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Students get lessons on sexual consent

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The growing number of sexual assaults and cases of harassment on university campuses are to be targeted by the public health watchdog with a programme that encourages students to intervene when they witness abuse (Rosemary Bennett writes).

The Bystander Intervention Initiative has been used at universities in the United States, where the fraternity house culture has led to an epidemic of sexual abuse.

Public Health England said it was becoming a significant problem here too, with more than a third of female students and one in eight men saying they had suffered harassment at university. The programme, comprising eight hours of instruction and role play, gets students to act out how to prevent or stop abuse. Avon and Somerset police have helped to create the scenarios from real cases. In one, a male student is attempting to seduce a heavily drunk woman and take her home.

His friends are told that they are in the best position to stop an offence taking place and to get their friend away from the woman.

The programme has been developed by Public Health England and the **University of the West of England**, where from now on all students are required to take the course.

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