



CASE STUDY

Delivering Consent Matters as part of the student pre-arrival induction programme at Keele University



Background

Keele University has run sexual violence prevention initiatives for several years, aiming to promote positive cultural change throughout the student community through a comprehensive programme of education in consent, communication, and bystander intervention.

Dr Kelly Prince is a Serious Incident Officer at the university, and since 2017 has focused on policies and procedures, staff training, case investigations, and student campaigns around sexual violence prevention and support. Kelly works closely with colleagues in the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Team who provide specialist support and advice to student victim-survivors. Kelly authored the second edition of Epigeum's *Consent Matters: Boundaries, Respect, and Positive Intervention* course, and implementing the course as part of the university's consent initiatives has been a significant part of her role.

Implementation

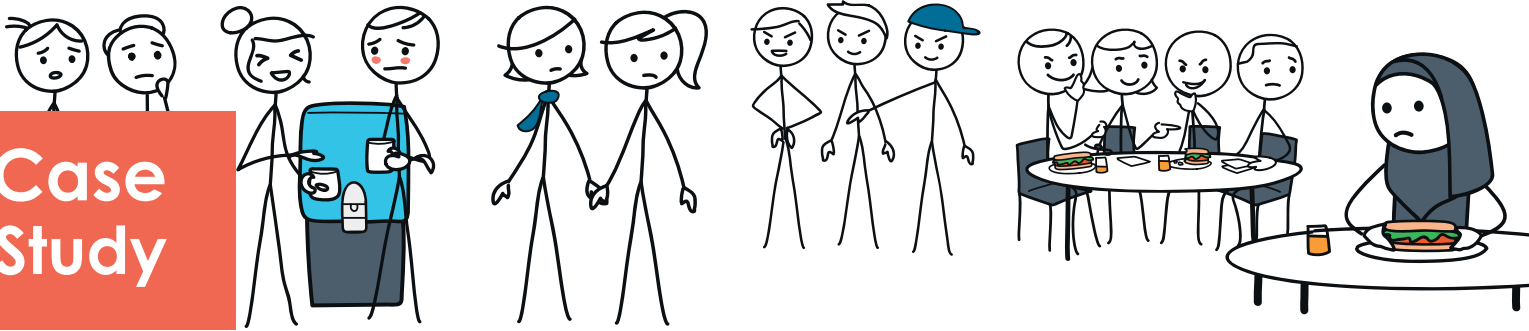
In 2017, Kelly approached Tim Smale to integrate *Consent Matters* into the university's pre-arrival programme, which is available for new students via Keele's Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard. As an Educational Technologist, Tim's role is to support members of staff and students in utilising technology to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment, and both Tim and Kelly were keen to include *Consent Matters* as part of their already successful online induction programme.

As Kelly explains, 'in the first two weeks of the academic year there are really high incident rates, so we wanted *Consent Matters* to be a protective, preventative factor' – encouraging positive behaviours as soon as students join the university, and demonstrating that 'we're a community and we want to look after each other and protect each other, and there are certain things that are not acceptable'.

Tim worked with Keele's IT department to generate online accounts that students receive upon accepting their course offer, and he collaborated with the student support services to put together an 'all-encompassing pre-arrival induction programme' that introduces students to key resources at the university, including *Consent Matters*. Tim also incorporated an element of gamification in the form of Digital Badges, which are awarded upon completion of each stage of the programme.

In the 19/20 academic year, 70% of all new undergraduate students and 44% of postgraduate students completed the *Consent Matters* course as part of their pre-arrival induction. As Tim explains, this lower completion rate for postgraduates was due to 'a strong percentage of those postgraduates that did the induction programme when they started at undergraduate level, and so didn't undertake it again'. As a result, Tim is now exploring ways to increase that engagement rate, such as creating separate 'Postgraduate new student' and 'Postgraduate continuing student' induction programmes.

Case Study



Promoting the new edition

Kelly has also been coordinating campaigns throughout the year to build awareness of *Consent Matters*, taking an ‘educational approach’ as well as encouraging students to proactively improve their understanding of consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention. The second edition of the course was published in 2019, and Kelly has been promoting this new edition through initiatives such as a university-wide #NeverOK campaign, and February’s Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week.

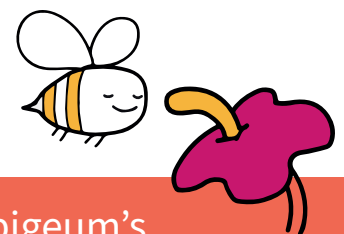
For this year’s Awareness Week, Kelly and Tim worked together to provide the second edition of *Consent Matters* for every student, and then promoted it through social media and promotional postcards. Kelly comments, ‘we provided a list of different places where they could find healthy information about sex and relationships, and we included signposting to *Consent Matters*’. She adds that ‘these were aimed at those that have questions or concerns about sex and relationships, but perhaps don’t feel comfortable talking to someone face-to-face’. Run annually, 2020’s awareness week campaign resulted in 469 additional completions of the three *Consent Matters* modules: ‘Thinking about consent’, ‘Communication skills and relationships’, and ‘Looking out for others’.



Next steps for consent training

Both Kelly and Tim have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from students about *Consent Matters*. Tim recently undertook an evaluation with all student groups on the efficacy of the course – ‘anecdotally, talking to students, it showed me that they were taking it on board, and it was certainly getting them thinking’. Although some mature students felt that the first edition of *Consent Matters* wasn’t as relevant to them, Kelly believes that the new edition’s coverage of a wider variety of student experiences, backgrounds, and relationships will resonate with all student groups. She has received very positive feedback from student representatives about the new edition of *Consent Matters*, and is planning a ‘Campus Climate’ survey in the near future to test understanding of consent within the wider student community, and she will continue to promote ‘being part of a community and challenging negative behaviour, prejudice, and discrimination’ to students through a range of campaigns.

For Keele’s pre-arrival induction programme, Tim will be working on integrating the new edition of *Consent Matters* in time for the next student cohort, with the online format of the programme being particularly important, as Keele scopes out how best to deliver teaching and learning over the coming months in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.



To discover how Epigeum’s interactive online training could benefit your institution, email: epigeum@sagepub.com