

Government pledges action after northern students' unions lead call for misogyny to be reclassified as a hate crime

Students' union officers from three universities in the north of England have welcomed the government's response to their petition to make misogyny a hate crime - but say proposed legislation changes do not go far enough to protect women and girls from male violence.

Leeds University Union Equality and Liberation Officer Amara Relf, Newcastle University Students' Union Wellbeing and Communities Officer Lily Allan and Liverpool Guild of Students Deputy President Holly Thompson launched the petition urging the Government to update the law to record abuse and violence motivated by misogyny as hate crimes, introduce tougher laws for online abuse, and commit to early education and intervention as a means of preventing crimes before they occur.

The campaign amassed 114,927 signatures following its launch in December.

After surpassing the 10,000-signature threshold, the Government responded, stating it had proposed an amendment to the Crime and Policing Bill to extend the aggravated offences in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to include sex as a protected characteristic.

By April, their petition reached 100,000 signatures, and is currently being considered for debate.

Amara Relf said: "The change to the law that the government does not address prevention of misogynistic crimes - just harm that has already occurred.

"The support we have received for this campaign so far is fantastic, and we massively appreciate everyone who signed the petition to bring this to the government's attention.

"While we're pleased that the government is engaging with our concerns, we believe there's still a way to go before we see measures to address the epidemic of violence facing women and girls."

The officers revealed that they received online misogynistic abuse after launching their campaign and promoting the petition.

Holly Thompson said: "Most of the abuse we have received has come from people behind a screen because that's where they feel more confident to do it.

"It just proves the point that something needs to be done to address the growing problem of hate that women face in both their online and offline lives.

"We've also received a lot of male allyship comments throughout the campaign, which has been really positive."

The petition was launched to press for the government to follow the recommendations in Labour's 2021 green paper 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls', which backed changing the law to make misogyny a hate crime, and empowering judges to hand out enhanced sentences when the link is shown between the crime and the victim's sex or gender.

Lily Allan said: "The Government's pledge to amend the law is a positive step, but we are determined to achieve larger change. We want to see the government doing more to stamp out every-day abuse and harassment directed at women such as catcalling, groping, and sexually-suggestive comments.

"The lack of action taken against these issues and the law's failure to recognise the misogynistic dimension of many of these behaviours both act as an enabler of serious crime and actively discourages reporting.

"We're pleased to have been able to use our platforms as sabbatical officers to demand a change that is possible, and hope our successors and Russell Group Students' Unions continue to drive for change."

The three SU officers visited Downing Street on June 11 to officially submit the petition to the Government, and intend to continue to work together to lobby for change when their terms in office end.

View the petition at: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/746640>

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. In England and Wales alone, more than one million crimes involving violence against women and girls were recorded in 2022/23, around 3,000 offences every day - a 37% increase over the previous five years.
2. A pilot programme by Nottinghamshire Police to record misogyny as a hate crime category received 87 per cent public support.
3. In Scotland, regulations were laid in January 2026 to add "sex" as a protected characteristic under the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021.
4. In 2022, Mayor of West Yorkshire Tracy Brabin backed changing the law to recognise misogyny as hate crime
5. Officers from Leeds University Union, Liverpool Guild of Students and Newcastle University SU collaborated on a detailed exploration of the issue in a recent article for WonkHE:
<https://wonkhe.com/blogs-sus/students-need-misogyny-to-be-recognised-as-a-hate-crime/>
6. For more information, contact MakeMisogynyAHateCrimeUk@gmail.com