

WomCam forum 18/1/18

Minutes of the first Women's Campaign forum of Lent term, hosted in the Grad Union lounge at 7pm by Lola Olufemi, CUSU Women's Officer.

Committee present: Ellie Byrne (non-binary rep), Em Travis (disabilities rep), Sian Creely (graduate rep), Anna Pick (media & outreach officer), Miriam Gauntlett (secretary), Claire Sosienski Smith (zine officer), Flic Kersting (LGB officer)

Agenda points:

1. Committee Updates

Ellie: Discussion group next week for non-binary and gender non-conforming people: 24th January, CUSU Lounge, 5:30-6:30pm.

Flic: Next Thursday starting a discussion group for women and nb people with the women's officer on the LGBT campaign. Also organising a zine, please submit if you can!

Sian: Every Thursday half five to half six, grad reading group in King's Bar. Next week we're reading about how 'gender' has become a catch all term to express discontent with the (neo) liberal order, please come along!

Claire: New Gender Agenda zine theme is Survival, deadline 21st Feb!

2. Important Event Announcements – RECLAIM THE NIGHT

Lola: Most important event of this term = Reclaim the Night. Annual march for women + nb people to reclaim our bodies + space + time and draw attention to sexual violence. Life-affirming event. Long list of previous women's officers speaking before the march, Sara Ahmed (feminist theorist + writer) going to give a keynote speech at the vigil. Not just for students, any woman/nb person in Cambridge is welcome to come. Assemble on Parkers Piece at 5pm, 11th March.

Lola: Usually a parallel event for men organised by men to show solidarity with the event.

3. Disciplinary Procedure Explanation and Discussion of Plans

Lola: Breaking The Silence = prevention of sexual misconduct + support offered to survivors with aim of ending sexual assault across the university. New centralised procedure. Give a form to OSCA (office of students) – make informal suggestions/resolutions which enable survivors to continue education in Cambridge. If these aren't sufficient, students referred to disciplinary procedure. Old + archaic procedure, like a court, relies on criminal burden of proof not balance of probability, want to write an open letter to the university change it to balance of prob. Only UK university that doesn't do that. Could be really successful so when the letter is drafted I will bring it to forum to get ideas on it but also please spread the word.

Sian: Important bc the court will always rely on burden of proof so university disciplinary procedure (if relies on balance of probability) can be important to get justice.

Lola: less than 6 people use procedure per year + takes 6 months (supposed to take 3).

Lola: Depending on how well the letter goes, can brainstorm ideas for what we can do follow up.

4. Survey and Feedback on BTS

Lola: Going to do a formal survey. WomCam was pivotal in launching breaking the silence so want to get people's opinions on it. Do people feel like it's had an impact?

Ellie: Definitely heard it talked about e.g. my dos and people are aware.

- Raised awareness, heard people talking about posters for BTS in a positive way.

Em: Thinking specifically about Homerton, made a youtube video n line with BTS. But they interpreted it as survivors breaking our silence, but it's more about breaking the silence of the institution on sexual violence. How can we combat this?

- Women's officers last year at Pembroke reviewed college sexual harassment policy. Still going on and still in the works. JCR haven't been as on it as they should have been.

Lola: making sure that students know about it. University dealing with it clumsily, patting themselves on the back for something that's not that comprehensive. Every student entitled to an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) to help support them whether or not they're going through the procedure. Can still access an ISVA even if it didn't happen at Cambridge. Important to be critical of BTS. Institutions put lots of money into particular thing, no sense of renewal, no sense of how things improve. Impetus comes from Women's Campaign to change things and make things better.

Lola: Still independent college sexual assault policies. Decision lies first with the survivor – if they feel that their college policy is robust enough they can go to them. Advantage of procedure – now can report somebody to the university. Since serious cases are often dealt with at a university level it's unlikely they'll refer you back to college level. Having a procedure is important so if your college doesn't have one then that's something that can be done for BTS.

- Lots of colleges stopped thinking about their own procedures when the planning started for the centralised procedure (4-5 years ago). My college said they wouldn't do anything until the university procedure had been released. Important to turn to colleges now and make sure their policies are being reviewed / created. Exactly the time for people to be pushing back as institutions have been saying that "this has to stop etc" so we need to start asking them what they've been doing about it.
- Problem when staff run student societies e.g. classics society. Blurred lines, crossing boundaries, often very late meetings, who to talk to about that?

Lola: Institutional problem that academic life becomes personal e.g. repercussions for not going. Bring a lot of testimony that things need to change e.g. have an earlier time.

- Approach it at an institutional level e.g. go to the people who organise it, Tiffany Page (academic) works a lot on student-staff misconduct, can help.
- Has anyone got experience with writing proposals in terms of being sensitive towards survivors (outside of the procedure)? My college hasn't acted appropriately outside of the procedure. My college doesn't have its own sexual assault procedure.

Lola: WomCam can provide guidance for policy change in colleges – will speak later about this.

5. Feminist Exhibition: Spreading the word?

Lola: Theme is feminist persistence and survival. Submissions open to ALL women and nb people. In Churchill, 1st – 5th March. Email womcamexhibition@cusu.cam.ac.uk with your name and college if you would like to submit a piece of art work or perform poetry on opening night. Would love as many submissions as possible. Marking BTS from a student perspective. If you'd like to be involved / get posters to put up in your college to advertise it please let me know.