

Dr Amber McKinley

Executive Summary

The *Change the course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities* was released to the public on 1 August 2017 by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The report came with nine recommendations and specific guidelines for Australian universities to create plans, policies and guidelines to tackle the significant issues raised within the survey results. The National Student Survey informing the report had confirmed that acts of sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH) were taking place, to varying degrees, in all Australian universities. The report outlined the major issues that were discovered from the survey and subsequent interviews and offered recommendations and suggested actions that each university needed to tackle within an 18 month period, including within one year of the report, commissioning an independent, expert-led review of existing university policies and response pathways in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The clear message from UOW senior leadership team about positive change and behavioural expectations is clearly communicated with a zero tolerance campaign, the introduction of trauma-informed practice and clearly visible information on campus and their intranet relating to support seeking and reporting. The UOW community have been collaboratively working together for some time to find solutions to this complex set of problems. They appear to be making positive inroads and a concerted effort towards enduring change.

This review reflects the recommendation of Universities Australia and the University of Wollongong's (UOW) desire to review the effectiveness of its existing policies, processes and pathways regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH). The review was required to be expert led and to make specific recommendations for improvement (this report), with the final objective being to ensure that UOW's policies, processes and pathways for responding to SASH:

- accommodate the needs of students, staff and affiliates from a diverse range of backgrounds and identities (e.g. LGBTIQ¹)
- are clear, accessible and, modelled on best practice
- ensure the immediate safety and wellbeing of the individual who has experienced the sexual assault or sexual harassment
- have the flexibility to suit individual circumstances
- provide individuals with control over what happens to their report where possible
- provide specialist support, from someone who has recognised professional expertise and training in sexual assault, sexual harassment and trauma counselling of sexual assault survivors; and
- provide students with support to continue with their studies and staff and affiliates with support to continue in their roles at the university.

This review looked at 27 existing policies relating to SASH (see Appendix 1) and sought to identify strengths and opportunities to implement new or improved practices that are legally compliant and in line with contemporary best practice. The primary aim is to achieve sustainable cultural change with staff, students and support services at UOW to prevent and manage SASH incidents so as to ensure the university is a safe place of study and work.

Seven themes emerged from both the interviews and the desktop review of policies, support materials and information. The review addresses each theme outlining the problems discovered and makes recommendations for solving them. It also seeks to highlight dependencies between the themes. The 12 recommendations across the seven themes are:

1. Trauma Informed Policy and Practice

- a. Adapt trauma-informed victim-centric care processes
- b. Minimise the number of times students need to recount their traumatic experience and offer multiple ways to make a formal report

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer.

2. Leadership and Resourcing Cultural Change

- a. Implement a new trauma-informed model to create and resource permanent organisational change at UOW within the SASH environment.

3. Behaviour, Barriers and Prevention

- a. Simplify the UOW policy suite by blending and collapsing some policies (noted in Table 1)
- b. Using the combined SARC skill set identify key preventative measures based upon known behaviours and identified barriers to reporting.

4. Reporting and Supporting

- a. Train all staff to respond in a trauma-informed manner to disclosures or reports using a simple six step guideline
- b. Confirm that the staff at UOW understand that support-first, trauma-informed disclosure (or reporting) should, where possible, be guided by the victim's needs and work with them for their full recovery.

5. Staff Morale

- a. Target staff (and student advisors/representatives) involved in the SASH area and survey their needs, expectations and capacity.

6. Vicarious Trauma

- a. Target staff (and student advisors/representatives) involved in the SASH area quarterly for EAP de-brief.
- b. Training for staff (and student advisors/representatives) involved in the SASH area to proactively protect them from vicarious trauma.

7. Auditing for Improvement

- a. Complete continuous improvement audits
- b. UOW Support and resource an independent, objective external audit in 2020 to gauge where the university sits compared to the sector and to ensure sustainable change, noting the impact this issue has on UOW's reputation, as an institution and it's future financial viability.

These recommendations are intended to be cumulative and mutually supporting, in that each enables the enactment and success of the other. The primary risk to achieving permanent

cultural change, in relation to sexual violence with a nexus to the University of Wollongong is if each theme was viewed and acted upon, in isolation. Whilst this review did not focus on the economic or financial impacts of cultural changes, (such as impact to enrolment numbers, student graduation rates, student/staff attrition, business admin costs insurance/legal etc.), it is recommended the UOW Senior Executive Leadership team consider the impact that not successfully implementing sustainable change will have on the university's international reputation. For example: now that the UA data is publically accessible, potential students, their parents and staff can critically assess institutions on this issue and whether they have a workable policy suite, guiding behaviour, expectations and acceptable practice at this institution, which in turn may affect UOW's future financial viability.

Summary of Recommendations

The following table provides a summary of the review's seven recommendations.

SASH POLICY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS	RECOMMENDED FOR SUPPORT	SUGGESTED UOW RESPONSE/PROGRESS
<p>1. Trauma Informed Policy and Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopt trauma-informed victim-centric care processes ▪ Minimise the number of times students need to recount their traumatic experience and offer multiple ways to make a formal report 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be incorporated into relevant UOW policies and processes ▪ To be addressed within relevant UOW policies and processes
<p>2. Leadership and Resourcing Cultural Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement a new trauma-informed model to create and resource permanent organisational change at UOW within the SASH environment. 	<p>—</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Currently in place through the SARC operational framework
<p>3. Behaviour, Barriers and Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Simplify the UOW policy suite by blending and collapsing some policies [for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>blending of Student Conduct Rules and Student Conduct in Residences Policy;</i> ○ <i>recasting the Student Charter into a formal Student Code of Conduct;</i> ○ <i>Recasting the UOW Grievance Policy as a Complaints Policy</i>]. ▪ Using the combined SARC skill set identify key preventative measures based upon known behaviours and identified barriers to reporting. 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be adopted ▪ To be incorporated into y wider UOW SARC Framework.
<p>4. Reporting and Supporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Train all staff to respond in a trauma-informed manner to disclosures or reports using a simple six step guideline ▪ Confirm that the staff at UOW understand that support-first, trauma-informed disclosure (or reporting) should, where possible, be guided by the victim's needs and work with them for their full recovery. 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First Responder Training has been rolled out to key staff and students. Simple, Step by Step Guideline to be developed. ▪ This has been implemented via First Responder Training ▪ To also be incorporated into relevant UOW policies and processes
<p>5. Staff Morale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Target staff (and student advisors/representatives) involved in the SASH area and survey their needs, expectations and capacity. 	<p>✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be incorporated into SARC processes.
<p>6. Vicarious Trauma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Target staff (and student advisors/representatives) involved in the SASH area quarterly for EAP de-brief. ▪ Training for staff (and student advisors / representatives) involved in the SASH area to proactively protect them from vicarious trauma. 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EAP currently available to all staff. De-brief to be encouraged to targeted staff on a quarterly basis by SARC manager. ▪ Note First Responder Training Further training regarding vicarious trauma to be explored.
<p>7. Auditing for Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete continuous improvement audits ▪ UOW Support and resource an independent, objective external audit in 2020 to gauge where the university sits compared to the sector and to ensure sustainable change, noting the impact this issue has on UOW's reputation, as an institution and its future financial viability. 	<p>—</p> <p>—</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UOW has a culture of continuous improvement facilitated through regular student feedback and policy reviews ▪ Defer considering second student survey is being planned by UA and UA and other bodies are monitoring compliance with AHRC recommendations.

LEGEND: ✓ Proposal recommended

— Proposal not endorsed