



# RMIT progress against the Australian Human Rights Commission Recommendations

March 2019

# Recommendation

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## Recommendation 1

Vice-Chancellors should take direct responsibility for the implementation of these recommendations, including decision-making and monitoring and evaluation of actions taken.

To assist and advise them in this respect, Vice-Chancellors should have an advisory body within their institution which has responsibility for guiding the implementation of the recommendations made in this report. The advisory body should report directly to the Vice-Chancellor of each university and include representatives from:

- the university's senior leadership
- the student body
- academic staff
- residential colleges affiliated with the university
- student services, such as: counselling services, medical services and campus security, and
- frontline sexual assault services.

The advisory body should be responsible for developing an action plan for the implementation of these recommendations. The development of an action plan should involve broad and extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders from the university community and, where relevant, the wider community. The advisory body should also seek independent expertise where relevant and draw on existing research and best practice.

The advisory body should assess and publicly report on the university's progress towards implementation of these recommendations within 18 months.

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## Recommendation 2

Universities develop a plan for addressing the drivers of sexual assault and sexual harassment that:

- provides students and staff with education about: behaviours that constitute sexual assault and sexual harassment, consent and respectful relationships, 'violence supportive attitudes' and bystander intervention, and
- identifies existing resources and communications campaigns that reinforce key messages of education programs for dissemination to staff and students.

Education programs and communications should:

- target all levels of the organisation – current and future students, staff, residential colleges, public transport to/ from university, sports clubs, student societies and student unions
- be based on best practice and research
- be developed and delivered by individuals and/or organisations with expertise in sexual violence prevention
- be developed in consultation with university students, and
- include measures for evaluating and refining the actions taken.

# Action

**1.** RMIT has established the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Reducing and Responding to Sexual Harm. With broad membership consistent with Recommendation one, it meets at least twice annually to drive and monitor actions outlined in the three-year Changing the Course framework and annual plans, and to discuss and resolve issues. The joint chairs of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group meet with the Vice-Chancellor twice a year to report on data, trends and key issues for decision.

**2.** RMIT's three-year (2017-2020) plan and prevention framework is published on the RMIT website and is supported by a detailed annual action plan. Both involved broad and extensive consultation and were endorsed by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group prior to implementation.

**3.** RMIT reports its progress against the Changing the Course framework and action plans directly to the AHRC and to other stakeholder groups including the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) and internal University stakeholders. General progress to wider external stakeholder groups is communicated via RMIT's website.

**4.** Annual reports and updates will continue to be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and endorsed by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Reducing and Responding to Sexual Harm.

**5.** Planning and action will continue to be both dynamic and informed by context. Actions will be revised and refreshed each year to inform an annual plan.

**1.** A number of face-to-face education and e-learning modules for students and staff have been implemented, including:

Consent and respectful relationships (available to all students)

- Face-to-face sexual consent and respectful relationships workshops (for international students)
- Bystander intervention (for student leaders and others)
- Responding to disclosure of sexual harm (staff)
- Based on participant feedback and other inputs, RMIT is committed to refining and improving the quality of, as well as increasing the level of participation in these courses.

**2.** Student leaders, club members and RMIT executives are a particular focus area for sexual harm education. Education programs are developed and delivered by individuals and/or organisations with expertise in sexual violence prevention.

**3.** RMIT's 'Be the Change' engagement campaign was designed in collaboration with students and launched early in 2018. RMIT's 'Be the Change' engagement campaign will continue to be refined with ongoing consultation across a variety of stakeholder groups, including students. The 'Be the Change' engagement campaign will be refreshed and re-launched in 2019, including male leaders' commitments to the narrative.

**4.** A Staff-Student Relationships Commitment Statement was introduced, which replaced a previous Staff-Student Relationship Policy Process. This document acknowledges that power imbalances exist between staff and students and is in line with the Universities Australia 'Principles of Respectful Supervisory Relationships' document. Staff and students will be informed of the new Commitment Statement.

**5.** A student survey designed to measure attitudes that drive sexual harm is under development. The

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### Recommendation 3 (Support)

In order to ensure students and staff know about support services and reporting processes for sexual assault or sexual harassment, universities should:

- widely disseminate information about university reporting avenues to staff and students
- widely disseminate information about internal and external services to staff and students, including: university counselling and medical services, campus security, local sexual assault services, police, medical centres, hospitals, counselling services and anti-discrimination agencies
- ensure that information about internal and external reporting procedures and support services is displayed clearly, in a logical place(s) on the university website
- ensure that information about internal and external reporting procedures and support services is provided to students as part of their orientation into university and to new staff as part of their human resources induction/ on-boarding
- ensure that information about internal and external reporting procedures and support services is accessible to all students and staff, including: people with disability, people from CALD backgrounds, and
- develop relationships with external services (local sexual assault service, local hospital) to enable referral of students to these services where necessary.

Universities should evaluate the activities undertaken to increase awareness of support services and reporting processes to ensure that these measures have been effective in increasing awareness among staff and students

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### Recommendation 4 (Monitoring progress, best practice)

In order to ensure that actions taken by universities to prevent and respond to sexual assault and sexual harassment are appropriate, within a year of the release of this report, universities should commission an independent, expert led review of existing university policies and response pathways in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

This review should assess the effectiveness of existing university policies and pathways and make specific recommendations to universities about best practice responses to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

In the interim, and at an institutional level, universities should draw on sexual violence counselling expertise to develop and review processes for responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment of students to ensure that they:

- secure the immediate safety and wellbeing of the individual who has experienced the sexual assault or sexual harassment
- are clear and accessible

survey is informed by the National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women survey (NCAS) and will act as a measure of cultural change over time

6. New respectful research training resources (produced by the Australian Council of Graduate Research) will be incorporated in training for research supervisors and administrators in 2019.
7. A new bespoke micro credential for students addressing respect and consent will be developed.
8. Culture change will continue to be measured over time.

1. In line with recommendation two, whole-of-university communication campaigns were initiated and websites (staff, students and public websites) updated to ensure students and staff know how to report and gain support in relation to sexual harm.

2. A printed guide on responding to disclosures, including support services, was provided to each staff member in 2017 and in early 2018. The printed guide, including support services, will be refreshed and provided to staff in 2019.

3. A 'responding to disclosure of sexual harm' e-learning module was launched in 2018. The e-learning module will be incorporated into staff on-boarding processes in 2019.

4. Relationships with Victorian Police have been strengthened with a delegate joining the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Safer Campus Advisory Group.

5. In 2017, the University funded a CASA worker to support students on campus and CASA House continues to provide specialist training expertise to RMIT, delivering face-to-face workshops. The Domestic Violence Resource Centre is also involved in delivering training programs. RMIT will extend networks with relevant expert agencies and researchers with expertise in sexual violence prevention and continuously improve the availability of information about internal and external reporting procedures.

6. RMIT Safer Community (a student sexual harm intake point) team members attend student orientation events in order to build student awareness of reporting processes and support services available.

7. Messaging will continue about the single point of contact for students and for staff to report, and the support available irrespective of the circumstances of the sexual harm incident. This will be captured in a plain language guide to options for reporting and support.

8. The student academic 'at risk' process documentation will be refreshed to enhance a focus on support for students impacted by sexual harm.

1. Processes for responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment of students were developed to align with trauma informed practice and involved expert input via the CASA House partnership in 2017.

2. An independent, expert-led review of existing University policies and response pathways was commissioned in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Key observations of the expert-led external review will be addressed in the 2019 action plan.

3. A threshold will be developed to refer a report of sexual harm for external investigation.

4. Evidence-based behaviour change programs designed to prevent recurrence or escalation will be researched.

- provide individuals with control over what happens to their report
- have the flexibility to suit individual circumstances
- provide students with support to continue with their studies
- provide specialist support, from someone who has specialist expertise and training in sexual assault, sexual harassment and trauma counselling of sexual assault survivors, and
- accommodate the needs of students from a diverse range of backgrounds.

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**Recommendation 5 (High impact/risk)**

Universities should conduct an assessment to identify staff members and student representatives within their institution most likely to receive disclosures of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Universities should ensure that these staff members and student representatives receive training in responding to disclosures of sexual assault and sexual harassment, delivered by an organisation with specialist expertise in this area.

**1.** 'Responding to disclosure' face-to-face training initiatives have been underway since mid-2017 (delivered by CASA House) to:

- student in clubs and leadership roles
- staff in frontline support and conduct roles
- counselling staff (tailored professional development)
- other staff and students leaders (those more likely to receive a disclosure of sexual harm)

**2.** A 'responding to disclosure' e-learning module is in place and its completion is mandated for all RMIT staff (with specific exemption for those for whom it may trigger distress). Staff completion of the 'responding to disclosure' e-learning module will be monitored.

**3.** Evidence-based 'bystander intervention' face-to-face training has been delivered to key student leaders in student clubs.

**4.** A restorative engagement framework has been approved by RMIT for responding to grievances held in relation to historical incidents of sexual harm experienced by former students. The Vice-Chancellor and the executive have undertaken specialist training in responding to sexual assault and restorative conferencing. The Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor's executive have committed to participating in restorative conferencing with former students.

**5.** Specialist support will be provided in relevant teams to prevent vicarious trauma of staff.

**6.** Completion of training by student leaders, volunteers and club officials will continue to be encouraged by embedding it into the RMIT student leadership framework.

**7.** Participation in restorative conferencing (restorative engagement) will be offered to former students who may have grievances in relation to historical incidents of sexual harm.

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**Recommendation 6 (Records and reporting)**

Universities should ensure that information about individual disclosures and reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment is collected and stored confidentially and used for continuous improvement of processes, including:

- details of the complaint/incident
- steps taken to respond to the complaint/incident, i.e.: whether the individual reported to police, whether the perpetrator was moved to a different lecture/tutorial
- support or assistance received, i.e.: whether the person received counselling from university services, whether they reported to police, whether they received support from an external sexual assault service
- time taken to respond to the report and/or refer the person to support services, and
- any feedback provided by the complainant/respondent in relation to the process. Access to this information should be limited to staff members with responsibility for responding to disclosures and reports and those responsible for improving university responses to disclosures and reports.

On a regular basis – at least every six months – Vice-Chancellors should be provided with de-identified reports of this data, including any trends or identifiable concerns which arise, along with recommendations for any necessary improvements to processes.

**1.** Information about individual disclosures and reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment is collected and stored confidentially and used for process improvement. Insights and data analysis continue to inform both the development and evolution of annual action plans in service of RMIT's broader 'Changing the Course' three-year framework.

**2.** Data is provided to the Vice-Chancellor as part of an ongoing and embedded reporting process.

**3.** Continued improvement in the quality and completeness of data collection and reporting will remain a focus.

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### **Recommendation 7 (Counselling)**

Within six months of this report, but as soon as possible, universities should conduct an audit of university counselling services to assess:

- the capacity of university counselling services to respond to students' requests for counselling in an appropriately timely manner, and
- how many university counselling staff have received training in working with sexual assault survivors.

As part of this audit, universities should collect data on:

- the average length of time students are required to wait to see a university counsellor, and
- the number of urgent/crisis requests for counselling received.

This data should be assessed to determine whether additional counselling services are required to meet the urgent needs of students who have experienced sexual assault or harassment. If additional counselling services are required, universities should ensure that these additional resources are in place as soon as practicable.

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### **Recommendation 8**

Universities should engage an independent body to conduct the National university student survey of sexual assault and sexual harassment at three yearly intervals to track progress in reducing the prevalence of these incidents at a sector wide level.

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### **Recommendation 9 (University residences)**

In addition to considering the implementation of the university recommendations made in this report, residential colleges and university residences should commission an independent, expert-led review of the factors which contribute to sexual assault and sexual harassment in their settings. This review should consider:

- appropriate responses by a college or university residence to reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment
- a trauma-informed and rights-based approach in a situation in which an allegation of sexual assault has been made
- the ways that hazing practices and college 'traditions' facilitate a culture which may increase the likelihood of sexual violence
- the role of alcohol in facilitating a culture which may increase the likelihood of sexual violence
- the level and nature of supervision in a twenty-four-hour residential setting in which large numbers of young people are living away from home, and the level and adequacy of training required to equip residential advisors to serve as first responders or in response to matters of sexual assault and harassment.

**1.** An audit of availability of University counselling support has been completed. The audit outcome was reported to the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Reducing and Responding to Sexual Harm. Audit results indicated appropriate and timely counselling service levels.

**2.** In addressing the points called out in recommendation seven:

- Students who have experienced sexual harm are prioritised for appointments with RMIT counsellors
- Specialist professional development for student counsellors has been delivered by CASA House
- In 2017 the University funded an on-campus CASA worker to support students.

**3.** The outcome of further annual audits will be reported to the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Reducing and Responding to Sexual Harm.

**4.** Availability of counselling support for those who disclose experiences of sexual harm will continue to be monitored to ensure that resources remain sufficient and counselling responses are timely.

**1.** Universities Australia will commission this survey on behalf of all Australian universities.

**1.** An independent review of the student residence (capacity of 368 people) Walert House, at the RMIT Bundoora Campus was completed. RMIT was commended on the respectful culture of Walert House and the work to ensure training was in place for staff on responding to disclosure and student residents were aware of how to seek support and report.

**2.** An alcohol management procedure was approved in 2018. The scope includes the Walert House University residence.

**3.** Preferred suppliers of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) will be required to have mature plans in place to reduce and respond to sexual harm.

**4.** Healthy and safe attitudes to alcohol will be promoted among students, with a focus on University and club events and the Walert House university residence.