

STATUS REPORT

October 2023

**Sexual Harm Prevention and
Response 2022–2023**

ENQUIRIES
Kat Norderm
Senior Manager Student
Conduct and Investigations
La Trobe University
Victoria 3086

E kat.norderm@latrobe.edu.au
latrobe.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

La Trobe recognises the profound impact that sexual harassment and sexual assault has on students. Since 2020, we have invested an additional \$5m in funding for services, primary prevention and the improvement of processes to create a safe environment for our students on campus. In the past year alone, \$2.5m has been invested in wellbeing, reporting and prevention functions.

SEXUAL HARM PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ACTION PLAN

Following the 2021 National Student Safety Survey and building on La Trobe’s 2018 *Change the Course: Action Plan*, the University launched our *Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan 2023–2026*. This plan was developed in consultation with students, including our student organisations. The plan scaffolds the institution’s response to addressing the root causes of sexual harm, raises awareness of reporting channels and enables the University to appropriately capture details of incidents.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

Prevention, Training and Education

In 2023, over **4000 students** and **300 staff** have attended training and/or professional development modules aimed at addressing the root causes of sexual harassment and assault, including raising awareness of reporting and disclosure mechanisms.

- We have introduced compulsory EAAA training (a program that provides young women with the knowledge and tools to defend themselves against attempts to sexually coerce or assault them) for female students in residential accommodation.
- Students in residential accommodation are required to undertake La Trobe’s Respectful Behaviour and Culture Module, and from January 2024, all students will be required to complete it.
- We have continued development and delivery of a range of educative and preventative training modules for staff and students, including:
 - Targeted respect programs developed for residential students
 - Culturally Safe Bystander Intervention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff
 - Respectful Relationships and Bystander Intervention
 - Gender Equality and Bystander Intervention Staff Program
 - Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm, Discrimination and Bullying
 - LGBTQIA+ SB Ally Program
 - “Tomorrow Man” workshops with male students
 - Higher Degree by Research Respectful Supervisory Relationships program
 - Placement, study abroad and excursion training packages, aimed at supporting students studying outside our campus network.

Important Initiatives

- In July 2023 we expanded the scope of Safer Community to include reports from staff members about other staff. We now have a single reporting point through Safer Community for staff and students experiencing or witnessing inappropriate behaviour, including sexual harm.
- In 2022, Safer Community implemented daily, then bi-weekly, triage meetings with Living at La Trobe accommodation staff. As a result, reports about concerning behaviour from accommodation staff more than doubled.
- We are developing a university wide Prevention of Sexual Harm social marketing campaign.
- We have expanded staff vicarious trauma support and are upskilling staff to support staff who are experiencing vicarious trauma.
- In 2023 we implemented an inter-divisional case management system, which has improved risk mitigation, streamlined information sharing and evidence storage and improved the secure distribution of complex case information.
- Sexual harm and gender-based violence prevention considerations are being embedded into the review of La Trobe’s placements program for students.
- We have commenced inclusion of gender equality and violence prevention into the curriculum.

- We are undertaking a review of relevant policies to address positive duty requirements and bring them closer to sector best-practice, including a recent review of our *Sexual Harm Prevention & Response, Family Violence, Workplace Behaviours* and *Student Behaviours* policies.
- La Trobe University contributed to the development of the [Universities Australia Good Practice Primary Prevention Guide](#).

REPORTS OF SEXUAL HARM

Disclosures and Formal Reports via Safer Community

Students and staff may choose to either disclose or formally report any incident of sexual harm to Safer Community, including recent or historical incidents, and whether the incident occurred on or off campus.

A disclosure is when a person tells someone about their experience of sexual harm for the purpose of seeking support, advice, and for precautionary or safety measures to be arranged. Disclosures will not generally lead to investigation, unless we are required to by law.

A formal report is when a person provides a formal account of their experience, and this will initiate an investigation. A formal report can be withdrawn at any time, and the matter will then be treated as a disclosure. If someone chooses not to make a formal report to Safer Community, they have the right to change their mind and can decide to formally report the matter in the future. Safer Community will also advise about and assist with external reporting, for example to the police, if that is what the student or staff member wishes to do.

Sexual Harm Data 2022

Please note that the 2022 data below does not include reports from staff about other staff. From July 2023 La Trobe has implemented a single reporting point through Safer Community for both students and staff. As a result, more comprehensive staff data will be available in the next status report. In 2022, Safer Community received 25 sexual harm reports – 20 were disclosures and 5 were formal reports. Of these,

- 12 reports related to sexual harassment,
- 9 were about sexual assault and
- 4 were about an historical sexual assault.

Of the 25 reports of sexual harm

- 23 involved incidents that occurred on campus,
- 1 incident occurred off campus and
- 1 incident was unspecified.

With respect to respondents

- In 12 reports the respondent was a student,
- 4 reports were about staff or contractor behaviour,
- 6 reports did not specify whether the respondent was a staff member or student, or it was unknown, and
- 3 were about the behaviour of people external to the university. 17 respondents were identified as male, and 8 were unspecified.

Given the low reporting numbers, it is not possible to break the data down further due to privacy concerns. However, it is possible to comment broadly on the data and outcomes.

Of affected persons,

- 18 identified as female, 1 affected person identified as non-binary and 6 did not wish to disclose their gender.
- 20 affected persons were students, 4 were undisclosed and 1 was a contractor.

Most disclosures were resolved through the provision of support and information. 5 matters were formally investigated.

Outcomes included referral to Workplace Relations and Support for investigation and actioning, educational responses such as the requirement to complete Respectful Behaviours training, referral to the University's general misconduct process and conditions placed on enrolment.

Range of Supports Offered

A range of interim measures were put in place during both the preliminary and formal investigation process. These included no contact orders, relocating students and restriction of access to campus or areas of the University.

Local level supports for students included safety planning, referrals to Student Wellbeing Connect and counselling, specialist external wellbeing support such as the Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault, as well as the option to make a formal report to Safer Community, or externally to police. Students were offered assistance with connecting with external organisations.

All students who met with Safer Community to discuss a report of sexual harm were offered support from a member of the Student Wellbeing Connect team, to be present in the meeting. This ensured that students did not need to disclose traumatic or distressing information to University staff multiple times and is in line with a victim/survivor-centred approach. Respondents were also offered wellbeing support throughout the process.

Student Awareness of University Support Services

La Trobe's results from the 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) indicated a concerning level of students' awareness about university support and reporting channels.

- 52.9 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to go to make a complaint about sexual harassment.
- 55.1 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to go to make a complaint' about sexual assault.

When it came to seeking support:

- 48.5 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to seek 'support or assistance' regarding sexual harassment.
- 43.5 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to seek 'support or assistance' regarding sexual assault.

In 2023 La Trobe included a question in the yearly internal experience survey asking students about their knowledge of how to report and receive support. In 2023, **3,627 students responded** to the survey and the results showed a promising improvement in students' awareness. The inclusion of these questions will continue, on a yearly basis to ensure we can track improvements over time and between national survey periods.

- 41.6 % reporting that they were unaware how to report.
- 39.5 % reporting that they were unaware of where they could go to receive support.

These improvements are positive, though a key focus for 2024 is to continue to promote and improve awareness of La Trobe's reporting and support services and pathways.