

# University of the West of England

Healthwatch engaged with students studying at the University of the West of England to find out their experiences and thoughts of access to contraceptive services. Research into what method they have in place in order to ensure adequate contraception whilst studying at university. The questionnaire aimed to find out which university or health services students had used for support, what was good about their experiences and what students think could be improved:

- Females aged 18 to 19 were most likely to use a contraceptive service in 2016/2017, with 18% having at least one contact.
- Many students said that they are aware of free contraceptive options provided by the NHS. The majority of students, when asked how to improve access, stated that introducing a walk-in site on UWE campuses would encourage more students to make better use of the contraceptive services.
- Supported by Healthwatch Bristol, university students shared their experiences. Responses highlighted the importance of clinic locations, opening times and various other features to increase awareness and improve access to contraceptive services.

Healthwatch Bristol listen to what people say about local health and social care services, like hospitals and GP surgeries. This report aimed to discover what university students think about the local contraceptive services. The questionnaire gave valuable insights into what is working well, what students would like to see improved and how to increase support for those students wishing to access sexual health and contraceptive advice whilst studying in Bristol.

According to the 'Statistics on Sexual and Reproductive Health Services' report published by NHS Digital in October 2017, females of ages 18 to 19 were most likely to use a contraceptive service in 2016/2017. 18% of females in this age category had at least one contact with a service, a decrease from 19% in 2015/2016.

Healthwatch Bristol were keen to hear from the students attending

"Universities see people from across the country relocating to a new area. There should be a way to continue repeat prescriptions without needing extra tests."

UWE Student

"They took time to consider the best option for me as an individual"

UWE Student

"I prefer booking appointments online because I don't always feel comfortable speaking over the phone"

UWE Student



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Healthwatch Bristol speaking to students at University of the West of England about their thoughts and experiences accessing contraceptive services.

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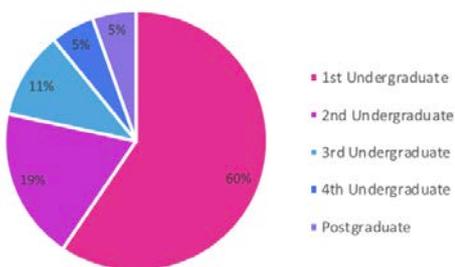
the University of the West of England about their preferred

method of accessing contraceptive services and advice in the local area.

## Data Analysis: Feedback from total of 37 participants.

Participants of the questionnaire were mostly female (89%). The year of study was taken into consideration, as were relationship statuses.

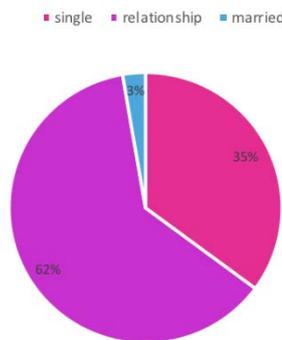
Which year are you currently studying in at UWE?



## Question 1

Question one asked if participants were aware of free contraceptive services provided by the NHS. There were 36 responses and 30 of these responded that they are aware (83%), 6 were not aware

Which best describes your relationship status?



(17%). Following on from this question, participants were asked if they use these services, either in the past or present. 24 of 35 people use these services (69%). Two people have used the services in the past but do not any longer. Three people do not currently use the services and do not plan to start using them. Finally, six people do not currently use the services but are considering using them in the future. Of these six people, four of them were not

aware of the free contraceptive services provided by the NHS until completing this questionnaire. This is an interesting finding as if awareness was improved then these participants may have known of the services sooner.

## Question 2

The second question focused on specific clinic locations and the students' experiences of the locations they have used. Seven responses stated that they did not use a service located in Bristol, or at all, so these were excluded. The other answers included UWE Health Centre, Old School Surgery, Brook Bristol, Bradley Stoke Surgery, WISH Clinic, Tudor Lodge Surgery and local GP Practices.

The most common response for a lower rating was prolonged waiting times, some state specifically the waiting times for an appointment, others state waiting times in the clinics. UWE Health Centre had ratings ranging from 3 to 5, 5 being the highest score, from eight people. They were praised for the ease of booking

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appointments over the phone. Two participants explained they felt the appointment was “too short” leading them to feel not all options had been adequately explained. Students often worry about the contraception they are on, a participant highlighted this in their response of visiting a GP surgery in Bristol: “wouldn’t listen to my worries about the contraception I’m on”. One person stated that UWE Health Centre offers “quick access to appointment, suitable appointment time and on uni site”.

Another person who had visited UWE Health Centre and Old School Surgery, Fishponds stated that it was “difficult to get an appointment but the staff are nice and the nurses I’ve seen are always lovely”. Friendly staff is an important factor as other students mentioned feeling slightly embarrassed when talking about this subject in earshot of others, such as in pharmacies.

## Question 3

Question 3 focused on students’ preferred access to different aspects of contraceptive services,

including: condoms (C-Card scheme), emergency contraception, female contraception, pregnancy testing, repeat contraception prescriptions and advice around contraception and sexual health. For C-Card condoms, female contraception and repeat contraception prescriptions, the most popular access method was to order online and receive at home; receiving 59%, 38% and 59% of subjects’ votes respectively. Visiting GP Practices and UWE Health Centre were most popular for receiving contraceptive and sexual health advice. Pharmacy was most popular for emergency contraception and pregnancy testing.

## Question 4

This question asked whether students could be encouraged to use contraceptive services more though suggested methods. Introducing a walk-in site on UWE campuses gained the most votes (48%). This could mean a specific time slots dedicated to walk-in advice and appointments. The locations of potential walk-in sites were more popular to be

on UWE campuses rather than in Bristol city centre. In terms of booking appointments, online was the preferred method with 10 votes - booking over the phone received no votes and booking in person received 1 vote.

## Question 5

Question 5 determined the importance of certain clinic features to students. The ‘very important’ rating was most popular with the location of the clinic and how soon the next available appointment is. This links with the previous questions and introducing a walk-in site on UWE campuses. Early and late weekday opening times, and extended weekend opening times were rated important. Having specific time slots for different genders to visit the clinic was rated not important. Choice of doctor, whether a male or female doctor is seen, had no correlation of importance.

## Question 6

The final question focused on improving students’ awareness of sexual health and contraceptive services to allow

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better access for students. 11 people out of 29 voted that posters in public toilets on UWE campuses would be the most successful method. 10 people voted for more advertisement and information shared with students via email. Other options included displays in GP Practices (2 votes), UWE website (1 vote), social media (3 votes), displays in the library (0 votes) and 'other'. The 'other' suggestions included: "all of the above" and "building near on-campus accommodation". Information displayed on posters or sent via emails could include the location of the nearest clinic, its opening times and appointment booking procedure.

## Summary

This report examined students' access and knowledge of contraceptive services. Most participants were aware that the NHS offers free contraceptive services, some options with age restrictions. Evaluations of specific clinic experiences revealed strengths and weaknesses. The most common weakness across locations was the waiting time

to get an appointment. The most common strength across locations was the friendly and welcoming nature of the staff and nurses. This topic can be quite uncomfortable for people of any age, so this is a very important aspect of the services.

Location and ease-of-access of the clinics proved to be a very important feature when students are considering using the service. Also, the access to relevant information regarding opening times and locations.

Participants were asked to provide any additional comments and/or suggestions on completion of the questionnaire; three students provided information. One student said "Improving access to repeat prescriptions for those who are living in Bristol, away from home. If tests are needed [...] an adequate supply of their pill should be provided until an examination can be arranged". Another student said that the "walk in sex clinic in Bristol had more available appointments the on-site doctors". The final student referred to improving awareness: "Everyone in this day and age is online so

getting on social media is very important".

## Recommendations

After reviewing all responses given in the questionnaire there are several suggestions for improving access and awareness of contraceptive services available to UWE students.

Introducing an online booking system may be beneficial at UWE Health Centre. Several days a week could see new specific times for five to ten-minute contraceptive and sexual health advice appointments.

Linking with the previous suggestion, instead of booking an appointment in the specific contraceptive and sexual health timeslot, it could be a walk-in system. Students may give their names at the reception desk and they are called in to the doctor or nurse on a first-come-first-served basis. There is a similar system implemented for careers advice at UWE Frenchay.

The final recommendation is to look into the potential delivery options of condoms, on the C-Card scheme, and repeat

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contraceptive prescriptions. This was a very popular choice in question 3 so should be looked into. Further and wider research by HWB into students'

opinions of this could indicate how effective and beneficial this could be. However, it may be that it can no longer be offered as a free service due

to delivery costs. This is something to be considered in any future research.