



RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS
**National student survey of
sexual assault and sexual harassment in
university communities**

University of Melbourne
Summary Findings and Actions

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Contents

A national campaign to prevent and address sexual assault and sexual harassment on campus	3
Findings to drive comprehensive and sustained improvements in policy, practice and culture	3
Interpreting and disseminating University of Melbourne findings	4
Defining sexual assault and sexual harassment.....	4
Key findings for the University of Melbourne.....	5
Recommendations made by Australian Human Rights Commission and Universities Australia	7
Staff responsibilities when findings released	7
University of Melbourne commitments.....	9
Strengthening University support services.....	9
Influencing culture and individual behaviours through communication, training and educational materials	9

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

A national campaign to prevent and address sexual assault and sexual harassment on campus

In late 2016 the University of Melbourne, along with 38 other Australian universities, participated in a national student survey of sexual assault and sexual harassment commissioned by Universities Australia. The survey was conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). A total of 30 930 students responded across the nation.

In addition to the national survey quantitative data, qualitative data was gathered by the AHRC through 1849 written submissions from across Australia. Information from these personal accounts provided by current and former students has been incorporated in the AHRC's national report.

The qualitative information allowed the AHRC to identify **four major contributing factors to sexual assault and sexual harassment across Australian universities** (see pages 9–12 of the AHRC national report):

- ***Attitudes towards women and LGBTIQ people, as well as a wider lack of respect for all individuals***
Across Australian universities, women were almost twice as likely to report being sexually harassed in university settings than men, and more than three times more likely to report being sexually assaulted.

44 per cent of students who identified as bisexual and 38 per cent who identified as gay, lesbian or homosexual reported being sexually harassed in a university setting, compared with 23 per cent of students who identified as heterosexual
- ***Alcohol***
The consumption of alcohol, and excessive consumption in particular, is associated with incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment in university settings.
- ***Perpetrators abusing positions of power***
Those abusing positions of power were predominantly staff, but included senior students holding leadership positions.
- ***Prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault in residential settings***
Sexual harassment and sexual assault occurred most frequently in residential settings, including colleges, university camps and overseas trips.

This paper offers a short summary of important findings from the national survey for the University of Melbourne. The paper also outlines the present and future actions by the University to prevent and address sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Survey findings to drive comprehensive and sustained improvements in policy, practice and culture

The *Respect.Now.Always* questionnaire sought information from students on the prevalence, nature and reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Students were asked whether they had experienced sexual assault or harassment and, if so, where this occurred; the nature of the perpetrator/s; and whether the incident was reported. Students were also asked about their knowledge of their university's policy on sexual harassment and assault, where to seek support or assistance, and where to go to make a complaint.

A random sample of 9775 University of Melbourne students was surveyed and 2305 students responded. The University of Melbourne had one of the highest university response rates at 24 per cent.

The University of Melbourne is grateful to the many students who responded to the survey and recognises that doing so may have caused distress for some. The University community must now listen to what our students have told us. We will take further action to prevent and address sexual harassment and assault.

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

The national findings provide evidence of unacceptable sexual assault and sexual harassment on Australian university campuses. The AHRC notes that while no directly comparable data is available, the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in university settings appears to correspond broadly with the prevalence in the wider community.

The University of Melbourne findings show that while we have made positive progress through the Safer Community Program, much more needs to be done to prevent sexual assault and harassment on our campuses and to ensure all members of the University community are aware that sexual assault and harassment are totally unacceptable.

The University has committed to a range of new and enhanced actions to improve our institutional culture and responses to reports of sexual assault and harassment. These actions are targeted at increasing awareness of the problems, improving training, increasing student confidence and willingness to report incidents, and enhancing the institutional response to allegations.

To lead this work, the University has established a Respect Taskforce chaired by Professor Richard James, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Provost (Academic and Undergraduate). The taskforce will develop strategies to improve the culture, policies and practices of the University in relation to sexual assault and harassment and to oversee and evaluate implementation.

Interpreting and disseminating University of Melbourne findings

The *Respect. Now. Always* project has generated a large amount of data and information and the Australian Human Rights Commission has prepared a lengthy and detailed report. This report does not identify institutions or individuals. To accompany the national report, each university has received a summary report of its own findings. This shorter report contains the quantitative findings for the University in a tabulated format. Vice-Chancellors have agreed to make these reports available to their communities.

Institution-level findings have only been reported where response rates have been sufficient for statistical reliability and, therefore, reports across the sector are of differing length and detail.

In the case of the University of Melbourne, we have received extensive findings from the AHRC on patterns of sexual harassment and on students' knowledge of the University's policy on sexual harassment and assault; of ways to seek support/assistance; and of how to make a complaint. The findings we have received on sexual assault are more limited. The University has been provided with findings on the percentage of respondents who reported being victims of sexual assault or witnessing sexual assault in a university setting or elsewhere. However, due to the size of the data set, it has not been possible for the AHRC to provide the University with findings on the nature of the perpetrators, specific locations, and whether or not incidents were reported or formal complaints were made.

Survey findings on sensitive and complex social issues will always be the subject of debate. Already there have been media reports questioning the methodology, the findings, and the motives of Universities Australia in commissioning the study. From the University of Melbourne perspective, the *Respect. Now. Always* survey findings provide the most comprehensive information ever to be made available on the nature and extent of sexual harassment and sexual assault in Australian universities. This is the best data set available to us.

The fact we have a large student population of over 60,000 individuals should be taken into account in considering the University of Melbourne findings. Even an apparently small percentage figure in the findings will represent a sizeable number of students who have experienced some form of sexual harassment and/or sexual assault.

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

Defining sexual assault and sexual harassment

The Australian Human Rights Commission has used the following definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, noting that there are different definitions across the states:

Sexual assault includes a range of behaviours, all of which are unacceptable and constitute a crime. Sexual assault occurs when a person is forced, coerced or tricked into sexual acts against their will or without their consent, including where they have withdrawn their consent.

Sexual harassment is an unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favors or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which, in the circumstances, a reasonable person, aware of those circumstances, would anticipate the possibility that the person would feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Key findings for the University of Melbourne

The following summary is provided to assist the University of Melbourne community to understand and interpret the findings. It is intended to supplement, in a readily accessible format, the details in the national report and the University's institutional data set – not to replace them.

The Melbourne findings are similar to the national findings in many respects. This offers no cause for comfort. Overall, the findings are challenging for the University of Melbourne community. We will need to widely discuss the findings within the University community, consult and design actions to address the problems.

Respondents

- The 2305 respondents are broadly representative of the University's overall student demography. Compared with the student population overall, females are slightly underrepresented among the respondents and international students are overrepresented.

Sexual assault

- 6.2 per cent of Melbourne respondents reported being sexually assaulted (at university or elsewhere) in 2015 and/or 2016. A much higher proportion of female respondents reported being victims than males (8.9 per cent compared with 2.8 per cent). Domestic students reported significantly higher incidences of assault than international students. Undergraduates reported significantly higher incidences of assault than graduate students.
- 1.5 per cent of respondents reported being sexually assaulted *at university* over the same period. Again, a much higher proportion of female respondents reported being victims than males (1.9 per cent compared with 1.1 per cent). Domestic students reported significantly higher incidences than international students and undergraduates reported significantly higher incidences than graduate students.
- 1.6 per cent of respondents reported witnessing sexual assault at university in 2016. A much higher proportion of male respondents reported witnessing assault than females (2.2 per cent compared with 1.2 per cent).

Incidence of sexual harassment

- 50 per cent of Melbourne respondents reported being sexually harassed (at university or elsewhere) in 2016. A much higher proportion of female respondents reported being sexually harassed than males (62 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Domestic students reported higher incidences than international students. Undergraduates reported higher incidences than graduate students.

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

- 27 per cent of respondents reported being sexually harassed *at university* over the same period, including on transport to and from university. If travel is excluded, this proportion drops to 20 per cent. Female respondents reported being sexually harassed at higher rates than males (36 per cent compared with 16 per cent). Domestic students reported much higher incidences than international students and undergraduates reported higher incidences than graduate students.
- 29 per cent of respondents reported witnessing sexual harassment at university in 2016. Female and male respondents reported witnessing harassment in comparable proportions (29 per cent and 28 per cent respectively).

Nature of sexual harassment and of the perpetrators

- The survey revealed the broad nature of sexual harassment within university settings. The most prevalent forms of sexual harassment were staring or leering (36 per cent), sexually suggestive comments or jokes (18 per cent) and intrusive questions about private lives or physical appearance (13 per cent) that made individuals feel intimidated or offended. The full data set provides more information on other forms of sexual harassment.
- Sexual harassment in university settings occurred most frequently on public transport to and from university (32 per cent overall, 36 per cent for females), on university grounds including carparks, walkways and gardens (12 per cent), and university teaching spaces (9 per cent). The full data set provides more information on other locations of sexual harassment.
- 40 per cent of respondents indicated they knew all or some of the perpetrators of sexual harassment (34 per cent of female respondents indicated they knew all or some; 55 per cent of males indicated they knew all or some of the perpetrators). 61 per cent of female respondents reported that the perpetrators were not known to them.
- 68 per cent of respondents who were sexually harassed identified students of the university or those living at their place of residence as the perpetrators. Six per cent identified 'tutors or lecturers' (using the terminology of the questionnaire). Four per cent identified 'non-academic university staff members' (again, using the term used in the survey).
- Males were the perpetrators in 86 per cent of the incidents of sexual harassment reported by respondents. Females were the perpetrators in 19 per cent of incidents. (Some incidents involved both male and female perpetrators.)
- Three per cent of those who experienced sexual harassment sought support and assistance. Two per cent made a formal report/complaint. Typically, respondents did not believe the incident was serious enough or they did not feel the need for help. Other reasons included not knowing who at university could provide support/assistance; thinking it would be too hard to prove; and not wishing to hurt the offenders or get them into trouble.

Awareness of university policy, of where to seek support/assistance and of where to make a complaint

- Respondents reported low levels of knowledge or awareness of their options for seeking support or assistance within the University. The overwhelming majority of Melbourne respondents indicated they had little or no knowledge of University policy on sexual harassment and assault; of where to seek support/assistance; and of where to go within the University to make a complaint.

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

Recommendations made by Australian Human Rights Commission and Universities Australia

The Australian Human Rights Commission has provided nine recommendations to the university sector and Universities Australia has developed a 10-point Action Plan. The University of Melbourne fully supports these considered recommendations and actions, many of which have already been implemented. These recommendations and actions will be used to frame specific strategies and approaches of the University in the future.

The AHRC and Universities Australia recommendations include concrete actions to improve reporting and access to support for students and staff, as well as approaches and actions that can be undertaken to help change the wider culture and enforce and normalise 'zero tolerance' for sexual assault and sexual harassment. They are broadly outlined here:

- Engagement at all levels (including with students) needs to be led and supported throughout by the senior leadership of universities. Vice-Chancellors should take direct responsibility for ensuring that the recommendations are implemented and that the actions taken are transparent and based on evidence and expertise.
- Universities need to make a long-term commitment to change, and continuously assess the effectiveness of changes made to ensure ongoing improvement.
- The commitment to change needs to involve development and use of best practice guidelines for the sector, including enforceable codes of conduct and reviews of policies and processes. These need to be clear, accessible and well publicised.
- Support services should similarly be better publicised and have transparent information about the process for reporting of, investigation into, and outcomes for allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment.
- To better support both students and staff, more widespread specialised training and education should be provided at all levels, but particularly for those who are in 'frontline' and leadership roles. This training needs to take into account the diversity of university communities and ensure that all members know that they are valued and supported.
- De-identified data should be collected and reported regarding complaints, their management and the utilisation of support services. Independent data should be collected to inform and evaluate ongoing improvements.
- Affiliated residential colleges and universities need to work closely to influence attitudes and behaviours.
- Each university should establish an advisory board that reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor and includes representatives from across university communities (students, staff, support services, colleges and experts in the field) to develop a framework for ongoing planning. The board should seek independent expertise where relevant and draw on existing research and best practice. The board should assess and publicly report on the institutional progress in creating change.

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

Staff responsibilities when findings released

In the coming days and weeks, academic and professional staff of the University of Melbourne who have direct contact with current and former students will be asked questions about the University's response to the *Respect.Now.Always* survey findings and will encounter individuals wishing to report recent and historic incidents. Some students and staff may be distressed. **Care, compassion and sensitivity will be needed.**

University staff have been reminded of their responsibilities to direct current and former students to the University's Safer Community Program if individuals have experienced concerning behaviours, either recently or in the past.

In any meetings they have with students, staff have been asked to emphasise that:

The Respect.Now.Always national student survey of sexual assault and harassment reveals evidence of unacceptable assault and violence across Australian campuses.

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are always unacceptable, at the University of Melbourne and anywhere else. Harassment and assault are never the fault – or the responsibility – of the victim.

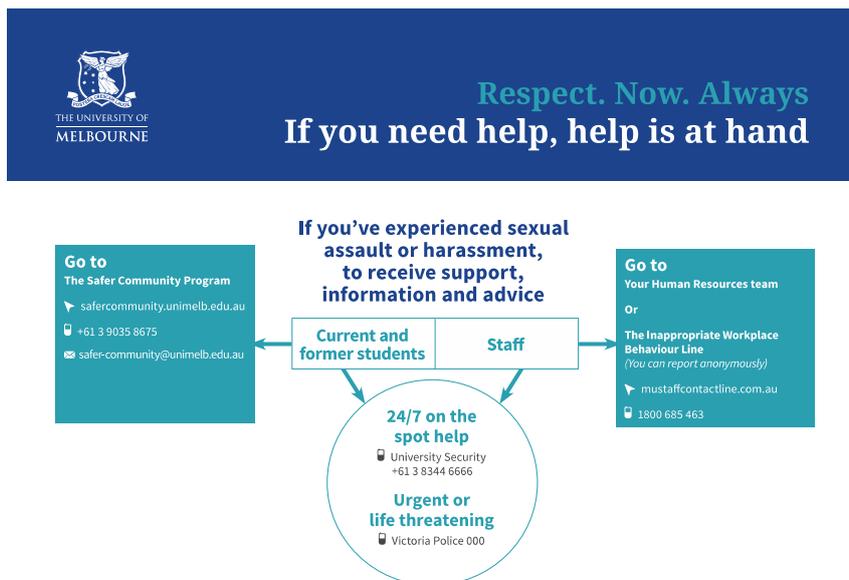
Every disclosure of sexual assault or sexual harassment is treated with respect. For those making disclosures, their privacy will be respected, and every effort made to support them through the process.

If staff meet current or former students who have experienced sexual assault or harassment, they are expected to advise them to contact the University's Safer Community Program, where students can report incidents and access support, advice, information and other specialist services.

The Safer Community Program can be contacted by email at safer-community@unimelb.edu.au or by calling 9035 8675. Students can also visit www.safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au for information, including on reporting to Victoria Police.

Students who have experienced sexual harassment or assault can also access Universities Australia's National University Support Line on 1800 572 224. This new hotline will be available until 30 November 2017.

Staff can raise concerns, report incidents, and access support, advice and information by contacting their HR team or the University's Inappropriate Workplace Behaviour Line on 1800 685 463 or at www.mustaffcontactline.com.au



RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities

University of Melbourne commitments

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are utterly unacceptable within the University of Melbourne community. The University will use the national survey findings to drive comprehensive and sustained improvements in the policies, practices and culture of the institution.

The University acknowledges that it needs to *prevent* and *address* the problem of sexual assault and harassment. Accordingly, actions underway include:

- Making the problem of sexual assault/harassment and the University's values more visible on campuses
- Significantly elevating the use of training modules on, for example, consent and first response to disclosures
- Doing more to increase student confidence in making disclosures and improving the response of the University to allegations, and
- Improving overall accountability and transparency.

Strengthening University support services

- The Safer Community Program has made preparations for higher demand for its services and will continue to monitor the volume of student contacts and further expand the number of staff if necessary.
- Counselling & Psychological Services (CAPS) has also made preparations for higher demand for its services and will ensure timely support in relation to reports of sexual assault.
- The University has rigorous processes for investigating allegations, including through the use of external investigators, and will continue to ensure sufficient resources are available to support comprehensive investigations.

Influencing culture and individual behaviours through communication, training and educational materials

- Intensive University-wide communications have been developed to reiterate the University's values and to highlight new initiatives.
- The University has purchased a licence for campus-wide use of *Consent Matters: Boundaries, Respect and Positive Intervention*, a fully interactive and evidence-based course of four modules covering sexual consent, communication and relationships, and bystander intervention.
- Online module/s on responding to disclosures will be also rolled out for staff and student leaders, with potential offerings currently being evaluated to determine the best fit for Melbourne.
- The Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education (MCSHE) is intensifying the [training for research higher degree supervisors on appropriate and inappropriate behaviours¹](#) with the objective of linking more strongly to Positive Behaviours training and/or other modules.
- Working in collaboration with academic divisions, MCSHE is also providing new advice to support sessional teacher induction and training, including future linking to responding to disclosure modules.

¹ melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/study/for-academic-staff/graduate-researcher-supervisor-programs/graduate-researcher-supervisor-online-training

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS

National student survey of sexual assault and harassment in university communities