



# UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE STUDENT UNION REPORT TO THE RESPECT TASKFORCE

Compiled by Dr. Patrick Tidmarsh, the Student Union Sexual Harm Response Coordinator, on behalf of the students and Office Bearers of UMSU.

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## Background to the report

This report has been compiled by the Sexual Harm Response Coordinator, within the Advocacy and Legal Division of the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU). It represents the culmination of exhaustive consultations with students, both graduate and undergraduate, local and international, particularly elected student Office Bearers. Consultations were also held with UMSU, chancellery, faculty, Stop 1, counselling and residential college staff. Many other students also sought consultation. Those who did so were universally critical of the current situation, all having lived experience of both abuse and the current state of complaints and justice processes at the university. The report will be submitted to the UMSU Students' Council, for its endorsement, before being presented to the Respect Taskforce.

The purpose of this report is to articulate the views of students about how sexual and relationship harms are currently addressed within the University of Melbourne (UoM). It will review the policies, practices and initiatives students would like to see that would improve UoM's current response and prevention measures. This report cannot possibly cover all the opinions across UoM, or the initiatives and advancements UoM has made in the last two years, nor does it seek to. It represents a significant cross-section of opinion as to the work undertaken so far, the critical issues that remain to be addressed, and some suggestions for the best ways to accomplish them. It will begin by providing a brief background to the key issues faced by all universities, including UoM. The Executive Summary then provides an overview of student views, including recommendations for future initiatives. More comprehensive descriptions of student consultations then follow.

The report is structured around the six foundation principles laid out in the landmark 2017 UNSW (AHRC Centre) report, "On Safe Ground". These principles address the core elements of effective responses to relationship harms within Higher Education institutions.

The six principles are:

- Development of safe and inclusive frameworks for responding.
- Comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated design and content, of all related materials, processes and programmes.
- Accessible, transparent, and enforceable processes for investigation, and adjudication of allegations.
- Resourced, inter-connected and responsive support services.
- Collaborative links with external support services.
- Institutional commitment to prevention framework.

Crucially, the principles do not draw distinctions between different aspects of institutions, such as the University's own educational divisions, its affiliated colleges, or the independent student organisations, rather seeing universities as whole communities with common goals. This report is written in the same spirit. Each section will address the key issues described by students, about current responses and future work they wish to see undertaken. They have not drawn distinctions as to which part of the university community should undertake that work. The last section will outline a workplan that UMSU will seek to implement, better to provide structure and clarity to the students' involvement in Respect issues, including changes that are required in student-led activities and events.

The report, as requested by many, is as brief as possible, given the depth and breadth of opinion. Whilst the core purpose of this document is critique, it is important to note the positive intent of many within UoM, and the myriad practices and policy changes already underway.

As terminology and meaning may differ, or be subject to interpretation, this report will utilise the following definitions to denote elements of sexual and relationship harms: where the term 'rape' is used, it refers to penetration of the anus, mouth, or vagina without consent. The term 'sexual assault' refers to the touching of genitals, buttocks, or breasts without consent. 'Sexual harassment' refers to unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances in a workplace, or other professional, or social, situation. 'Stalking' refers to persistent and unwanted attention that leaves the subject feeling harassed and/or in fear of violence. 'Relationship harm' refers to a pattern of emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, or financial abuse, occurring within a relationship context (either current or past). All case studies are real events, as described to the writer, but names have been changed.

Finally, please be warned that this report contains graphic information, and narratives, about sexual and relationship harms.

## Executive Summary

Higher education institutions are high-risk environments for sexual assault, harassment, and relationship violence. Young people, particularly young women, are the most targeted community group for sexual assault and harassment. Risks also emanate from the pressures of relationships in early adulthood, cultural norms around the prevalence of alcohol, and the power differential in relationships between staff and students. The development of a preventative community culture, victim-centric reporting processes, and effective justice processes, are therefore vital.

Since the landmark 2017 AHRC and UNSW reports, UoM has made some progress. There were clear statements of support for victims from leadership and the development of a Respect Taskforce. Numerous initiatives were established, around the university, to improve students' understanding of consent, to encourage increased reporting, and to improve community safety. It is clear to the student body, however, that since the initial phase of action, progress has slowed considerably. In 2018, in response to the AHRC and UNSW reports, students made a series of twelve recommendations to the Respect Taskforce. There has been little tangible progress on these recommendations, with the slow pace of change appearing most marked in the last twelve months, as projects have dwindled, and Taskforce momentum has diminished. It is also clear that UoM has fallen behind many comparable institutions in its responses, particularly those that have adopted community-wide approaches. The notable exception to this trend has been those colleges who, although both separate entities and high-risk environments, have developed cooperative practices and fostered shared goals, in attempts to improve safety and develop positive relationship cultures. Whilst there is much more to be done, students within certain colleges were optimistic about their environment, and positive about leadership from both staff and students. Other areas of UoM have also made significant changes, but initiatives are not yet integrated into a university-wide approach, diminishing the prospect of transformative change to the wider environment.

Three issues most concern students in the current climate. Firstly, there is considerable opposition to the physical placement of reporting and therapeutic services within the administrative area of student services, Stop 1. Many have commented that, despite the best efforts of the staff at the Safer Communities Programme (SCP), the location represents a barrier to reporting. It is neither victim-centric nor trauma-informed to position services responding to those who have experienced sexual and relationship harms in an administrative and bureaucratic setting. Students stated that the location, and its public nature, reinforced a mistrust between students and the university. Students would like to see all relationship harm processes and practices within an appropriately located wellbeing centre, separate from ordinary administration services. There was also

suggestion that, should such a change take place, students themselves could play a more integral role in disclosure and support services.

The second most pressing issue is the multiple systems of complaint and reporting, and the subsequent investigation and adjudication processes that lack transparency. In many cases, students who did complain, either to university or external agencies, had already told their story multiple times, to different people, before responses were put in place. Some had reported multiple times only to be told there was nothing UoM could do. These issues have fostered mistrust and confusion, leading to continued low reporting rates. In fact, the university complaints system came in for the most sustained criticism, with many suggesting policies are also neither victim-centric, nor trauma-informed, and are inappropriate and insufficient for dealing with interpersonal and relationship abuses. Those students who commented on a preferred process identified the need for a stand-alone system, connected to therapeutic and justice processes, that addresses the unique challenges of relationship harms.

Thirdly, when reporting harassment or assault many will utter some variation of the phrase, “I want you to know what happened, but I don’t want you to do anything.” This phrase is the key to understanding the unique pressure of peer culture, fear of ostracism from their groups, and the universal concerns and anxieties common to relationship crime victims. Victims often then say, “I don’t want him to get into trouble. I just want him to stop doing it.” This highlights the lack of alternative justice processes throughout UoM, and the reliance on inadequate localised processes. Not only does UoM have no relationship with law enforcement, for potentially criminal matters at one end of the spectrum, but equally there are no early intervention measures, nor restorative justice processes, and no intervention processes for those with problem behaviours.

Although these three issues were of most concern to students, there were several other criticisms of current culture and practice, along with suggestions for improvements:

- Narratives about students as “fully-fledged” adults, and UoM not being “in loco parentis” need to be clarified. Students reported the need for relationship guidance, in both academic and residential settings, and assistance with the development and maintenance of safe cultures.
- Narratives about UoM as a collection of separate entities – the University itself, private residential colleges, and student organisations — rather than one community are counter-productive.
- Current responses are too focused on individual responsibility, at the expense of community and culture development.

- Messaging around issues of consent and the development of transformative change initiatives should, wherever possible, be done by students, or in liaison with student representatives.
- The central narrative, of male sexual violence towards women, whilst clearly the dominant issue, was seen to overshadow the prevalence of sexual harms to other groups and genders.
- The lack of messaging and materials in languages other than English does not reflect the needs of international students when faced with traumatic experiences.
- Students perceive a lack of diversity across reporting and therapeutic services.

Students have made suggestions for numerous improvements, these are incorporated into the recommended university initiatives and UMSU's own activities which are described in the UMSU Action Plan, at the end of the document. Importantly, students want to take a lead role, both at local and university-wide level, in the development of initiatives and processes that create transformations in the culture of UoM. Many also acknowledged that students could have done more, in recent years, to create initiatives, drive change, and demand greater action from the university. It is hoped that, despite the strong criticisms in this report, the development of both a UoM 'Community of Practice' and an UMSU Working Party to address sexual and relationship harms, will lead to renewed progress in addressing these important issues.

# ARC Principles

## Key points and recommendations

### Principle 1 - Development of safe and inclusive frameworks for responding.

#### **Key points:**

- There is no integrated, university-wide framework for addressing sexual and relationship harm.
- Many parts of the university have improved processes and policies.
- The issue of sexual assault and harassment has been made to fit into the current administrative and complaints systems, rather than being addressed separately.
- University messaging about sexual and relationship harm is vague and inadequate. Students do not relate to the content or process.
- Many groups do not feel current service provision, including reporting and support, reflect their need.

#### ***Recommendations:***

The development of a working party, as a partnership between students and staff, to guide the development of university-wide initiatives, to develop better integration of services and inclusivity. Development of services that represent the breadth of cultural, sexual and gender-diverse groups across UoM.

Development of integrated, university-wide messaging, with greater focus on inclusivity.

All Respect related materials to be presented in languages reflecting the breadth of the international student body.

Clarification of 'Duty of care' issues, particularly for students on placement with outside organisations, or where abuses occur primarily outside the physical university environment.

## **Principle 2 - Comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated design and content, of all related materials, processes, and programs.**

### **Key points:**

- Multiple reporting and complaint systems are confusing.
- Complaint and reporting policies processes are neither victim-centric nor trauma-informed.
- Anonymous reporting systems are uncoordinated and have shown little benefit.
- Many areas of the university have improved responses, but these are uncoordinated, and not part of a university-wide plan.

### ***Recommendations:***

Stand-alone, university-wide policies and practices for addressing relationship harms, holding perpetrators to account, and fostering a culture of prevention.

Initiatives should include all policies related to sexual and relationship harms (rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and relationship violence), including reporting, anonymous reporting, investigation, and adjudication. Where possible, students should also have access to alternative justice responses, and intervention services for those found to have perpetrated abuses.

## **Principle 3 - Accessible, transparent, and enforceable processes for investigation, and adjudication of allegations.**

### **Key points**

- Students are confused about disclosure and reporting options, leading to reduced disclosures and multiple reporting before accessing services.
- The placement of therapeutic and reporting services in Stop One is a significant barrier to reporting. Mixing administrative services and therapeutic services in the same space is neither victim-centric, nor trauma-informed.
- Duty of care issues, both within UoM and between UoM and other institutions are confusing, regularly leading to inaction.
- Despite a plethora of information, students continue to avoid, and lack faith in, the university's complaints and reporting processes. Reporting rates are less than half what they are in the general population.

- Queer students, students of colour, and international students, were the least likely to find the services accessible or wish to report.
- Responses to sexual harm focus on individual responsibility rather than community values and relationship management principles.
- Students have most faith in systems that include relationship management processes and principles.

***Recommendations:***

Development of stand-alone policies for sexual and relationship harm complaints.

Initiatives to encourage reporting for all student groups, genders, and identities.

Development of appropriately trained investigators and adjudicators to deal with serious misconduct, sexual and relationship harms.

Greater focus on alternative justice practices.

## **Principle 4 - Resourced, inter-connected and responsive support services.**

**Key points:**

- Current services are not appropriately located.
- Responses are not coordinated or inter-connected.
- Services are under-resourced, and do not reflect the breadth of the university community.
- There is no 24-hour telephone service, for responding to sexual and relationship harm within the university. (N.B. There is now a mental health helpline at UoM, but it is not specific to sexual and relationship harm issues)

***Recommendations:***

The creation of a Health and Wellbeing Centre, separate from the Stop One administration building, incorporating reporting and therapeutic services, and a 24-hour telephone support service.

## Principle 5 - Collaborative links with external support services.

### Key points:

- Collaborative links appear non-existent.
- All areas of the university are accessing resources about similar issues and needs, but efforts are not coordinated.
- There are no formal links with police or other forensic services.
- There is no plan to develop formal links with sexual assault services, relationship violence services, or those with expertise in addressing stalking.
- There are no services, or links with external services, providing interventions for perpetrators of abusive behaviour.

### **Recommendations:**

The development of a liaison committee, including student representation, with relevant external service providers, including, but not limited to: Victoria Police SOCIT, CASA, Safe Steps, No to Violence, and eHeadspace.

## Principle 6 - Institutional commitment to prevention framework.

### Key points:

- There is no institutional prevention framework.
- UoM documents on student life and student-centric practices do not include Respect issues in priority initiatives.
- Prevention strategies are mostly localized, and university-wide initiatives are not compulsory.

### **Recommendations:**

The development of a university-wide prevention strategy, incorporating faculties, colleges (and other student residences), including clubs, societies, camps and events. Attention should be given to relationships with other institutions, particularly those where UoM students are on placement.

## Feedback from consultations

This section provides a background to the key issues of sexual and relationship harms within higher education institutions, and a fuller picture of the consultations undertaken in the development of this report. The writer sought consultation with as broad a cross-section of the student body as possible, particularly those elected as student representatives. Workshops and seminars were conducted with some student groups, but many students opted to talk one-on-one, particularly those who had lived experience of abuses, or of the university's systems and processes. Consultations were also sought with a cross-section of UoM staff, including UMSU, faculties, services, and colleges. These are their views, once again presented through the six principles outlined by the AHRC.

### Brief background to the issues

#### ***Prevalence and reporting***

Sexual offending and harassment are prevalent in our communities, with young people most at risk. Higher education institutions around the world have acknowledged, particularly in the last decade, that issues of sexual and relationship harms are widespread within their communities, that it is under-reported, and that much still needs to be done in the prevention of, and response to, sexual and relationship harms.

In an Australian context, several reports have highlighted the prevalence of sexual crime in higher education institutions:

The Talk About It (2011) report found that 86% of students had experienced sexual harassment, 67% had unwanted sexual encounters, and 17% experienced sexual assault.

The AHRC (2017) report, "Change the Course", found that, *every year*:

26% of students are sexually harassed *in a university setting*.

6.9% report sexual assault *on at least one occasion*

1.6% report sexual assault *in a university setting*

These numbers suggest that, *every year*, at the University of Melbourne:

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17,420 students experience sexual harassment  
4,623 experience sexual assault  
419 experience sexual assault *in a university setting*

These figures are slightly higher than for the general population, where 2.5% of women and 0.5% of men report sexual assault or rape each year, but when the high-risk age bracket of students is factored in, the figure is unlikely to be significantly different from the wider community. Sexual harassment figures suggest high rates of victimisation within the broader community. Whilst the rate found by the AHRC (2017) report may not seem as high, the figure is for the duration of respondents' student experience, whereas community figures are taken over a lifetime prevalence. In that context, sexual harassment rates for students are high. The 2018 AHRC report, "Everyone's Business: 2018 Sexual Harassment Survey", found that young people were at greatest risk of sexual harassment.

There is an even greater difference between community figures, and those of higher education institutions, when it comes to reporting. Whilst general reporting of sexual assault is low, and sexual harassment even lower (ABS 2016; AHRC 2018), student reporting is significantly lower still. The 2015 Talk About It report found that 73% of students had experienced sexual harassment and 27% experienced sexual assault. It also stated that 51% of perpetrators were students and that *fewer than 6% of students reported the incident to the university*. Of those who did, *a very significant majority, of 72%, were dissatisfied with the outcome*.

### ***Increased risk in higher education settings***

Young adults, between 18 and 25 years-old are the group most targeted by perpetrators of sexual harm in our communities (NSPCC 2011, Tarczon and Quadara 2012). The increased risk to young people is particularly prevalent in public space (ANROWS 2015, Cox 2015), but is also the case online (Wolak, Finkelhor and Mitchell 2008). The AHRC (2017) report found that female students are more than twice as likely to experience sexual harassment than male students, and more than three times more likely to experience sexual assault. Sexual offenders target vulnerability, so the high-risk groups described in the AHRC (2017) report are also reflected in the wider community. The vulnerabilities created by distance from dominant cultural and relationship norms within the community

mean that LGBTQA+ young people are more likely to experience rape and sexual assault (Walters and Breiding 2010, Rothman, Exner & Baughman 2011). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are at greater risk (Tarczon and Quadara 2012). Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are more at risk (ONS (UK) 2012, AIHW 2018) than those from white backgrounds. People with a disability are more likely to be targeted than those without (Martin et al 2006, Murray and Powell 2008, Plummer and Findlay 2012). It is important to recognize that increased offending against these groups does not reflect on the groups themselves, but rather the vulnerability of distance from dominant norms. Offenders often come from outside the groups, recognizing the vulnerabilities and the reduced risk of their abuses being reported.

It is also important to recognize that alcohol, so prevalent in higher education contexts, is a significant factor in the increased risk of sexual assault and rape (Neame 2003, Hurley, Parker & Wells 2006, Hall and Moore 2008).

There is extensive evidence to suggest that higher education institutions are an environment likely to attract perpetrators, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, young people themselves commit at least 20% of all sexual crimes (US DoJ, 2009). Late adolescence and early adult are also a significant period of offending onset, with peers the likely target. Middle age is another period where offending may begin, with universities offering a unique vulnerability, where staff may hold considerable power over students' future work prospects (Finkelhor 1984, Hanson 2002, Smallbone and Cale, 2015).

### ***Relationship between sexual offending and IPV/Stalking***

Whilst the focus of this report is sexual harm, there are considerable connections between sexual crime, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence (IPV), and stalking. Any changes to policies and practices concerning sexual harm, whether preventative or responsive, must understand and include IPV and stalking.

One in six women, and one in fifteen men, have experienced an episode of stalking since the age of eighteen (ABS, PSS 2016). Research suggests that stalking is most prevalent against 18-24-year-olds (Baum 2009), and that campuses are a place of significant risk (Sheridan, Deakin Respect, 2020). Here too, LGBTQ+ people are at greater risk of being

targeted, with homophobia a significant driver of the behaviour (Sheridan et al, 2016). It is important to note that many perpetrators of sexual assaults against the queer community identify as heterosexual (Hodge & Canter 1998; Turchik & Edwards 2012).

Research into IPV regularly shows that a significant proportion of young people are both victims and perpetrators of IPV. Whilst young men are most likely to be perpetrators, particularly of sexual harm, young women also commit acts of IPV (Spencer et al 2015, Capaldi et al 2018). There are strong arguments that the causes of IPV are different for young women (Swan and Snow, 2006), but some agreement that the outcomes for both intervention and prevention efforts are improved when considering both young men and young women (O’Leary and Slep, 2012).

### ***Effective strategies for addressing sexual and relationship harms***

The dynamics of sexual offending have now been the subject of significant scientific inquiry for over forty years. Although much of the evidence refutes commonly held views, many myths and misconceptions persist. Each misconception affects the of both victims, perpetrators, and the wider community, stopping victims from reporting, and impacting decision-makers and fact finders. This provides the architecture of current failures to provide justice, including within the higher education sector. Misconceptions surrounding delayed reporting, continued relationship with alleged perpetrators, lack of cohesion in complainant narratives, and fragmented memories of events, can have significant impact on fact finders’ beliefs in the veracity of complaints. A lack of specialist training, in understanding offender behaviour and victim reaction, allows poor practice in both investigation and adjudication, and risks continued low reporting rates and unjust processes.

Systems that focus on adversarial processes have low satisfaction rates for all parties, particularly complainants. Even where the standard is only ‘the balance of probability’, few cases are upheld. Most higher education institutions in Australia and New Zealand do not have alternative resolution pathways. Fewer still run an all-encompassing relationship management and restorative practice model, despite clear evidence that such processes are ideal for higher education settings. Research shows restorative processes are felt to be procedurally fair for all parties, reduce both fear and anger towards perpetrators, and

can provide appropriate consequences. Most importantly, with the focus on both individuals and community, they can foster a sense of safety and community cohesion (AIC 2017, Daly 2001 & 2002, RJ Council 2016, Tyler et al 1997).

**Key points:**

- University offending rates are comparable to the general population, but reporting rates are significantly lower.
- University settings present unique risks and vulnerabilities. Young people between 18-25 are the most likely to be targeted.
- 20% of all sexual offending is committed by young people.
- Groups outside the dominant norms, particularly queer students, Indigenous students, and people of colour, are disproportionately targeted.
- The significant power differential between staff and students, during a pivotal period in students' career development, constitutes an ongoing risk factor for abuse.
- There are strong connections between sexual harm, sexual harassment, relationship violence and stalking.
- Myths and misconceptions of sexual offending are widespread. Investigation and adjudication must be carried out by appropriately trained personnel.
- Effective, accessible systems are identified by trauma-informed and victim-centric practices, including a focus on both community and individual outcomes.

# AHRC Principles

## Principle 1: An integrated and inclusive framework

In almost all consultations, there was confusion as to the University's overall approach to developing a culture of inclusivity and integration. Many students felt that the messaging emanating from UoM's "Respect. Now. Always." campaign was vague and inadequate, and that groups and issues were separated into different themes or 'weeks', rather than being part of a collective process of developing justice and equity, where all groups felt included and connected to the university's culture and processes.

### Vulnerable Groups

Whilst sexual assault is a markedly gendered issue, as are sexual harassment and stalking, there are, as previously discussed, several groups who are disproportionately targeted by offenders, across all genders and sexualities. As in the wider community, these groups are less likely to report abuses or access support services and students felt little had been done to address this. Although the university has made some progress on broader inclusivity issues, there were many comments about the need to focus more on accessibility and inclusivity where relationship harm and trauma have occurred. During such times of heightened vulnerability, it was pointed out, the need to feel understood, and to be helped in an environment without anxiety, was paramount. "I would want to tell someone who looks and sounds like me", articulated one international student. Queer students also felt more could be done than having 'queer-friendly' supports. Most students who expressed a view on the matter, suggested that the university's messaging around relationships, consent, and relationship harms, did not reflect the breadth of cultural, sexual and gender identities at UoM. This lack of diversity, they felt, was a strong inhibitor of reporting problems and abuse.

#### Case study 1:

*Alan was sexually assaulted by his partner, who was also a student of UoM, but in another faculty. He decided not to make a formal complaint, nor to go to Stop 1 to access the SCP's assistance. He was not aware of any university service for queer students and had a previous, negative, experience of contact with Stop 1 (for an administrative issue, not the SCP). He was anxious about further involvement, and feared disclosing there would 'out' him, which he did not want to happen. He did not want to go to the police either, so he has remained silent.*

## **Diverse cohorts**

Lack of clarity about inclusion and cultural standards is associated with lack of reporting and a fear of the consequences of disclosure. International students reported a wide variety of cultural backgrounds in which they received their sex and relationship education. They described the difficulties of transition into Australian culture and university life, including values and laws around sex and sexuality. Of all groups consulted, international students had the least knowledge about where and how to report at UoM, and the highest fear of reporting to any authority, including police. They reported the lack of information, in languages other than English, about 'Respect' related matters such as handling disclosures, reporting and complaints processes, was a significant barrier to seeking help and/or reporting abuses.

### *Case study 2:*

*Bai was driving to the beach with several friends, all from Asian backgrounds, when they were pulled over by police. The policeman spoke to them in a loud and patronizing voice, questioning what they were doing and where they were going. Although he let them go without consequence, as they had committed no offence, the student found the experience frightening. Bai also spoke of the fear of authority in his home country, the lack of sex education and the stigma of reporting abuse. He said he was highly unlikely to report to any authority figure, in policing or UoM. This was partly because, he said, that he could not see himself represented in current services.*

## **Cultural Background and Perceptions of Authority**

International students also raised concerns about whether any students would report at all, as many were concerned that it would not only affect their ability to stay at the university, but also that reporting may impact on their visa status. These fears, coupled with varying experiences of police within their home countries, make it less likely that international students will report. Policies that insist all UoM materials are only in English exacerbate these issues. Whilst it may be appropriate from an academic point of view, to concentrate on English as the core language of the institution, accessibility to therapeutic and reporting services would be greatly improved by having materials, and staff, with whom international students were able better to relate.

Some expressed the view that the focus on male violence towards women, whilst representing most abuses, disconnected some groups from community messages of support, advice about reporting, and a sense that their story would be understood and addressed. There was also

criticism that too strong a focus on ‘toxic masculinity’ left male students feeling excluded from the development of cultural change.

### **Lack of a Coherent University Community Approach**

One of the drivers of the current disjointed approach is the assertion, made in several areas of UoM, that the university is not one community, but rather several, all laws unto themselves. There was regular commentary that this was unhelpful and confusing, particularly for those harmed, trying to navigate the different systems of reporting and accessing services. Furthermore, some felt that the reality of different ‘businesses’ within UoM is being used to avoid a university-wide approach to culture, values and standards. Whilst there is an obvious complexity to these issues, students could not understand why so many systems existed, nor why they cannot be coordinated or centralised. This criticism was voiced by those seeking to create better processes, as well as those harmed. Where changes had been made, the critique was that these were often compliance-driven, rather than responses to a transgression of the university community’s values. Whilst students often identify with their faculty or college, they also see themselves as a part of UoM. Students believe there must be a unified system, active across all areas, if students are to understand the processes available. Such a unified system of investigation and adjudication, across the whole university community, must be transparent and accountable.

There is a variety of approaches to reporting and complaint, leading to widespread confusion and a block to action. Although most colleges have coordinated their reporting and complaints processes, the same cannot be said across the rest of UoM. The piecemeal approach is at odds with the AHRC recommendation of a “whole-of-university commitment to addressing gender inequality, inclusivity and diversity, discrimination and gender-based violence” (p.53)

In a theme that was raised frequently during discussions, it was felt that more work should be placed in the development of both navigating individual relationships and developing positive group cultures. Several commentators raised the over emphasis on individual responsibility, pointing to its use to avoid reflection on wider group cultures. This issue was also raised by both staff and students negotiating abusive behaviours, where cultural norms and values had not been clearly outlined, allowing perpetrators to either continue with relative impunity or, on rare occasions, be subject to abrupt and punitive measures without reasonable warning.

Failure to see the bigger picture, and to create university-wide disciplinary and cultural change processes, has left students feeling disconnected from the university’s narratives, cynical about

the effectiveness of reporting, and sceptical of the university's commitment to the principles outlined in the AHRC report. Students outside the dominant norms are reluctant to report to a system in which they cannot see themselves. Most commentators suggested that UoM is still some way from an accessible and inclusive framework for addressing sexual and relationship harm and that a transformation of culture, policies, and practices has barely begun.

## **Principle 2: Comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated design and content**

Whilst the previous principle looks at the ability of an organization to develop culture and practices of equity and inclusivity, where all student groups and identities feel represented, this principle concentrates on the processes and policies designed to maintain such a culture and address abuses.

“Fragmented, contradictory and ad hoc policies and practices can be confusing for students and may exacerbate the reporting experience and resolution of complaints of sexual assault and harassment.” (AHRC, p.53)

Unfortunately, this is exactly the circumstance many students describe at UoM. The situation appears particularly problematic in student accommodation, when students are on placement, or when engaged in clubs and society activities, but it was mentioned in every context. Despite the university's efforts to date, students are unclear what policies pertain to sexual harm, what will happen when they report, and what options are available to them once they have done so. Most alarming of all, many students could not identify UoM's main initiative, the Safer Community Programme (SCP), as the place to report, nor what would happen once they did.

### **Communication Strategies**

Although the university has produced a range of communications about relationship abuses, reporting, and services, they do not appear successfully to have engaged a broad cross-section of students' attention. Some students interviewed were keenly aware of the issues, whilst others showed little understanding. Whilst this mirrors the wider community, there is far greater opportunity within higher education settings to develop broader knowledge and values around relationships and relationship harms. The MySafety website, having engaged with students in its construction, is an example of the types of initiatives that might have more impact. Students were overwhelmingly keen to develop their own media, about developing and maintaining positive relationships, consent,

sexuality, and understanding relationship harms. Consistent design and content must extend to all elements of university life, whether academic or social. For example, clubs, societies, camps, and events came in for a wide variety of criticisms. It is apparent that some are still labouring under archaic rules and traditions, that cultures are sometimes defined by cliques of student leaders, where commentary or complaint is difficult. Where activities are undertaken, behavioural expectations were often unclear, the presence of alcohol ubiquitous, and some leaders were untrained and unprepared for dealing with problems. Importantly, those clubs who sought out training, which appears to be a minority, usually spoke well of it, and felt it made a difference to their practice.

### **Trauma informed and victim centred approaches**

The disjointed nature of responses to relationship harms is apparent across all aspects of the university, encompassing avenues of reporting (including anonymous reporting), complaints processes, and educational and prevention initiatives. Most problematic, from a trauma-informed perspective, is the mixing of relationship abuses with other administrative grievance procedures. The view of many students, and some staff who contributed to this report, is that the issue of sexual assault and harassment was initially “tacked on” to the grievance procedure, as if it were an extension of the administrative issues traditionally addressed by the process. Some students commented that current processes smacked of bureaucratic expediency over the needs of complainants. It was also suggested that it was expedient to see alleged abuses only as individual behavioural problems, further removing the need for a whole-of-university approach. Many felt that greater inclusion and integration will come from stand-alone policies for serious misconduct, particularly sexual and relationship harm.

### **Ineffective reporting is Retraumatizing**

The multiple processes also highlight that students are still telling their story to multiple people, in some cases as many as five, before they engage with a therapeutic or complaints process (or both). Once they have reported, many find the system hard to navigate, and decidedly untherapeutic. This is not to say that students who get to SCP get a poor response, as several reported good experiences and positive support. However, it is the journey to that point many have found most troubling.

#### *Case study 3:*

*Cassie had experienced sexual harassment from a male student at her college (typically sexualized comments and ‘jokes’ at her expense, both in public and privately). When he appeared in her room*

*unexpectedly (she had left her door open when she went to borrow something from a friend, and he was in her room when she returned), she decided to act. She first disclosed to a friend, who suggested she tell a student leader, which she did. After that conversation she was persuaded to talk to a staff member, who asked if she wished to make a complaint. Afraid of the consequences of reporting, she declined. Had she chosen any complaint option, the total of disclosure and reporting conversations would have been four, at minimum. She also expressed disappointment that she was required to make an official complaint before his behaviour could be addressed. All she wanted, she said, was for him to stop doing it.*

There are multiple processes of complaint, investigation and adjudication across the different areas and entities of the university. Students were bewildered by the processes, did not understand what would happen should they report, and most were pessimistic about the effectiveness of doing so. Concerns were also raised about fairness. The variety of complaints can be summed up by these comments:

“I had a good experience, but it was because of the people, not the process.” (complaint to college)

“The policy wasn’t terrible, but it wasn’t being done.” (complaint to college)

“There’s no process in any of it.” (complaint to UoM)

N.B The term “process” here was intended to refer to victim-centric practice.

The unique pressures on students, particularly peer group inclusion, power differentials between students and staff, and the high stakes of preparing for post-university working life, mean that reporting can be a huge ordeal. The confusion over policies and processes is a major impediment to improvements in this area.

The development of anonymous reporting processes, which is an initiative long argued for by advocates in this field, has also been heavily criticised by students. There are now several versions across the university, in residential and non-residential environments, none of which is connected to another. Students were most sceptical of the university’s own version, with several commenting that it served only to collect data for UoM and would have little impact on reducing abuse. “If the university doesn’t release the data on reporting, then what’s the point. It’s tokenism”, was a comment echoed by many interviewed.

### **Development of Positive Cultures across the University Community**

Several areas of the university community have instigated initiatives to develop positive cultures or improve responses, but good practice is not being shared or replicated across the rest of the

university community. Several students also noted that progress was reliant on the good work of individuals, rather than systemic changes.

Where there are university-wide initiatives, such as online consent training, some students were concerned that participation was only voluntary. This has been a matter of contention previously, and further debate is required to resolve the most effective pathways for consent and relationship education. Students were mixed in their views on both the specific consent module offered by UoM, and the broad “Respect” campaign messaging, portraying messages of support and understanding for victims. Most of those interviewed agreed that it was a good beginning, but that not much had changed in the last two years. The original posters about Respect issues, featuring university identities, were universally mocked by those who participated in this research. Some indicated that they found later messaging an improvement, but the words “meaningless” and “irrelevant” were conspicuous in the feedback. Despite claims that messaging was derived from students’ own words, many felt they had been altered beyond recognition. Students believe that messaging should derive, primarily, from those with lived experience, and from the voices of students themselves.

Finally, students welcomed the new peer mentoring programme being introduced across UoM. Many expressed a lack of understanding about the implementation of the programme and the training undertaken by peer leaders. Some voiced concerns that it appeared that an opportunity was being missed, to coordinate peer messaging with the Respect campaign.

### **Principle 3: Accessible, transparent, and enforceable processes**

The single source of greatest concern and disappointment for many students was the lack of accessibility of therapeutic services, a need for an understanding of therapeutic, complaint, and forensic processes, and a need to believe in the potential for just consequences and positive outcomes.

Evidence suggests UoM is failing to deliver change on this principle more than any other. In short, many students lack faith in the university’s response, frequently complaining that the university’s interests are placed first, and that complainants are made to “jump through hoops”, while alleged perpetrators are seldom held to account.

There are reasons for this, both within and without the university's control, but the fundamental flaw is that it appears that UoM has tried to adapt its processes and services to fit the issues, or even to protect its reputation and interests, rather than develop systems, facilities, people, and processes that are specifically designed to address sexual and relationship harms. Key among these concerns is the process for addressing relationship harm matters via a complaint and grievance system that is ill-equipped to deal with it. Investigation and adjudication processes were variously described as "arbitrary", "unfair", "ad hoc", and "amateurish". While the greatest concern was expressed for the impact on victims, responses for alleged perpetrators were also often seen to lack procedural fairness. As one student, who had reported abuse, expressed it, "I don't think they're bad people, they just have no idea what they're doing." Whilst this commentary may be inflammatory, it is important to note that it was expressed, out of deep frustration, by those with lived experience of both the abuse itself and poor institutional responses. Several were told, for example, that their cases could not be investigated because there was "no evidence", without any statements being taken, nor any attempt made to find witnesses. Students were also told that there was 'insufficient evidence', despite there being multiple complainants accusing the same person. Others were told that nothing could be done because of "confidentiality". Those that complained were sometimes given a copy of university regulations so they could check (without support or assistance) whether their complaint met the university's criteria. Those that attempted to resolve matters less formally have been told that alleged perpetrators would undergo "grog bans or would write "sorry" letters. Not only do these measures amount to little, in terms of a therapeutic response or a deterrent to future harms, but they demonstrate a lack of rigour and structure in alternative justice practices. More importantly, they were not asked for by complainants themselves. These issues, and many more that students described, do point to a lack of professionalism in responding to sexual harms in some areas of UoM and, despite the harshness of the language used to describe this, it is critical that these lacks are addressed.

### **Improving Accessibility**

Many students expressed the view that the university was more concerned with its reputation than in the cultural and practice changes required adequately to address sexual and relationship harm. Whilst this view might not be accurate, it was expressed frequently and widely and is evidently what many students perceive. Low reporting rates add evidence to the extent of this opinion amongst the student body.

Three years on from the AHRC "On Safe Ground" report many students, particularly international students, cannot name the SCP or Safer Communities Programme as the UoM's point of contact should they experience harassment or relationship harm. Whilst the service receives positive

commentary from some who have used the service, there have been many criticisms of its location, and its role within Stop 1. As one student put it, the location made students feel like it's, "A bureaucratic arm of the university". Another said that anyone who had experienced an abuse of their power would not want to place themselves in a building where they felt under the power of the institution. "It's not at all victim-centric", she said. The current structures, it was suggested, made complainant stories seem like *administrative* issues, rather than complaints of *trauma and distress*.

Several students articulated the problems for LGBTQ+ students, who may feel "outed" by having to report to an arm of the university, making them even less likely to report. Should reporting be centred on a separate centre, particularly one with a broad health and wellbeing focus, this issue may be alleviated. Whilst the AHRC report clearly states that therapeutic support services should be linked to other academic or broader student services (p.59), the priority should be a system that is responsive, primarily, to therapeutic need.

### **Location, location, location**

Ultimately, the message from those interviewed is that the physical location of therapeutic services, both SCP and, to a lesser extent Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS), within Stop 1, is fundamentally flawed.

As subject matter experts on the Respect taskforce will be aware, the research literature on trauma-informed approaches recognises that victims often report sideways, to peers, or to a trusted adult in their immediate sphere. This is highly likely at an institution such as UoM, where students primarily identify with their peers, and their college or faculty (and their systems and processes), rather than the mechanisms of the larger institution. This was recognised in the previous model of student support for sexual harm issues, where 'Sexual Harassment Advisers' were located throughout the university, rather than in one place. The change to the current model has therefore exacerbated the problem of multiple reporting, where victims disclose to several people, in varying pastoral and professional roles, before arriving at the central university service the SCP. Some students reported that they had spoken to five or more people before the conclusion of their matter. Several students angrily suggested that the difficulties identifying and accessing services, the bureaucratic responses of the complaints processes and the demand for multiple reporting created a culture that appeared victim-blaming, or at least demanded considerably more of victims than it did of alleged perpetrators.

## **Holding Perpetrators to Account**

Those who found their way to SCP reported mostly positive experiences, particularly with assistance around personal security on campus, navigating university processes, and being informed of external services.

Commentary on the complaints processes themselves were overwhelmingly poor. Several voiced the view that complaint processes lack a focus on justice outcomes, and that perpetrators are seldom challenged or held to account. The most positive commentary was that, “Student welfare here is pretty poor, but better than it used to be.” Most complaints concerned students on first contact with the system being sent lengthy paperwork about university regulations, to determine whether they wished to pursue their complaint. Many were also informed that only allegations that took place directly within UoM’s premises or service systems would be considered. It was less the regulation itself that most upset complainants, although the delineation of ‘duty of care’ issues between areas of the university is a concern, but the bureaucratic nature of the response to sensitive and traumatising issues.

There is no rigour or transparency in investigative processes undertaken by most areas of UoM. ‘Investigation’ has become a term lacking meaning, where roles and responsibilities in adjudication and decision-making are confused and flawed. The writer did not talk to a single student who expressed a positive view about the rigour, integrity, or transparency of investigative and adjudication processes. There is a strong need to develop centralised investigative and adjudication processes, with suitably trained personnel, as has been accomplished in other higher education settings.

## **Broadening the Meaning of ‘Responsibility’**

Many of those interviewed, both staff and students, raised ‘Duty of Care’ issues, identifying three issues of most concern. Firstly, the narrative that problems arising within certain parts of the university community which are separate entities from UoM, such as a private college, are not within the remit of the University. Whilst in some respects this may be a legal reality, many believed it to be a mechanism for the avoidance of responsibility, and fundamentally at odds with the ‘Respect’ messaging and its espoused values of cultural change. It also conflates the notion of absolute legal liability with a broad duty of care to its students. Where harm is done to a student at the University, the institution arguably owes that student support and assistance regardless of the site of that wrong. The University’s narrative, that issues within the private colleges are only a matter for those colleges themselves for example, not only leads to a mistrust of UoM, but leads to the second issue of concern, as students felt it betrayed the University’s misunderstanding of

sexual and relationship harm. Most harms occur within relationships, and do not suddenly cease to exist outside the confines of one physical space.

#### *Case study 4*

*Drishiti was told that the university could not investigate her complaint because all the acts of harassment she alleged, and which she could prove, had not occurred at the university, nor on its electronic server. The alleged harasser shared courses, classes, and teaching spaces with her, so to suggest that the relationship abuses did not exist within the university seemed absurd to her. Although help was given to navigate coursework and finish her studies without further harassment, it was done so without formal complaint investigation, nor any consequences for the alleged perpetrator. Whether this was ultimately the case or not, the student was left feeling that the only reason the university assisted her at all was because she had successfully sought sanction from the legal system, with which they were forced to comply.*

#### **Placements**

The third issue frequently raised was that of student placements with outside organisations and graduates doing PhDs. In such situations, there are significant power differentials, long-standing institutional relationships, and supervisors are likely to be senior figures in their field and often lucrative grant winners. Due to these factors, many students were unsure of whether the university would support them should they make a complaint. Those who had experienced problems on placement or in PhD laboratory settings spoke of mixed messages, where responsibility was deflected and shifted between institutions, or unsatisfactory compromises were found, to avoid formal complaints procedures. In almost all the cases, it was the complainant who was forced to withdraw, compromise (read sacrifice), or find any alternative options. Consultations with Victoria Police also showed that the most common outcome for students who reported abusive behaviour from a staff member, whether at UoM or a placement organisation, was to withdraw their complaint due to fears of reprisals, or career-ending consequences.

#### *Case study 5*

*Ellie was on placement with a prestigious institution, external to, but affiliated with UoM. She experienced persistent sexual harassment from a senior member of the outside institution (being asked on dates, pestered for sex, and having derogatory comments made when she declined). She sought counsel from her faculty, who advised her that, without proof, a complaint would be difficult to pursue. She was removed from the placement, which meant she had to repeat that aspect of her course.*

The overall conclusion of many interviews was that UoM remains a long way from truly accessible responses and practices. Whilst the information to guide students has improved, there is little understanding of how to access services and what rules, from which part of UoM, will be enacted should they do so.

### **Transparent**

UoM has made some movement towards addressing the first element of the AHRC's recommendations on increased transparency, with the establishment of 'big picture' messaging in support of victims, Consent week, the establishment of the UniSafe app, and other initiatives. The establishment of two University commissioned reviews in 2020, and the undertaking to consider this report in the Respect Taskforce also show commitment to improvement. There is a disconnect however, between the University's straightforward, headline rhetoric, and the mechanisms by which UoM intends to achieve those goals. This is present around cultural change issues, prevention initiatives, and issues of reporting and complaint. Students remain largely unaware of what the University is doing, leading to a mistrust of complaint and reporting processes. This has been exacerbated by a lack of reporting on what has been achieved so far, and the lack of transparency around any data collected by SCP. It is in this context that the anonymous reporting option, long argued for by students, has now also become mired in suspicion, with many students saying that it is no more than an internal data gathering exercise. The lack of communication about what data the University will report, to whom, and in what time frame, has turned a potential tool for positive student engagement into the opposite. Many students expressed the view that the University was yet commit to openness and accountability around the extent of problematic behaviour at UoM. The perceived lack of "truth-telling", as several described it, continues to breed cynicism in the University's overall response to relationship abuse and sexual harm.

In consultations, students not only expressed a lack of confidence in the University's reporting processes and complaints system, but also demonstrated a lack of understanding of police reporting processes. They had little knowledge of the specialist police units designated to investigate relationship-based crime, or of what would happen should they make a report. Most stated a strong preference not to go through police and court processes. This reluctance is exacerbated by strong pockets of student hostility towards police, and misconceived narratives about whether police had authority over university premises and processes.

## **Enforceable**

The area of enforceability creates a variety of dilemmas. On the one hand, many students expressed disappointment and anger that most perpetrators of abuses appear to “get away with it.” On the other, most talked of consequences rather than punishment, with a surprisingly generous view of how abusive behaviour should be addressed. For example, one student said, “Before this, he was my friend. It’s a complex relationship. I still wanted him to do well, but I also wanted him to learn this lesson now”. “We just wanted him to learn not to do it again”, said another, describing the behaviour of a serial perpetrator.

Most commonly, where reported, victims asked that their report not be acted upon, usually saying something like, “I want you to know this, but I don’t want you to do anything.” This leaves the person disclosed or reported to, whether staff or student, on the horns of a tough dilemma. Some institutions have a rule that whatever victims say should be what happens. Others hold the view that risk management principles, for the wider community, make such a finite rule inappropriate. Those with greater experience, both staff and student, talked of understanding disclosure and reporting as a process rather than an event, which when well-handled, allowed victims’ needs and wishes to change over time. Any change, it must be noted, is also dependent on an understanding of the context in which the report is made, and the range of options and processes available to the complainant.

## **Barriers to Reporting**

The most abiding fears expressed by students are of not being believed, and of ostracism from their peer group. Elements of UoM have come some way in addressing the first fear, and stories of being dissuaded from reporting, warned of potential consequences, or accused of fabrication, are seen to be receding. This is a very positive shift. Risks of dissuasion or inaction remain, however, particularly where the perpetrator is a staff member, or UoM privileges its relationship with another institution over students’ welfare.

To the second fear, of peer ostracism, the lack of sophistication and depth in current approaches leave many feeling that disclosure is pointless, and that reporting will have greater consequences for them than the perpetrator, leaving relationships between them and their peers broken beyond repair. This fear was repeated over and over, with comments such as, “You’d have to be so sure of yourself to know it was assault”, from a young woman quizzed by her friends about what had occurred. She felt the clear, implicit, message was that they would be more comfortable if she told them she may have misread his actions, rather than her certainty of experiencing abuse. Another said, “The college knew what happened, but said they couldn’t do anything because of

confidentiality.” Whilst the student recognised that confidentiality was a factor in any decision-making they felt strongly, as did others, that it is also used as an excuse for inaction.

### **Lack of Consequences**

Inaction and lack of consequences for perpetrators came up time and again as a frustration. “The hardest thing... was hearing multiple stories about the same perpetrator”, said one student. This comment raises alarm about a small, but significant, number of young men who appear to be serial offenders, often the subject of multiple complaints, who appear to have faced little or no consequences for their actions. Another young woman, describing the culture of her college, said, “I think girls become women very quickly because they have to. The boys don’t need to because they get looked after.” These two comments highlight the twin needs of cultural change development and perpetrator consequences. Unsurprisingly, those areas of the university that have been most transparent about culture and consequence, are those in which students appear to have most confidence.

Cultural change development and relationship-management principles are widely lacking at UoM. Several students also expressed scepticism of restorative processes, describing past failures, and episodes where perpetrators were “warned” about their behaviour, or forced to write a letter of apology. However, the examples of past processes described did not match the rigours and disciplines of effective restorative practice. Across UoM, issues of relationship abuses are, for the most part, seen as an individual issue, best dealt with by complaint or reporting to police. Restorative management principles appear to hold little favour, despite evidence that restorative processes reduce fear, foster survivor empowerment, can create effective consequences for perpetrators, and are considered procedurally fair by all parties (AIC 2017, Daly 2001 & 2002, RJ Council 2016, Tyler et al 1997).

### **Restorative practice**

Restorative practice would appear particularly well suited to university environments, where group culture plays such a prominent role, and all parties are likely to remain in each other’s orbit after allegations are made. Flexible responses and consequences are also needed where perpetrators are young, and in need of both clear consequences and, for the most part, second chances. Without restorative practices, or other alternatives, students are left with only the option of silence, using the university complaints systems, or reporting to police.

### Case study 6

*Fatima was the subject of persistent, unwanted attention, from a fellow student. She was reluctant to call it stalking. Despite a brief sexual relationship, she had made clear that she no longer wished any romantic involvement. He continued to attempt online contact and to tell mutual friends that they were still in a relationship. She wished to join a society but was reluctant when she found out he had also joined, and that contact would be unavoidable. Unwilling to make a formal complaint, nor able to seek assistance outside those mechanisms, she was left with no alternative but to give up her interest. His behaviour continued.*

Whilst many parts of the University community have improved their responses to relationship and sexual harms, only those that have addressed culture setting and relationship management from a broad perspective, aiming to balance victim needs with community safety, appear to have the confidence of students. Crucially, any changes initiated have been preceded by “truth-telling”. Although there is some way to go, those attempting greater transparency, about reporting processes and consequences, are also garnering respect from students.

## **Principle 4: Resourced, inter-connected and responsive support services**

As discussed above, the location of UoM's preferred avenue of reporting is at odds with the AHRC report, which recommended that the traumatic impact of sexual harm, on both victims and the wider university community required "... the provision of victim-centred support services that are delivered at an appropriately located site in a sensitive manner by experts who are responsive to the distinct needs of different student cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, CALD and international students, students with disability, and students who are LGBTIQ."(p.58)

There are relatively few people working in the field of sexual harm response prevention at UoM. Fewer still have specialist training in understanding sexual harm and the dynamics of sexual crime, even within the counselling and support services set up to help victims. Those investigating and adjudicating on such matters, on behalf of the colleges or the university, do so on a largely amateur basis. This is surprising, given the widespread experiences of sexual harassment and assault within university settings, and the high numbers of people who could be accessing services. It is hard to assess whether the volume of reporting has increased since the AHRC report, as the University does not publish figures, either within UoM or publicly. Should the University effect change to the chronic under-reporting of such matters, support services will need a substantial boost of appropriately trained staff. As one student put it, "There is a lack of support everywhere. At least, it's not tangible."

### **Reporting Rates, Data and Transparency**

In the absence of data, reporting rates (including anonymous reporting) at UoM appear to have remained low. Although anonymous systems can be victim-centric, offering a safe reporting mechanism for reluctant victims, there is a significant inter-connectivity problem. The better systems allow for encrypted dialogue between reporter and reporting system. Without this two-way process, advice cannot be offered, particularly about what further forensic or therapeutic options may be available. Such a system, of course, relies on regular monitoring, from appropriately qualified staff, to converse with reporters. The systems set up within the university community cannot or do not provide such processes. This diminishes any therapeutic benefit that may be achieved by the system, rendering it no more than a (potentially inaccurate) data gathering tool. There are concerns also that the plethora of systems being utilised across the university community creates a wasted opportunity for collective data about the incidence of sexual harassment and

offences and the experience of victims. There are also concerns about the rigour of data protection measures in the systems currently in use, as well as the qualifications of those monitoring the systems. Students have also complained that they have not received feedback about what anonymous reporting has shown, and that the systems have not been set up in such a way as to provide measures of change in both what is reported, and by whom.

### **Diversity, Inclusion and Adequate Resourcing**

As previously discussed, students felt more could be done to make services more inclusive. The current support system does not have therapeutic staff who specialise around relationship harm, particularly for those from minority groups and communities. The lack of appropriate resourcing of both SCP and CAPS is one of the reasons. Under-reporting also plays a role, leaving the service dealing only sporadically with reports, rather than being able to access clear data about the breadth of the problem and the ongoing need. On this subject, UoM has yet to complete one of the core recommendations of the AHRC report, that, “At minimum, a well-publicised 24-hour university telephone service should be available with appropriately trained personnel who can refer victims to nearby police, forensic, medical or counselling services.”

There is a growing awareness amongst higher education institutions that there is a need for a wider variety of processes and practices for prevention, relationship management, accountabilities and consequences for alleged perpetrators, and therapeutic programs for both victims and perpetrators. Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the paucity of approaches currently available, describing only a choice between the university’s complaints process and reporting to police, neither of which found favour. Whilst there was both scepticism and ignorance about alternative approaches, many felt that these needed to be explored.

### **Principle 5: Collaborative links with external support services**

This is an area of significant weakness at UoM. There appear to be relatively few links with external agencies in the fields of sexual harm and relationship violence. There are a variety of connections that exist within services or faculties, but they are not coordinated. Connections are made with agencies on a case by case basis, rather than developing a network of communication at both clinician, case manager and managerial level.

The lack of links with external agencies is also apparent when colleges or academic divisions, for example, wish to address individual behaviour problems, or cultural issues, within their area. Most

are attempting to find their own resources, 'reinventing the wheel', and contacting external agencies separately. This has led to a variety of practitioners being brought in to address training needs, student wellbeing issues, and legal matters.

The university community needs a liaison process with key external agencies, and to develop a preferred provider list for key issues. This should include, but is not limited to, sexual assault services (CASA), Victoria Police sexual offence and child abuse units (SOCITs), relationship violence services (e.g. 1800 Respect/Safe Steps), legal centres, and eHeadspace.

### **Awareness of processes, Support and Communications to Students**

Communications need to be reviewed. Some messaging to students is factually wrong, or out of date, and frequently fails to engage the target audience. Not only could a significant number of students not correctly identify SCP as the site of reporting and support, but even fewer knew where they could go within the criminal justice system for advice, or to report an incident. There was significant confusion about the University's internal reporting and disclosure mechanisms, but students were also unaware, almost without exception, about what would happen, and what options may be available to them, if they reported to police or to CASA.

#### *Case study 7*

*Greta was sexually assaulted by a fellow student during an event on campus. They had been friends, and she was aware that he became aggressive after drinking alcohol, but not that he became sexually abusive. After disclosing to a friend, she became aware that other young women had also experienced this form of abuse, from the same young man. Several had contemplated a report to police but didn't feel they could do it alone. None had been informed, by any of those they disclosed or reported to, that they could have provided information to police without making formal statements, so they were denied the opportunity to give contemporaneous evidence, which may have proved crucial in an investigation.*

This case study highlights the lack of a relationship between specialised community services, including police, and the related areas of UoM. The lack of an easily identifiable central resource for information about services and systems, whether therapeutic or forensic, has meant students receive a wide variety of advice, and therefore a mixed response, depending on who they disclose or report to. Students who wish to report to police, for example, have variously been sent to North Melbourne police station, to the Melbourne SOCIT, or a divisional detective unit. Although students have expressed a variety of concerns about the relationship between UoM and police, they have

nonetheless felt that students should be fully informed about how best to access the criminal justice system, and what they can expect should they make a report to police.

Where therapeutic services are concerned, most students could identify CASA as the main service to access, although several were unsure if their experience were one that CASA would deal with. Most areas of UoM that have run information sessions on sexual harm, including advice for first responders, have utilised CASA resources. As each area is asking different people, however, the reviews of sessions have been mixed. Although there should always be room for individual needs when developing educational sessions, a coordination of messaging would be appropriate. This has been noticeable across the different parts of the university community responsible for resourcing a range of student facing activities, including clubs, societies, camps and events, where there is little or no coordination, and some responsible areas run no sessions at all.

Since there are many connections between all forms of relationship harm, it is of concern that there are few links with external agencies, and that there is no formal connection with the service sector across all areas of relationship harm. This point was highlighted by many students, who were unsure of the University's view of external agencies, their right to utilise external community resources, or their understanding of how the service sector worked.

There also appears to be little or no connection between the University and services set up to assist young men or women with behavioural issues. In some contexts, CAPS may address these issues, and some colleges also offer psychological support, but students could not readily identify what resources might be available in this area. For example, 'No to Violence' and the Men's Referral Service are community resources that address issues for young people with problem behaviours, but nobody could identify these services.

In conclusion, except for advice offered by SCP or CAPS, should a student use those resources, UoM has no coordinated links with the community service sector, whether therapeutic or forensic. The Respect Taskforce reinforces this position, dominated as it is by UoM staff, with relatively little ongoing advice from subject-matter experts, and no involvement from, or collaboration with, outside agencies.

## Principle 6: Institutional commitment to prevention framework

Students arrive at the University with diverse experiences of the concept of consent and consent training. One student described the consent teaching she received at primary school, where students were informed that, each morning, they were to greet their teacher, but could do so in the manner they chose. As they arrived at the classroom door, they could point to one of three pictures, depicting a wave, handshake, or hug. Similarly, numerous students described positive secondary school experiences of sex education, including consent and relationship communication modules, how to navigate pornography etc. Others described a much more perfunctory process, but one which continued throughout their time at school. Once students arrive at university, there seem to be mixed views about what continuing relationship and sex education is required or warranted. As described by the Federal Department of Social Services, “The supports and programs that are available for students in secondary school are not continued into tertiary education. The absence is even more problematic for international students. Any increase in demand cannot be met.” (Sexual Violence Consultation Summary Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022). Education is the business of the institution but, voluntary online consent modules aside, it appears to believe that this is a largely academic function, despite education being a central pillar of primary prevention.

### Alcohol and Sexual Harm

Many commented on the association between alcohol and sexual harm, noting the varied ways in which it is being addressed within the university community. Alcohol bans, whether for individuals or groups, were seen to be ineffective, or even excusing of abusive behaviour. Responsible service of alcohol has a key role to play in the prevention of sexual harm, but the over reliance on alcohol in a range of settings is entrenched in the cultures of many colleges, clubs and societies, and is still frequently seen as an inevitable and essential rite of passage. Students asked for clear, but nuanced approaches, to tackle alcohol consumption on both a cultural and practical level.

### Need for a Unified Prevention Approach

There appears to be no overall prevention plan across the university community. There are many initiatives that contain a preventative element, amongst various faculties and colleges, but students could not identify a university-wide strategy or framework. The AHRC report recommends, “The existence of an embedded **institutional program directed at prevention** (*their emphasis*) of sexual assault and harassment is essential to the validity of any good practice policy framework” (p.60) It further recommends that these include remedial, environmental and intervention programs,

emphasising that the program should be coordinated, in both design and content, throughout the institution. This is not yet the case at UoM. The SCP program, the logical place for the development and coordination of such a program, is not equipped with enough human or material resources to carry out such a project.

It is also unclear whether UoM has the intention to carry out a comprehensive prevention strategy. Both the University's narrative about segmented institutional responsibilities within the university community, and its position that students are adults, meaning UoM does not act *in loco parentis*, suggest a reluctance to undertake such a process. Several students pointed out that there were also mixed messages in the University's materials. The *Student Life White Paper*, for example, whilst aiming to "Become more student-centric" and "...track key drivers of the student experience", does not mention a single Respect issue, nor does it list any in its signature initiatives.

Without a clearly stated commitment to prevention strategies, it remains unclear to students what role, if any, UoM intends to play in the prevention of sexual and relationship harms within the university community. The repeated view among those consulted for this report was that, after initial messages by the University about care for victims and zero-tolerance approaches, there has been little practical progress.

### **Student Led Initiatives**

Students voiced their desire to be more engaged with consent and sexual harm reduction initiatives. Colleges have had much more success both involving students in the process of change and transferring responsibility for leadership wherever possible. Students have also led numerous initiatives, typically around creating group standards and safe, inclusive cultures. However, without UoM support, these initiatives are always in danger of changing or disappearing, as the university population shifts.

#### *Case study 8*

*Harriet described sexually harassing behaviour from a fellow student in her college. She reported the behaviour. Despite describing the existing processes as poor, she went on to catalogue a string of productive conversations between staff and students, and amongst the students themselves, that led to a much-improved culture. A collective will developed to bring such behaviour to an end, or at least to account. She believed that the people who took it seriously, and allowed students to lead the culture of change, created a much safer community.*

# Draft UMSU Action Plan

2020–2022

## 1. Development of safe and inclusive frameworks for responding

- Regular First Responder disclosure training for all Union staff and Office Bearers.
- Review of other higher education models in utilising student leaders as first response in university “Wellbeing” centres, as a part of campaign for the separation of administrative and wellbeing services.
- Campaign for a 24-hour telephone crisis service, or ongoing collaborative links with CASA and 1800 Respect services, to identify relevant student services.

## 2. Comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated design and content of all related materials, processes, and programmes.

- Advocacy, on relevant working parties and committees for unified complaint, investigation and adjudication processes across the university.
- Coordination of student-led development of materials for university-wide education and promotional materials on relationship and sexual harm issues.

## 3. Accessible, transparent, and enforceable processes for investigation, and adjudication of allegations

- Campaign for the separation of relationship and sexual harm responses from Stop 1 administrative services.
- Campaign for the development of a Wellbeing Centre, incorporating the CAPS and SCP programme.
- Campaign for student leaders to be trained, and appropriately supported, in first responding (possibly as a key resource for any new centre).
- Campaign for a stand-alone complaints process designed to address allegations of sexual and relationship harm, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and relationship violence.

#### **4. Resourced, inter-connected and responsive support services**

- Campaign for university-wide stand-alone policies on sexual and relationship harm issues
- Campaign for a university Health and Wellbeing centre

#### **5. Collaborative links with external support services**

- Assist in the coordination of improved links with the local Victoria Police SOCIT and Family Violence investigation units/CASA Forum/eHeadspace/NTV etc.

#### **6. Institutional commitment to prevention framework**

- Campaign for a coordinated, university-wide prevention and response plan.
- Review of events, camps, clubs and societies – rules and regulations/behavioural standards/training of student leaders/complaint and dispute resolution processes.
- Establishment of a student working party on seeding key Respect elements – utilising online resources/events and seminars/workshops on innovative practice, including:
  - Restorative practice
  - Consent and relationship ed training
  - Development of webpage around relationship issues
  - Establishment of regular events on relationship issues
  - Development of student-led resources: consent, relationship ed

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