

**La Trobe University: ‘Change the Course’ summary – September 2020**

La Trobe University is committed to promoting a respectful community culture and student safety is a key priority. We are working hard to ensure our campuses are safe places to be and we will continue to make ongoing safety and security improvements, and actively champion equity, diversity and inclusion. To support this, La Trobe has agreed in principle to all the recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) ‘Change the Course’ report and action plan, as part of a commitment to our students regarding transparency and openness.

The recommendations focus on five areas of action:

1. Leadership and governance: A strong and visible commitment to action from university leaders, accompanied by a clear and transparent implementation of these recommendations.
2. Changing attitudes and behaviours: Development of measures aimed at preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment.
3. University responses to sexual assault and sexual harassment: Implementation of effective processes for responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment.
4. Monitoring and evaluation: Ensuring that steps taken to prevent and respond to sexual assault and sexual harassment are evidence-based and that improvements to prevention and response mechanisms are made over time.
5. Residential colleges: Specific steps to improve the culture within residential colleges and university residences, with a particular focus on risk management.

La Trobe has been making solid progress and identified future priorities against the nine recommendations in the report including a commitment to address the drivers of gender-based violence and to change behaviours, attitudes and culture over the longer term.

La Trobe has a Campus Safety Group, chaired by Vice Chancellor, which receives a quarterly Respect at La Trobe update on the actions against the recommendations. The Campus Safety Group also continues to monitor and evaluate data from the Speak Up service on incidents and actions to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions since March 2020, our community has been largely working and studying remotely, and with this comes the responsibility to provide psychological health, safety and wellbeing support in new ways during this challenging time. As a response, there have been a number of continuous supports for students including:

* A comprehensive education suite of offerings for students that addresses the drivers of sexual harm, with a priority in 2020/2021 to strengthen in-house training in respectful relationship and bystander intervention to ensure it is tailored for the needs of students.
* The development of the *Respect, Prevention and Culture* unit within the Student Wellbeing portfolio to strengthen the governance and operations structure within the University.
* A new internship program through the University’s Work Integrated Learning initiative (pending COVID restrictions) which aims to nurture and develop students in social work and health sciences in becoming future primary prevention practitioners against sexual harm and violence against women.
* The continuous rollout of workshops and programs including Tomorrow Man workshops, Enhanced, Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA), Sexual Assault Resistance Education Program, the Respectful Behaviour Program for students, the Drugs And Alcohol Awareness program in La Trobe’s residential colleges, the 16 days of activism program of work, and a range of online and printed resources on bystander action, sexual harm and family violence.

We have also developed partnerships with a number of key organisations to drive cultural change including:

* Our Watch: collaborating on a whole of University approach to sexual violence prevention including a respectful relationships education program drawing on cutting edge expert research.
* Centres Against Sexual Assault: working with us to support our victims/survivors of sexual assault and delivery of training and education to staff and students.
* SAGE Athena SWAN: leaders in a national project to improve gender equity in STEMM which has been extended to all our disciplinary areas.
* Women’s Health in the North and Bendigo Gender Alliance: partners in a community wide Building a Respectful Community Strategy and Gender Equality Strategy.
* Male Champions of Change: our male leaders led by our Vice-Chancellor taking action on gender inequality.
* Victoria Police: including a representative in our Campus Safety Group to provide advice and support.
* La Trobe Student Union: including their ‘Be a Better Human’ campaign.

The University has also realigned and rebranded the Speak Up Services to Safer Community, to ensure there is a centralised area of the University to receive disclosures of sexual assault and sexual harassment and to ensure our responses are compassionate, supportive and victim/survivor centred. The wellbeing support for students has also increased during the COVID pandemic with the Crisis Line after hours mental health support phone service open 5pm – 9am on weekdays and 24 hours during weekends and public holidays. Students can also request a call or online video chat (Zoom) from one of the wellbeing team for tips and tricks on how take care of mental health and wellbeing during this time.

There has also been an increase of support for staff during this time, with a wellbeing and support portal developed to support people through periods of change and transition. Resources to assist staff in improving on the pillars of good mental health have included health and wellbeing guides and online webinars for family and personal wellbeing during the COVID pandemic, and the availability of the new FlourishDx app. An expansion of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has also been available to staff with extra online sessions and a Guide to Work and Wellbeing outlining the role Converge/EAP can play in helping managers build mental fitness in their teams. Extra flexibility has also been available for staff members who may need extra support across all campuses during the COVID Victorian lockdown including extra carer’s leave for staff with primary caring responsibilities to support them and their families. An additional 10 hours a week carer’s leave has also been available for staff including those who are not primary carers but require extra support during this challenging time. In addition, staff who cannot work from home (due to such circumstances as family violence) have been provided with a space on campus, with a UniSafe escort to and from transport.

Culture has also been a focus point during the pandemic for demonstrating and role modelling positive stories and workplace behaviours for staff. The Culture Influencer Leadership Development Program recommenced in 2020, for supporting our leaders with the skills, tools and structures to drive culture in their teams during these difficult times. The University also developed an Equality and Inclusivity Plan to improve on the existing Gender Equality Blueprint (2018-2022), Diversity and Inclusion Plan (2018-2022) and SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze Action Plan (2019-2023). This new plan will be a driving force towards attaining a Silver SAGE Athena SWAN Award in 2025, with clear responsibilities for senior leaders and staff to proactively eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying at La Trobe University.

The findings in the ‘Change the Course’ report made clear that sexual assault and sexual harassment are far too prevalent in university settings - as they are in the broader community - and that universities need to do more to prevent such abuse from occurring in the first place, to build a culture of respect and to respond appropriately by supporting victims of abuse and sanctioning perpetrators. La Trobe aims to continue to improve our culture, knowledge, processes and policies, and to effectively address violence, advocate equality and respect, and eliminate discrimination in our communities. So far, we are on track to eliminating gender-based violence at La Trobe University with more transparency and management for reporting inappropriate behaviour, where and when it occurs. While there is still much work to do as this is a long-term commitment to change attitudes, behaviours and culture across society, we aim to continue identifying further preventive measures that are necessary and tailoring our responses to meet the needs of our community.