must have the capability, and the opportunity to perform it. And they must be more motivated to do that behaviour than anything else. A key feature of the BCW approach is the importance of understanding *behaviour in context*. The Opportunity domain of the COM-B model highlights the influence of the physical and social environment on behaviour. This can include how features of the physical space or resources such as budgets and financial incentives may shape behaviour, but also the influences of peers, the social and behavioural norms, beliefs and values of an institution, and the wider cultural context in which it is situated. The centrality and importance of theorising the influence of the external environment on the expression of

behaviour is a key feature of the COM-B model and BCW framework and differentiates it from other commonly used frameworks within behavioural science (EAST, MINDSPACE) which tend to foreground internal influences on behaviour rather than context. By having equal focus on internal and external influences on behaviour the BCW, and COM-B in particular, allows any given behaviour to be theorised within the complex system of its occurrence. This feature of the BCW means that it is particularly appropriate for investigating the causes of behaviours associated with sexual misconduct which occur within the context of the complex system that is an academic institution.

Figure 2.

The COM-B model of behaviour



Behavioural Systems Mapping

Any given behaviour such as sexual misconduct towards one person from another is located within a complex web of causal influences. These may include the behaviours of other people within the system, but also the structural features of the system itself, for example how a person's behaviour is viewed within the system, the content of the policies and procedures relevant to that behaviour, as well as their implementation (e.g., whether or not a manager institutes disciplinary procedure proscribed by policy in response to a reported event of sexual misconduct). Behavioural Systems Mapping is a method for exploring the complex causal relationships that influence expression of a target behaviour within a given system. Behavioural Systems Mapping has been used to map the influences on other behaviours located within complex systems in order to

inform recommendations for policy, most notably to inform recommendations to the Welsh Assembly to inform its decarbonisation policy for the Welsh Housing System (West et al., 2020).

Behavioural Systems Mapping involves bringing together key stakeholders with different experiences, and therefore understanding, of the behaviour under exploration. A range of participatory group methods are used to elicit each stakeholder's understanding of the problem which are recorded and then synthesised to create a Behavioural Systems Map using the conventions of Systems Mapping (Barbrook-Johnson & Penn, 2021). A Behavioural Systems Map is a visual representation of the shared understanding of the problem created by the process of stakeholder consultation. It displays the relationships between the key actors, behaviours and influences on a given behaviour highlighting how the behaviour is influenced by both simple and complex chains of causation such as feedback loops. Behavioural Systems Maps seek to generate a visual representation of a shared understanding of behaviour which reflects and integrates the perspectives of different stakeholders. This is particularly important when the issue under exploration can be experienced very differently by stakeholders who may exist in complex and unequal power relationships to each other, the operation of which may lead to the dominance of the perspective of a more powerful group over less powerful ones when understanding the problem.

Previous work in this area has highlighted how the institutional response to the issue of sexual misconduct has been largely framed by the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of academic intuitions, which has prioritised the male viewpoint subordinating the voices and contributions of the abused, usually women (Ahmed, 2015). The processes involved in generating Behavioural Systems Maps try to create more balanced view of the problem that represents equally the contributions of each stakeholder group, hopefully to create the conditions for a shared understanding of the problem, and more constructive conversations about how to resolve it.

Aims of the UCL CBC and EDI Collaboration

The collaboration between the CBC and EDI team began in January 2019. The agreed aims of the joint work were as follows:

- Build capacity through training and supervision for the EDI and HR Business Partnering teams to use the Behaviour Change Wheel framework to address a range of issues relating to bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct within the institution
- Use the framework of Behavioural Systems Mapping to identify the systemic influences on staff to student sexual misconduct within UCL with a view to make recommendations for interventions to make the institutions prevention efforts more effective. Given the high level of sexual misconduct reported by PhD students in previous reports, the analysis was targeted primarily to understand the experiences of this group.

Method

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were selected by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Manager responsible for commissioning the research. They were selected on the basis that they had been directly involved in at least one formal UCL process involving the management of an actual or alleged incident of sexual misconduct within the last 12 months. To minimise any possibility of bias or conflict of interest due to the researcher's personal relationships with colleagues, participants were selected from outside the department in which the researcher was located. Table 1 describes the composition of the sample.

Participants were made aware of the nature of research by the EDI Manager and preliminary consent to participate was obtained at that point. The names and contact details were shared with the researcher who contacted the participant and scheduled an interview directly, or through the EDI Manager. The researcher explained the nature of the study at the start of each interview and what use would be made of the data. Participants were asked to indicate that they were still happy to consent to be part of the research following this.

Table 1.*Participants' role and reasons for selection*

Participant ID	Role	Reason Selected for Participation	Participation in the Validation Meeting
1	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager	Experience in developing policy and direct management of reported incidents	
2	Human Resources Senior Manager	Experience of direct management of reported incidents	X
3	Professional Services Director	Responsibility for all policy related to management of reported incidents	
4	Case worker team	Experience of managing reported incidents	
5	Students' Union Representative	Experience of advocating for students reporting incidents	X
6	Student Representative	Experience of reporting an incident	
7	Dean	Experience of managing staff involved in reported incidents	X
8	Tutor and senior departmental manager	Experience of managing staff involved in reported incidents	x

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted in groups or in one-to-one settings. Some groups were interviewed in the presence of the EDI Manager (Specialist Team, Students' Union and Students, Human Resources, and Professional Services Director) and some only in the presence of the researcher (Dean, and Graduate Tutor). Due to the sensitive nature of the content matter, and that the research was being conducted within UCL using the experiences of UCL staff and students, the interviews were not recorded. This is consistent with the methods of other work investigating the institutional culture in relation to sexual misconduct (e.g., Phipps et al., 2018). Notes were taken by the researcher during the meetings and afterwards. All participants were asked to speak about incidents that illustrated important aspects of the system of dealing with sexual

misconduct in ways that prevented the specific incident or persons involved from being identified by the researcher. The exception to this was when reference was made to high profile cases within the institution that had received considerable attention within the public domain. The EDI Manager was both a commissioner and a participant in the research.

Interview protocol

Interviews were carried out using *Behavioural Systems Interviewing* (BSI) a technique specifically designed to elicit complex chains of causality involving behaviour. This technique draws upon methods common in applied psychology settings to identify the antecedents, consequences and maintaining factors involved in a problematic behaviour (Haynes and Hayes O'Brien, 2000) Characteristics of BSI include:

- Open-ended questions to elicit participants perceptions of the relevant actors, behaviours, and influences on the target behaviour (e.g., sexual misconduct towards PhD students by their supervisors)
- Targeted, but open-ended questions to establish perceptions of causality between different behaviours and influences using the Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequences (ABC) model of behaviour (e.g., 'what sorts of thing make (behaviour x) more or less likely to occur?', 'when (behaviour x) occurred, what happened next?' and 'when (behaviour x) occurred, who else does it have an impact on and how?').
- Questions to elicit the functional relationships and feedback loops in the perceived chains of causality (e.g., 'what role do the relationships between actors, behaviours and consequences play in maintaining the behaviour?')
- Questions to elicit participant's perceptions of chains of causality between different elements of the system and the target behaviour (e.g., 'could you explain how the low level of people management skills in academic staff increases the probability that supervisors will be sexually inappropriate with their students?')

Participants were asked to talk about the issue from their own experience, but also as representatives of their stakeholder group. This means that the experiences described in this report are composite descriptions of experiences of the system for a particular stakeholder group that should not be linked to any individual participant.

Data Analysis

All data was entered into an excel spreadsheet by the researcher using the following procedure

1. Variables were extracted from the interview notes and coded as an 'actor', 'behaviour' or 'influence'. A record was also made of the participant who identified each variable. If a variable was identified as coming from more than one source this was recorded. When required, variables were renamed to fit the conventions of behavioural systems mapping, for example converting variables that are about desirable future states (e.g., better training into communication skills in managing difficult conversations for line managers) into variables that reflect the current state (e.g., lack of communication skills in line managers) or to decompose complex constructs into simpler constituent parts that could be identified as an actor, behaviour or influence. A record was kept of all data that was transformed in this way. A total of 251 variables were identified.
2. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to identify clusters of variables that appeared to be linked with each other. Within each of these clusters the researcher also identified behaviours or influences that were felt were critical to the cluster and should be prioritised for inclusion in the map.
3. The excel spreadsheet, a description of the clusters and their critical behaviours or variables were passed to the principal stakeholder (EDI Manager) who reviewed these and indicated agreement or suggested alternatives to the critical variables.
4. The researcher uses the critical variables agreed with the principal stakeholder to build a prototype map using the conventions for constructing causal loop diagrams in systems mapping. A line between two variables suggests that there is a causal connection between the two variables (i.e., one influences the other) whilst the arrow on the line indicates the direction of causality (i.e., A influences

B). Lines between variables are labelled as positive (+) or negative (-). A positive line indicates that as the amount of one variable changes, the amount of the other variable changes in the same direction. A negative line indicates that as the amount of one variable changes the other changes in the opposite direction. This was reviewed once by the principal stakeholder who gave feedback following which another round of adjustments was made.

5. The researcher used the map to develop themes which described how the variables in the systems map influenced behaviours relating to sexual misconduct or its prevention. This was done to support users of the map to more easily interpret the data contained within it.
6. The resulting map was then presented to a subsample of participants who had contributed to its development by taking part in the focus groups or interviews. Participation was based on availability at the time of the validation meeting. Participants in this validation meeting were presented with an overview of the development of the map and given copies of the map to examine. The researcher presented the theme explaining how each worked independently, and with other themes, to contribute to the expression of behaviours associated with sexual misconduct. Participants were asked to comment on whether they felt the map and/or themes were an accurately reflection of their recollections of their contributions to the process of map building (i.e., contributions in focus groups and interviews), but also whether it represented a reasonable description of the complex web of influences that contribute to the expression of sexual misconduct within the institution. Participants in the validation group agreed that the map and the features reflected their contributions and was a reasonable representation of the system within the institution. No changes to the map were felt to be required following the feedback from the validation group.
7. To elicit further feedback and therefore validation of the map and themes, they were also presented to the following key groups of internal Participants; UCL Human Resources Leadership Team, UCL Organisational Development Leadership Team, HR Business Partnering, and EDI Team. There was consensus across all teams consulted that the map was an accurate reflection of the influences at play within the institution, and no further changes were required.

RESULTS

The causal loop diagram developed from the data is presented in Figure 3 which outlines the key variables involved in the system and illustrates how these are causally related to one another. The system themes derived from the causal loop diagram is presented on Figure 4.

Figure 3:

Behavioural Systems Map

Output from Behavioural Systems Mapping investigation into factors influencing staff-student sexual misconduct.

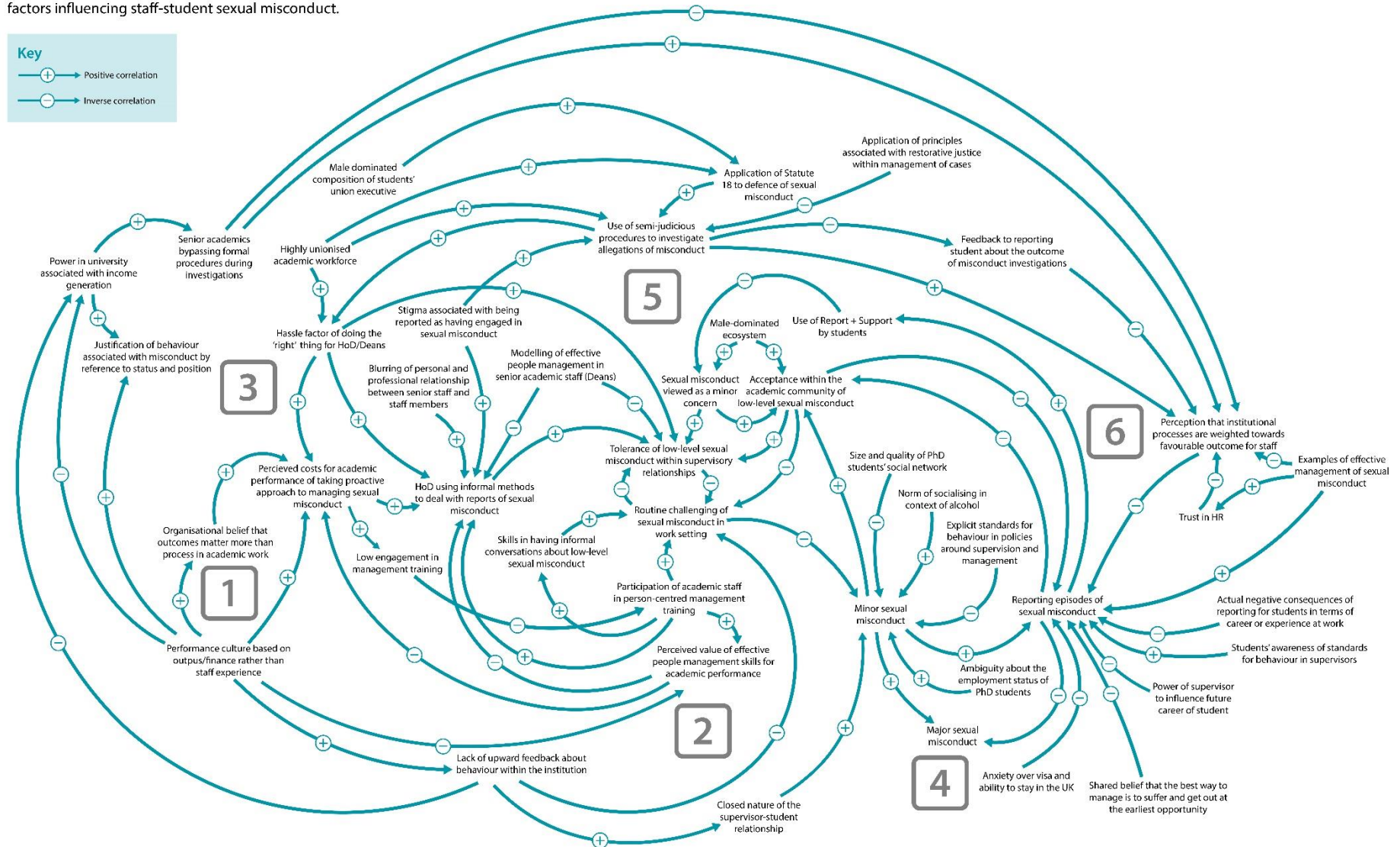
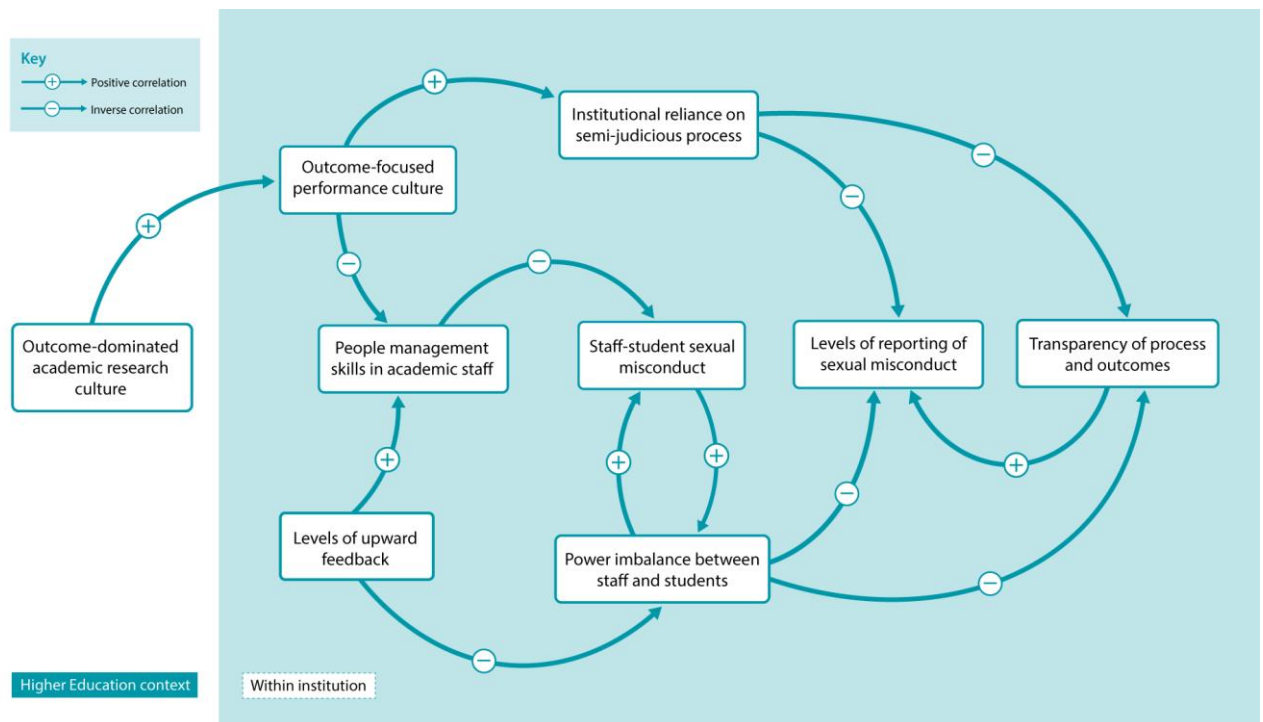


Figure 4.

System themes influencing staff-student sexual misconduct within UCL



Terminology

This report follows the conventions within UCL for referring to individuals involved in an allegation of sexual misconduct. The term ‘reporting’ is used to refer to a student or other individual who makes a report of sexual misconduct within the institution.

The term ‘reported’ is used to refer to staff members who have had a report of alleged sexual misconduct made against them within the institution. The terms ‘perpetrator’ and ‘survivor’ are used to refer to actors outside of the UCL system.

Themes

1. Power imbalances between the student and supervisor provide the setting conditions for the potential abuse of power

All participants identified imbalances of power as being at the heart of staff to student sexual misconduct, with supervisors having significantly more power than students.

Multiple contributions to this power imbalance were identified, including:

- *Structural power*; imbalances arising from differences in gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.
- *Institutional power*; imbalances arising from different access to the resources of the institution. For example, whilst staff have access to the resources of the institution as part of their employment status, students are situated outside of this and often lack rights associated with employment.
- *Social power*; imbalances arising from differences in the richness and accessibility of social support. For example, students are often living away from home and have limited social networks, particularly international students.
- *Financial power*; students are often on a low income and are dependent on their supervisor to earn additional income through activities such as teaching and marking.

Student representatives described several mechanisms by which imbalances of power contributed to the conditions enabling sexual misconduct. These included the need to be thought well of by supervisors to ensure success in their studies and to secure benefits like paid teaching opportunities. Student representatives described how students felt they had to 'put up' with sexually inappropriate behaviour from supervisors to access opportunities beneficial to their career, or to support themselves financially. Students who are perceived to have personal or sexual relationships with faculty members tend to be viewed and treated negatively by their peers, even when sexual attention from a staff member is unwelcome and unreciprocated. This can result in ostracism of the student by their peers, leading to isolation, reduced social support, and increasing dependence on their supervisor. Student representatives described that students feel powerless to stop sexual harassment at the moment of its occurrence, or to prevent future episodes once an incident has taken place. The main barriers to acting were fear of alienating supervisors, the possibility of retaliatory behaviour, and the potential negative impact that it might have on their immediate and future career plans.

The role of alcohol was mentioned by all participants as playing a significant part in enabling sexual misconduct. Socialising in the presence of alcohol – at both official

and unofficial functions – was felt to increase the risk of sexual harassment, but also to licence and excuse it. For example, students reported instances where supervisors exhibited unwanted sexualised behaviour in a social setting which was subsequently dismissed on the grounds of intoxication.

Although the student representatives in this sample were clear about the definition of sexual misconduct and the behaviours associated with it, they did not feel that this to be the case across the wider community of staff and students. This view was also endorsed by participants from academic and professional services staff. Student representatives perceived the preponderance of men in senior leadership positions within the university as contributing to the problem. References were made to the ‘old boys club closing rank’ as mechanisms by which reports of sexual misconduct could be silenced to protect individuals and the institution.

Links to existing research. In the university environment academic supervisors are gatekeepers to knowledge as well as sometimes providing pastoral support and care. They are uniquely placed to be trusted on both an intellectual and emotional level. Students are structurally positioned to trust those that teach them, and their progression and development rely on accepting the feedback that their teachers and supervisors provide (Whitely and Page, 2015). The NUS Power in the Academy report (2018) found that women PhD students were the group of respondents most likely to report all forms of sexual misconduct (‘major’ and ‘minor’). The nature of postgraduate study means that students spend a considerable amount of time with supervisors, work closely with a small cohort of peers, and are often also isolated geographically from friends and family. Geographical and social isolation is particularly enhanced for international students, who may be experiencing British culture for the first-time during their study. Instead of being taught by a range of different people PhD students are often reliant on a single supervisor which increases the power of one individual over another.

These features of postgraduate study create a power imbalance at the heart of the student-supervisor relationship, and this leaves students inherently vulnerable to the abuse of power. Previous work has emphasised role of power imbalances in

enabling sexual misconduct in higher education settings and the importance of considering multiple sources of inequality (Bull and Page, 2021). The unequal power structures of higher education (institutional power, financial power) interact with unequal power structures of gender, gender-identity, ethnicity, and sexuality to multiply vulnerability to the abuse of power. Risk increases at the intersection of these positions. The behaviour of supervisors and staff members can exacerbate existing power imbalances. Even minor forms of sexual misconduct – for example, noticeable displays of personal or sexual interest from a staff member to a student – disempower students by reducing support from peers and increasing their dependence on the staff member who is sexualising the relationship. Boundary blurring and grooming behaviours, such as meeting outside of university premises in the presence of alcohol, whilst not sexual misconduct in themselves, are part of a continuum of behaviours that might eventually lead to sexual harassment (Bull and Page, 2021). These behaviours should be recognised as risk factors by the institution so that students can recognise them and take action to minimise their impact.

The gendered nature of sexual misconduct in higher education is important. Men are far more likely to be perpetrators of sexual misconduct in a university setting and women are far more likely to be targets. The dominance of men in positions of power within an institution has been associated with higher levels of sexual misconduct (Gutek, 1985). There are several mechanisms by which unequal distribution of men within leadership positions may increase the prevalence of sexual misconduct within an institution. Firstly, holding a position of power has been linked with deficits in social perceptual processes that increase the likelihood of problematic behaviour. Being in a position of power has been associated with an inability to take the perspective of others (Galinsky et al., 2006), diminished concern or empathy with others (van Kleef et al., 2008), and difficulty perceiving ethical problems (Kennedy and Anderson, 2017). Powerful individuals within an institution are also often at a greater social distance from others making it less likely that they will recognise the harms resulting from their behaviour (Magee and Smith, 2013). Secondly, men identify fewer socio-sexual behaviours as sexual harassment than women and tend to perceive such behaviours as lower intensity problems (Rotundo et al., 2001).

Individuals are more likely to sexually harass another when they have had a previous positive power discrepancy experience, suggesting that failure to tackle minor forms of sexual misconduct may be a risk factor for the occurrence similar behaviour in the future (Walker, 2014).

Individuals who hold power within institutions have the prerogative to 'name the world' and it has been noted that discussions of sexual harassment are often characterised by the use of euphemisms and inability to name harassment (Wood, 1992). If the leadership team of an organisation is comprised of individuals who do not recognise the full range of behaviours that constitute sexual misconduct and recognise their impact, then it follows that they may struggle to create and implement effective policies and procedures to deal with the issue (Westmarland, 2019).

Departments and groups where men dominate the senior leadership team may be at particular risk of inadvertently creating or reinforcing an invisible network of power that makes sexual misconduct towards female students more likely. Conditions for the perpetuation of harassment may thrive in departments and leadership teams where there are multiple sources of power differential between staff and students, a lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment, and poor understanding of the social-psychological processes that blind supervisors to the impact of sexualised behaviour on students. The role of language in this process is critical. If most staff and students within the institution are not clear about what behaviours constitute sexual harassment, then the socio-psychological process involved in its expression cannot be disrupted.

2. 'High performance' culture in academia prioritises academic and financial success, over student and staff wellbeing

Academic and professional services staff located the problem of sexual misconduct within the context of the performance culture of the institution, and the wider higher education sector. The institutional culture was experienced by staff as a high-performance organisation which prioritised research outputs and financial success over staff and student wellbeing. The institutional culture was not thought to

contribute directly to sexual misconduct. Instead, it was thought to contribute indirectly by creating the setting conditions in which the potential for the abuse of power in the form of sexual misconduct could remain unchecked.

The systems by which academic performance is measured relate primarily to performance indicators such as the amount of funding secured and number of papers published, which reflect the ways that universities themselves are measured and benchmarked against each other. Academic and professional services participants identified high workloads, considerable pressure to perform, and the wider research culture as having a detrimental effect on academic staff wellbeing. This problem was not felt to be unique to UCL and participants felt that it was unlikely to change without reform in the wider sector.

The current performance culture was felt to drive a 'task-based' rather than 'person-centred' approach to management. Task-based management referred to conversations and activities that were primarily related to the outputs upon which a group or department were measured. Person-centred management referred to conversations or activities directed towards developing the broader skills of an individual through coaching techniques and improving the wellbeing of individuals, and wider culture of a group or department. Whilst a balance of task and person-centred management was felt to be required to work effectively as an academic, participants indicated that the institution devoted considerably less resource and placed less value on the development of skills for person-centred management. This was felt to create a strong disincentive for academic managers to engage in the development and use of skills to support person-centred management, even when such skills were highly valued.

A more holistic and person-centred approach to management was seen as an important component of preventing sexual misconduct and its harms. Academic staff felt that many instances of sexual misconduct could be prevented if managers had the time and skills to engage with team members in less transactional ways, and to give feedback and take action to address behaviours at lower ends of the

misconduct continuum to prevent subsequent escalation. All stakeholder groups felt that the performance culture of the organisation facilitated the expression of high levels of other behaviours that could be characterised by the misuse of power, such as bullying and non-sexual harassment.

Academic participants recognised that an effective institutional response to preventing sexual misconduct required more than simply policing the behaviour of problematic individuals. Rather, effective prevention and proven leadership requires greater clarity of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and time to develop and use a more person-centred management style that could tackle problematic behaviours. All participants felt that leadership and role-modelling of people-centred management should be embedded within reward and recognition frameworks such as the Academic Careers Framework.

Links to previous research. The experiences of academic and professional services staff in this study are consistent with other reports on the nature and impact of institutional culture in the higher education sector. The culture of individual institutions and the wider research environment have been identified as enabling a range of problems associated with the misuse of power within universities, including sexual misconduct. Across the sector, approximately 33% of researchers think that institutions deliberately turn a blind eye to issues of bullying and harassment, and only 45% of researchers feel that they are able to effectively balance the demands of the competing roles required of their employment (Wellcome, 2020). The Wellcome report into research culture acknowledged that increasing competition for grants, funds, and jobs creates conditions ripe for aggressive, unkind behaviour, crowding out collegiality and collaboration, generating high pressure as researchers try to succeed and survive. Academics feel that their employing institutions place little importance and emphasis within success frameworks on activities such as training, supervision, mentoring and coaching, all of which were identified in this study as potentially helping to prevent sexual misconduct.

3. Hierarchical nature of academic system limits opportunity for upward feedback about behaviour

The need for people to recognise the impact of their behaviours upon others, and the specific role of feedback in enabling this, featured heavily in participants' accounts of the conditions enabling or discouraging sexual misconduct. Participants felt that there was variable understanding across the academic community about the negative impact of sexual misconduct. The negative impact of behaviours falling at the 'minor' end of the continuum (e.g., sexualised language, unsolicited physical contact) was felt to be least well understood. Ambiguity over what constitutes sexual misconduct, particularly at the 'minor' end of the continuum was thought to facilitate expression of problematic behaviours. High levels of sexualised behaviour in day-to-day academic life were highlighted as a particular issue, making it difficult for participants who had experienced sexual misconduct to identify it as being problematic. This normalisation of sexualised and grooming behaviours created doubt in the minds of those experiencing sexual misconduct about whether raising the issue would be taken seriously.

Feedback about the appropriateness or impact of behaviour that could be considered sexualised was thought to be an important mechanism by which ambiguities could be clarified, and 'minor' misconduct prevented from escalating into even more damaging forms. However, the costs of giving such feedback were experienced as extremely high for students. Staff-student power imbalances meant that students found it difficult to give informal feedback directly to members of staff who had behaved in sexually inappropriate ways. Although it is possible to give formal feedback about supervisors' behaviour using Report and Support, this was also perceived as a high-risk strategy, particularly for behaviours towards the minor end of the sexual misconduct continuum. All forms of feedback about a supervisor's behaviour – whether this was formal, informal and with or without anonymity – were experienced by students as having potentially significant negative consequences for their education and careers. Report + Support data (UCL, 2019) demonstrates that one of the key reasons students and staff chose to report unacceptable behaviours anonymously is because they are worried about impact it would have on their

careers. Other key barriers also include fear of being labelled a 'troublemaker', retaliation from the supervisor, and that no action would be taken.

Sexual misconduct was not the only supervisor behaviour mentioned as having a negative impact on student's wellbeing and performance. Bullying and non-sexual harassment were also referenced in the interviews. Student representatives could not identify any routine and formal mechanisms that would allow them to give feedback about problematic behaviour of supervisors. Participants linked the lack of a routine formal feedback mechanism for PhD students to feedback about supervisors' behaviour to wider patterns of feedback within the institution. They identified the institution as a 'fiercely' hierarchical system in which feedback largely flowed from senior members of staff to junior ones, or in some instances through peers reviewing each other. Feedback about the behaviour of academics is limited to their academic colleagues. Professional services staff do not routinely provide feedback on the performance or behaviour of academic staff, although academic staff are often responsible for the appraisal of professional services staff. Participants from professional services groups highlighted how fundamental differences in the frameworks for managing performance between academic and professional services staff amounted to a double standard within the institution.

Frameworks for managing professional services staff hold them to higher standards of behaviours in relation to bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct than those for academic staff, for example the test for professional services is gross misconduct (which aligns with employment law), whereas the test for senior academic staff is 'conduct of an immoral, scandalous or disgraceful nature incompatible with the duties of the office or employment.' Internal data on disciplinary incidents were cited which suggests that academics are twice as likely to allegedly perpetrate sexual misconduct compared to professional services staff, they are less likely to be terminated for sexual misconduct. It was noted that professional services staff can be witnesses to unacceptable behaviour in their academic colleagues and may themselves be subject to this. The absence of a formal mechanism by which one group of staff can feed back on the behaviour of another group was thought to be

another mechanism maintaining expression of unacceptable behaviour. It was felt that some of the principles within the professional services career framework could be brought into the career framework for academic staff.

Links to previous research. Sexual misconduct is a violation of the power differential between two individuals. The act itself exacerbates this power differential by further reducing the power of the person to whom it is directed, increasing the likelihood of further abuse (see *Theme 1*). Institutions can reinforce this widening of the power differential by 'increasing the cost of challenging power' (Ahmed, 2017).

The absence of a routine mechanism by which PhD students can feed back about the behaviour of their supervisor creates an additional burden for those who experience sexual misconduct by requiring them to initiate a 'special' process of complaint. The lack of any form of upward feedback mechanism within the UCL academic performance appraisal structure means that there is little opportunity for the student-supervisor power differential, and the potential for abuse that it creates, to remain unchecked. The lack of a formal mechanism to collect and review feedback from junior members of staff about senior members of staff, or from professional services staff to academic staff, means that there is no formal institutional record of the behaviour of staff who repeatedly violate the standards expected by the institution. This is likely to contribute to the persistence of sexual misconduct, but also other problems associated with the misuse of power such as bullying and harassment.

4. Low levels of people management skills contribute to difficulties in dealing with problematic non-performance related behaviours

Academic and student participants reported that recent initiatives within the institution had increased staff and student awareness of the range of behaviours that could be defined as sexual misconduct. All participants felt that such initiatives had increased the willingness of academic staff to address sexual misconduct when it occurred but did not necessarily equip staff with the interpersonal and

communication skills required to deal effectively with it once it had been recognised and reported.

Participants described being aware of episodes where academic staff knew of instances of sexual misconduct but did not instigate a formal report. A lack of formal reporting did not mean a lack of action to address the issue. Participants reported instances of academics attempting to deal with the issue informally, for example by speaking 'off the record' to the instigator of the act, or by taking steps to limit the potential for future abuse by limiting contact between the staff member and the student. Informal management of sexual misconduct was thought to be common response to being made aware of the problem. However, such actions were not often communicated to the reporting party, contributing to a generally held belief within the student body that there was little point in reporting since 'nothing will be done' (see *Theme 6* for an elaboration of the processes involved in this).

Academic and professional services participants talked about the burden of dealing with sexual misconduct for academic staff. Being made aware of the potential sexual misconduct of a colleague often generated significant emotional and administrative burdens on top of the relentless pressure to perform high quality impactful research, bring in grant money, and maintain one's status within the institution. Academics were felt to be poorly equipped by the institution with the person-centred management skills required to skilfully handle reports of sexual misconduct. This contributed to the experience of burden (see *Theme 2*).

Participants identified several factors contributing to an over-reliance on informal management, labelled by one participant as 'brushing it under the carpet'. These included the conflation of personal and professional relationships, for example, failing to act because of a personal connection or loyalty to the reported party, and anticipated discomfort arising from not having the skills to handle a conversation about a sensitive and stigmatising issue. It was also felt that there was implicit organisational pressure to avoid formal reporting in order to protect the reputation of the reported academic, the department in which they were located, or the wider

institution. The rotational nature of the Head of Department in some departments was felt to contribute to a reluctance to instigate formal processes.

Student representatives also described instances where informal management of reported cases had taken place. Whilst informal management had sometimes led to satisfactory outcomes for the student, it was also felt that reliance on informal processes was not fair and not right.

The burdens associated with managing reports of sexual misconduct were felt to be like those experienced when dealing with other problematic behaviours related to the misuse of power, for example bullying and non-sexual harassment. Participants described that academics within the institution receive very little training in management as they progress through an academic career, such that even senior academics may have never received any formal management training. If individuals receive such training it is often a single event, with limited opportunity for ongoing reflection and development.

Links with previous research. Reports of sexual misconduct create significant emotional and administrative burdens for academic staff. Senior academics articulated conflict and discomfort when faced with issues of dealing with sexual misconduct. This came from experiencing a strong moral obligation to speak out and take action pitted against the need to sustain extremely high levels of performance within an environment perceived to be unsupportive of the time taken to manage such instances with the required level of sensitivity and due process. Whitley and Page (2015) highlight the importance of acknowledging the labour and emotional energy that goes into addressing issues of sexual harassment. One contribution to this burden is the perceived lack of person-centred management skills required to respond effectively to this kind of problem. Academics and those responsible for supporting them described that academics receive very little training in management as they progress through an academic career structure, meaning that academics could find themselves in senior leadership positions, and therefore positions of institutional power, without engaging in any form of management training. It has

been noted that leadership, and management in academic institutions poses unique challenges and is particularly demanding when compared to other types of organisations (Murphy, 2003; Rowley and Sherman, 2003; Smith and Hughley, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). Whilst there is a long tradition of enhancing the practice of teaching and learning within academia (Tigellar et al, 2004) programmes for the development of management skills at all levels of leadership are much less common and not universally valued or accessed (Strathe and Wilson, 2006; Wolverton et al., 2005; Braun et al., 2016).

The perceived value of development opportunities within a workforce is linked to how an organisation defines success. The Wellcome report on research culture reported that less than half of academic managers surveyed stated that they received any training on managing people, and only 44% believed good management and leadership was recognised in their workplace. If research success is the only outcome by which performance is measured, then research-related development opportunities will be valued more and prioritised over opportunities to develop person-centred management skills (see *Theme 2*).

Tenbrunsel et al (2019) argue that lack of investment in the universities to develop senior management means that individuals in such roles may be unprepared, less inclined and less able to deal with issues such as sexual harassment. The Wellcome report (2020) highlighted a disconnect between supervisor's perceptions of their own management skills and the perceptions of those they supervise. Many researchers want their principal investigators to take more training in management and create opportunities to collect feedback on this aspect of their role (Van Noorden, 2018). The experiences of participants in this report, along with the findings of previous research, reinforce the importance of upward feedback in the development of a management culture that can deal sensitively and effectively with issues of sexual misconduct (see *Theme 3*).

The management practices of individuals contribute significantly to the organisational climate of an institution, which has been identified as a factor in the expression of sexual misconduct. The inability of managers to identify and provide feedback on behaviour related to sexual misconduct creates the conditions for it to flourish. Research has also identified other forms of non-sexual anti-social behaviour to be a factor in the expression of sexual harassment. 'Incivility,' defined as rude and discourteous behaviour that lacks intent to harm has been recognised as an antecedent of and contributor towards the occurrence of sexual misconduct within organisation (Cortina et al, 2013; Leskinen et al., 2011). Incivility within higher education institutions is common as academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members to express unpopular or controversial ideas and views and the habits of intense critical review can spill over from intellectual discourse to the expression of personal views and interactions (Kelly, 2017). Incivility alienates those to whom it is directed, and these effects are disproportionately experienced by women and individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Brief, 2008; Cortina et al., 2013; Leskinen et al., 2011). This suggests that incivility may further reduce the power of those most at risk of experiencing sexual misconduct, exacerbating the power differential that provides the setting conditions for abuse (see *Theme 1*).

5. Use of and reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process in response to reports of sexual misconduct

All participants recognised that an allegation of sexual misconduct is a serious and stigmatising event for both parties. Reported individuals are at risk of losing their job or other career-limiting sanctions. Reporting parties are at risk of being ostracised by their peers, switching institutions, and dropping out of their studies, even when an allegation is upheld. In recognition of this all parties articulated that any process of investigation is thorough and fair. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that students and academics do not have access to equal resources during the investigatory process. Student participants felt that the policies and procedures that come into play after a report is made are weighted in favour of the academic. Participants referred to reporting and responding to an allegation of sexual harassment as a 'high stakes game' based on an adversarial process in which there can only be winners and losers.

The adversarial nature of the process was experienced as creating burden for academic managers responsible for investigating reports. One participant referred to the use of such formal processes to manage minor forms of sexual misconduct as 'using a sledgehammer to crack a nut'. Participants described being aware of instances where the anticipated emotional and administrative burdens associated with managing a report had led others to manage reports informally. Such burdens were not unique to academic managers - the process of investigation was experienced as burdensome for all involved parties. Student participants highlighted the lack of support for emotional burdens experienced during the process. Emotional burdens and the perception that the process was unfairly weighted towards academics was identified as a factor in students withdrawing reports or failing to report in the first place.

Academic and professional services staff highlighted that academic managers do not always possess the person-centred management skills to deal effectively with reports of lower-level misconduct. It was felt that equipping managers with the person-centred management skills to deal effectively with more minor forms of sexual misconduct would help prevent more serious incidents from occurring. However, it was also felt that organisational support was needed to enable managers to put such skills into practice. Respondents articulated a need to find alternative ways to deal with reports of minor sexual misconduct that recognised the seriousness of the behaviour but were less stigmatising for the reported and reporting parties.

Links to previous research. The adversarial and unequal nature of HEI processes related to the investigation and management of reports of sexual misconduct have been described in previous work (Bevan et al., 2020). Higher education institutions can take steps to equalise power by adopting policy consistent with the processes involved in civil law cases by giving both the reported and reporting party equal access to the process. Equalising the institutional power imbalance may help to increase the reporting of cases by students and reduce the withdrawal of cases by changing student's perceptions that the process of investigation is weighted towards

protection of the reported party and the institution. This would include initiatives which provide support to students during the process, not just legal support.

Equalising power may be necessary but insufficient strategy to prevent sexual misconduct, especially for the management of behaviours at the minor end of the continuum. All respondents felt that there needed to be alternative processes for dealing with minor incidents, but professional services and academic staff highlighted the need for greater training on how to deal more effectively with such behaviours. At present the burdensome nature of the investigatory process discourages formal reporting and encourages informal management. Over-reliance on informal management contributes to institutional blindness about the prevalence and impact of the issue. This prevents the institution from taking the necessary steps to create a culture in which the abuse of power is no longer tolerated. This reinforces the findings reported in *Themes 2, 3 and 4* about the need to support the development of person-centred management practices within the academic workforce.

Whilst all forms of sexual harassment are harmful and unwelcome in the workplace it is also the case that such behaviours fall on a continuum in terms of severity and impact. Dealing effectively with so-called 'minor' forms of harassment may prevent escalation into more damaging behaviours. Institutions that have a range of ways to deal with sexual misconduct, not simply reaching for an adversarial, semi-judicious process may be more effective at preventing misconduct. Approaches to managing sexual misconduct derived from the concept of restorative justice may be usefully applied to the issue of sexual misconduct within institutions. This is an umbrella term for a 'range of processes that bring together offenders, victims and other members of a community with the aim of understanding the impact of a wrongdoing and resolving collectively how the accused can make amends to the victim and wider communities' (McGlynn & Westmarland, 2019). The benefits of this approach are predicated on the acknowledgement of responsibility by the accused. Principles of restorative justice could be applied to the development of interventions to deal with minor incidents of sexual misconduct. This might work to reduce the stigma for both parties

and increase productive dialogue that might lead to modification of behaviour, particularly in those cases where misconduct arises from a lack of understanding.

6. Lack of institutional trust and transparency over outcomes

Student participants described very low trust in the institution to deal effectively with reports of sexual misconduct, and this distrust extended to the wider higher education sector. Several factors contributed to low levels of trust. Whilst student representatives were aware of instances where peers had reported sexual misconduct of supervisors and other academic staff members, they reported being unaware of the outcomes of such reports. Student participants felt that there were no readily available narratives within the student body which described how the institution had taken official action to sanction staff members found to have sexually harassed students. Students were aware that actions were sometimes taken in response to a report, for example switching supervisors or finding other ways to limit contact between the reporting and reported individual. However, since these actions did not represent an official acknowledgement that sexual misconduct had taken place, this was experienced by the student as invalidating their experience.

Professional services staff acknowledged that institutional practices at the time that this study was conducted meant that students who make reports do not get feedback on the outcome of the university's investigations, even in cases where the institution has identified that serious misconduct has occurred. Since the time of the original interviews steps have been taken to improve processes to enable sharing of outcomes with reporting parties.

All participants made reference to high profile media of academics who have failed to experience sanctions despite evidence of serious sexual misconduct. These cases were cited as evidence of wider systemic failure in the higher education sector to deal effectively with sexual misconduct. The narrative of 'superstar academic' who could behave inappropriately with impunity on account of their value to the institution featured strongly in the contributions of all participants.

Low levels of trust in the organisation when combined with the high costs of raising concerns (see *Theme 5*) were felt to strongly discourage students from making formal reports of sexual misconduct. This affected student's willingness to report regardless of whether the reporting could be done anonymously or non-anonymously. All participants felt that the prevalence of sexual misconduct within the institution was greater than reported in official statistics.

There were two clear but contradictory narratives about the organisations' response to sexual misconduct within the different communities of the institution. Within the student body, the dominant narrative is one of distrust. Student representatives expressed a widely held view across the student body that the policies and procedures in place for dealing sexual misconduct were weighted to prioritise and protect the reputational and financial status of the institution over the physical and emotional health of students. This stands in stark contrast to the 'official' narrative of the institution which promotes the idea that this issue is taken seriously. However, the lack of visible action by the institution to issue sanctions against staff members who violate its code of practice widens the disconnect between these two accounts of institutional life. This seeds mistrust in the student body with the consequence that students who experience misconduct do not report their experience.

Links to previous research. When an instance of sexual misconduct is formally reported, the principle of confidentiality comes into play to protect the reporting student, to safeguard the reputation of the reported individual, and to protect the institution. Current institutional practices in relation to investigating and reporting the outcomes of reports of sexual misconduct mean that students who report instances of sexual misconduct do not get feedback on the outcome of the organisations' investigations, even in cases where the institution has identified that misconduct did occur. The secrecy imposed by confidentiality can obscure sexual harassment from public view.

The lack of transparency imposed by the requirement of confidentiality is common across the sector and is related to the use of an institutional process modelled on criminal rather than civil justice principles (see *Theme 5*). The confidential nature of

the investigations process means that even when a faculty member is subject to severe sanctions the victim and wider community are unaware of this. This perpetuates a lack of trust in the institutions processes and contributes to the persistence of the unacceptable behaviour due to the lack of modelling of an effective process to deal it (Tenbrunsel et al, 2019). The lack of clear narratives about sanctions arising from sexual misconduct may also reinforce the lack of awareness about what behaviours constitute sexual misconduct described in *Theme 1*. It is likely the institutions failure to acknowledge that an assault has occurred has a negative effect on the psychological adjustment and recovery for individuals who have been assaulted (Whitley and Page, 2015).

The true prevalence of sexual misconduct is likely to be higher than reported in official institutional statistics. The most common response to being sexually harassed in a university context is to remain silent (Knapp et al, 1997). Only 8-10% of students who experience sexual harassment report it to university agency or police (Revolt Against Assault, 2018; Cantor et al., 2015). Narratives about institutional inertia or non-action in response to reports of sexual harassment have been linked to reduced levels of reporting within universities (Offermann and Malamut, 2002), and the visibility and proportionality of sanctions have been noted to contribute to institutional norms that support the expression of unacceptable behaviour (Tenbrunsel et al., 2019; Offermann and Malamut, 2002; Willness et al, 2007). Lack of visible action or feedback by the institution reinforces norms that perpetuate the abuse of power as those with less power become socialised to expect that nothing can or will be done (see *Theme 1*, Davis et al., 2017).

The importance of wider cultural narratives about the ability of 'superstar' academics to act with impunity has not featured heavily in published research about the issue of sexual misconduct in higher education. The fact that this featured strongly in participant's accounts of the issue reinforces the importance of considering the role of the culture and leadership on this issue, reinforcing the issues around performance culture described in *Theme 2*.

Discussion

This piece of work used the method of Behavioural Systems Mapping to explore the influences on sexual misconduct within a single Higher Education Institution. The resulting systems map synthesizes the perspectives of stakeholder groups with very different experiences of the behaviour; those who have been sexually harassed, academic staff responsible for investigating and managing reports of sexual misconduct, and the professional services staff responsible for supporting those affected by the issue and drafting and implementing policy to address it. To our knowledge this is the first time that behavioural systems mapping has been applied to the issue of sexual misconduct and the first analysis to integrate different perspectives on the problem to create a shared understanding that can form the basis for institutional change. [Table 2](#) summarises recommendations derived from this analysis.

The primary subject of this research was to explore influences on staff-student sexual misconduct. However, most participants felt the conditions enabling student-supervisor sexual misconduct enabled staff-staff sexual misconduct, and other behaviours characterised by the misuse of power such as bullying and other forms of harassment under the Equality Act 2010. Many of the recommendations made in this report could also be applied to reducing bullying and non-sexual harassment.

Performance culture

It is widely acknowledged that the UK higher education requires reform in relation to research culture (Wellcome, 2020). Current practices within the sector have created a hostile setting in which academics and the institutions they work for are pitted against each other creating opportunity for unhealthy competition. This can lead to organisational cultures characterised by relentless pressure, competition and incivility that can incentivise expression of problematic behaviours and disincentivise pro-social behaviours. The accounts of staff, students and professional services staff in this study found evidence that many elements of this wider culture are at play

within UCL, creating the setting conditions for the expression of a range of problematic behaviours, including sexual misconduct.

A unique finding in this study was the high level of conflict and burden experienced by academic staff in relation to the management of sexual misconduct. Whitley and Page (2015) have drawn attention to the burden of sexual misconduct for students, but the experiences recounted in this study suggest that academic staff experience the issue as burdensome also. Responding to awareness of sexual misconduct was experienced as an ethical dilemma by academic staff. Staff were not blind to the occurrence of the issue and its impact and felt a strong ethical push to address the issue. However, the performance culture of the institution, the burdensome nature of the process for dealing with it, and the perceived lack of effective management skills to address it, worked together to provide strong disincentives for academics to behave in line with their values. This suggests that an effective institutional response cannot simply rely on consciousness raising and reporting. While such initiatives are necessary an effective response will require that academics and professional services staff have the necessary resources – time and skills – to act on their knowledge. Put simply the institution needs to re-engineer the system to reduce unnecessary friction for academics to do the right thing when they become aware of sexual misconduct.

Power imbalances between student and supervisor

Inequalities of power lie at the heart of staff-student sexual misconduct. Whilst it is not possible to eliminate many aspects of this inequality it is possible to put in place checks and balances to prevent its abuse. Creating clearer and behaviourally specific guidance on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within a supervisory relationship will help to increase awareness of what constitutes sexual misconduct. This has partly been addressed through guidance included within the [Personal Relationships Policy](#). This policy sought to prohibit relationships between students and staff where there was direct supervision, and to require all staff in relationships to declare where there may be a real or perceived conflict of interest. However, this analysis suggests that it would be helpful to officially recognise

boundary blurring and grooming behaviours in UCL policy (National Union of Students and The 1752 Group, 2018; Bull and Page, 2021).

Initiatives that reduce the reliance of the student on a single person will also diffuse the potential for the abuse of power: for example, mandating and monitoring the implementation of secondary or co-supervisors, perhaps with clear expectations that the secondary or co-supervisors have a role to play in ensuring that the students are not experiencing any form of unacceptable behaviour associated with the misuse of power. Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly (2005) propose that intervention by observers of sexual harassment will increase when there exist organisational role expectations for taking action. Including a co-supervisor addresses the reliance on one person to provide supervision, and the closed nature of the student-supervisor relationship. Furthermore, it will provide clarity of roles and expectations which may increase the likely intervention if unacceptable behaviour occurs.

The NUS *Power in the Academy* report highlighted how the experience of sexual misconduct is normative for the majority of students within UK Higher Education institutions with four in ten students reporting having at least one experience of sexualised behaviour from staff, with a further five percent indicating they were aware of instances of sexualised behaviour happening to someone they know (National Union of Students and The 1752 Group, 2018). More extreme forms of sexual violence and abuse from staff towards students are relatively low frequency events, albeit with devastating consequences for the individual who experiences them. However, the high frequency of subtle forms of sexual misconduct are thought to play a significant role in enabling more extreme forms by contributing to the sexualisation of learning spaces that are shared by students and staff. Because of their everyday nature these subtle, but still sexualised, behaviours of staff create a culture in which boundaries between the personal and professional are blurred and creates opportunities for sexual misconduct. The results of this study suggest that there is widespread ambiguity about the nature of minor sexual misconduct within the institution. This lack of understanding of the nature and impact of behaviours such as grooming, sexualised language, and touching creates missed opportunities to

prevent harms arising from minor sexual misconduct and paves the way for more serious forms.

People management and providing effective feedback

A key challenge for supervisors is managing underperformance effectively without engaging in behaviour that could be labelled bullying. Currently the [Where do you draw the line training](#) explores the difference between firm management and bullying, however there is limited opportunity in this training for participants to develop the person-centred management skills to provide feedback constructively. Therefore interventions like developing scripts and role play will be critical for embedding skills and competencies amongst UCL staff with line management or supervisory responsibilities. These core competencies are required in all effective people managers and training to help establish these competencies should be mandatory.

Effective people management in academic staff was identified as a critical feature of a system that discourages sexual misconduct and other unacceptable behaviours. Initiatives that improve academics recognition of the importance of person-centred management will contribute to an environment where the continuum of sexual misconduct behaviours can be managed more effectively. Increasing the confidence of academic managers to deal with sexual misconduct and consistent implementation of policies designed to reduce the enabling conditions for misconduct (e.g., heavy reliance on alcohol, supervision in non-institution environments) could reshape the behavioural and social norms enabling the routine sexualisation of academic life.

The research identifies the need to model effective people management across all staffing roles and functions. However, work is needed to ensure that effective people management is viewed and accepted by the academic community as essential to being a UCL academic. This is inherently linked to how success is defined, and

performance is measured. Therefore, it is critical to enable academic staff to develop and practice effective management and leadership, and for this to be evaluated throughout the academic pipeline, particularly during the promotions process.

The current institutional learning and development portfolio has a number of courses relating to management and leadership skills, including courses specifically targeted at research staff to develop management and leadership skills. However, there is no mandatory training within this offering, or core competencies outlining management essentials for all staff.

This analysis suggests that feedback is critical for improving person-centred management and reducing sexual misconduct. Reshaping feedback culture within the institution by developing processes for feedback from junior to senior staff, and between different professional groups will increase accountability and reduce the propensity of informal management of misconduct.

Judicious and investigative processes

Having clear, transparent and trauma-informed policies and processes is essential to providing effective support for survivors and holding reported parties to account (Donaldson et al., 2018; SAMHSA, 2014 as cited in Humphreys and Towl, 2020). In February 2020, UCL introduced new policies which included definitions of UCL of sexual misconduct, abuse of power and consent. The Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy also introduced new processes to address inconsistent approaches and the barriers to reporting, including: a risk assessment framework and interim measures, environmental investigations from cluster reporting and providing clarity on what information can be shared with the reporting party regarding the outcome. While the policy changes are a necessary step, there is a significant need to ensure both policies are communicated and implemented effectively.

Increased transparency over the outcomes for formally reported cases may be necessary to promote fair treatment and to see an increase in reporting. This provides students and staff the sense that action is taken to address problematic behaviour which may increase trust in the institution; a critical factor in facilitating reporting and action to protect students.

Strengths and limitations

The primary strength of this report is the use of a methods from behaviour change science to synthesise the perspectives of a range of key stakeholders from across the institution. This enabled a rich description of the different influences contributing to sexual misconduct from across the organisation as well as identifying multiple opportunities for intervention. The findings and recommendations of the report have developed with stakeholders across the institution including participants, professional services and academic colleagues.

There are also a number of limitations that should be considered. This was an exploratory study which sampled a relatively small number of participants who were heavily invested in the issue of sexual misconduct. We deliberately sampled individuals with significant experience and interest in this issue because resources did not allow for a sampling strategy which aimed for representation from all groups within the institution. It was not possible to find participants who had experience of being reported as perpetrating sexual misconduct. The perspective of this group is important and should be included in any extensions of this work, or initiatives based on it. It is possible that inclusion of a wider group of stakeholders, including reported individuals, would have led to different pattern of result. However, the findings show remarkable consistency with existing research, suggesting that we can be confident of the validity of many of the report's main findings.

The primary purpose of a behavioural systems is to help different groups of stakeholders develop a shared understanding of complex issue and identify

opportunities for intervention. It can be adapted in light of changes to policy and practice, new research, and the perspectives of additional stakeholder groups. The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to a delay between the first outputs based on this work in early 2020 and the production of this report. There have been significant developments in UCL during that time which may warrant reanalysis of parts of the map. The content of recommendations has been drafted in consultation with colleagues in Organisational Development and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to ensure that they are consistent with the current state of the organisation.

Recommendations

The recommendations in Table 2 were prepared by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion manager and were tested with contributors to the research, including HR and student representatives. Whilst the recommendations are not exhaustive, they do take into consideration progress made through the Behaviour and Culture Change work undertaken at UCL, including the work of the [Preventing Sexual Misconduct Strategy Group](#).

Table 2.*Recommendations mapped against themes of the Behavioural Systems Map*

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
1	Create behaviourally based descriptions of what constitutes sexual harassment, using examples drawn from across the sexual misconduct continuum and include within the ways of working framework and academic careers framework	x		x			
2	Update all institutional policies and procedures related to bullying and harassment to include the concept of behaviours which could be considered as grooming or blurring boundaries between personal and professional relationships	x					
3	Mandate that all PhD students have a second or co-supervisor and provide and monitor the implementation of a framework for secondary supervisors to review the welfare of the student and the appropriateness of the primary supervisor-student relationship.	X					

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
4	Develop and pilot a supervisor-student 'ways of working agreement' to reduce potential for the misuse of power. This would include outlining appropriate behavioural standards, stating how the professional relationship will operate, the nature and type of support that will form the basis of the relationship, and create the expectation of a two- way process of feedback.	X		x			
5	Review and revise the PhD Student and Supervisor handbooks and training to ensure clear and consistent guidance on behavioural standards for each role, information on UCL reporting pathways and relevant policies, and links to external support.	X					
6	Add in the assessment of person-centred management competencies to the academic careers' framework and appraisal process and create a process for ensuring meaningful engagement with this aspect of the appraisal process.		X		x		

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
7	Add a requirement for evidencing feedback about person-centred management skills from direct reports into the academic appraisal process and ensure this is taken into consideration when assessing suitability for promotion. (See also recommendation 9 on feedback).		X	X	x		
8	Review the structure of bullying and harassment training to ensure (a) basic understanding of bullying and harassment is a mandated course for all students and staff, including those who have been at UCL for a long time (b) academic managers are supported in developing the person-centred skills to effectively address formal and informal reports of bullying and harassment, and (c) create and implement meaningful but acceptable penalties for departments where staff do not return an acceptable number of attendees.	x	X		X		
9	Pilot 360-degree feedback in academic departments as a means of creating a robust feedback and review framework for academic staff.	X	X	x	x		

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
10	Develop scripts for managers to engage in constructive but direct dialogue with staff and supervisors about sexual misconduct. Pilot this and embed it into the learning and development portfolio for academic staff.		X		x		
11	Develop and review training for Principal Investigators (e.g., Lab Leaders Programme) to ensure that PI's understand and develop the necessary skills to lead in a research-intensive environment.		X		X		
12	Embed the prevention of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct policy and personal relationships code into key communications, updates and training for all students and staff.	x			X		
13	Assess effectiveness of initiatives to reduce bullying and harassment in the annual staff survey		x				

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
14	Review all formal disciplinary and grievance procedures for staff and students to ensure fair treatment to all parties, manage expectations, and ensure consistency of outcomes for staff and students found to be in breach of UCL policies. This includes Statute 18, Staff Grievance Policy and Procedure, Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, and the Student Disciplinary Procedure.	X				X	
15	Promote and use environmental investigations to explore areas with problematic behaviour and culture.	x	x	x	x		
16	Create a tool to support academic groups and departments to self-assess and manage their culture with respect to bullying and harassment. This may involve the development of digital tool to monitor local culture.	x	x	x			
17	Ensure there are dedicated internal resources to conduct trauma-informed student and staff investigations.	x	X			x	

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
18	Ensure consistent and transparent updates across the UCL community, including departments and faculties, regarding the action taken from reports (within the bounds of GDPR) to ensure student and staff are aware of progress made. Perhaps based on the procedure instituted by Durham University: https://www.dur.ac.uk/notices/discipline/						x
19	Promote the Report + Support Faculty and annual reports in local areas, including actions taken and outcomes of formal cases to build transparency and trust. Including templates for Deans and Heads of Departments to provide regular updates on the number of reports and actions taken.	X					x
20	Create opportunities for support for senior managers to explore their responses to issues of bullying and harassment, identify best practice and opportunities for leadership		x		x	x	
21	Create guidance on the use of alcohol within official university events involving students and staff	x					

Recommendation		System Theme					
		<i>Student-supervisor power imbalance</i>	<i>Harmful expression of 'high performance' culture</i>	<i>Lack of upward feedback within institution</i>	<i>Low levels of people management skills</i>	<i>Over-reliance on burdensome semi-judicious process</i>	<i>Closed nature of investigative process</i>
22	Convene a working group to explore the use of restorative justice principles for managing allegations and incidents of minor sexual misconduct					x	

These interventions will need to be evaluated over time to see if the policies and processes are implemented with integrity and in accordance with their intention. The evaluation will need to consider how trust is defined by students and staff and if confidence in reporting and formal procedures has increased.

To ensure the success of implementation and to identify impact over time, an evaluation framework is critical for each intervention. The authors recommend the continued engagement of the Centre for Behaviour Change in providing expertise in conducting effective evaluation.

About the Centre for Behaviour Change

The UCL Centre for Behaviour Change harnesses cross-disciplinary expertise to address social, health and environmental challenges. The world-renowned Centre develops and promotes the application of the science of behaviour change to address any issue where human behaviour is at the centre of a problem or its solutions. As well as doing basic research into the tools and methodologies to support the development of behaviour change as a scientific discipline, it has developed frameworks such as the Behaviour Change Wheel that can support the translation of that science into practice.

If you are interested in working with the Centre for Behaviour Change, please contact Dr. Paul Chadwick: p.chadwick@ucl.ac.uk

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