

Evaluation of Safeguarding Students Catalyst Fund Projects

Round three – Final report

Report to the Office for Students by Advance HE

August 2020

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Catalyst student safeguarding funding

In 2016, the Universities UK (UUK) Harassment Taskforce report *Changing the Culture* recommended that higher education (HE) providers put in place measures to address the effective prevention of and response to harassment, sexual violence and hate crime within the HE sector in all its forms.¹

In line with UUK's ongoing work in this area and in response to the Taskforce's recommendations, HEFCE and then the Office for Students (OfS) provided £4.7m in matched funding of up to £50,000 to a total of 119 projects between 2017 and 2020.² This Catalyst funding was spread across three rounds, each with a different focus:

- + **Round one** focused on tackling sexual misconduct and involved 63 one-year projects;
- + **Round two** supported work tackling hate crime and online harassment and involved 45 one-year projects;
- + **Round three** supported work to address hate crime/incidents on the grounds of religion or belief and involved a network of 11 projects.

The aim of the Catalyst funding³ was to identify and support good practice in the sector and to improve and enhance student safeguarding, specifically in relation to sexual misconduct, hate crime and online harassment.⁴ This was achieved through short-term diverse interventions, designed to encourage more widespread adoption of sector-level culture change to identify and support good practice in tackling these issues.

1.2 About the evaluation and this report

The OfS appointed independent evaluators from Advance HE in early 2018 to support learning, exchange and dissemination of effective practice from the three rounds of funding, and help establish 'what works' in safeguarding students.

For this final round of the OfS Catalyst student safeguarding funding, Advance HE evaluated the extent to which round three has instigated and embedded positive change around tackling issues related to religion and belief hate crime or harassment in the English HE sector. The evaluation considered the holistic impacts of the third round of the Catalyst funding, which ran between 2018 and 2020. Supporting the 11 projects, this round also involved the organisation of five network

¹ Universities UK (2016). *Changing the Culture*, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-final-report.aspx>.

² The OfS inherited the safeguarding catalyst programme from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) when the latter ceased to exist. Also see, Universities UK (2018). *Changing the Culture: One Year On*, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/changing-the-culture-one-year-on.pdf>.

³ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/>.

⁴ Further details on the projects are available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/what-are-the-projects/>.

meetings, each focused on different themes related to religion or belief. Network meetings provided an opportunity for project teams to share good practice and form a collaborative network of specialist knowledge.

Advance HE's round three evaluation returned to the themes of change, evaluation methods and sustainability investigated in the round three interim report. This round three final report presents an evaluation of the round three funded projects, as the Catalyst funding comes to an end.⁵ It follows a summative report for rounds one and two that presented a list of strategic recommendations for the HE sector and individual providers. It compiles and presents examples of 'what works' in student safeguarding and particularly focuses on identifying any recommended practice, knowledge gaps and inherent risks relating to work tackling religious-based hate crime or harassment not previously reported.

One-to-one interviews conducted with project team members for this final round of research explored the three themes of change, evaluation methods and sustainability, as well as providing interviewees with the opportunity to discuss any other topics or issues. During analysis, it became apparent that these three themes did not neatly map onto findings from this final round of research. This report, therefore, presents insights that cut across the themes discussed in the interim evaluation (as well as the summative evaluations of rounds one and two of the Catalyst funding). This final evaluation of round three presents an account of outcomes, in terms of impact, partnership working, student engagement and experience, evaluation methods and sustainability, as round three funding comes to a close.

1.3 Key findings

The evaluation of round three projects found that, in general, projects achieved their intended outcomes and produced other unintended outcomes. These unintended outcomes included positive changes (such as the raised profile of the project staff among senior leaders at the provider) and changes that were more complex (for example, an increased awareness of hate crime heightened students' fears about hate crime). Project outcomes went beyond the specific contexts of individual projects and potentially impacted other individuals and organisations in the higher education (HE) sector, providers' local communities and future work intended to address religious-based hate crime and harassment.

The projects reported a diverse range of outcomes and the impact this had on other parts of the provider and the wider sector. Key findings related to **outcomes and impact** were:

- + The projects reported a diverse range of outcomes that had been fully or partly achieved, including a mixture of operational changes, new ways of working within a provider and changes in the knowledge and behaviour of staff and students.
- + The most frequently noted outcome related to the increase in joined-up working between internal and external partners to design and deliver initiatives to combat harassment.

⁵ Additional published outputs include three interim thematic reports covering each round of the projects in detail and a summative evaluation of the first two rounds of funding. These are available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/what-are-we-doing/>.

- + One-to-one interviews also presented an opportunity for those engaged in projects to consider any unexpected or unintended outcomes that emerged as part of the work. This included raising the profile of project staff among senior leaders at the provider.

All round three funded projects shared activities, challenges and learnings from their individual providers and indicated how these initiatives might work more widely across the sector. Key findings related to **activities, challenges and learnings** were:

- + Project teams highlighted a variety of dissemination activities where materials were shared across the provider and throughout the sector. Using a breadth of communication channels was identified as a beneficial way to reaching a wide audience.
- + The most frequently noted type of collaboration was with external and community partners, such as regional organisations and charities working to tackle religious-based hate crime or harassment. The relationship was often mutually beneficial. The project momentum was supported by external expertise but providers also had the opportunity to make an impact in their local community.
- + Echoing findings in the round three interim report, the network meetings - which convened the 11 project teams throughout the two-year programme to share specialist knowledge and good practice - continued to be viewed positively. Interviewees noted they provided an opportunity to share findings and collaborate on the development of new materials. Interviewees also explained that it enabled them to look at their project approach with a fresh perspective, and to apply learnings to suit their context.
- + Despite the recruitment of student ambassadors and ongoing consultation with students across the course of project work, project teams highlighted a number of challenges associated with student engagement. This included difficulty engaging with students with a range of identity characteristics (including where religion and belief intersected with other identity characteristics) which interviewees suggested might relate to a lack of safe space to share their stories.
- + Senior leaders continued to be closely involved with the projects, and project teams recognised the value in this collaboration. However, teams were also cognisant that senior leaders were wary of possible misinterpretation of results that may arise from the project, for example a rise in reported hate incidents. This presents a future consideration as project teams will need to establish how to balance raising the profile of hate crime with the possible perception of the provider.

With regards to sustainability, project teams highlighted the importance of the continuation of working groups, training and events, collaboration between the project team and different parts of the provider or external organisation, and the embedding of policies and procedures. Project teams also highlighted a small number of risks related to sustainability. Key findings related to **sustainability** were:

- + The most frequently noted point related to the continuation of a staff member in their role, or a similar role, beyond the end of the funded project.
- + Information presented in the final reports and shared by interviewees also highlighted the continuation of project working groups, training and events; the mobilisation of support from

senior leaders; collaboration between the project team and different parts of the provider or external organisations; and the embedding of policies and procedures.

- + Interviewees discussed the risk of being too reliant on a small number of individuals with a passion for a specific area of student safeguarding, in this case religion and belief work. This risk to sustainability also emerged as a key theme in round three interim report.
- + As the final project reports were submitted against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, several interviewees discussed the challenges this posed for project sustainability.
- + When compared with findings from the round three interim report and thematic reports from rounds one and two, it is apparent that concerns noted in round one about the appointment of staff have been partly addressed in round three. It is also clear that engagement with senior leaders was a recurring approach to sustainability across all three rounds.

Analysis of the final project reports and interviews highlighted examples of effective practices that helped to ensure the impacts of the project work continued beyond the end of the Catalyst funding.

1.4 Recommended practice from Advance HE's evaluation

Based on research conducted for the round three interim and final reports, and Advance HE's knowledge of and expertise in the HE sector, recommended practice to support student safeguarding work was developed. This recommended practice is in addition to and builds upon the practice noted in the round three interim report. Although Advance HE's research for this funding round specifically focused on initiatives designed to tackle religion or belief hate crime and harassment in the English HE sector, recommended practice from this evaluation can apply more broadly to projects on student safeguarding and to institutions not in receipt of Catalyst funding for work in this area.

The sector should consider the following recommended practice:

Outcomes and impact

- + Ensure that initiatives to tackle hate crime and harassment receive adequate resources to design, implement and evaluate their work.
- + Be prepared for the possibility that raising awareness of hate crime might heighten students' fears about hate crime (regardless of the risk of hate crime). Ensure that this risk is mitigated by communicating adequate support mechanisms to students concerned about hate crime and harassment.
- + Consider ways to carefully and transparently position results that arise from research into religious-based hate crime or harassment.

Student engagement and experience

- + Maintain consistent consultation with students across the course of the project and ensure activities are run with a student-centred approach.
- + Foster collaboration between providers and student unions to ensure safeguarding work remains student-focused. Providers should also consider other ways to engage students in their projects, including mentorship programmes, the development of student ambassadors, and participation of students on working groups and steering committees.

- + Seek to amplify the voices of under-represented students in the conversation around faith by creating safe spaces for students to come forward and share their story without fear of repercussions. This should also include students identifying as having no faith.
- + Support faith-centred work that follows an accessible and inclusive approach to ensure students from minority or marginalised groups have equal access to services that respond to their needs and experiences.
- + Ensure that hate crime and harassment work does not overlook students of particular faiths that might feel less welcome to share their experiences due to the limited range of activities on offer or the spaces in which work is conducted.
- + Explore the safeguarding experiences and needs of students of particular faiths (for example, Hindu and Sikh faiths) to understand the barriers or challenges that particular groups may experience in accessing opportunities to share their experiences.
- + Acknowledge that hate crime and harassment related to religion or belief often intersects with other identity characteristics, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity and gender.

Partnership working

- + Seek out external partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Utilise and share expertise from community groups and organisations, but also ensure that the project is making an impact on the local community.
- + Foster collaboration between providers and local/regional organisations. This will help guarantee that initiatives, events, campaigns and training to tackle religion or belief hate crime and harassment align with activities in the community where the provider is located.
- + Ensure that work to tackle hate crime and harassment facilitates internal engagement across multiple academic areas and professional services. This will draw on existing expertise within the provider, help respond to challenges when they emerge and create opportunities for safeguarding work to become embedded across the provider.
- + Facilitate work that engages different parts of the provider and, where possible, involves external organisations. This spread of activity helps to ensure the project is embedded across the provider, and beyond, in different ways.

Evaluation methods

- + Adopt a 'multi-pronged approach' to survey distribution among students to address issues of survey fatigue and to reach a wider audience.
- + Follow a reflexive approach to evaluation that encourages students and staff to reflect upon their experiences.
- + Encourage the involvement of students in evaluation, particularly as paid researchers.
- + Instil a pragmatic approach to evaluation to ensure team members are utilised effectively and the project is able to deliver what was intended.

Measures to ensure sustainability

- + Include senior leaders in the governance and/or management structure of a project. This might include membership of an advisory group or steering committee.
- + Ensure that senior leaders are made aware of the wider benefits of the work with a view to students', staff and the provider's reputation.
- + Remember that project infrastructure, such as reporting systems or associated policies, may outlive particular staff roles. Effective project infrastructure is, therefore, a vital element of project sustainability.
- + Ensure projects are not only reliant on the passion and skill of individual staff members as this poses a risk to the future sustainability of the work.

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview

Advance HE evaluated the extent to which round three of the Office for Students (OfS) Catalyst student safeguarding funding has instigated and embedded positive change around tackling issues related to religion and belief hate crime or harassment in the English higher education (HE) sector. Findings presented in this final evaluation are based on analysis of self-reported information in the final reports produced by the 11 funded project teams, as well as insights gathered from one-to-one interviews with those engaged in the projects. Project teams submitted final reports to the OfS in March 2020, which covered project activity between January 2019 (the submission date for interim reports) and the end of the funded period (March 2020).

2.2 Catalyst student safeguarding funding

In 2016, the Universities UK (UUK) Harassment Taskforce report *Changing the Culture* recommended that HE providers put in place measures to address the effective prevention of and response to harassment, sexual violence and hate crime within the HE sector in all its forms.⁶

In line with UUK's ongoing work in this area and in response to the Taskforce's recommendations, HEFCE and then the OfS provided £4.7m in matched funding to a total of 119 projects led by English HE providers between 2017 and 2020.⁷ This Catalyst funding was spread across three rounds, each with a different focus:

- + **Round one** focused on tackling sexual misconduct and involved 63 one-year projects;
- + **Round two** supported work tackling hate crime and online harassment and involved 45 one-year projects;
- + **Round three** ran between 2018 and 2020, supporting 11 projects to address hate crime/incidents on the grounds of religion or belief. This round also involved the organisation of five network meetings, each focused on different themes related to religion or belief. Network meetings provided an opportunity for project teams to share good practice and form a collaborative network of specialist knowledge.

The aim of the Catalyst funding⁸ was to identify and support good practice in the sector and to improve and enhance student safeguarding, specifically in relation to sexual misconduct, hate crime and online harassment.⁹ This was achieved through short-term diverse interventions, designed to

⁶ Universities UK (2016). *Changing the Culture*, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-final-report.aspx>.

⁷ The OfS inherited the safeguarding catalyst programme from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) when the latter ceased to exist. Also see, Universities UK (2018). *Changing the Culture: One Year On*, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/changing-the-culture-one-year-on.pdf>.

⁸ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/>.

⁹ Further details on the projects are available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/what-are-the-projects/>.

encourage more widespread adoption of sector-level culture change to identify and support good practice in tackling these issues.

2.3 About this evaluation

The OfS commissioned Advance HE to support and enable learning, disseminate innovative and good practice from the three rounds of Catalyst funded projects and help establish ‘what works?’ in relation to safeguarding students. This report focuses on the third round of funding and the 11 project teams that have undertaken work to address hate crime/incidents related to religion or belief.

Project teams submitted their final reports in March 2020 and participants from across the 11 project teams were also invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. These were conducted between March and April 2020 and were designed to assess what has changed since the publication of the interim report. Data was captured via the following activities:

- + Detailed thematic analysis of the 11 interim project reports;
- + One-to-one interviews with seven participants engaged in four of the funded projects.

This round three final report presents an evaluation of the round three funded projects, as the Catalyst funding comes to an end.¹⁰ It follows a summative report for rounds one and two that presented a list of strategic recommendations for the HE sector and individual providers. It compiles and presents examples of ‘what works’ in student safeguarding and particularly focuses on identifying any recommended practice, knowledge gaps and inherent risks relating to work tackling religious-based hate crime or harassment not previously reported.

2.4 Religion and belief among students in the UK higher education sector

To help position this evaluation, Advance HE undertook analysis of data related to the religion and belief of students at the 11 providers and the wider HE sector. It was found that the religion and belief of students at the 11 round three funded providers is broadly similar to the religion and belief of students across all UK providers. Advance HE’s recent research insight, *Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education* (2020), presented detailed information on the participation and outcomes of students by religion and belief in UK HE. Using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the 2017-18 academic year, 50.2% of students that disclosed information reported that they had a religion or belief (49.8% reported that they had no religion or belief). Of those students who were religious, the majority were Christian (65.5%), followed by Muslim (17.8%), Hindu (4.4%), any other religion or belief (3.6%), Buddhist (3.5%) and spiritual (2.6%), Sikh (1.7%) and Jewish (0.9%).

These findings broadly reflected the religion and belief composition of academic and professional staff in UK HE. Although a higher proportion of staff were Christian (39.3%, compared to 32.9% of

¹⁰ Additional published outputs include three interim thematic reports covering each round of the projects in detail and a summative evaluation of the first two rounds of funding. These are available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-safety-and-wellbeing/what-are-we-doing/>.

students) and a lower proportion of staff were Muslim (3.2%, compared to 8.9% of students). Using 2017-18 HESA data, and including students for whom data about their religion or belief was refused or unknown, on average 43.3% of students in the 11 funded providers had a religion or belief. The proportion of students who had a religion or belief varied across the providers, from 30.6% to 52.7%.

3. Outcomes from round three projects

3.1 Overview

This section considers five thematic areas that were identified within Advance HE's analysis related to tackling religious-based hate crime or harassment. Each thematic area highlights key findings alongside any challenges that project teams encountered. Based on research conducted for the round three interim and final reports, and Advance HE's knowledge of and expertise in the HE sector, recommended practice to support student safeguarding work was developed based on these themes. This recommended practice is in addition to and builds upon the strategic recommendations noted in last year's summative report from rounds one and two and the practice identified in all three thematic reports. All of this is included at the end of each sub-section.

Findings from Advance HE's research highlight how round three Catalyst funding has helped instigate and embed positive change around tackling issues related to religious-based hate crime or harassment. The evaluation of round three projects found that, in general, projects achieved their intended outcomes and produced other unintended outcomes. These unintended outcomes included positive changes (such as the raised profile of the project staff among senior leaders at the provider) and changes that were more complex (for example, an increased awareness of hate crime heightened students' fears about hate crime).

3.2 Impact of the projects

Projects delivered a mixture of operational changes, new ways of working within a provider and changes in individuals' knowledge and behaviour. The most frequently noted outcome achieved related to the increase in joined-up working between internal and external partners to design and deliver initiatives related to religious-based hate crime or harassment.

Project teams described how the project had led to a positive change in provider policies and procedures. The impetus for these changes varied across providers. In one instance, the start of the Catalyst funded project increased the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) team's awareness of policies related to hate crimes and highlighted the need for them to be updated. In another instance, a provider mentioned that 'the findings and lessons learned from the ongoing evaluation are being used to inform all non-academic misconduct policies and practices'.

Improved relations between different faith groups at the provider was also discussed by project teams. At one provider, this involved students from different faith societies participating in a joint event with the students' union, resulting in improved 'relationships across faiths'. Another interviewee described the positive effects of bringing different faith groups together. They said:

“They've really connected with each other and tried to understand that each student from different faith backgrounds are tackling the same issue but in various different ways.”

Interviewee 1

Projects also increased students' awareness and willingness to discuss matters related to religion and belief. This change materialised in different ways. One provider described how 'going to actual places of worship, having a meal or meeting local faith leaders were crucial ways of creating a student community engaged in positive interfaith dialogue'.

Although slightly less common, project teams also described how the project had increased awareness between faith groups and other identity groups at the provider, most notably LGBT+ student groups. For one provider, the organisation of an event that explored sexuality and Islam was an outcome of the project that was extremely enriching for those involved.

One unintended outcome was the raising of the profile of project staff among senior leaders at the provider. One interviewee described how the entire team 'has become more visible within the university leadership'. This was a positive unexpected consequence of the project. They said:

“When the university wants advice on some things related to religion or belief [...] or they need advice around adopting definitions of particular forms of prejudice [...] they do approach us. And I think that's a good thing because what we can do is give them a research-informed perspective that draws on this project, but then also the other work that colleagues within the team have done.”

Interviewee 5

Although the heightened profile of the project could foster closer links between the project team and senior leaders, this also meant that students and staff were more conscious of the topic of hate crime. Two interviewees described an unintended outcome of the project, which was an increase in reported hate crimes due to awareness raising activities and improvements in reporting/support systems. However, this was complemented by improved support and increased confidence that the provider would handle the report effectively. This interviewee explained:

“Even though fear levels were slightly increased, so too was confidence that it would be dealt with appropriately and so too was more of an awareness of where to go to if it were to happen to you. So, it's not a negative finding but it is still an inherent risk when you're dealing with or trying to raise an awareness of such a negative experience.”

Interviewee 2

This highlights a potential inherent risk related to student safeguarding, whereby improved reporting mechanisms and increased student confidence might lead to a higher number of reported incidents. However, as noted by the interviewee, although students' fears of hate crime increased slightly this was mitigated through the provision of adequate support mechanisms.

A further challenge presented by project teams was that senior leaders were wary of how any negative results associated with the projects may be received and understood. For example, one provider's final report mentioned that university leaders had an 'understandable concern, given the sensitive nature of the project focus'. Two interviewees were mindful that senior leaders needed to

balance raising the profile of hate crime with the possible perception of the provider. One interviewee mentioned that they ‘understood management’s potential concerns in having a very visible project about religion-related hate because it may be misinterpreted’ and another was keen to ensure that, as a result of project work, ‘the university isn’t portrayed in a bad light’.

Very few providers reported negative project findings in this round of funding, which meant that they were not required to address this issue. However, should initiatives be rolled-out in other providers it is unlikely that findings would always present providers in a positive light. Further work into the gap between action and perception management may help address future issues.

Recommended effective practices

Project teams and interviewees shared several learnings related to the areas of impact presented in this section that can inform ongoing or future initiatives. These included:

- + Ensure that initiatives to tackle hate crime and harassment receive adequate resources to design, implement and evaluate the initiatives.
- + Be prepared for the possibility that raising awareness of hate crime might heighten students’ fears about hate crime (regardless of the risk of hate crime). Ensure that this risk is mitigated by communicating adequate support mechanisms to students concerned about hate crime and harassment.
- + Consider ways to carefully and transparently position results that arise from research into religious-based hate crime or harassment.

3.3 Student engagement and experience

Project teams collaborated with students’ unions and religion and belief/faith societies. For a number of providers, the students’ union was regarded as integral for engaging and reaching students. For example one provider mentioned that ‘the students’ union was involved in developing the communications plan, which allowed us to ensure that our messages resonated with students’. This collaboration also extended to religion and belief/faith societies. As one provider mentioned ‘skills and guidance’ were taught to ‘incoming faith society presidents for funding, event ideas, planning and hosting, risk assessment and committee elections’. Collaboration with religion and belief/faith societies also presented an opportunity for providers to engage with specific faith groups. For example one provider ‘built very strong relationships with the Jewish Society’ and another gave a talk to their Sikh Society.

The most frequently noted form of engagement was to ensure students were consulted across the course of the project. One provider explained how their students were involved with ‘student experience research, awareness around reporting opportunities and consultation for development of support programmes’. Similarly, another provider ensured students and student representatives were engaged ‘at every stage from design and data collection through to analysis and the development of the final training materials’. A third provider established a variety of touch-points to engage with students face-to-face, particularly during their induction process. This was done by hosting a ‘wide range of awareness-raising events and activities, including matriculation, fresher’s fairs and campus stalls.’

Providers also discussed their use of student ambassadors, and how this has been a successful way of engaging students in religious-based hate crime or harassment work. One provider appointed ambassadors through the students' union, while another provider ran an 'Interfaith Ambassadors' programme, which is now embedded as one of their 'annual programme offerings to students'.

Lastly, providers discussed their efforts to work with students of no faith. For one provider, this was borne out of a 'respect that some students maybe genuinely want to use university to understand faith' and was a key way for the project to 'show its inclusivity'. Another provider also looked at the intersection of faith (or no faith) with sexuality and gender identity, hoping to 'prompt discussion and respectful debate'.

Whatever the nature of engagement activity, providers faced a similar set of challenges. On a more general level, three providers discussed the challenges of with engaging students. One provider recognised that it 'continues to present a risk in terms of continuing to raise awareness of reporting opportunities and adequate provision of support'. Another provider felt this was due to time considerations and acknowledged that 'student involvement often depends on students with study, work and care commitments being able to find additional time to assist'.

A further challenge discussed by three providers was that students felt nervous coming forward to share their stories. As a result, this limited audiences for events as they 'largely attract people who are sufficiently open-minded to enter into a dialogue with someone whose life experiences may be very different to their own'. This posed a risk to providers as it meant that some students may never be involved or engaged with project work. Through data collection, another provider discovered that this may be due to the fact that 'students with a religious identify feel unable to engage in academic debate and enquiry around some topics because they anticipate negative reactions from colleagues'.

This may explain why providers mentioned facing the additional challenges of difficulty engaging across a range of identity characteristics (reported by two providers) and difficulty engaging all faiths (reported by two providers). One provider recognised that there is a 'significant lack of reporting through 'Report and Support' by Black and Minority Ethnic students and staff', while another recognised that they 'struggled to get Hindu and Sikh faith involvement in Interfaith Ambassadors'. Another provider was similarly disappointed that, while there were no specific commitments to cover all religions, they 'have been unable to include conversations with people from the Jewish, Hindu and Sikh faiths'.

Two interviewees described this issue in more detail, and discussed additional ways of engaging students from under-represented groups. They focused on the importance of providing these students with a safe space to discuss their stories. They said:

“If I had more time, I would give space and more time for students of a faith persuasion to actually tell their story in a place where they know they can be comfortable just telling their story.”

Interviewee 4

“The only thing we might have added was qualitative focus groups at some point [...] that would have perhaps given us a deeper sense of the lived reality.”

Interviewee 5

Highlighted in two reports, difficulty engaging with Hindu and Sikh faiths, in particular, may relate to the lack of appropriate spaces and opportunities for students of those faiths to come forward with their stories. **Further research into this potential knowledge gap** might help to explain whether projects with a focus on Jewish and Muslim faiths, for example, related to students from those faith groups feeling like they had increased opportunities to share their experiences.

Recommended effective practices

Project teams and interviewees shared several learnings related to student engagement and experience as presented in this section that can inform ongoing or future initiatives. These included:

- + Maintain consistent consultation with students across the course of the project and ensure activities are run with a student-centred approach.
- + Foster collaboration between provider and the students' union to ensure safeguarding work remains student-focused. Providers should also consider other ways to engage students in their projects, including mentorship programmes, the development of student ambassadors, and participation of students on working groups and steering committees.
- + Seek to amplify the voices of under-represented students in the conversation around faith by creating safe spaces for students to come forward and share their stories without fear of repercussion. This should also include students identifying as having no faith.
- + Support faith-centred work that follows an accessible and inclusive approach to ensure students from minority or marginalised groups have equal access to services that respond to their needs and experiences.
- + Ensure that hate crime and harassment work does not overlook students of particular faiths that might feel less welcome to share their experiences due to the type of opportunities provided or the spaces in which work is conducted.
- + Explore the safeguarding experiences and needs of students of particular faiths (for example, Hindu and Sikh faiths) to understand the barriers or challenges that particular groups may experience in accessing opportunities to share their experiences.
- + Acknowledge that hate crime and harassment related to religion or belief often intersects with other identity characteristics, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity and gender.

3.4 Partnership working

The most frequently noted collaboration was with external or community partners. This included collaboration with local/regional organisations, as well as national charities working to tackle religious-based hate crime or harassment. The relationship was often mutually beneficial. The project momentum was supported by external expertise but providers also had an opportunity to make an impact on their local community. One provider discussed their project's community approach and how it worked to 'explicitly target young people outside the university where the need for education

and awareness is so pertinent'. The project recognised 'the need for the institution to use its prominence and standing in the local community'.

Project teams explained in more detail how providers shared their findings externally with stakeholders and the wider community. This included examples of sharing survey findings with action groups or police forces to help develop and influence community interventions. On a slightly different note, one provider felt that by disseminating their findings with the wider community they were committing to a degree of 'transparency'. They mentioned that it was a notable achievement to 'recognise and communicate our lack of maturity in addressing issues and topics around Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, within both policy and procedure'.

An additional type of external collaboration was with police officers and community policing teams. These providers explained how they used internal reporting trends to target specific areas of the provider where increased support from police might be required. For example, one provider worked with the police 'where there have been reports of incidents occurring more persistently to ensure a heightened visible presence during certain periods'.

A number of the collaborations developed were intra-provider, for example across different departments. Project teams mentioned developing a partnership with academic schools and/or departments. As a result, this enabled academic and research expertise to become embedded in project activities. For example, one provider mentioned that their expertise 'brought to bear on university policy and discussions are underway about doing more research with the students' union and the rest of the university brought together'. Similarly, another provider utilised colleagues from the criminology department in 'discussion and analysis of data, to bring to bear their expertise from the study of hate crime'.

A number of project teams noted collaborations with their equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) unit, and four reported collaborations with the chaplaincy/provider chaplains. Collaborating with the EDI unit often provided the practical resources and solutions to run projects effectively, including managing the 'infrastructure for delivering report and support activities' as well as developing a 'Respect Toolkit' which could be used within hate crime training for teaching staff. One provider mentioned that the calendar of activities produced by the Interfaith Forum had been supported by their EDI team, with leadership provided by the provider's chaplain.

Collaborations were also developed across the HE sector, between providers based in the UK and across the globe. This included developing relationships with colleagues at other UK-based providers to collaboratively work on research as well as joining international networks, such as the Citizenship in Higher Education network, to focus more widely on the topic of student safeguarding. Another provider also discussed an opportunity for 'internationalisation', as they secured funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a project on minorities in Indian HE.

Within the one-to-one interviews interviewees discussed the positive impact of collaboration between the wider community and the HE sector and how this had led to the provider becoming a social beacon against hate crime. For the following two interviewees the exchange of knowledge and resources, such as training and guides, was viewed positively by senior leaderships as it built on their reputation for leading the way in religious-based hate crime or harassment work. They said:

“This was an opportunity for the university to lead the way in the framing of difficulties around religion or belief hate across the sector. And the leadership quite liked that, that the university was contributing to a guide that other universities might use.”

Interviewee 5

“Because we have received such positive feedback in terms of a lot of the training modules we have created [and] shared with others, I think this has led to our Executive Board realising almost the huge positives reputationally to really leading in this area and instigating change.”

Interviewee 7

Recommended effective practices

Project teams and interviewees shared several learnings related to the partnership working presented in this section that can inform ongoing or future initiatives. These included:

- + Seek out external partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Utilise and share expertise from community groups and organisations, but also ensure that the project is making an impact on the local community.
- + Foster collaboration between providers and local/regional organisations. This will help guarantee that initiatives, events, campaigns and training to tackle religion or belief hate crime and harassment align with activities in the community where the provider is located.
- + Ensure that work to tackle hate crime and harassment facilitates internal engagement across multiple academic areas and professional services. This will draw on existing expertise within the provider, help respond to challenges when they emerge and create opportunities for safeguarding work to become embedded across the provider.

3.5 Evaluation methods

Evaluation remains a central component of future safeguarding work, findings from the projects' final reports identified a greater level of confidence in evaluation methods among project teams. This is a positive finding but it remains vital that the sector continues to provide funding, advice and guidance to support and enhance the evaluation skills of practitioners who are starting or developing work in this area.

As well as exploring evaluation methods used, analysis of the reports and interview transcripts also uncovered recommended effective practices related to evaluation. For example, one provider shared detailed recommendations regarding their 'multi-pronged approach to survey distribution'. This addressed the challenge of 'survey fatigue' and aimed to 'ensure that survey distribution covers [...] the diverse range of ways in which students access information'. Recommendations included the use of online and offline methods (such as paper surveys in particular situations), engaging students in the research in areas of high footfall (such as welcome events) and working closely with course leaders to help disseminate survey links.

Another project team put a reflexive dimension at the forefront of their evaluation methods. One interviewee explained how after each event or activity they asked students involved to reflect on their experience with questions such as ‘What did it mean to you? What did you understand? What didn’t you understand? What had an impact on you?’ This self-reflection did not only apply to students involved in the project. Staff were also encouraged to use both one-to-one and team meetings to test each other and ask themselves ‘Why are we doing this? What are we getting out of this? Is that a good place to go to?’ Team meetings also presented a good opportunity to review the project’s objectives and chart progress towards meeting outcomes.

Interviewees noted the involvement of students in the project evaluation process. One provider noted that they had employed students to conduct research interviews. Another provider also highlighted the usefulness of working with ‘students who were postgraduates who had not only research skills, but knowledge of hate crime’. Across these examples, students were compensated for their involvement in the project work.

Lastly, interviewees stressed the need to adopt a pragmatic approach to evaluation. One interviewee noted that the project team ‘had a realistic understanding of what we could achieve’, which meant team members’ skills were utilised effectively and they were able to deliver what they intended to deliver. Another interviewee explained ‘It’s one thing to talk about evaluating but you’ve got to have something to evaluate’ – a reminder that a successful approach to evaluation must operate in tandem with the effective delivery of a project.

Recommended effective practices

Information presented in the project final reports and interviewees shared several learnings related to evaluation methods which will help to inform ongoing or future initiatives. These included:

- + Adopt a ‘multi-pronged approach’ to survey distribution among students to address issues of survey fatigue and to reach a wider audience.
- + Follow a reflexive approach to evaluation that encourages students and staff to think about their experiences.
- + Encourage the involvement of students in evaluation, particularly as paid researchers.
- + Instil a pragmatic approach to evaluation to ensure team members are utilised effectively and the project is able to deliver what it intended to deliver.

3.6 Measures to ensure sustainability

Interviewees discussed the risk to sustainability of being too reliant on a small number of individuals with a passion for religion and belief work. This risk also emerged as a key theme in the round three interim report. When compared with findings from the round three interim report and thematic reports from rounds one and two, it is apparent that concerns noted in round one about the appointment of staff have been partly addressed in round three. It is also clear that engagement with senior leaders has been a recurring approach to sustainability across all three rounds.

Continuation of a staff member in their role is now perceived – across both project final reports and in one-to-one interviews – as the most visible marker of a project’s sustainability. This tangible development was not identified in the interim report and most likely reflects decisions made at the provider between January 2019 and March 2020 about the future funding of positions.

The decision to appoint a permanent staff member often followed conversations between different parts of the provider to establish ‘the most effective way of scaling-up so that the work becomes self-sustaining’. Although the job description for this position varied across different providers, it often involved continuing the work started with the Catalyst funded project and ‘taking forward the work around reporting, specifically relating to race and religion’.

Also related to the theme of sustainability, project teams described how there were already plans in place for the project working group, advisory group and/or steering committee to continue the project work. At one provider ‘a reconfigured steering group will continue focusing on harassment and safeguarding across the university’. One interviewee at this provider noted ‘as a direct result of this project, we are looking at other things that the university or the working group can look at’.

Project teams also noted the continuation of training and events. One interviewee explained how ‘the foundation that we’ve already built will definitely continue so we will now make sure the training we’ve implemented happens every year’. Other providers outlined their commitment to running events that started with project funding on an annual basis.

It was also apparent that several providers intended to not only repeat what started during the funded project but expand this work to other parts of the provider. This included staff workshops, a digital training module for staff inductions, undergraduate and postgraduate students and the integration of project outcomes into future welfare and wellbeing campaigns for staff and students.

Project teams discussed the importance of mobilising support from senior leaders to ensure the project’s sustainability. In addition, two interviewees described how recognition among senior leaders of the project’s values (in terms of students, staff and institutional reputation) further strengthened sustainability.

Lastly, project teams described the embedding of policies and procedures and how this had also strengthened the sustainability of project work. This theme, additionally, emerged in interviews, with two interviewees noting the introduction of new or refreshed systems for reporting hate crime related to religion and belief. In particular, one interviewee emphasised how Catalyst funding had provided an infrastructure for hate crime reporting that would outlive the life of the funded project. They said:

“Before having any of the Catalyst funding we didn’t have this centralised reporting mechanism which meant that data was being collected across the university. It wasn’t being shared and there was no plan in terms of disseminating it in a safe and secure way. As a result of Catalyst we now have this new reporting mechanism. We now have a new pathway through to access support services.”

Interviewee 7

This new infrastructure was often underpinned by new or refreshed policies and procedures. One provider noted the implementation of ‘policies and procedures for reporting unwanted behaviour at the university’ and how this demonstrated the sustainability of funded project work. Another provider explained that their equality, diversity and inclusion policies have been revised as ‘staff knowledge and expertise has been widely spread and embedded into the organisation’.

As was noted in the round three interim evaluation report, interviewees described how people involved in religion and belief work in the HE sector are often ‘big advocates’ who use their ‘initiative to drive something within the sector’. This could mean that the success of projects would often be linked to the passion and efforts of individuals. If these individuals were to leave their role, there would be a risk that the work they had been carrying out may lose energy and fail to continue.

Recommended effective practices

Information presented in the final reports and interviewees shared several learnings related to sustainability which will help to inform ongoing or future initiatives. These included:

- + Include senior leaders in the governance and/or management structure of a project, this might include membership of an advisory group or steering committee.
- + Ensure that senior leaders are made aware of the wider benefits of the work for students, staff and the provider’s reputation.
- + Remember that project infrastructure, such as reporting systems or associated policies, may outlive particular staff roles. Effective project infrastructure is, therefore, a vital element of project sustainability.
- + Ensure projects are not solely reliant on the passion and skill of individual staff members as this poses a risk to the future sustainability of this work.

3.7 COVID-19 and project sustainability

Interviews were conducted during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that interviewees understandably framed recent project activities through the prism of how COVID-19 had impacted everyone’s everyday lives. The most frequently noted issue related to the **disruption of dissemination activities**. For most projects, the pandemic had not impacted the delivery of project work but had led to the postponement or cancellation of events where project teams intended to share findings. This had required some teams to consider alternative dissemination approaches, such as the use of online communication.

Interviewees also described the negative impacts of COVID-19 on students, including one interviewee who noted a link between COVID-19 and hate crime at the provider. They said:

“Two weeks ago I sat down with four international students who come from Hong Kong and Singapore. All of them had been abused and didn’t feel safe anymore within the university. So I think there’s so many links in so many ways [...]. There is that direct link that we know within this environment it has led to a spike in incidents of hate and harassment against particularly those vulnerable students who were already feeling pretty much that they don’t fit in sometimes within university life.”

Interviewee 7

In response, some project teams found themselves working even more closely with students. One interviewee, at another provider, explained that they have taken on ‘a mentoring role and coaching role as well’ and that during ‘this time of crisis we’ve kind of very much expanded it into almost like pastoral chaplaincy’.

As well as concerns around student wellbeing and welfare, there was also the risk that COVID-19 would dominate the HE sector for the foreseeable future and potentially reverse achievements related to hate crime and student safeguarding, as an interviewee said:

“What worries me is that because of COVID-19 – it’s the implications that it will have for student numbers, for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) being put on hold, for closing of campuses. How we then get back to that platform of seeing it as something that is really important. My only positive is that so much development has been made as a result of Catalyst funding with new policies, practices, new reporting mechanisms across HE. Hopefully that infrastructure is now in place to kind of maintain and continue once we’re out of this bizarre situation.”

Interviewee 7

As this interviewee noted, one hope was that the embeddedness of project work would ensure its continuation into the future – even against a backdrop of many other competing demands.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OfS extended the deadline for projects to have used their funding by six months and, where appropriate, allowed project teams to use funding for alternative activities (for example, the delivery of online rather than in-person training).

4. Conclusion

Advance HE's analysis of the final reports submitted by the 11 funded project teams, as well as information shared in the one-to-one interviews, shows that, on the whole, the Catalyst funding created a positive impact in relation to tackling religious-based hate crime or harassment. While mainly positive, the research also uncovered a small number of knowledge gaps and inherent risks which providers and sector organisations may wish to consider for future work in this area.

All round three funded projects shared learnings that emerged from project work in their own provider and across the wider sector – using a breadth of communication channels and dissemination methods to reach a wide audience. In addition, providers frequently collaborated with external, community partners, including local/regional organisations and charities working to tackle religious-based hate crime or harassment. These relationships were often mutually beneficial as they were an opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise. They also enabled project teams to make a positive impact on their local community. The Catalyst funded projects also benefited from the network meetings, as they offered an opportunity to collaborate on the development of materials, address common challenges and share best practice.

Building external partnerships was understood by project teams to be a vital means for supporting and encouraging project momentum. Additionally, partnerships within the provider, such as those with the students' union, EDI teams and academic departments, were seen as crucial to assist the project team in designing and delivering initiatives related to harassment. This included the running of activities, events and campaigns open to a broad mix of attendees, as well as embedding training for students and staff across the provider. Awareness of religious-based hate crime or harassment, and a willingness to talk about it, has continued to grow as a result of these initiatives.

Project teams have made clear efforts to maintain ongoing consultation with students across the course of project work and to involve them in different initiatives. However, final reports highlighted a number of challenges associated with student engagement, including the difficulty of engaging students with a range of identity characteristics (including where religion and belief intersected with other identity characteristics). A number of project teams recognised that this might relate to a lack of safe space for students to share their stories and acknowledged a need to enhance this form of support in future.

The round three interim report noted that around half of all participants discussed the use of baseline and end-point surveys to evaluate the impact of the Catalyst funding. Project teams also acknowledged that the full extent of any impacts may not yet be known as evaluation was ongoing. The summative report for rounds one and two funding continued this discussion and highlighted the fact that the use of evaluation methods aligned with those noted in the interim round of research. It also noted that project teams' evaluations have now mostly been completed. Project teams, again, highlighted the desire to adopt a mixed-method evaluation approach, such as the use of focus groups, which, in turn, could provide a platform for students to come forward with their stories.

As the Catalyst funding comes to a close the discussion around sustainability in the final reports was related to measures put in place to ensure the longer-term continuation of project work. Similar to the interim report, participants reflected on the key role of senior leaders and their ability to raise awareness of the projects among staff and students. Project teams noted the importance of ensuring

representation of senior leaders on the project working group, in turn mobilising their support for the projects and ensuring the work becomes embedded across the provider. However, project teams were cognisant of striking the correct balance between raising the profile of religious-based hate crime or harassment with possible implications on the perception of the provider – senior leaders wary of being portrayed in a negative light.

Additional risks emerged related to sustainability that created concerns for project teams. This included the risk of being reliant on a small number of individuals with a passion for religion and belief work. As the success of the project was often linked to their work, this posed the risk that the work may lose energy or fail to continue should they leave their role. As the final research was conducted against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, several project teams also raised concerns around the challenges this posed to project sustainability beyond the end of the funding.

The information presented in the project final reports and the feedback shared in one-to-one interviews helps us determine to what extent overall project objectives and intended outcomes have been achieved. Although this round three final report offers a holistic account of the round three Catalyst funding, in which objectives and outcomes are discussed in-the-round rather than on a project-by-project basis, it was felt that projects have been largely successful in tackling religious-based hate crime or harassment. Also, despite challenges, the embedding of the work, dissemination of findings and ongoing engagement with students, staff and external partners will ensure the funding's continued impact.

Both this evaluation and the summative evaluation of the first two rounds of funding highlight the positive impact produced across all three rounds of Student Safeguarding Catalyst funding. Advance HE's evaluation demonstrates that, over the past three years, the OfS' Catalyst funding has enabled providers to instigate and embed positive changes to tackle sexual misconduct, hate crime and religious-based hate crime. Across all three rounds of funding, Advance HE have identified recommended effective practices which providers may wish to adopt to support the implementation of activities to tackle sexual misconduct and all forms of hate crime. Recommended effective practice shared within this round three final report supports and builds upon the broader strategic recommendations for providers and the HE sector that were shared in the summative report for rounds one and two of the Catalyst funding.

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