

Safe and Respectful Communities 2023 Annual Report: Sexual Harm Response and Prevention



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA



BACKGROUND

In 2022, Universities Australia released the 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS). The NSSS is the second national, sector-wide survey under Universities Australia's Respect. Now. Always. Initiative. The NSSS built on the foundational 2016 National Student Survey and Change the Course Report (released in 2017), which reports on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH) at Australian Universities, which outlines the Commission's findings on the prevalence and nature of sexual assault and sexual harassment at all Australian universities.

The NSSS was conducted from 6 September - 3 October 2021 by the independent Social Research Centre who selected students at each university across the country. It was completed by 43,819 students from 38 universities, including 1052 UOW students.

Nationally, the NSSS found that:

- one in six (16.1%) students had been sexually harassed since starting at university while one in 20 had experience sexual assault since starting at university (4.5%).
- One in twelve (8.1%) had been sexually harassed in the past 12 months while one in ninety had been sexually assaulted in the twelve months prior to the survey (1.1%).
- Of the ten behaviours measured in the survey, the most common forms of sexual harassment reported in an Australian university context in the past 12 months were: staring (5.6%); touching, hugging, or invading personal space (2.9%); following or loitering nearby (2.5%); comments or intrusive questions about their private life, body or physical appearance (2.2%); sexually suggestive comments, jokes or insults (2.1%).
- Female, gender, sex and sexuality diverse students, younger students, students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students who lived in student accommodation and university residence, were more like to experience SASH.

At UOW, the NSSS showed that instances of SASH reported were higher than the national average with 18.5% of students surveyed reporting they had experienced sexual harassment since starting university and 6% had experienced sexual assault since starting university. UOW data showed themes consistent with the national data relating to the increased vulnerability of diverse cohorts. In addition, the UOW library and university residences were found to be particular locations of concern and, more generally, that students were not aware of avenues of reporting and support available within the university.

In response to the NSSS findings, UOW undertook extensive consultation across university communities and stakeholders (including students, staff and community partners), developed a targeted Action Plan outlining a range of priority initiatives for implementation across the following 12 month (1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023) to address some of the most pressing findings of the NSSS, and established a comprehensive governance structure to monitor the implementation of the Plan. The Action Plan included a series of priority initiatives and short-medium- and long-term outcomes, informed by the Universities Australia Good Practice Guide. Key outcomes for the first 12 months of the action Plan centred around 4 key domains of Awareness, Response, Targeted Initiatives and Education and Prevention.

– Awareness:

- Increase student and staff awareness of SASH and online safety issues and strategies
- Students knowing where to find UOW and external SASH DFV support / resources

– Response:

- Staff feel confident to respond to disclosures and refer to SARC and other UOW services

– Targeted initiatives:

- Cohort specific and intersectional improvements mapped, and initiatives commenced through listening and responding to First Nations; Gender, Sex and Sexuality Diverse and disability student experiences in relation to SASH;
- Improve communication about support-seeking and information/initiatives for particular focus areas of Accommodation and Library

– Education and Prevention:

- Evidence based initiatives addressing the drivers of gender-based violence scoped with expert researchers, students & community partners

This report is divided into three sections. The first provides a snapshot of the key work being undertaken at UOW in response to the NSSS findings to increase awareness of SASH and drive attitudinal and cultural change. Part 2 highlights current priorities while Part 3 provides an overview of the Sexual Harm Reports and Disclosures of sexual and other harms that have been received by SARC over the past 12 months and the types of support provided.

PART 1:

UOW action plan initiatives

THE SAFE AND RESPECTFUL COMMUNITIES (SARC)

The Safe and Respectful Communities (SARC) initiative is UOW's commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for all members of its community including people of diverse cultural backgrounds, bodies, genders, relationships and sexualities. SARC provides individual student support to those who wish to make disclosures of sexual harm, investigates instances of sexual harm and gender-based violence and also leads the education and preventative work to address gender-based violence. SARC now have four full-time and two part-time staff, one more than in 2022.

This section of the report outlines key activities undertaken across the university and wider community and is shaped around the TEQSA's nine principles for managing sexual assault and sexual harassment, which are considered to be good practice in responding to gender-based violence.

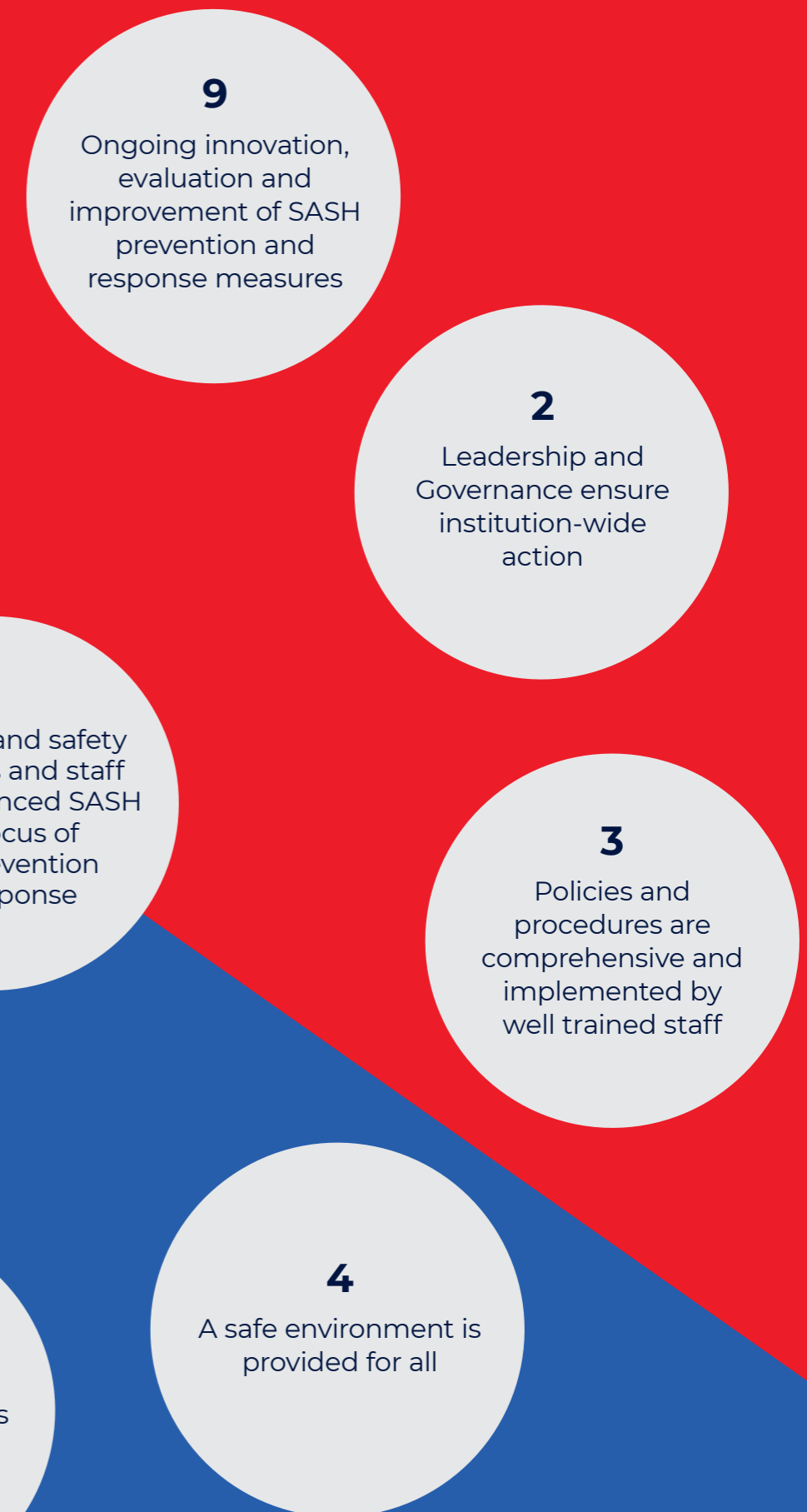
Nine principles for managing sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH)*

*From the TEQSA Good Practice Note on Preventing and Responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Australian Higher Education Sector: teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/good-practice-notes/good-practice-note-preventing-and-responding-sexual-assault-and-sexual-harassment-australian-higher-education-sector

RESPONSE



GOVERNANCE



PREVENTION



1. WELLBEING AND SAFETY

UOW is committed to creating a safe and respectful environment for all members of our community. We believe everyone has the right to feel safe and supported on campus, free from discrimination, harassment, and abuse. All members of the community are encouraged to speak out, report and seek support if they see behaviour that is threatening, offensive, or could be seen to be harassing or discriminatory in any way.

The SARC Team promotes safety on campus and aim to prevent sexual assault, violence and harassment at the University. When incidents do occur, they are managed with a compassionate, trauma-informed and support focussed approach. Those who contact SARC are received by trained staff who listen, believe them and can talk to them about their options to help decide next steps.

UOW's 'support first' approach has been widely communicated and is embedded in the First Level Responder Training (FLRT) which all staff are encouraged to undertake, especially those who serve in student facing roles within the university. The 'support first' approach prioritises messages of 'safety and support' first and aims to ensure all staff are aware of support available and referral pathways to SARC. To date approximately 400 staff across the university have completed the FLRT.

24 hour/7 days per week support is also available for students through SARC on call service. The after-hours service is staffed by a member of the SARC team and is accessible through the SARC contact number, 4221 3344.

2. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The university's commitment to addressing gender-based violence is reflected in the leadership and governance structures in place across the university. The Vice Chancellor takes an active role in SARC, speaking out against gender-based violence and proactively promoting and elevating safety on campus. The entire Senior Executive team attended bespoke training on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment which was designed to support the Executive Team to fully understand their responsibilities and obligations in creating an environment free of sexual harassment and sexual violence and how they can effectively respond to issues when they arise.

Further, the key role SARC plays across the university has been consolidated through a shift of SARC into a newly established Integrity Division, accompanied by the appointment of a Chief Integrity Officer whose role is to lead the implementation of the Action Plan and the university's response to the NSSF findings.

To guide the implementation of the SARC Action Plan, a governance structure has been established consisting of The Safe and Respectful Communities Advisory Group (SARC-AG) which is formally constituted to advise the Vice-Chancellor on the development, implementation, reporting and evaluation of initiatives aimed at preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment of staff, students and affiliates which occurs during the course of University activities. Alongside the SARC-AG is a Working Group comprising key decision-makers within the various work units at UOW as well as Student, Staff and Community roundtables which serve as opportunities for consultation, drawing on expertise and enable partnership approaches, particularly to our education and prevention work.

SAFE AND RESPECTFUL COMMUNITIES – GOVERNANCE AND CONSULATION

SARC Advisory Group

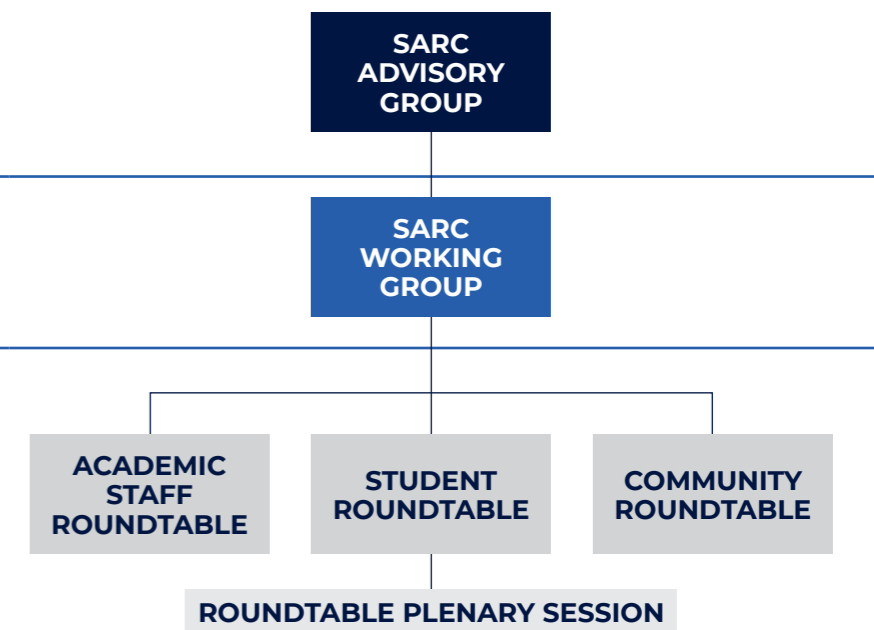
Senior Academic and operational chairs. Meets at least quarterly. Reports to VA. Sets strategic direction, approves and monitors SARC Action Plan

SARC Working Group

Chaired by SARC Director. Meets every 2 months. Reports to Advisory Group. Operationalised SARC Action Plan

SARC Roundtables

Collaboration spaces for academic experts, students champions and community partners to discuss issues, proposed initiatives and review current info and training at UOW. Option for Plenary Roundtables – to discuss survey results, action [plans, strategic direction etc. Reports to Advisory Group and Working Group.



3. POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The UOW policy suite are monitored and regularly updated. Key policies currently undergoing review include the Sexual Harm Response Policy in response to new NSW consent laws, in addition to strengthening the Close Personal Relationships policy to make clearer the university's expectations in regard to interpersonal relationships that may occur between individuals and provide great clarity on the types of relationships that are unacceptable and the potential consequences of unacceptable relationships. A general policy sweep is also taking place to better reflect a trauma informed approach.

4. SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Physical safety on campus and safety in the online space have been important focus for the university. Lighting on campus is constantly reviewed and regularly audited to record any malfunctioning lights to ensure they are rectified and repaired as soon as possible. Similarly, shrubbery and tree trimming is also regularly reviewed to ensure there are no areas contain dense bush or tress that are easy places for people to lurk unnoticed.

The UOW Safezone app plays a significant role in campus safety, offering a range of safety information as well as a single call button which, when pressed, alerts and calls security to the location of the person on campus. Safezone demonstrations and stalls are carried out multiple times a year, with Security presenting Safezone to hundreds of students at a time during orientation. An after-hours security escort has also been made available where anyone feels uncomfortable to walk alone to their car or other transport.

E-safety has also been an importance focus for the university in view of the increasing time students now spend in the online space, particularly during and post-pandemic. A series of e-safety education materials were developed and a dedicated eSafety webpage on the SARC website was established as part of this broader awareness and education campaign. SARC regularly promote E-Safety training sessions for staff with the E-Safety Commissioner's Office and promote resources such as the LGBTIQ+ learning lounge on Queer Safety online and dating, and webinars on understanding abuse through technology, social media self defence, and supporting women with intellectual or cognitive disability.

5. COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

In view of the NSSS finding that many students did not know how to report instances of SASH or how to access support services within the university, SARC intensified its focus across all university communities to increase awareness of SASH, knowledge of reporting pathways and how to access services at the university and within the broader community. This was done in a range of ways, with student consultation and co-design at the centre:

- developing and distributing promotional materials such as magnets and posters, designed by students;
- through direct contact with a range of student groups including the Student Advisory Council and other representative groups such as the Ally Network, Queer Collective, Woolyungah Indigenous Centre and the Disability Inclusion Network;
- presentations and training to residents of UOW accommodation including intensive training with Resident Ambassadors (student leaders)
- creating video content; utilising student media outlets;
- undertaking workshops; attending faculty and school events and Orientation Week;
- provision of slides and information for academics to use at the commencement of lectures/tutorials/ seminars.

RESPECT WEEK 2022

A significant education and awareness activity was the inaugural UOW Respect Week 2022 held from 29 August – 2 September across all regional and metropolitan campuses, which aimed to engage our university community in difficult conversations that were critical to building safe and respectful relationships, to raise awareness of the support available and to celebrate diversity. Each day across week were themed 'Empower Hours' which focused on the following topics: Cultural Safety; Beyond Binaries; Breaking the Cycle; Preventing Sexual Assault & Harassment; From Disability to Accessibility. Panel speakers included academic and community experts as well as those with lived experience. Bystander and E-Safety Training were also offered across the week, which culminated in a keynote address by activist, advocate and survivor, Grace Tame. Respect Week activities were very well attended, with over 1600 people attending sessions across the week.



Other key education and information activities that have occurred over the last 12 months have included:

Activity	Outcomes
General Information dissemination and awareness raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ongoing collaboration with student groups including the Student Advisory Committee, Queer Collective, Clubs & Societies to raise awareness of SARC, reporting and support avenues. – Interviews with UOW Student Media on NSSS Results and promoted UOW response and SARC services. – Produced video informing students of SASH reporting and support options – hosted on UOWnow YouTube channel and SARC website.
Respect@UOW	Working with students to co-design and create content on respectful behaviour including a video on behaviour expectations and "What is Respect". A Respect @ UOW Video was produced and released to coincide with UOW Respect Week 2023.
'Ride with Respect'	Ride with Respect is an initiative designed to target bullying, harassment and other harmful behaviours occurring on local public transport to/from/around UOW. Design students from the School of TAEM were engaged in the development of a promotional campaign with phase 2 roll out to continue in the latter part of 2023, part of which will include the training of bus drivers in bystander intervention.
'Set the Bar'	A comprehensive training program was developed and delivered to licenced venue staff to enable them to identify, call out and hopefully put an end to inappropriate behaviour and harassment in their venues. Over 100 staff from across 11 licenced venues have completed the training. It also provides guidance for staff on what to say and do if incidents of SASH are disclosed to them.
Targeted information within the library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Library rolled out new posters, desk cards and knowledge articles with information about how to get help, along with the introduction of twice daily live announcements about safety in the library and how to get help if feeling uncomfortable. – News article developed and given prominence on high-traffic Library homepage. – After-dark and Security escorts promoted within the Library – Safety signage and collateral distributed across all Library locations.
Targeted information sessions to university residences	Targeted presentations are made each semester to all accommodation residents in relation to SARC services and Consent and respectful relationships, reaching approximately 1,400 students. More intensive training around bystander intervention techniques is delivered to Resident Ambassadors.

TRANS & FRIENDS FESTIVAL

The university was proud to join with the Illawarra/Shoalhaven Gender Alliance to host the inaugural Trans and Friends Festival on 23 November 2022, coinciding with Trans Awareness Week. The Festival was attended by approximately 1000 trans and gender diverse people, their friends, families and allies. The day covered such topics as how to access care and what gender affirming treatments are available to ways of looking after one's mental health and being a supportive family.

Given their experiences of marginalisation, and the NSSS finding that queer, non-binary and gender diverse people experience SASH at higher rates, celebrating the richness and contributions of this diverse community was an important and powerful statement of visibility and support. UOW Pulse also hosted a range of events during the festival itself.



6. STAFF AND STUDENTS TRAINING IN SASH AWARENESS, RESPONSE AND PREVENTION

In addition to the information and education activities described above, SARC works with students and staff to raise awareness of SASH and trauma-aware responses in the event a disclosure is made to them. For staff, key training such as the Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence offered online through Epigeum and which continues to be offered as part of the organisational training calendar. For students, completion of a consent education module, Consent Matters, has now been made mandatory for all students from Spring 2022 and to date over 20,000 students have completed the module.

In addition, the university is committed to evidence-based prevention work to address the underlying drivers of gender-based violence. One such program is the MATE Bystander Intervention Training Program (MATE) which has been run for student leaders including Resident Ambassadors, Student Hub Ambassadors, Clubs & Societies Executives, Peer Success Coaches and Students Events Ambassadors. MATE is designed to help identify the drivers of gender-based violence and to increase confidence and personal leadership to respond in an effective way, whether through direct intervention or indirectly by reporting behaviour to someone else. Two of the SARC staff have been trained as facilitators of this program allowing us to roll out this program over time across the university. Key activities and outcomes are summarised below:

Activity	Outcome
Mandatory 'Consent Matters' Modules	Completion of an education module addressing consent issues was made mandatory for all students from Spring 2022. More than 20,000+ students have now completed the module.
MATE Bystander Intervention Training Program for student leaders	MATE Cultural Change Workshop was run for students leaders, including Resident Ambassadors, Student Hub Ambassadors, Clubs & Societies Executives, Peer Success Coaches and Students Events Ambassadors
E-Safety	An E-Safety training session was held for staff with the E-Safety Commissioners Office with 49 attendees, information and resources about E-Safety for students are on the SARC website, SARC is establishing a small working group including representatives from IMTS, LTC and the digital literacy space.
Staff Training and Education	First Level Responder Training. To date approximately 400 staff have completed the training. We also promote the Universities Australia/APS Training Module titled 'Sexual Violence in University Communities - What are the drivers, how can staff respond?' To date 243 staff have completed this online module.
Intersectional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Review of key training programs to ensure appropriate intersectional lens is incorporated, such as the First Level Responders Training – Awareness raising workshops with First Nations students at Woolyungah Indigenous Centre and through the Ally Network – Supporting the establishment of the Disability Inclusion Network – Multi-language resource about sexual assault produced in several languages was added to the SASH website – Promotion of ACON training on 'Sexual Assault in LGBTIQ+ Communities' – Development of a UOW People Library which involved recording interviews with First Nations, gender, sex and sexuality diverse people, and people with disability in which they shared their lived experiences.

7. ACCESSIBLE AND TIMELY SUPPORT FOR ALL PARTIES

SARC provides a support first case management model for anyone who discloses experiences of violence, abuse and harassment. Students are supported by ensuring they are informed of all their options and relevant supports.

Disclosures to SARC can be anonymous, identified or formal report. Anyone is welcome to discuss their options with SARC informally before making a disclosure or formal report.

SARC support within UOW includes Academic Consideration; personal safety plans; referrals to UOW Counselling, Legal Clinic, Student Advocacy etc. without the need to retell the situation or traumatic experience.

SARC also regularly support students with reporting to Police, applications for Victims Services payments and Victims services counselling and other community-based supports as needed.

Where there is a formal report, any students who are subjects of an allegation are also provided with supports and options for advocacy and advice, including access to the Student Advocacy Service, Legal Clinic and UOW Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

8. INCIDENT REPORTING IS FAIR, TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE

The University of Wollongong does not tolerate sexual misconduct and is committed to creating a safe and respectful environment for all members of our community. We believe everyone has the right to feel safe and supported on campus, free from discrimination, harassment, and abuse and we are committed to responding to reports of any sexual or other harm in a timely and accessible manner.

SARC is responsible for conducting investigations arising from critical incidents, including SASH. SARC manages these investigations adhering to the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice and in accordance with relevant policy, procedures, and regulatory requirements. The UOW Sexual Harm Policy requires that a Primary Investigation Officer (PIO) is appointed and that a finding be made within 10 working days of receiving an allegation of sexual harm. This is often delayed as matters are with the police. The Respondent will usually have the PIO outcome within 4 weeks. Findings of sexual harm are then referred to Student Conduct Committee to determine the appropriate outcome.

Support is available for both the person making the report of sexual harm or violence as well as the Respondent to an allegation. 24 hour/7 days per week support is also available for students through an after-hours service. The after-hours service is staffed by a member of the SARC team and is accessible through the SARC contact number, 4221 3344.



PART 2:

Future projects and priorities

9. ONGOING INNOVATION, EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

UOW are committed to evaluation, continuous improvement and evidence-based practice in managing, supporting and responding to sexual misconduct and other gender-based harms. Evaluation and review are built into our work in a range of ways, including through our Student, Academic and Community Roundtables where we aim to ensure our Action Plan, developed in response to the NSSS findings, is informed by, and implemented in collaboration with, students, practitioners and researchers experts in gender-based violence, and victim-survivors. Currently, we are further embedding evaluation mechanisms into our case, education and preventative work, with a particular focus on developing a social impact measure in relation to our community partnerships and longer-term outcomes articulated within the Acton Plan.

UOW is committed to continually promoting awareness of SASH and of reporting and support avenues within the university and wider community. Several initiatives are also planned in the prevention and education space in 2023, including:

- Development of trauma aware teaching resources and workshop
- Wider roll-out of the MATE Cultural Change Active Bystander training
- Implementation of the 'Ride with Respect' campaign to promote safety on public transport
- 16 Days of Activism campaign to promote UOW Research into Gender Based Violence

- Offering the EAAA training program Enhanced Assess Acknowledge Act, the only evidence based Sexual Assault Resistance Program specifically designed for university contexts.
- Undertake additional SARC campaigns that focus on intersectional issues, including those specifically affecting gender, sex and sexuality diverse students including Respectful Relationships and e-safety, and programs targeting International students to increase awareness and risk factors for coercive behaviour.
- Developing a Risk Assessment/Safety Screening tool with particular consideration of sexual assault in a university community context.
- Improved case management and reporting system

PART 3:

Reports and disclosures of sexual and other harms

The University of Wollongong is committed to creating a safe and respectful environment for all members of our community. We encourage all members of the community to speak out, report and seek support if they see behaviour that is threatening, offensive, or could be seen to be harassing or discriminatory in any way.

The Safe and Respectful Communities (SARC) initiative is UOW's commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for all members of its community including people of diverse cultural backgrounds, bodies, genders, relationships and sexualities. SARC provides trauma-informed support for students who make reports and disclosures of sexual harm and domestic and family violence, whether or not these occur on-campus or off-campus or involve family members, partners/ex-partners, and persons unknown to the University, as well as investigating instances of alleged sexual harm that occur on-campus.

SEXUAL HARM INVESTIGATIONS

SARC is responsible for conducting student sexual misconduct investigations. SARC manages these investigations adhering to the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice and in accordance with relevant policy, procedures, and regulatory requirements. Allegations made against staff are managed by the university's People and Culture division. In 2022, there were 5 sexual misconduct investigations, an increase of 1 on the previous year.

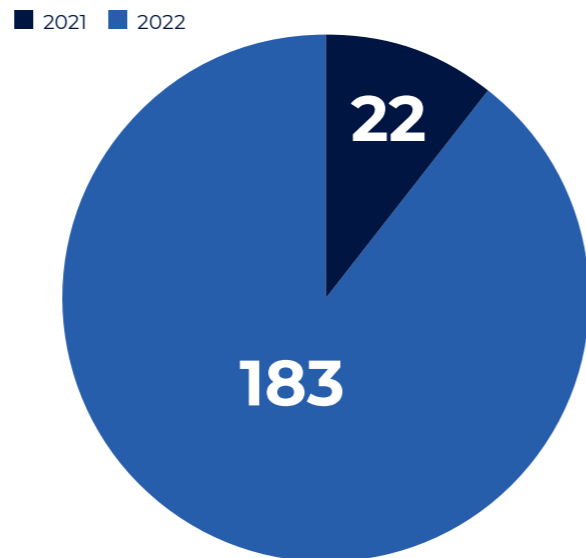
Table 3 – Investigation	2021	2022
Sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH) #	4	5

DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In addition to sexual misconduct investigations, SARC also receives disclosures of violence, abuse, and harassment from student victim-survivors, providing specialised trauma-informed support and ensuring students have the information they need to make an informed decision about what happens next.

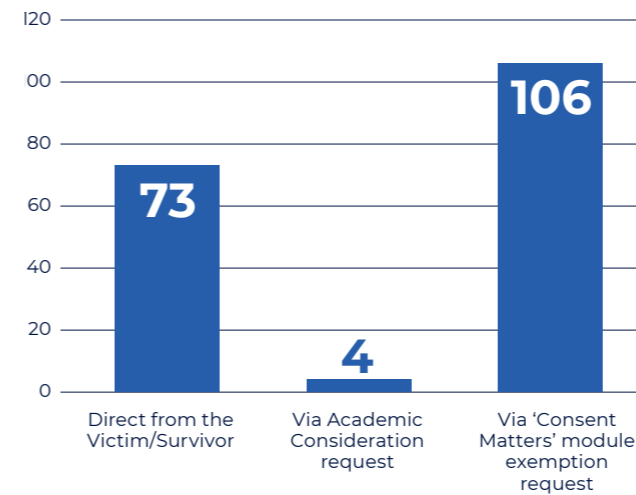
There was a significant increase in the number of disclosures received during 2022 compared to 2021. In 2021, there were 22 disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment (SASH) and domestic and family violence related disclosures. In 2022, there were 183 and so far in 2023, there have been 91 (see Chart 1). This suggests that the intensive focus over the past 12 months on increasing awareness of SASH, reporting pathways and avenues of support available at UOW have been successful.

CHART 1: SASH DISCLOSURES



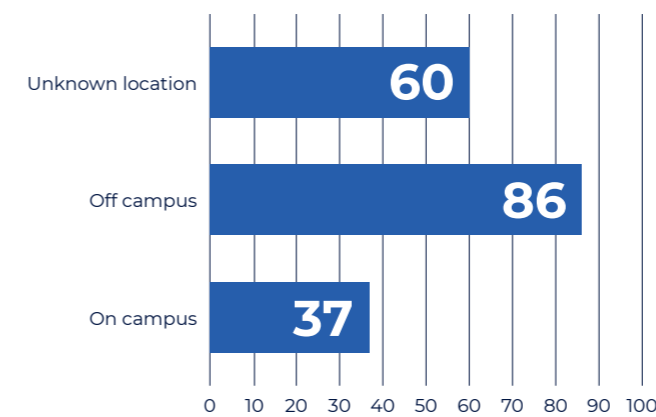
Of the 183 SASH disclosures, 73 disclosures were made via a direct report from the victim-survivor, 4 were reported via application for academic consideration and 106 via request for Consent Matters module exemption. In each case a member of the SARC team contacted the victim-survivor to offer support (see Chart 2).

CHART 2: MODE OF DISCLOSURE: 2022



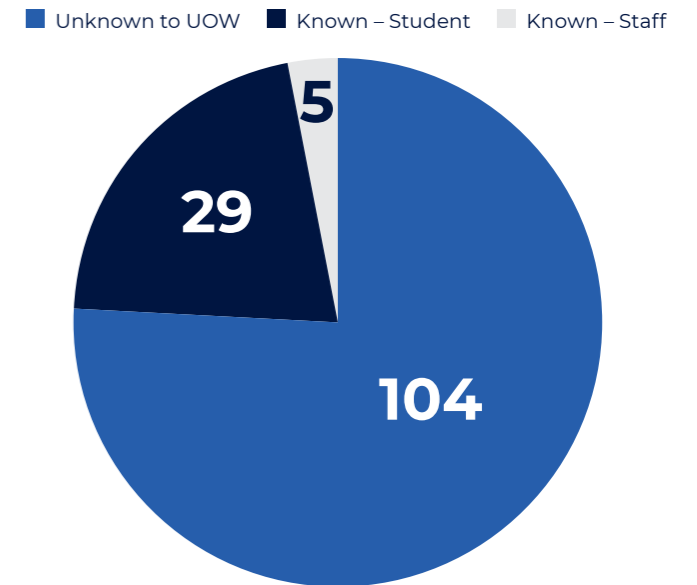
Of the 183 disclosures, 37 involved incidents on campus, 86 were off campus and 60 occurred at an unknown location (see Chart 3).

CHART 3: LOCATION OF INCIDENT: 2022



In most cases, the person causing harm (PIO) was unknown to the University, however, 29 involved UOW students as PIOs and 5 involved UOW staff (see Chart 4). Of the disclosures made during 2022, three resulted in formal Student Misconduct reports to UOW. There were a further two SASH related student misconduct matters in 2022 that resulted from disclosures made in 2021.

CHART 4: RESPONDENTS - 2022



RANGE OF SUPPORTS OFFERED

In each disclosure, a member of the SARC team contacted the student to offer support. Consistent with best practice, SARC provides wrap-around support to minimise the number of people to whom a student needs to disclose information that may be traumatic. These supports include regular check-ins with students, reporting to the police, seeking medical assistance, warm referral to counselling, Victim Services applications, personal safety plans, academic consideration and other forms of external and internal support and advice. SARC supports students no matter where or when the harm occurred. SARC's service provision model meets the Universities Australia best practice guidelines as outlined in UA Sexual Harm Response Guidelines. Table 2 provides a summary of some of the support that has been provided in 2022 & 2023.

Table 2 - Support provided to students in 2022-2023

Advocating for students when reporting to police [incl. AVO's and informal statements]	33
Safety Plans with UOW Security	55
NSW Government Victims Services Recognition Payment applications granted [over \$150,000 provided to students] – NB: In addition, 12 applications are still pending	24
Applications for Victims Services Immediate Needs Support Packages	9
After Hours [on call] sexual assault disclosures, supports and advice	22

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Safe and Respectful Communities

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