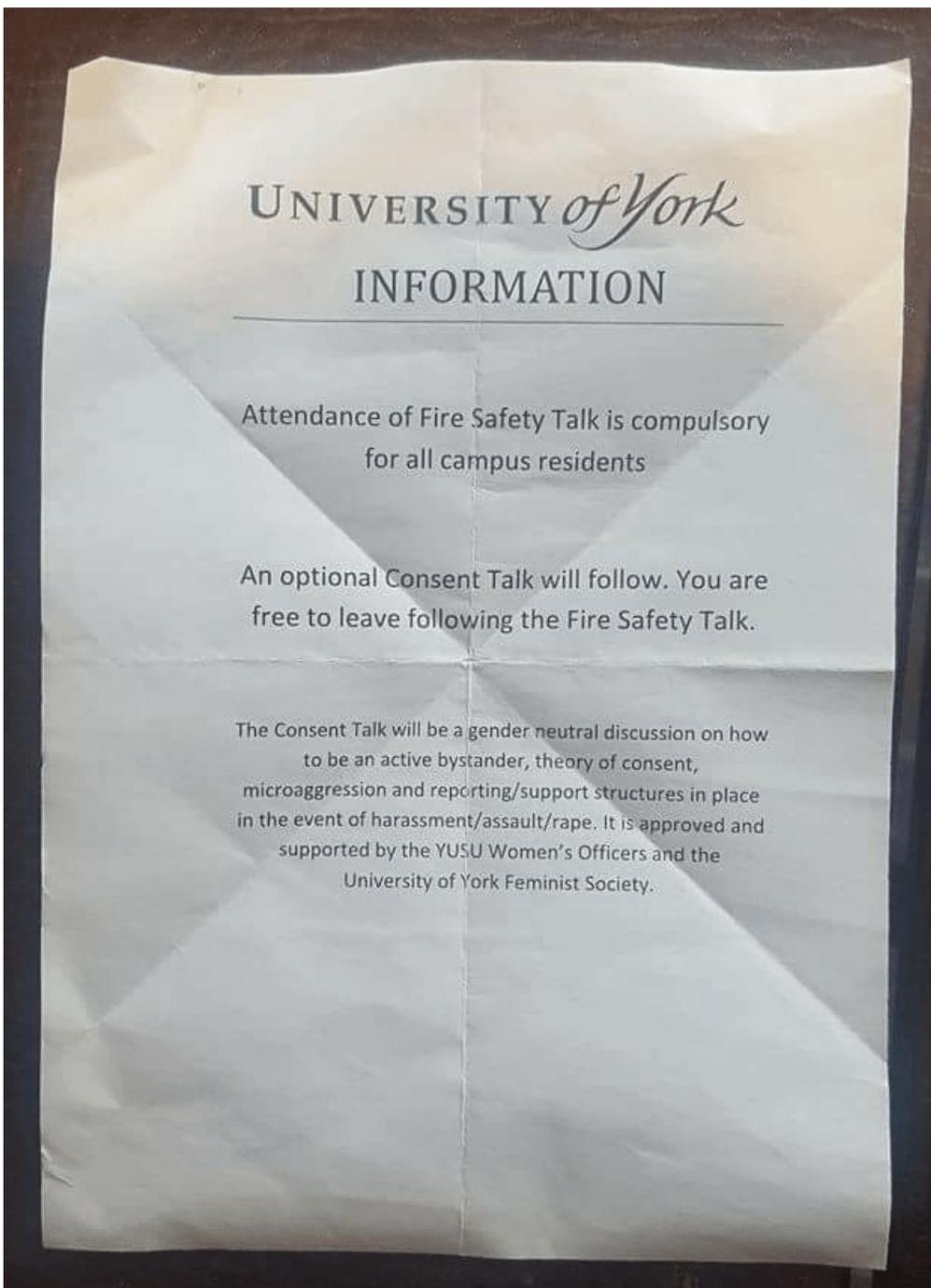


Freshers walk out of sexual consent talk after activist encourages boycott

A quarter of first years chose to leave the first ever talk at York

By Chris Owen, Amy Gibbons and Ben Rowden
Tuesday 27 September 2016



The faked document before it was adjusted, claiming to be from an official University source, was distributed by activist Ben Froughi to remind freshers that the consent talk was not compulsory

Over a quarter of freshers walked out of the first ever sexual consent talk at the University of York today, as an activist spent the afternoon issuing flyers while posing as a University official. The flyer went to lengths to explain that the talks, led by YUSU Women's Officers Mia Chaudhuri-Julyan and Lucy Robinson, were non-compulsory and that students had the right to leave after the first segment on fire safety.

The first talk at 1pm, which was attended by freshers from two of the University's eight colleges, saw an estimated 25 per cent of the students present choose to leave. Third-year activist Ben Froughi, who from the second talk onwards distributed a flyer informing students that they had no obligation to stay for the segment on sexual consent, spent time encouraging freshers to boycott the consent briefing if they saw fit.

All freshers were informed by talk organisers at the beginning of the talks that, while the fire safety segment was compulsory and non-attendance was enforceable by a fine, the sexual consent segment was entirely optional.

Froughi was later told by York officials that he was not allowed to distribute material on campus which carried the University's official logo. Instead of leaving, he elected to chop the top off of the flyers, removing the University's logo, and continued to distribute his material to all freshers attending talks.

In talks later in the day, when Froughi's flyer had been adapted, only a handful of first years chose to leave ahead of the ten minute consent briefing, however Froughi claims not all were entirely happy to attend. "When handing out the flyers to the final group of the day, one fresher stood beside me and shouted towards the group waiting to enter, 'We don't consent to consent talks!' which got a laugh," he said.

Women's Officers Chaudhuri-Julyan and Robinson claimed that they believed Froughi's behaviour led to a compromising of students' safety, as freshers were encouraged to skip the segment "designed to give them basic safety information to protect their wellbeing, physically and mentally".



Freshers were issued with 'official' documentation reminding them that the consent talk was optional

They told Nouse: "We appreciate Froughi's right to an opinion on the matter, despite our disagreeing with that opinion. What we cannot agree with is impersonating a University of York staff member to attempt to

prevent new students receiving basic safety information.

“The talks were gender neutral, short and solution based. They were accessible to all and actively invited questions and discussion.”

However Froughi claimed his motive was in the best interest of students. “Consent talks are patronising; if students really need lessons in how to say yes or no then they should not be at university.

“There is no ‘correct’ way to negotiate getting someone into bed with you. In suggesting that there is consent talks, perhaps most damaging of all, encourage women to interpret sexual experiences that have not been preceded by a lengthy, formal and sober contractual discussion as rape.

“Consent talks propagate the backward message that all women are potential victims and all men potential rapists.”

The Women’s Officers recently [made national headlines](#) when the introduction of consent talks at York was announced.

The pair added that they thought the talks were “an immense success” and they are looking forward to hearing about more consent education in future Freshers’ Weeks.

Froughi clarified that he was informed by University officials that he was not allowed to distribute the flyers as long as he claimed to represent the University. He told Nouse: “Following a few minutes of conversation, we established that I was well within my rights to hand out flyers with anything on them provided I wasn’t claiming to represent the University.”

Though he opted to remove the logo from the flyers, University officials later returned to challenge Froughi again.

“I was approached again when handing out flyers at a later talk by the same member of university staff who repeated that the information I was giving out was already available to students. I gave the same answer – ‘that’s good’ – and carried on handing them out,” he added.

Froughi continued: “The flyer was made to ensure students were aware that although there is a fine in place for non-attendance of the Fire Safety Talk, the University has confirmed no one is required to attend consent talks of any kind.”

The talks were introduced by YUSU Welfare Officer Dom Smithies, and followed up with a short announcement from local rape and sexual assault support service Survive.

When asked, Smithies commented: “I really welcome the Women’s Officers efforts to tackle what is a difficult issue. They did a brilliant job with the consent talks, challenging stigma and conveying important information in an inclusive, positive and informative environment.

“Sexual violence is, sadly, a reality, putting in place measures to ensure students are better informed to both prevent it and to highlight the support and services that are available is the right thing to do and the consent talks are a real step in the right direction.

“The main feedback I received today was overwhelmingly positive with many students wondering why the talks weren’t compulsory. I was glad they were well received and I think we need to be looking at making them a permanent fixture on the welcome programme.

“The Women’s Officers have opened up an important conversation and I would hope that as a campus community we can explore any issues around this in an open, respectful and transparent way – the safety and well-being of all York students is in everyone’s interest.”

28/9/16: This article has been amended. It originally stated that Froughi staged a walk out in protest

before the segment on consent during the second talk of the day. Nouse would like to clarify that Froughi did not attend any of the day's talks, and no walk out was staged.

The article also stated that Froughi distributed flyers before the first talk. It has been amended to state that Froughi was in fact only present and campaigning after the first talk, from 2pm.



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