

RESPECT.
NOW.
ALWAYS.



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY • AUSTRALIA

Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan 2024–2026

(YOU)us



Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Macquarie University is situated, the Wallumattagal people of the Dharug Nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured, and continue to nurture, this land since time immemorial. We also acknowledge the Elders, past and present, and pay our respects to them. We further honour and pay our respects to the spirits of this land and its waterways. We humbly ask that all members of the Macquarie University community are granted the capacity to wingaru (think), to learn and to walk safely upon this ngurra (land). The University continues to develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with all Indigenous people in Australia and throughout the world.



Vice-Chancellor’s message

Universities have long served as places of sanctuary – where people from all backgrounds are welcomed and encouraged to pursue knowledge without fear of persecution or discrimination.

Yet, despite the culture of welcome and safety that is a hallmark of universities such as Macquarie University, we know that sexual violence continues to cause great harm within campus communities.

To truly earn the abiding trust society places in us at Macquarie University, we must do more to create an environment that ensures the safety and wellbeing of our students.

We have made notable progress towards this goal in recent years, informed by investigations including the 2021 National Student Safety Survey.

The Respect. Now. Always. project, established at Macquarie in 2017, has guided the development of strategies to prevent and respond to sexual violence on our campus. We were one of the first Australian universities to introduce anonymous online reporting for sexual misconduct, a measure reinforced by the release of our Student Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy in 2019.

Now, in 2024, we harness the resolve, courage and great sense of care within the Macquarie community to release our *Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan 2024–2026*.

Developed in consultation with our staff and students, the plan reflects the University’s fundamental mission: to provide safe, accessible and transformative education that improves the lives of students and the communities around them. It commits us to improving the systems and processes in place to protect students from sexual harm and respond to reports of sexual violence in trauma-informed and therapeutic ways. The plan also introduces important new initiatives focusing on the physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual safety and wellbeing of our students.

I am deeply grateful for the candid, considered, and sometimes confronting, contributions that informed the development of this plan. It is my hope that its impact extends well beyond our Wallumattagal Campus so that all students can experience a safe haven in education.

Professor S Bruce Dowton MD
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY



Why sexual safety and wellbeing?

With student wellbeing a key priority under the Macquarie Advantage Education Strategy, we aim to support students to flourish on their own terms, including by respecting their sexual and gender expression.

We recognise that sexual safety goes hand in hand with sexual health, wellbeing and personal development. Many of the initiatives in the *Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan 2024–2026* are designed to support both safety and wellbeing, to protect and enhance the sexual autonomy of students in the university context.

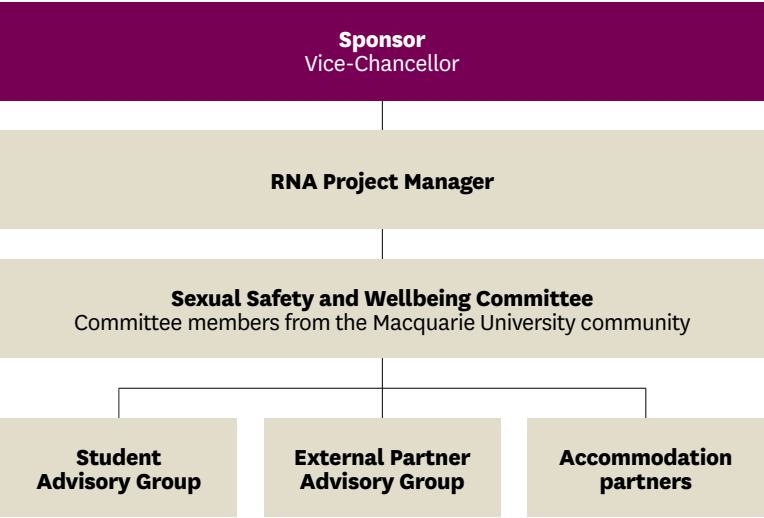
Governance

The Respect. Now. Always. (RNA) project is sponsored by the Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University. The RNA project team is responsible for implementing this Action Plan and is governed by the University’s Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Committee (SSWC), which comprises professional and academic staff, and our accommodation partners.

The Student Advisory Group (SAG) – comprising a diverse mix of students, domestic and international, undergraduate and postgraduate, including First Nations students – advises the SSWC. The SSWC is also guided by a new advisory group that includes external stakeholders from the Macquarie Park area.

For more information on our RNA project, visit mq.edu.au/about/about-the-university/vision-strategy/other-university-initiatives/respect-now-always

THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF OUR RNA PROJECT



Regulatory and policy context

To prevent and respond to sexual violence, Macquarie University has a comprehensive framework that encompasses specific policies and procedures, including **student** and **staff** codes of conduct. Our strategies and actions are also guided by the following legal, regulatory and sector standards:

- criminal law relating to sexual assault and associated offences
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), including the new Respect@Work legislative framework
- *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (Cth)
- Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education
- Sexual Harm Response Guidelines 2023 (Universities Australia [UA])
- Good Practice Note: Preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Australian higher education sector 2020 (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency)
- Educating for Equality 2021 (UA, Our Watch, and the Victorian Government).
- Universities Australia Charter on Sexual Harm

This Action Plan recognises that sexual violence may stem from intersecting power differences that can be exploited in acute ways within university settings. Intersectionality acknowledges that certain groups disproportionately experience sexual violence, compounding existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

Macquarie’s diverse community includes students from culturally and racially marginalised or minoritised backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also includes students with disability, students with neurodiversity, those pursuing non-traditional pathways (eg mature-age students), international students, first-in-family students, and students of diverse sexualities and genders.

National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) data shows that some of these populations report the highest rates of sexual harassment and assault in university settings. Failing to consider students’ intersectional characteristics can contribute to them ceasing their studies, further contributing to their marginalisation.

The Action Plan was designed to align with the following key internal strategic frameworks that focus on addressing intersectional barriers to equality and advancement:

- *Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Framework 2023–2028*
- *Macquarie Advantage Education Strategy*
- *Workplace Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2024–2028*
- *Respect@Work Action Plan*
- *Macquarie University Indigenous Strategy 2016–2025*.

We understand that First Nations communities are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence. We draw inspiration from one of three Dharug language words foundational to our Indigenous Strategy – baduwa: unlocking the capacity and building the aspirations of Indigenous students and staff through increased access to and opportunities for tertiary education.

Key milestones and achievements

2016

- Staff attended sex and ethics training provided by Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia

2017

- Established the RNA project’s governance structure
- Implemented the Consent Matters mandatory online unit for students
- Implemented face-to-face consent education

2018

- Launched Macquarie’s *Respect. Now. Always. Action Plan 2018–2020*
- Piloted the Peer Education Program
- Delivered Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm training to staff

2019

- Implemented the Student Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy, and the Staff Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Policy
- Piloted anonymous, accessible online reporting, with 55 reports received in the first 12 months

2020

- Streamlined and implemented the Symplicity Advocate reporting system

2021

- Recruited a Safety and Behaviour Wellbeing Adviser
- Piloted an online safety and resilience project with UA and eSafety, Australia’s regulator for online safety

2022

- Refreshed the RNA project’s governance structure and outcomes
- Established the SSWC and the SAG
- Renamed the Student Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy as the Student Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy
- Held SEXtember at Macquarie for the first time

2023

- Launched the mandatory Safer Communities@MQ online training unit for all students
- Macquarie University profiled in UA’s Primary Prevention of Sexual Harm in the University Sector – Good Practice Guide 2023

2024

- Offered the Safer Communities@MQ online unit to all staff
- Delivered mandatory online Responding to Disclosures training to staff
- Launched our *Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan 2024–2026*

Macquarie was one of the first universities in Australia to implement online reporting for sexual misconduct

Policy

The Student Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure were introduced in 2019 following extensive consultations with students and staff. In 2022, following a review, they were renamed as the Student Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedure. This change was made to reflect national best practice and the advice of student groups, urging the University to treat sexual harassment and assault as serious misconduct. The policy and procedure were also amended to incorporate the new standard of affirmative consent introduced into criminal law in New South Wales in 2022.

Reporting systems

Macquarie was one of the first universities in Australia to implement online reporting for sexual misconduct, enabling genuinely anonymous reporting. Responding to anonymous reports prompted the University to explore ways to improve prevention through education and bespoke responses to the issues raised, proving invaluable for improving student safety.

Engagement

Each year, Macquarie hosts the sex-positive festival, SEXtember. This educational festival embraces our community and educates individuals about safe, healthy and respectful relationships. The festival also showcases student-led initiatives and workshops hosted by key external partners from the sexual health, wellbeing and empowerment sectors.

Education

Safer Communities@MQ is a mandatory online educational unit that was introduced in 2023 following stakeholder consultation, including focus groups with students. The interactive unit draws on best practice sexual violence prevention scholarship to educate students about healthy relationships and other aspects of personal wellbeing and safety.

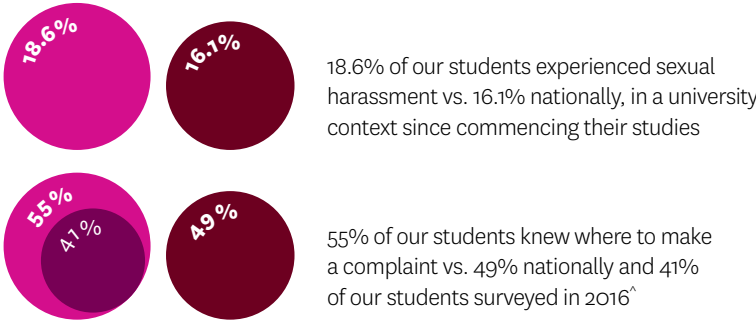
Staff training

In 2022, we partnered with Full Stop Australia to accredit Ubar, the University’s bar, as a Good Night Out provider. Ubar staff were educated about the nature and causes of sexual violence, trained to recognise and report sexual misconduct, and empowered to de-escalate unsafe situations. Staff surveyed after completing the training expressed increased confidence in identifying and responding to sexual assault and harassment.

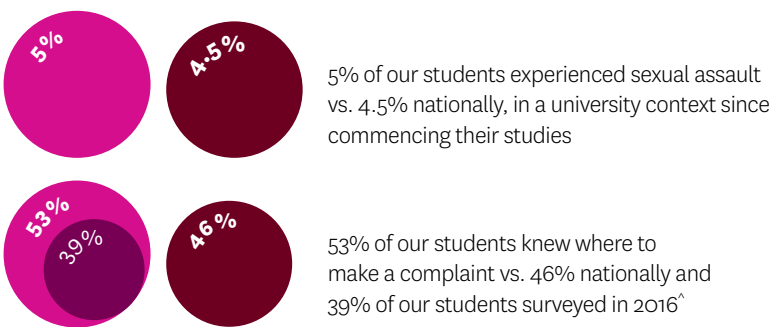
Sexual misconduct and reporting at Macquarie University

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE 2021 NATIONAL STUDENT SAFETY SURVEY

SEXUAL HARASSMENT



SEXUAL ASSAULT



MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES



Macquarie University students Students from other universities nationally

A significant priority of this Action Plan is to develop even more targeted communications to students and staff about reporting and support services at Macquarie. We also aim to enhance students’ understanding of the processes that follow a report being made to the University.

Guiding principles

Our guiding principles for implementing the *Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan 2024–2026* are informed by the principles of UA’s **Sexual Harm Response Guidelines 2023**:

- 1. Positive duty** to prevent sexual harm in the University environment through appropriate policy settings, a safe environment, accessible response and support mechanisms, and the evaluation of relevant programs.
- 2. Trauma-informed care and practice** that provide clear and accessible information, including reporting options and processes.
- 3. Self-determination and empowerment** by providing information to students about their rights and responsibilities, without imposing pressure to take any particular action (within the constraints of the law).
- 4. Support and assistance** that avoids causing further harm by offering support from staff trained in intersectional approaches to respond to victim-survivors from across the spectrum of diversity.
- 5. Confidentiality and privacy** involving consultation with the person impacted by sexual harm when the sharing of information is necessary to understand appropriate response options or implement a response.
- 6. Acknowledging diversity and prioritising the needs of the student population**, with the University acknowledging intersecting vulnerabilities in both policy design and staff training.
- 7. Natural justice**, with the University observing procedural fairness, providing support staff for both the person impacted by and the person named as responsible for sexual misconduct, and providing prompt reporting to relevant parties.

^ Based on analysis of the data collected through a national survey conducted in 2016, and reported in *Change the course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities*, August 2017

Priority areas and objectives of the Action Plan

Four key priority areas will guide our focus on enhancing the sexual safety and wellbeing of the Macquarie University community

1.

GOVERNANCE, POLICY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- The governance of sexual safety programs is responsive, representative and accountable.
- The University collaborates with external stakeholders to lead a culture of gender equality, respect, diversity and inclusion relevant to the Macquarie Park area.
- The University’s sexual misconduct policies are accessible and effective for students and staff, and reflect national best practice.
- The University’s reporting and support services are accessible, victim-centred, trauma-informed and informed by intersectional perspectives.
- Students and staff have confidence in the University’s sexual safety initiatives.

2.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Students understand the respectful behaviours expected by the Macquarie community.
- Students are aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual misconduct and trust the University’s reporting and support services, including sexual misconduct investigations.
- Students are empowered to recognise and challenge sexual misconduct, and promote a more equitable and inclusive environment at the University.
- Students’ voices are amplified in our RNA processes and projects, heightening engagement and trust among students, staff and leaders.
- International students are empowered to protect their sexual health and wellbeing.

3.

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Macquarie’s Executive Group models commitment to the RNA project and ethical leadership values.
- Macquarie’s leaders are committed to implementing the Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan.
- Sexual safety is a whole-of-organisation priority and responsibility.
- Staff understand their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual misconduct and are equipped to respond appropriately to disclosures from students and staff.
- Staff champion the RNA project and the Action Plan.
- Staff are empowered to lead cultural change that challenges gender and other inequalities, and promote a more equitable and inclusive environment at the University.

4.

EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Data collection is integral to the RNA project and sexual safety programs, including all educational and training initiatives, and informs the developmental evaluation of all relevant programs.
- Inappropriate and unwanted behaviour (IUB) reporting provides a whole-of-organisation profile of sexual misconduct reporting.
- IUB data is transparent and accountable to the University, the general public and other stakeholders, while also respecting the right to privacy and confidentiality.
- Developmental evaluation principles guide and inform future action plans.

The expected outcomes of implementing the Sexual Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan include an enhanced understanding of respectful interactions, reduced incidents of sexual harm, and heightened trust when reporting incidents and seeking support.

“It is my hope that all students can experience a safe haven in education”

Professor S Bruce Dowton MD
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Support services

INTERNAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- Student wellbeing: **Submit a CARE report** on (02) 9850 7497 1800 or at wellbeing@mq.edu.au
For after-hours support call 1800 CARE MQ (1800 2273 67)
- Submit an **inappropriate and unwanted behaviour (IUB) report**
- **Safety on campus:** Campus Security
Level 2, 16 Wally's Walk, (02) 9850 7112
- **Respect. Now. Always. project at Macquarie University**

EXTERNAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- **1800 Respect:** National domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service

