



LA TROBE  
UNIVERSITY

# SEXUAL HARM PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ACTION PLAN REPORT 2023–2024



# SEXUAL HARM PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ACTION PLAN

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Acknowledgement of Country

La Trobe University acknowledges that our campuses are located on the unceded lands of many traditional custodians in Victoria and NSW. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society.

La Trobe University is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and for communities, through learning and teaching, research and community partnerships across all our campuses.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and thank them for their ongoing care of the land, skies, and waterways of this beautiful country.

We acknowledge our Indigenous staff for their valuable contributions, dedication and ongoing support of our strategic objectives.

### Acknowledgement of the Movement

La Trobe University acknowledges the many victim/survivors of sexual harm and gender-based violence who have so courageously spoken up about their experience and those who have advocated and researched on this issue. Without you, we would not be here today, and we are indebted to you and grateful to be able to build upon the foundation you have created.

### Acknowledgement of Loss

La Trobe University would like to acknowledge and remember the people who have lost their lives as a result of gender-based violence.

## INTRODUCTION

La Trobe University (LTU) recognises the profound impact that sexual harm has on the university community. From 2020 to 2023, we invested \$5m in funding for services and prevention initiatives. This funding has resulted in the redevelopment of our Safer Community service module and the establishment of a Sexual Harm Prevention Program responsible for driving the implementation of LTU's Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan 2023–2026.

Following the 2021 National Student Safety Survey and building on LTU's 2018 Change the Course: Action Plan, the University launched our Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan 2023–2026 ('the plan'). The plan was developed in consultation with staff and students, including the La Trobe Student Union and Association.

The plan applied a 'whole of institution' approach to address the intersectional and gender-based drivers of sexual harm. It seeks to create an environment free from sexual harm and gender-based violence, however, also works to strengthen the structures and processes that enable both staff and students to disclose or report sexual harm when required, and for the institution to track and respond to the data captured.

The plan is supported by a cross-institutional Implementation Group that oversees and ensures its implementation. In 2023 the Implementation Group reported into the Campus Safety Group, and the Senior Executive Group, on the key deliverables and actions of the plan. A monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed, articulating how La Trobe will seek to measure and report on the social and structural changes achieved. This framework will be implemented in 2024.

# WHAT WE ACHIEVED

## PREVENTION

In 2023, over 5,500 students and 300 staff attended formal training and/or professional development aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the intersectional drivers of gender-based violence, including sexual harm, and building skills in bystander intervention and appropriate responses to disclosures of sexual harm, discrimination and bullying. These results met 2023 expectations and will be expanded upon in 2024.

## LIVING AT LA TROBE RESPECT PROGRAM

LTU also introduced a Living at La Trobe Respect Program in partnership with UniLodge, which included the following face-to-face training programs:

- The evidence based training program 'Flip the Script with EAAA' for women students in residential accommodation.
- The Respectful Relationships and Bystander Intervention Program for all men and interested women living on campus.
- Tomorrow Man Healthy Masculinity Workshops for men students.
- Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm and Gender Based Violence for all Residential Leaders



## RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOUR AND CULTURE MODULE

All students in residential accommodation were required to undertake LTU's Respectful Behaviour and Culture module. The module was also redeveloped in 2023 with the support of La Trobe's learning designers and is a compulsory module for all commencing students from 2024.



## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

LTU contributed to the development of the Universities Australia Good Practice Primary Prevention Guide as a key member of the Universities Australia Guide Working Group. This guide aims to support prevention workers within universities consider how best to approach gender-based violence prevention work. It was released to the public and is available online.



## STAFF SEXUAL HARM PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TRAINING PROGRAM

In 2023 LTU also expanded the Staff Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Training Program to include development and delivery of a range of educative and preventative training modules for staff and students, including:

- Gender Equality and Bystander Intervention Staff Program (Staff)
- Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm, Discrimination and Bullying (Staff)
- LGBTQIA+ SB Ally Program (Staff and Student)
- Higher Degree by Research Respectful Supervisory Relationships training (Staff)



## COMMUNICATING FOR IMPACT

LTU also developed the Communicating for Impact program including:

- Communications, activations and stalls targeting staff and students during O-week and throughout semester detailing rights, responsibilities, reporting and support information and increasing awareness of gender-based drivers of violence.
- A public health social marketing campaign, *Safe & Respected at La Trobe*, rolled out in Semester 1 2024, aiming to increase student knowledge and trust of reporting and disclosure options at LTU as well as increasing understanding of the types of behaviour that constitute sexual harm.
- Celebrating and acknowledging key annual events including 'Are you Safe at Home Day', 'Pride Week' and delivering *Picturing Respect* for the '16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence'. *Picturing Respect* resulted in students and staff sharing their ideas around respect through delivery of an institution-wide photography competition and exhibition.
- Significant contributions to the cross-institutional *Respect @ Uni Week*. A collaboration between Victorian universities to raise awareness of student rights and responsibilities. LTU used *Respect @ Uni Week* to launch our Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan 2023-2026 with a discussion panel exploring intersectional gender equality in university settings.



## INSTITUTIONAL POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

Structural change was supported by institutional policy review and development including:

- A review and update to LTU's Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Policy to ensure that LTU is meeting positive duty requirements as per the *Respect@Work* amendment to the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984. For example, reference is now made to LTU's obligation to embed sexual harm hazard prevention into organisational OHS programs.
- A legislation focused update to the *Family Violence Support Policy* and plans for additional review and addition of a student lens to this policy in 2024.
- Update to the *Workplace Behaviours Policy* and *Student Behaviours Policy* to establish a policy environment supportive of planned prevention initiatives, including the establishment of compulsory staff responding to disclosures of sexual harm and student respectful behaviour and culture training modules.



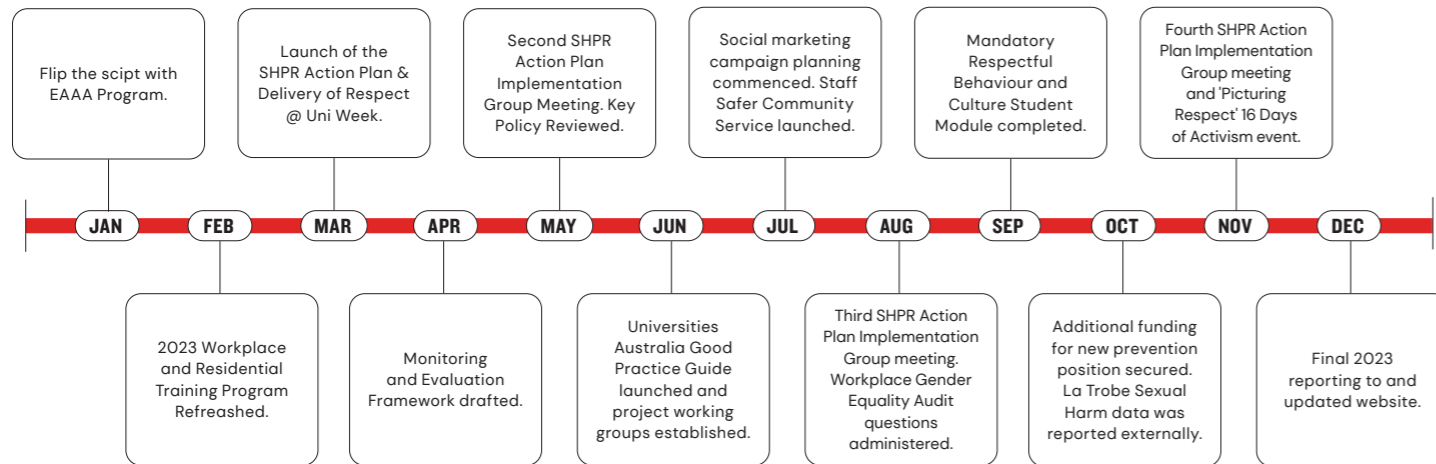
## EMBEDDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION

In addition to these significant pieces of work, LTU also provided a gender-based violence prevention lens to the following ongoing projects:

- *Placements Review* - sexual harm and gender-based violence prevention and response considerations are being embedded into the review of LTU's placements program for students.
- *Up-Skilling Pre-Service Professional Project* - LTU is working towards a pilot project embedding gender equality and violence prevention into selected curriculum areas in 2024.
- *Academic Respect Community of Practice* - establishment of a community of practice for academic staff to identify issues and be involved in the development of resources to prevent poor classroom behaviours, including sexual harm. In 2023 the CoP identified resource gaps and new resources to support academics manage classroom behaviours were drafted. These resources will be rolled out in 2024.



# 2023 JOURNEY



## RESPONSE

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 UniLodge Living at La Trobe accommodation staff across Victoria. As a result, reports about concerning behaviour from accommodation staff more than doubled.

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.



# REPORTS OF SEXUAL HARM

## SEXUAL HARM DATA 2023–2024

In 2023, Safer Community received 27 sexual harm reports from staff and students – 5 were disclosures and 22 were formal reports. Of these:

- 18 were about sexual assault,
- 7 reports related to sexual harassment, and
- 2 were about an historical sexual assault.

Of the 27 reports of sexual harm:

- 14 involved incidents that occurred in student accommodation on LTU campuses across Victoria
- 6 incidents occurred off campus
- 5 involved incidents that occurred on campus (e.g. campus property, classroom, etc), and
- 2 incidents occurred on placement.

With respect to respondents:

- in 12 reports the respondent was a student
- 6 reports were about staff or contractor behaviour
- 2 reports did not specify whether the respondent was a staff member or student, or it was unknown
- 7 were about the behaviour of people external to the university
- 20 respondents were identified as male, 2 identified as non-binary, and 5 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 the affected persons:

- 23 identified as female, 2 were male and 2 were undisclosed or anonymous, and
- 24 affected persons were students, 1 was external to the university and 2 were undisclosed or anonymous.

All disclosures were managed through the provision of support, advice and information. Of the 22 matters formally reported, 21 were investigated and 1 remains an ongoing investigation in collaboration with Victoria Police, with a view to conclude in 2024. 12 matters were substantiated, resulting in outcomes and/or penalties. 9 investigations did not result in outcomes or penalties for reasons including unsubstantiated allegations, the respondent not being a La Trobe University student, the incident occurring off campus and beyond the scope of the University investigation, historic age of the case limiting University investigation (e.g. respondent and affected person no longer students), and limited evidence impacting identification of respondent(s). It is important to note that there are many reasons that an allegation may be unsubstantiated, and that it is not an indication that the allegations did not occur, but an indication that on the balance of probabilities, it could not be determined that the alleged behaviour took place. Reasons for potential unsubstantiated allegations include, but are not limited to, the complainant not wishing to proceed with the investigation and insufficient information and/or evidence provided during the investigation.

Outcomes and penalties included referral to Workplace Relations and Support for investigation and actioning (in cases where the respondent was a staff member), educational responses such as the requirement to complete Respectful Behaviours training, Safer Community local level outcomes included reminders of behavioural expectations, reasonable directions of no contact, accommodation probation, removal from student accommodation, referral to the University's general misconduct process, and conditions placed on enrolment. Specific penalties for 2023 matters include termination of La Trobe University staff, removal and exclusion of contracted staff from University property, behavioural training for relevant staff cohorts, exclusion from student accommodation and fines for damage to property.

## SAFER COMMUNITY

### 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.

Please note that the 2023 data does not include a full year of reports from staff about other staff. From July 2023 LTU has implemented a single reporting point through Safer Community for both students and staff. As a result, comprehensive staff data will be available in the next annual report. Half-year data regarding staff matters is included.

## 2023 STAFF GENDER EQUITY AUDIT RESULTS

Sexual Harm is a form of Gender Based Violence driven by gender inequality in our society. The Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020 and the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector require LTU to complete an annual gender equality audit. In 2023 LTU added additional questions to this audit template to better explore sexual harm in the workplace. The following is a summary of results:

- For those who experienced sexual harassment, (8% of 445 responders) the most common form was intrusive questions about one's private life or comments about physical appearance (4%), or
- Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made them feel offended (3%).

Where staff had experienced this type of behaviour, they were asked about how they responded. The most common response to the behaviour was to try and laugh it off or forget about it (42%), avoid the person by staying away from them (32%), or pretend it didn't bother them (29%).

Only 5% of people who experienced sexual harassment at work raised a formal complaint, with the most common reason for not doing so being that they didn't think it was serious enough (36%), would have negative consequences for their reputation (31%), or wouldn't make a difference (28%).

People who were from a gender minority group (trans, non-binary, gender diverse) reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction across all gender audit survey items compared to other staff. The most notable differences were around feeling culturally safe (27% vs 82% for other staff), being able to be oneself at work (27% vs 82%) and feeling safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour (18% vs 57%).

People with a disability felt less safe to challenge inappropriate behaviours (39% vs 57% for other staff), while those caring for someone with a disability also showed lower responses, particularly around feeling they could be themselves at work (59% vs 76% for other staff) and feeling safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour (41% vs 57%).



## SUPPORT SERVICES

### 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, changes to study timetable and requirements, and temporary standing down of staff for the duration of an investigation.

Local level supports for students included safety planning, referrals to Student Wellbeing Connect and counselling, referral to relevant internal stakeholder support (e.g. International Student Support), alterations to study requirements and timetables, 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. Staff were offered referral to Staff Wellbeing Connect and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for wellbeing assistance, in addition to ongoing support from Safer Community.

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. Staff were offered referral to Staff Wellbeing Connect, in addition to liaison with senior staff to assist with management of disclosure impact on work/life balance and wellbeing.

### STUDENT AWARENESS OF UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES

LTU's results from the 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) indicated a concerning level of student awareness about university support and reporting channels, as follows:

- 52.9 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to go to make a complaint about sexual harassment, and
- 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, and
- 43.5 % of students indicated they knew 'nothing or very little about where to seek 'support or assistance' regarding sexual assault.

In 2023 LTU included a question in the yearly Student Experience Survey asking students about their knowledge of how to report and receive support.

In 2023, 3,627 students (9.77%) responded to the survey and the results showed a promising improvement in student awareness as follows:

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

In 2024, 63.9% of respondents indicated they knew where to report concerning, threatening, or inappropriate behaviour they had witnessed or been a victim of, compared to 59.5% in 2023. Additionally, 65.7% of respondents were aware of where to receive support for such experiences in 2024, up from 62.1% in 2023. These improvements suggest that the university's efforts, including the Safe and Respected at La Trobe social marketing campaign, are successfully increasing student awareness and access to support resources. The La Trobe Experience Survey, which consolidates multiple previous surveys and covers a broad range of student experiences, provides comprehensive feedback that informs strategic interventions and enhances the student experience, inclusive of safety.

"I've been going through [this]... for over a year. It's good to know this is sexual harm. After seeing this I will report it. I felt good seeing these messages." (Campaign evaluation)

"I think the campaign explores and explains a very important issue being sexual harm. I don't think it is spoken or communicated about enough. I think the campaign allowed for this conversation to be more spoken about." (Campaign Evaluation)

"79% of respondents took action in direct response to the campaign, with 36% engaging in active measures such as seeking more information or reaching out to Safer Community for support." (Campaign Evaluation)

"The 2024 La Trobe Experience Survey reflected significant improvements in student awareness regarding sexual harm. In 2024, 63.9% of students knew where to report concerning behavior, and 65.7% were aware of available support resources, showing marked progress from previous years." (La Trobe Experience Survey)

### SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

The "Safe and Respected at La Trobe" campaign, launched during Orientation Week of Semester 1 in February 2024 and spanning 10 weeks, exemplifies a comprehensive and inclusive initiative aimed at addressing sexual harm on campus. Developed through extensive consultations with student representatives, stakeholders, and experts, the campaign featured 14 curated messages on various aspects of sexual harm, utilising physical posters, articles, and social media to reach a broad audience.

A campaign evaluation involving 15 students aged 18-21, representing diverse genders, abilities, cultural backgrounds, and disciplinary areas, revealed significant impacts. Over the 10-week period, there was a 60% increase in sexual harm incidents reported to Safer Community compared to the same timeframe in 2023. The campaign achieved a 93% prompted awareness rate and an 86% unprompted awareness rate among the students who took part in the evaluation. Notably, 79% of respondents took action in direct response to the campaign, with 36%

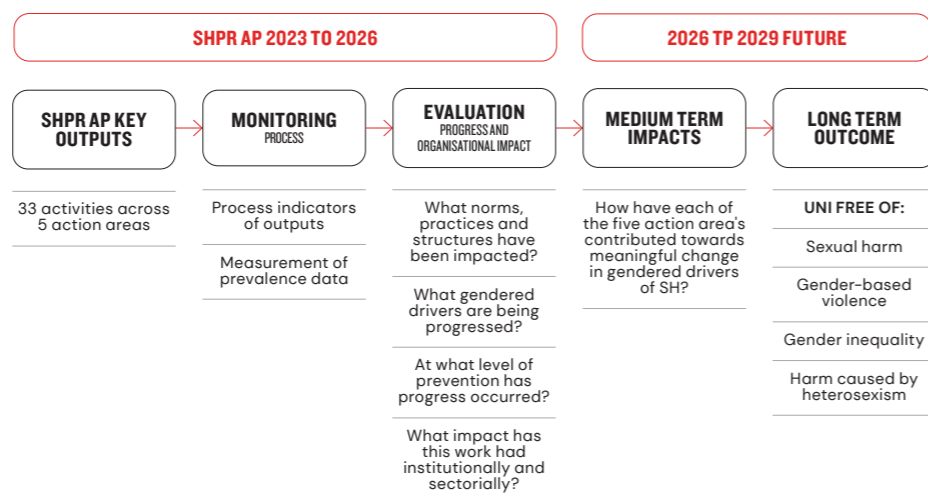
engaging in active measures such as seeking more information or reaching out to Safer Community for support. Furthermore, 93% of participants affirmed that the campaign effectively communicated La Trobe University's commitment to student safety.

This campaign is part of a suite of measures implemented over the past 12 months, contributing to an increase in awareness and incident reporting among students on campus.

# MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

La Trobe's Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Division has partnered with the Department of Public Health for the design of a Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework.

The MEL framework will guide and inform implementation and improvements into the longer-term. Importantly, the MEL framework will enable tracking of progress towards meaningful change in addressing the drivers of gender-based violence (GBV) and achieving La Trobe's vision for an environment where all members of our communities can work, study, research and live free from sexual harm, gender based violence, gender inequality and harm caused by heterosexism and cisnormativity.



## 2024 PRIORITIES

LTU's Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Action Plan 2023–2026 aligns with the evidence base used to develop the recently released National Action Plan Addressing Gender Based Violence in Higher Education. This means LTU is well positioned for the continued roll out of the plan.

2024 will see the addition of 1 full time position to the Respectful Communities prevention team. Key action plan items identified for priority implementation include:

### Action Area 1: Training and Professional Development

- Flip the Script with EAAA
- Gender Equality & Bystander Intervention
- Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm
- Respectful Behaviour & Culture
- Senior leadership briefings

### Action Area 2: University Life

- Student Co-Design and Partnership Program
- Whole of university social marketing campaign

### Action Area 3: Safe Learning Environment

- Embed gender-based violence prevention content into curriculum
- Conduct Academic Community of Practice
- Embark Placements Review Project
- Establish Living at La Trobe Respect

### Action Area 4: Safe Campus Environment

- Incorporate gendered violence risk and control measures into OHS systems

### Action Area 5: Evaluation and Reporting

- Build monitoring, evaluation and learning framework
- Connect SHPRAP data to GIA processes
- Disseminate SHPRAP progress and response data



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