



Curtin University

RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS.

A REPORT ON PROGRESS

Report 3
July 2021

Make tomorrow better.



The RNA Steering Committee Membership 2020-2021

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We acknowledge and thank past members of the RNA Steering Committee, and the many staff who have contributed to the development of approaches, resources, and other sources of support for students, staff, and visitors to Curtin.

Note that the RNA Steering Committee is responsible for the coordination of Curtin's response to the issue of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Details of individual incidents, reports or disclosures are NOT shared with committee members.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This third annual Report on Progress summarises the work coordinated and led by the University's *Respect. Now. Always.* (RNA) Steering Committee.

This multi-disciplinary group (which includes student representation) was established in 2017 following the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Change the Course* report.

The overarching aims of this committee are to ensure that:

- Curtin's zero tolerance stance is communicated to staff and students;
- Members of the University community are aware of Curtin policies, procedures, and processes relating to sexual assault and sexual harassment; and
- Curtin staff are able to deal with reported incidents sensitively and effectively.

Through the work of the RNA Steering Committee, Curtin identified eleven key objectives, which included responses to the recommendations made by the Australian Human Rights Commission, and those contained within the Universities Australia *10-Point Action Plan: An initial response from Australia's universities to the national student survey on sexual assault and sexual harassment*.

This document summarises our progress against those eleven objectives, and it identifies new initiatives underway as part of Curtin's ongoing commitment to maintaining a safe community for students, staff and visitors.

In line with our commitment to public reporting, de-identified data relating to the number of formal reports of alleged sexual harassment and sexual assault are also included, together with a synopsis of case outcomes.

In 2020, there were three formal reports of alleged sexual harassment and one formal report of alleged sexual assault. Curtin also provided academic and wellbeing support to students making a formal report or a disclosure, irrespective of where or when the incident occurred.

Priorities for 2021 include a continued focus on eSafety and further development of staff/student training resources. Curtin will participate fully in the forthcoming National Student Safety Survey, scheduled for release later in 2021. As part of a Universities Australia recommendation to develop initiatives to ensure student safety at student housing venues, Curtin also has opted into the inclusion of an additional 'extension' question set, focusing on students' experiences in accommodation.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harlene Hayne". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Professor Harlene Hayne ONZM
Vice-Chancellor

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Universities Australia and the Australian Human Rights Commission launched a campaign initiative to address the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault across the university sector.

The campaign, named '*Respect. Now. Always.*' (RNA) aimed to raise awareness of sexual harassment and sexual assault, lift the visibility of support services for students, gather data for improvement, and assist universities in sharing best practices.

Later that year, a national survey was conducted by the Human Rights Commission, reaching over 30,000 students across all 39 Australian universities.

The ensuing report, entitled [*Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities*](#) was published in 2017 with institutional-level data and nine recommendations, eight of which were directed to universities and one that was relevant to university colleges.

Of the 1078 responses from students at Curtin, 21% reported that they had been sexually harassed (vs. 26% nationally) with this occurring mostly on public transport to and from Curtin. Forty-eight per cent of respondents did not know (17%) or knew very little (31%) about where to seek support.

With respect to sexual assault, it was found that 0.3% of Curtin respondents identified that they had been sexually assaulted at university (vs. 1.6% nationally). Sixty per cent of respondents knew nothing (23%) or very little (37%) about where to seek support.

Curtin brought together existing initiatives and groups, forming the *Respect. Now. Always.* (RNA) Steering Committee with overarching responsibility for the coordination of related work, reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor and Senior Executive Team.

The RNA Steering Committee developed 11 key objectives for Curtin, all of which were consistent with the recommendations made within *Change the Course* and the recommendations contained within the subsequent Universities Australia [*10-Point Action Plan*](#).

The overarching principles of the RNA Steering Committee are to ensure that:

- Curtin's zero tolerance stance is communicated to staff and students;
- Members of the University community are aware of Curtin policies, procedures, and processes relating to sexual assault and sexual harassment; and
- Curtin staff are able to deal with reported incidents sensitively and effectively.

As outlined in the following sections, the RNA Steering Committee continues to play an active and ongoing role in helping to maintain a safe community at Curtin.

PROGRESS

The following sections report progress against the 11 key objectives, providing a brief synopsis of previous activities¹ and focusing on actions undertaken in 2020.

OBJECTIVE 1

To ensure that the policy framework at Curtin relating to sexual harassment and sexual assault is clear and consistently expressed.

Curtin developed and articulated a 'zero tolerance' statement, with further work being undertaken in 2018 to develop an overarching policy statement. This consolidated existing policies and procedures into one master document, approved in 2019: [Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy](#).

During 2019, Curtin also introduced special consideration provisions for assessment to facilitate and expedite assignment extensions and examination deferrals. Consistent with Universities Australia Guidelines, students do not need to make a formal report or complaint about their experience of sexual violence to become eligible for special consideration.

Processes have been established that facilitate approval of these requests whilst maintaining confidentiality and limiting the circulation of information. Six students took up this option in 2019, and 13 in 2020. The extent to which this has helped is reflected in student feedback which indicates that the support provided was very highly valued.

OBJECTIVE 2

To educate staff across Curtin campuses about acceptable behaviours and the impact of sexual assault and sexual harassment on mental health and wellbeing in accordance with Curtin's values.

Information about Curtin's commitment to RNA and related initiatives (such as the Respectful Relationships program and Domestic Violence Awareness training) is provided to staff through key channels, including the Vice-Chancellor's Note to Staff, Curtin Weekly, Staff Portal and Staff News.

Curtin encourages all staff who hold a management role to undergo domestic violence training in which the impact of sexual assault (along with other behaviours) is discussed in depth. The training focuses on how to respond to disclosures and outlines ways in which Curtin can support the individual(s) concerned.

In 2019, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre provided tailored training to the RNA Steering Group and other key staff in relation to responding to disclosures of sexual assault. Front line staff from our Counselling and Safer Community teams also received additional training consistent with the increased likelihood that they would need to discuss issues with students or receive a disclosure. Staff were also given access to the student-facing *Respect Now Always* learning module via the staff professional learning environment to increase awareness and visibility of this training to staff.

¹ Refer to the [Respect. Now. Always.](#) webpage for previous annual progress reports, published in 2019 and 2020.

PROGRESS

In May 2020, Curtin adopted the Universities Australia training module titled *Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault - What are the drivers and how can staff respond?* This new module was made available and piloted within the Curtin staff professional learning environment, with 56 staff completing the program by the end of 2020.

Towards the end of 2020, Curtin liaised with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to organise a training session early in 2021 for staff at Curtin to examine the issue of eSafety and sexual harassment and assault in online environments. This invitation included staff at Australian and our global campuses.

OBJECTIVE 3

To educate students across Curtin campuses about acceptable behaviours and the impact of sexual assault and harassment on mental health and wellbeing in accordance with Curtin's values.

The Respectful Relationships program was formally launched in 2019, following a successful pilot. This program was developed with input from a wide range of contributors. These included: students of a variety of backgrounds; members from the Curtin Student Guild; the Diversity & Inclusion Team; Counselling and Health Services; and the Western Australia Sexual Assault Resource Centre.

Respectful Relationships includes three modules: 'Understanding Sexual Consent', 'The Active Bystander', and 'Support', all of which are delivered using a mix of gamification, video, and novel style illustrations. It has a large emphasis on the legal and cultural expectations of consent and

behaviour in Australia, and does not speak to any one particular ideology, religion, or political stance.

Modules intentionally examine nuanced and ambiguous scenarios to highlight that sexual harassment is not always obvious. This program takes approximately 60 minutes to complete and is compulsory for all commencing students at Australian campuses.

In the second half of 2019, a total of 4,169 students completed the Respectful Relationships modules following the launch of this program. This represents a completion rate of approximately 78% of the commencing student population in Australia in that period.

Completion rates dropped for the first half of 2020, with only 1,056 commencing students completing the program (approximately 15%). This decrease is attributed to the removal of the sanctions for non-completion as part of initial responses to the emerging SARS-COV2 pandemic. With the reintroduction of the mandatory completion requirement in the second half of the year, completions rose to 76%, with 3,540 commencing students completing the program.

During 2020, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) selected Curtin's flowchart explaining the reporting process as an exemplar within a Good Practice Note: [Preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Australian higher education sector](#).

PROGRESS

OBJECTIVE 4

To ensure that information for students and staff (primarily digital content) meets the needs of the whole Curtin community, and is collated and readily accessible.

The initial RNA Campaign website was superseded by the [Respectful Relationships website](#) to align with the student training materials of the same name.

Information on the Curtin Staff Portal has been updated to include direct reference to Respectful Relationships and to guide staff members responding to disclosures.

OBJECTIVE 5

To ensure that the processes for managing and triaging cases is effective and adequately resourced.

Curtin has a well-developed set of processes for triaging cases and ensuring that our students are well supported. This is achieved through coordinated work across many services within Curtin, including the Safer Community Team and Counselling Service, amongst others.

To support our Western Australian students more broadly, Curtin led an initiative to develop a flyer for the Perth Transport Authority. All five WA universities collaborated to develop the flyer, which provides key contact and process information for transport officers who are dealing with a sexual harassment and/or assault situation. The flyer was finalised and released to Transport Authority control centres early in 2020.

OBJECTIVE 6

To develop a Curtin-wide system for collecting and collating data relating to sexual harassment and sexual assault, ensuring that data are de-identified as appropriate.

A University-wide data collection and reporting system was introduced in March 2018, to collate high level de-identified data securely within one repository without duplication. From 2019 onwards, Curtin differentiated formal reports from disclosures, consistent with the definitions described in [guidelines](#) published by Universities Australia. Further work was undertaken in 2020 to create a simplified set of standard reporting protocols to give advice on the classification of matters at Curtin, also highlighting the need for mandatory reporting in certain situations.

OBJECTIVE 7

To review existing mechanisms for appraising staff and student awareness of policies, procedures and support services to provide additional institutional data to complement national level initiatives.

The Student Experience Survey continues to examine students' perceptions of their learning environment, with a specific question including sexual harassment within its scope.

In 2020, the *Ngalang Waangi* staff experience survey was updated to focus on gender-based harassment and sexual harassment in the respondents work area. (Previously this had been described more broadly at the level of the organisation, which made it difficult to realise actionable insights.)

PROGRESS

During 2020, improved information regarding policies and processes was incorporated in staff on-boarding activities, and induction materials. For example, Curtin reinforced the importance of the Code of Conduct from the outset by including this at the employment offer stage.

Curtin will participate fully in the forthcoming National Student Safety Survey, scheduled for release later in 2021. As part of a Universities Australia recommendation to develop initiatives to ensure student safety at student housing venues, Curtin also has opted into the inclusion of an additional 'extension' question set, focusing on students' experiences in accommodation.

OBJECTIVE 8

To examine the infrastructure (including online) and work with external agencies to improve safety and wellbeing.

The main Curtin-owned social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) continue to be regularly monitored.

Procedures have been established to ensure that any disclosures or other posts indicating that student(s) may need support are swiftly escalated to relevant areas of the University.

The campus infrastructure has seen many improvements to safety, access and well-being being made across Curtin. For example, in 2019 the new Curtin Central Bus Station, was opened. It is situated within the Perth campus and will be in the heart of 'Exchange' - a vibrant dedicated industry-connected innovation precinct.

OBJECTIVE 9

To evaluate the broader efficacy of the approaches undertaken at Curtin and report on progress and outcomes as required to the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Executive Team.

The RNA Steering Committee continues to monitor and evaluate progress against these objectives, reporting periodically within the University and producing a public report annually.

OBJECTIVE 10

To consider reports that will be released (e.g. by Australian Human Rights Commission, Universities Australia, etc.) from time-to-time in order to inform developments at Curtin.

Curtin has provided feedback to the Social Research Centre to help inform the development of the National Student Safety Survey due for release in 2021.

Curtin also participated in the Western Australian Public Sector Commission analysis of systems to prevent and manage sexual misconduct in WA universities. The [final report](#) was released in March 2020.

PROGRESS

OBJECTIVE 11

To communicate on progress across Curtin, and to publicly report on the University's progress towards implementation of these recommendations.

Progress is communicated across Curtin, through presentations to the Senior Executive Team, Academic Board, with information also presented to relevant subcommittees, Heads of School meetings and other fora as required.

Curtin published its first public report in 2019, including summary data for the 2018 calendar year. The second public report followed in July 2020, reporting on data for the 2019 calendar year.

This document is the third public report, issued 2021. It includes data spanning the 2018-2020 calendar years. All reports are available from the [Respect. Now. Always. webpage.](#)

REPORTED INCIDENTS – 2020

Curtin University is Western Australia’s largest university, with 59,221 enrolled students and 7,152 staff across its Australian and global campuses in 2020.

Tables within this section summarise the number of formal reports of alleged sexual harassment and assault involving either staff or students at Curtin between 2018 and 2020. Data were drawn from five key areas across the University where the reporting of incidents takes place, including the: Office of the Academic Registrar; Safer Community Team; Support Services; Risk Management; and the Integrity and Standards Unit.

Incidents are determined according to the definitions provided by the University, which are outlined in abbreviated form below:

Sexual assault is when a person is forced, coerced or tricked into sexual acts against their will or without their consent, including when they have withdrawn their consent.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Whilst the number of reports presented here represent a small fraction of the Curtin student and staff population, we also recognise and acknowledge that there may be those that have not chosen to come forwards.

In accordance with Universities Australia Guidelines, Curtin differentiates between disclosures and formal reports. Disclosures may be unrelated to university activities (e.g. historical cases) and from 2019 onwards are no longer included in public reports. Although the incident leading to the disclosure may be unrelated to university activities, as outlined earlier in this document, Curtin has processes in place to support our students and staff in this situation.

FORMAL REPORTS 2018-2020

In 2020, there were three formal reports classified as sexual harassment, and one as sexual assault.

Two of the three sexual harassment cases occurred on campus, with one occurring off-campus. Case outcomes included a report to WA Police (one case) and performance management and/or training (two cases).

The instance of sexual assault in 2020 occurred on campus and was reported to the WA Police.

The number of formal reports received within the years 2018-2020 appear below.

Formal reports (alleged sexual harassment)

Location \ Year	2018	2019	2020
On campus	8	4	2
Public transport to/from campus	0	0	0
Off campus	1	1	1
Location unknown	0	0	0
Total	9	5	3

Formal reports (alleged sexual assault)

Location \ Year	2018	2019	2020
On campus	3	2	1
Public transport to/from campus	0	0	0
Off campus	1	2	0
Location unknown	0	0	0
Total	4	4	1

PRIORITIES FOR 2021

During 2021, Curtin will undertake work to advance the following initiatives, all of which serve to complement and support other existing initiatives to ensure that the University remains a safe place to work, study and visit.

STAFF INDUCTION/TRAINING

During 2021, additional content relating to sexual harassment and sexual assault will be incorporated into mandatory core training for new staff. At the same time, information will be included to ensure that staff are aware of the processes for making a complaint or lodging a public interest disclosure. (This is an intermediate step pending a full refresh of mandatory staff training modules which is scheduled for 2022.)

UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

Curtin will include questions in the forthcoming National Student Safety Survey to examine students' experiences in university residences. These will include questions relating to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

CAMPUS SPECIFIC MATERIALS

Further work will be undertaken to support the ongoing development of locally relevant educational materials and approaches for campuses of Curtin that are located outside Australia. To date, global campus Pro Vice-Chancellors and staff participated in an eSafety seminar held early in 2021. Other initiatives included a student-led 'Choose to Challenge' workshop held at Curtin Singapore to share strategies and ideas to address gender-based harassment issues.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

As part of the transition from pilot project to business as usual, further work will improve recording and reporting processes associated with the Respectful Relationships program. Additional content will be programmed in to focus on issues of eSafety in online environments, drawing on the recently released Toolkit for Universities designed to combat online abuse. The toolkit, produced by Universities Australia and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, aims to help university communities be safer online by building greater awareness of online safety risks.

RESEARCH

Thesis Chairs have been appointed across the institution, and further training for this group will be undertaken in 2021. This will include video-based seminars covering specific RNA-related content relevant to the research domain.

NATIONAL STUDENT SAFETY SURVEY

Curtin is actively supporting the *National Student Safety Survey* and will encourage student participation in this important analysis.

COMMUNICATION

The 2021 work of the RNA Steering Committee will include other activities designed to further raise awareness of our policies, procedures, and processes relating to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

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