

REDACTED

# **SAGE Cygnet Award Application**

## **RMIT: SAGE Cygnet 5**

Respectful cultures and behaviours

October 2025



## Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

### Artwork 'Sentient' by Hollie Johnson

Hollie is a Gunaikurnai and Monero Ngarigo woman from Gippsland who graduated from RMIT with a BA in Photography in 2016.

## RMIT: SAGE Cygnet 5

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	Current Cygnet	Barrier
[Mandatory] Institution-wide barrier		Attraction: Recruitment of academic women in STEMM
[Mandatory] Sub-group barrier		Participation and career fulfilment: Supporting parents and carers
Sub-group barrier		Supporting LGBTIQA+ inclusion
Sub-group barrier		Enabling accessibility – supporting people with disability and neurodiversity
Institution-wide	✓	Respectful cultures and behaviours

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## A note on terminology

Throughout this application, terminology used in figures or graphs reflects the terminology used in the relevant survey instrument. In some cases, particularly in relation to data from 2019, this terminology is not consistent with the University's current understanding of the non-binary nature of gender and gender-identity, or preferred language in relation to sexuality. Efforts are being made to ensure language is consistent and up-to-date across all instruments, in future.

## Key barrier

### Key barrier 5: Respectful cultures and behaviours

Creating “respectful cultures and behaviours” means creating an environment where gender-based discrimination, bullying and harassment—as well as sexual assault and sexual harassment<sup>1</sup>—are actively prevented and responded to appropriately when they occur. In this context, we have identified the below sub-barriers, addressing both the staff and student experience.

- Sub-barrier 5.1: Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports
- Sub-barrier 5.2: A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources
- Sub-barrier 5.3: Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students
- Sub-barrier 5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability
- Sub-barrier 5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect

## Evidence of barrier

### Sub barrier 5.1: Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports

In 2016, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) conducted a national, independent survey of university students to gain insight into the nature and prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH) at Australian universities. The survey resulted in the watershed *Change The Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Harassment* (2017).

In 2021, RMIT participated in the follow up to the survey, the National Student Safety Survey, conducted by the Social Research Centre, in collaboration with Associate Professor Anastasia Powell from RMIT, and on behalf of Universities Australia. The survey aimed to gather information about students' experience of SASH, on and off-campus. A total of 665 RMIT higher education students (less than 1% of the total student cohort of

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<sup>1</sup> These range of behaviours are referred to as “gender-based violence” or “gender-based harm” throughout this application, for brevity.

over 96,000) took part in the survey. The findings included that, of the responding students:

- more than 50% did not know where to go to make a complaint about sexual assault or sexual harassment
- more than 50% did not know where to seek support or assistance when they had experienced sexual assault or harassment, and
- very few students who had experienced sexual assault or harassment had accessed support from RMIT.

The survey also showed that:

- 10.5% of respondents said they had experienced sexual harassment since starting university, with 3% experiencing it within the last 12-months, and
- 2.8% of respondents said they had experienced sexual assault since starting university.

The National Student Safety Survey was undertaken in a post-COVID context, when significantly lower numbers of students were on campus, compared with prior to the pandemic. The original AHRC survey (2016), which had over 30,000 responses, had found that experiences of SASH were much more prevalent, compared with the 2021 findings—the AHRC survey found that around half of all university students (51%) were sexually harassed on at least one occasion in 2016, and 6.9% of students were sexually assaulted on at least one occasion in 2015 or 2016. The reduced prevalence of SASH in 2021 is likely to be a reflection of the post-COVID reduction in the number of students on campus.

### Sub-barrier 5.2: A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources

At the time of RMIT receiving its Athena Swan Bronze Award in November 2019, the University did not have a gender-based harm prevention strategy or action plan to provide oversight for the work, nor a dedicated prevention or response team to lead work in this space. The University was also lacking a case management system/risk assessment and management tool to manage reports of gender-based harm. As such, data from that period is limited, for both staff and students.

Anecdotal feedback was gathered to support the development of this application via a working group—the working group met twice and was attended by a range of University staff with considerable experience working for the prevention of gender-based harm. This feedback indicated that, historically, there had been inappropriate outcomes of sexual harassment investigations—including respondents continuing in their positions with no or limited consequences. This resulted in a lack of trust in reporting systems and deterred victims from coming forward.

In addition, a range of key policies related to staff and students, were either non-existent or out-of-date, including those related to gender-based harm prevention and response, domestic and family violence, student conduct and child safety.

## Sub-barrier 5.3: Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students

The New South Wales Ombudsman, in their *Complaints about the supervision of postgraduate students: Discussion paper* (2017), called out the exposure of postgraduate students in research programs to various forms of harm by academic staff, including sexual harassment. Although not specific to RMIT or the Victorian context, the paper highlighted the complex nature of such cases, including the potential power imbalance of the supervisor-HDR candidate relationship.

At RMIT, in 2021, there were 33 enquiries made by Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students/candidates to the counselling service regarding supervisory issues, including bullying. While the numbers are small, students/candidates who identify as men and students/candidates without disability were more likely to make these enquiries, as shown in Figure 1, below. This is, perhaps, indicative of the fact these two cohorts are dominant within the HDR community.

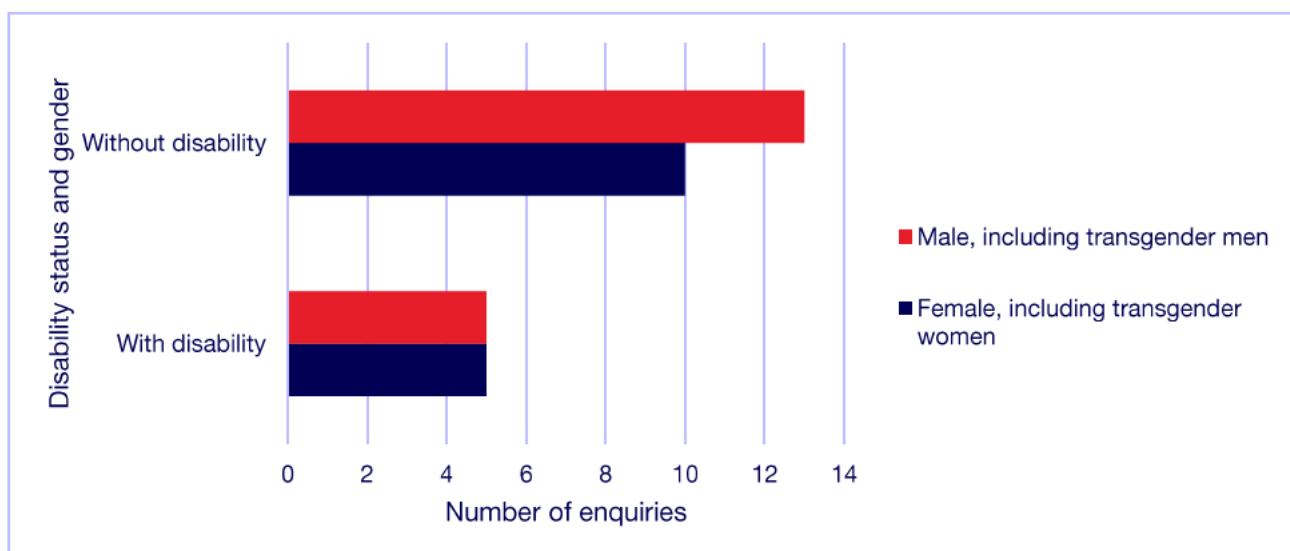


Figure 1: Number of enquiries to the counselling service concerning supervisory issues, by sex, gender and disability status

## Sub-barrier 5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability

An Advisory Group with a focus on preventing and responding to sexual harassment and assault was established in 2017, in response to *Change The Course*. Prior to this time, there was no formal governance mechanism for this work at the University. Feedback gathered to support the development of this application, via the working group of staff mentioned above, included that there was a lack of accountability for gender-based harm, such as:

- a broad unwillingness to “call-out” borderline or inappropriate behaviours
- holes in recruitment and performance systems that enabled the employment and retention of problematic staff, and
- an inconsistent culture of feedback to address concerns.

## Sub-barrier 5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect

In their 2017 report, the AHRC called on universities to address ‘the underlying drivers of these behaviours’ including ‘deeply held norms and attitudes about women, their role in society and relationships between men and women’.

There is limited data available to support understandings of attitudes in relation to gender equality at RMIT from this time. Noting that the 2019 Staff Survey did not offer options to record diverse/non-binary gender, beyond male or female, the survey showed that male-identifying staff were less likely than female-identifying staff to report that ‘*people from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT*’ and that ‘*my immediate supervisor/manager genuinely supports equality between genders*’, as shown in Figure 2, below. As also shown, below, in relation to the first statement, staff who identified as Diverse Gender, Sex and Sexuality (DGSS)<sup>2</sup> were less likely to agree than both male- and female-identifying non-DGSS staff.

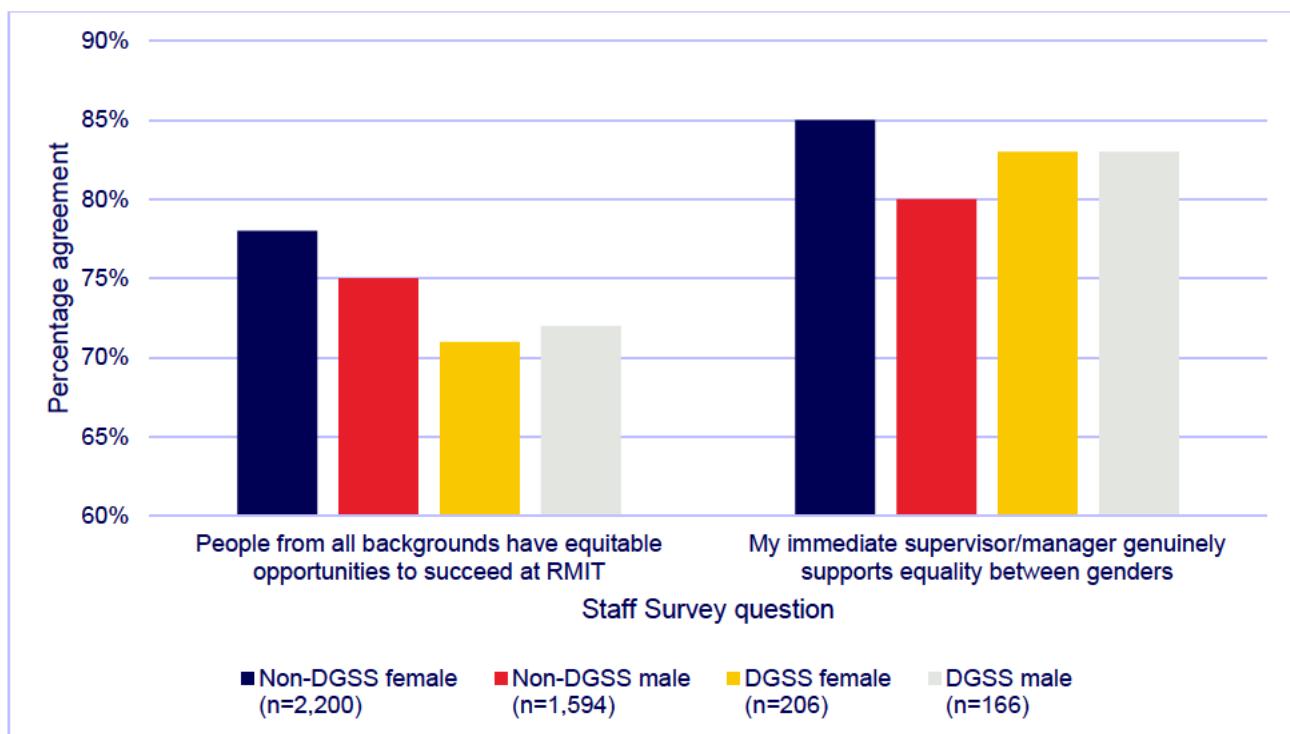


Figure 2: Staff Survey 2019 responses – perspectives on gender equity, by sex and sexuality

While there could be a range of explanations for this data, it may be that male-identifying staff felt threatened by gender equality efforts—at the University and beyond—and were not adequately supported to take up roles as allies. Anecdotal evidence gathered toward the development of this application, via working group, supports this—some staff noted that an academic “boys club” culture and a lack of recognition of higher education as a gendered workplace were common throughout the University, at this time.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the terminology of “DGSS” is no longer preferred in relation to sexuality and has been replaced with the terminology “LGBTQIA+” in later surveys.

## Progress (actions and outputs)

Since 2021, RMIT's prevention and response initiatives have demonstrated our strong commitment to national and sector-wide efforts to address gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence. Our initiatives align with Our Watch's guiding frameworks for higher education and vocational education, [Educating for Equality](#) and [Respect and Equality in TAFE](#), which call for a "whole-of-institution" approach.

As set out in our [Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023–2027](#) (the *Strategic Action Plan*), our prevention and response work is focused on four key areas: policies, processes and systems; awareness raising; learning and development; and targeted innovation projects. The *Strategic Action Plan* is underpinned by a unique Theory of Change, with three domains (Prevention, Response and Governance). RMIT's work in the prevention of and response to gender-based harm calls on *all* areas of the University to play their part.

The commitment and work is ongoing and, in light of the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence* (the *National Code*), legislated in August 2025, the University is working to continue meeting our obligations and strengthening our efforts. Under the *National Code*, universities are required to take evidence-based steps to prevent gender-based violence, including providing education and training to students and staff. Work in this space also ensures the University meets its workplace obligations under all relevant legislation, including its Positive Duty obligations<sup>3</sup>, set out under the *Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022*.

Table 1, below, sets out the range of initiatives undertaken throughout the period 2021–present to address the sub-barriers identified in this application, organised by the four areas set out in our *Strategic Action Plan*. Some of these initiatives are discussed in more detail throughout the rest of this chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Positive Duty is a legal obligation on employers to take proactive and reasonable steps to prevent, as far as possible, sexual harassment, sex-based harassment, discrimination, hostile work environments, and victimisation before they occur, not just respond after the fact.

Year	Initiative/action	Sub-barrier addressed	Detail
<b>Policies, processes and systems</b>			
2021	Establishment of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Addressing Gender-Based Violence	5.4. Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability	The Advisory Group established after <i>Changing the Course</i> came out was renamed the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Addressing Gender-Based Violence (Advisory Group) to reflect a broader and more inclusive scope, acknowledging the full spectrum of gender-based violence (GBV).
2021-22	Establishment of <b>Safer Community team</b> and expansion of the team's remit to include staff	5.2. A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources	The team provides a specialist response to gender-based harm and enables a trauma-informed, holistic approach to the formal reporting and management of sexual assault and sexual harassment matters. The team aims to minimise the potential impact of re-traumatisation and reduce delays in the reporting process.
2021-22	Development of <b>sexual harm risk assessment and management tool</b> for use by Safer Community staff		The Sexual Harm Assessment of Risk and Manageability Tool (ARMT) aimed to identify risk factors that may have led to a sexual harm incident, so that meaningful interventions could be devised and implemented.
2022	Full review of and updates to all relevant policies and procedures		This included a comprehensive Student Conduct Policy and Procedure review and redevelopment to ensure that the student discipline processes adopted a trauma-informed approach to sexual harm matters.
2023	Audit of policy, governance and management activities		The audit specifically referenced TEQSA's Good Practice Note and WorkSafe Victoria's guidance on work-related gendered violence. Overall, the audit found that RMIT's SASH policies aligned with the relevant guidelines, with some areas for improvement identified.
2024	Implementation of the <b>Salesforce Case Management system</b> for use by the Safer Community staff		This monitoring and reporting system provides access to protected, transparent and clear data. The system also improved data integration across systems and departments, and highlights trends and risks to better inform both response and prevention efforts.
2024-25	Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Policy Suite developed, covering both RMIT Australia and Vietnam		The updated suite introduced a dedicated Domestic and Family Violence Policy and Procedure, added the National Student Ombudsman as a complaint avenue (from 1 February 2025), clarified international partner obligations and embedded trauma-informed, safety-first and intersectional principles, in line with the proposed National Code.
2025	Coordinated institutional response to the proposed <b>National Code</b> (since legislated)		This has included a legislative review, a compliance readiness checklist and a comprehensive gap analysis. The team has been proactively commencing implementation of the requirements outlined in the National Code.
<b>Awareness-raising</b>			
2018-2020	Be the Change communication and engagement campaign	5.1. Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports	It was designed in collaboration with students and ran each semester until 2020. The campaign initially aimed to empower students to not walk past bad behaviour, know where to report it and to work together to create a safer community.
2024	Awareness-raising activations (33 events)		Activations were held at key events across all RMIT campus locations, such as O-Week, Club Week, Open Day and Wellbeing Weeks. By working closely with accommodation providers, we established inclusive spaces for reflection and dialogue, amplifying the importance of respect, consent and collective care in the student community.

2023-2025	Respect at Uni campaigns		Facilitated a variety of on-campus and online events and activities, with programs including awareness-raising information stalls.
2025	Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month		A key opportunity to reinforce RMIT's commitment to a safe and respectful community. Initiatives focused on staff and student engagement, with strong leadership visibility.
<b>Learning and development</b>			
2018-present	Sexual Harm and Responding to Disclosures e-learning module	5.1. Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports	This e-learning offering supports staff to respond to disclosures of sexual harm by other staff members—it offers an opt out option, in line with trauma-informed best practice approaches. Students can also access a module on how to support someone who discloses sexual harm.
2020-present	Respectful Research Training Program (RRT)	5.3. Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students	RRT is a University-wide program aimed at promoting a respectful and safe research training environment and preventing sexual assault and harassment, and other related problems. RRT is mandatory for all supervisors and HDR candidates.
2021-22	Development of the <i>Respect Capability Framework</i>	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	The RMIT <i>Respect Capability Framework</i> outlines the skills, knowledge and capabilities that we aim for our staff and students to cultivate, for the prevention of gender-based harm.
2023	Development of <i>Planning for Change: Learning and Development Plan</i>	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	In 2023, RMIT advanced its commitment to capacity-building by aligning efforts under RMIT's <i>Planning for Change: Learning and Development Plan</i> .
2024-present	Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace e-learning module	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	In 2024, in partnership with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHR), RMIT implemented a mandatory e-learning module for all staff on sexual harassment and responding to disclosures. This initiative complements Planning for Change's emphasis on foundational competency-building for all staff, addressing the core knowledge and skills needed to foster respectful behaviours.
2024 and 2025	Training for executive leaders	5.4. Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability	Training for executive leaders on their role in prevention GBV, delivered in 2024 and 2025.
2024-present	Academic Integrity Senior Officer Sexual Harm Workshop	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	The Sexual Harm Workshop pilot program equipped Academic Integrity Senior Officers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address student-facing conduct issues related to sexual harm.
2024-present	'Are You Safe at Home?' Workshop	5.1. Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports	This initiative is a critical tool for fostering safer and more supportive workplaces by addressing the often-hidden issue of family violence. Grounded in a trauma-informed and culturally-safe approach, this training has equipped individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to signs of family violence, ensuring those affected can access timely and appropriate support.
2024-present	Student e-learning module on Sex and Consent	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	RMIT developed and launched an e-learning module on "sex and consent" for students, to support them to understand the basic concepts of consent, communication and respect, which are vital for creating a safer environment for everyone.
2025	Face-to-face pilot of 'Preventing and responding to gender-based violence' training for staff		Two pilot, face-to-face training programs on preventing and responding to gender-based violence were developed and delivered—one session focused on student-facing staff, while the other targeted non-student-facing (operations) staff.

2025	Face-to-face pilot of 'Preventing and responding to gender-based violence' training for student leaders		The first face-to-face training program on preventing and responding to gender-based violence was delivered to student leaders.
2025	Targeted training	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	To support whole-of-institution readiness and <i>National Code</i> compliance, the Prevention and Respect team has adopted a targeted, data-informed approach to gender-based violence prevention and response training. Disclosure and inquiry data from 2023-24 was analysed to identify trends, risk levels and complexity of gender-based violence cases. This informed strategic engagement with specific schools and areas of study, with those with higher-risk indicators prioritised. Educators in these areas were engaged, first, recognising their critical role in supporting student wellbeing and safe learning environments.
Innovation projects			
2024-present	Working Together With Men	5.4. Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability	This 12-month pilot provided senior research leaders who identified as men the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skill in allyship for gender equality and harm prevention work. Twenty-eight senior male research leaders were engaged, with 14 commencing the intensive allyship model.
2024-present	The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic strip	5.5. Social and cultural norms that undermined respect	Co-designed by RMIT students, educators and violence prevention experts, The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic series aims to engage students in conversations about mental health, gender-based violence and harmful online behaviours, while challenging disinformation spread through online algorithms.

Table 1: RMIT's initiatives to promote respectful cultures and behaviours 2018-present

## 1. Policies, processes and systems

To address sub-barrier 5.4 (opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability), in 2021, the terms of reference for the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Addressing Gender-Based Violence (Advisory Group) were updated to embed visible leadership from the Vice-Chancellor's Executive, ensure a whole-of-institution approach and provide strategic oversight of RMIT's gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response agenda. To further strengthen the group's influence and effectiveness, a second phase of enhancements was implemented in November 2024. These updates reinforce the Advisory Group's leadership role in driving whole-of-university cultural and systemic change, aligned to sector best practice and the forthcoming *National Code*. The updates include that:

- the group is now co-chaired by a University Executive member to ensure high-level accountability and authority
- members are responsible for progressing GBV actions within their portfolios
- membership includes senior leaders from key operational areas such as: Legal, People and Health, Safety and Risk portfolios, University Communications, academic and vocational Colleges, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Education and Research and Innovation Portfolios, together with Indigenous and student representation and
- the group reports annually to Academic Board and Council, and every 6-months directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

Also in 2021, RMIT established a Safer Community team. Initially, the team provided student support only (with staff supported through the Industrial Relations team). In 2022, the Safer Community team remit was extended to staff, giving staff access to trained counsellors in this space for the first time.

In 2022, there was a full review of and updates to all relevant policies and procedures. In 2023, RMIT's Internal Audit team engaged Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) to conduct of an audit of policy, governance and management activities. Overall, PwC found that RMIT's SASH policies aligned with the relevant guidelines, with some areas for improvement identified. These included:

- clearer post-investigation outcome communication protocols in Australia
- better documentation of investigation roles and offshore partner monitoring and
- updating Vietnam's procedures to reflect recent team changes and new responsibilities.

These findings were addressed in a 2024-25 policy review, resulting in an expanded Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response Policy Suite, covering both RMIT Australia and Vietnam. The updated suite introduced a dedicated Domestic and Family Violence Policy and Procedure, added the National Student Ombudsman as a complaint avenue (from 1 February 2025), clarified international partner obligations and embedded trauma-informed, safety-first and intersectional principles, in line with the proposed *National Code*.

## 2. Awareness-raising

To address sub-barrier 5.1 (limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports), RMIT implemented a range of activation events and social media campaigns.

Campaigns initially focused on bystander action. Later campaigns focussed on enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of RMIT's response service, Safer Community.

In 2018, RMIT launched the Be the Change communication and engagement campaign. It was designed in collaboration with students and ran each semester until 2020. The campaign initially aimed to empower students to not walk past bad behaviour, know where to report it, and to work together to create a safer community. In 2019, the commitment was taken a step further—the campaign asked the RMIT community to make a public pledge to change our culture for the better.

In 2024, 33 events were held across all Melbourne campuses reaching over 3,000 students. Activations were held at key events across all RMIT campus locations, such as O-Week, Club Week, Open Day and Wellbeing Weeks (Figure 3 is a photo from Wellbeing Week 2024).



Figure 3: Wellbeing Week 2024

In March 2025, we launched the Respect at Uni 2025 campaign. Building upon the success of the 2023 and 2024 campaigns, we facilitated a variety of on-campus and online events and activities, with programs including awareness-raising information stalls. The student and staff-facing campaigns aimed to promote the Sex and Consent e-learning module, raise awareness about how staff and students could access support and utilise RMIT digital platforms to link to Respect at Uni events, stories and videos.

### 3. Learning and development

To address a range of sub-barriers, but particularly 5.5 (social and cultural norms that undermined respect), RMIT sought to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities among staff and students to prevent and respond to gender-based harm. To effectively address gender-based harm, it is crucial to understand its underlying drivers, including gender inequality, misuse of power and harmful gendered norms. The RMIT *Respect Capability Framework* outlines the skills, knowledge and capabilities that we aim for our staff and students to cultivate, for the prevention of gender-based harm. In 2023, RMIT advanced its commitment to capacity-building by aligning efforts under RMIT's *Planning for Change: Learning and Development Plan*.

Gender-based harm learning and development initiatives undertaken by RMIT throughout 2019-2025 are outlined in Table 1 and some are further described below.

**Sexual Harm and Responding to Disclosures e-learning module:** In 2022, the module was revised and re-designed and made mandatory for all staff—for commencing staff, it forms a part of the onboarding process and commencement of employment at RMIT.

**Respectful Research Training Program:** This program was a key outcome of the Australian Council of Graduate Research's (ACGR) landmark summit of Australian graduate research education leaders in 2018. As a lead institution in the development of this program, RMIT was one of the first universities in Australia to implement this culture change initiative.

The program involved the creation of instructional materials promoting respect in PhD and Master by Research degree programs. These materials, created in partnership with the ACGR and community, include six videos demonstrating realistic scenarios and an instructional manual. RMIT fully committed to the program by adopting the digital artefacts and developing complimentary learning materials relevant to the RMIT context. Implementation was a two-staged process from 2020, onwards, commencing with Higher Degree by Research (HDR) supervisors, followed by HDR candidates.

**Training for executive leaders:** In 2024, senior leaders across all Colleges, Portfolios and the RMIT Council, participated in the VEOHRC training on Sexual Harassment and Responding to Disclosures. In 2025, 15 RMIT executive leaders attended training with Our Watch, aiming to equip leaders with an understanding of the importance of a prevention approach to addressing gender-based violence in university settings.

**Academic Integrity Senior Officer Sexual Harm Workshop:** Academic Integrity Senior Officers have authority to manage reports of inappropriate actions and behaviours by students. They are responsible for considering reports of potential misconduct, directing internal investigations, referring serious cases to the Student Conduct Board, making determinations on facts and determining any resulting actions or penalties. Internally co-designed, the Sexual Harm Workshop pilot program has successfully equipped Academic Integrity Senior Officers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address student-facing conduct issues related to sexual harm. Following the successful pilot in 2024, the continuation of the Senior Officer Sexual Harm Workshop is planned for rollout in 2025 and ongoing. So far, there have been nearly 50 participants.

**‘Are You Safe at Home?’ Workshop:** Complementing the module, RMIT implemented six engaging promotional strategies inspired by the “Snack Cart” model, effectively raising awareness and encouraging engagement among employees.

**Student e-learning module on Sex and Consent:** From Semester 2 2024, this module became compulsory for all commencing students at RMIT, with a penalty of being unable to enrol into the next semester’s units if not completed.

**Face-to-face pilot of ‘Preventing and responding to gender-based violence’ training for staff:** In May 2025, two pilot, face-to-face training programs on preventing and responding to gender-based violence were developed and delivered for the first time. One session focused on student-facing staff, while the other targeted non-student-facing (operations) staff. The purpose of these pilots was to co-design<sup>4</sup> the learning experience and outcomes with participants and to gather comprehensive, qualitative feedback to strengthen engagement and inform future delivery. The training aims to build staff capability by increasing knowledge, confidence and competence in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

**Face-to-face pilot of ‘Preventing and responding to gender-based violence’ training for student leaders:** In August 2025, the first face-to-face training program on preventing and responding to gender-based violence was delivered to student leaders. Three co-design workshops with RMIT Active student leaders shaped the learning experience, ensuring their voices informed case studies, messaging and roles and responsibilities. Seventeen student leaders, collectively supporting over 150 peers within RMIT Active, completed the training to build their capability and strengthen their knowledge, confidence and competence to support prevention and response efforts within their clubs.

**Targeted training:** Analysis of Safer Community data from 2023–2024 highlighted key trends, risk levels and case complexities. These insights informed targeted engagement with schools identified as having higher-risk indicators. One such initiative was undertaken with the Built Environment and Sustainability program, in the College of Vocational Education. All staff in this area participated in the first face-to-face professional development sessions focused on wellbeing and gender-based violence.

#### 4. Innovation projects

To address sub-barrier 5.4 (opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability) and 5.5 (social and cultural norms that undermined respect), RMIT focussed efforts on leaders and male allyship in its innovation work. Two notable programs in this space, which were designed in 2024, are noted in Table 1 and further described below.

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<sup>4</sup> The pilot was co-designed with 30 staff—10 staff directly working with students from IDEA, Student Welfare, Student Support, Student Experience and Success, Education Support and Language teams, and 20 professional staff from Leadership and Capability, HR Operations, Enrolment Compliance and Records, Centre of Excellence in Exciton Science, International and Engagement, Governance, Policy and Workplace Relations and Privacy and Compliance teams.

### *Working Together With Men (WTWM)*

An adaption of the Working Together With Men (WTWM) model was customised for the research setting and commenced in August 2024. This initiative aligns with the proposed *National Code*'s call for innovative approaches to engaging men in violence prevention.

This 12-month pilot provided senior research leaders who identified as men the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skill in allyship for gender equality and harm prevention work. Twenty-eight senior male research leaders were engaged, with 14 commencing the intensive allyship model. This year-long pilot moved allies through key phases of learning and into action, where men co-designed gender equality projects with women and their teams.

### *The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends*

Co-designed by RMIT students, educators and violence prevention experts, The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic series aims to engage students in conversations about mental health, gender-based violence and harmful online behaviours, while challenging disinformation spread through online algorithms.

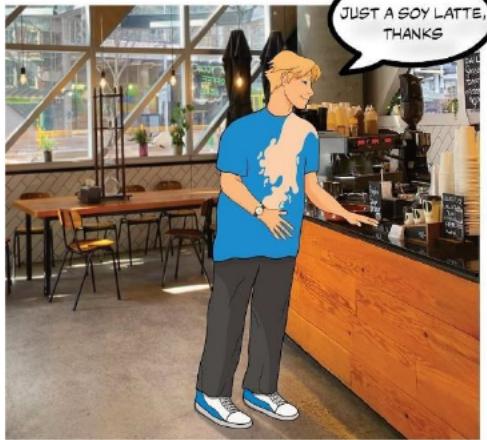
In 2024, 29 male students were engaged in several co-design workshops and campus pop-up sessions that provided young men with the chance to explore and discuss men's lived experiences associated with outdated gender stereotypes, violence, wellbeing and university life.

From these discussions, an idea to create a digital comic series about a group of friends navigating university life was created. In partnership with RMIT's College of Vocational Education's Creative Industries, the first ever co-designed and embedded student assessment opportunity was created. Students in the Advanced Diploma of Screen and Media were offered the opportunity to illustrate the comic as an alternative assessment, with the successful comic being chosen for public launch and promotion for Respect at Uni week in 2025. Following this, more co-designed stories will be released in 2025.

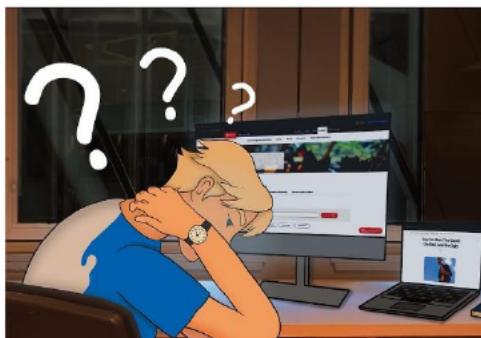
One of The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic strips can be seen in Figure 4, below.



SOY BOY IS ABOUT TO START HIS DAY AT UNI WITH HIS FAVOURITE BREW WHEN...



COULD T-BONE BE RIGHT?  
SOY BOY DECIDES TO DO SOME RESEARCH!



NIGHT OF THE DARK WEB, LOST TO ALGORITHMS AND HOTROD'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL. FINALLY, SOY BOY FINDS SOMETHING CREDIBLE.





Figure 4: The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic strip

## Outcomes

Outcomes in relation to identified sub-barriers have been assessed with reference to a range of available data, including data collected via the methods set out in Table 2, below.

Data collection method	Relevant initiative/action	Relevant sub-barrier
Survey	Respect at Uni campaign	5.1. Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports
Survey	All awareness-raising initiatives	5.1. Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports
Case management records	Safer Community team	5.2: A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources
Supervisor evaluation survey and participant pre-and post-training survey	Respectful Research Training (RRT)	5.3: Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students
Post-training survey	Executive leaders training (VEOHRC)	5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability
Pre- and post-training survey	Executive leaders training (VEOHRC)	5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability
Pre- and post-training survey	Academic Integrity Senior Officers training	5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect
Evaluation survey	Pilot of the Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence training for staff	5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect
Pre- and post-training survey	Preventing and responding to gender-based violence training for student leaders	5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect
Pre- and post-training survey	Built Environment and Sustainability educator pre- and post-training survey	5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect
2019 and 2025 Staff Survey	All	5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect

Table 2: Data collection methods

### Sub barrier 5.1: Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports

Building on the awareness raised by previous campaigns, in 2019, RMIT's Be the Change campaign received more than 450 commitment statements. By 2024-2025, there were high levels of engagement in our community with awareness-raising programs—3,000 students and 400 staff were engaged both in-person and through dedicated social media campaigns throughout this period.

In 2025, as a part of the Respect at Uni campaign, 725 students came to the Sex and Consent “Snack Cart stalls”. Students who attended the stalls were surveyed about their awareness of gender-based harms and supports available—and over 600 students completed the survey, with 91% of respondents saying they had strengthened their knowledge about RMIT Safer Community through the Respect at Uni campaign. Figure 5 shows a student scanning the QR code to complete a survey at one of the stalls in 2025. Further to this, the Respect at Uni website had 226 pageviews and 151 unique visitors throughout the campaign.

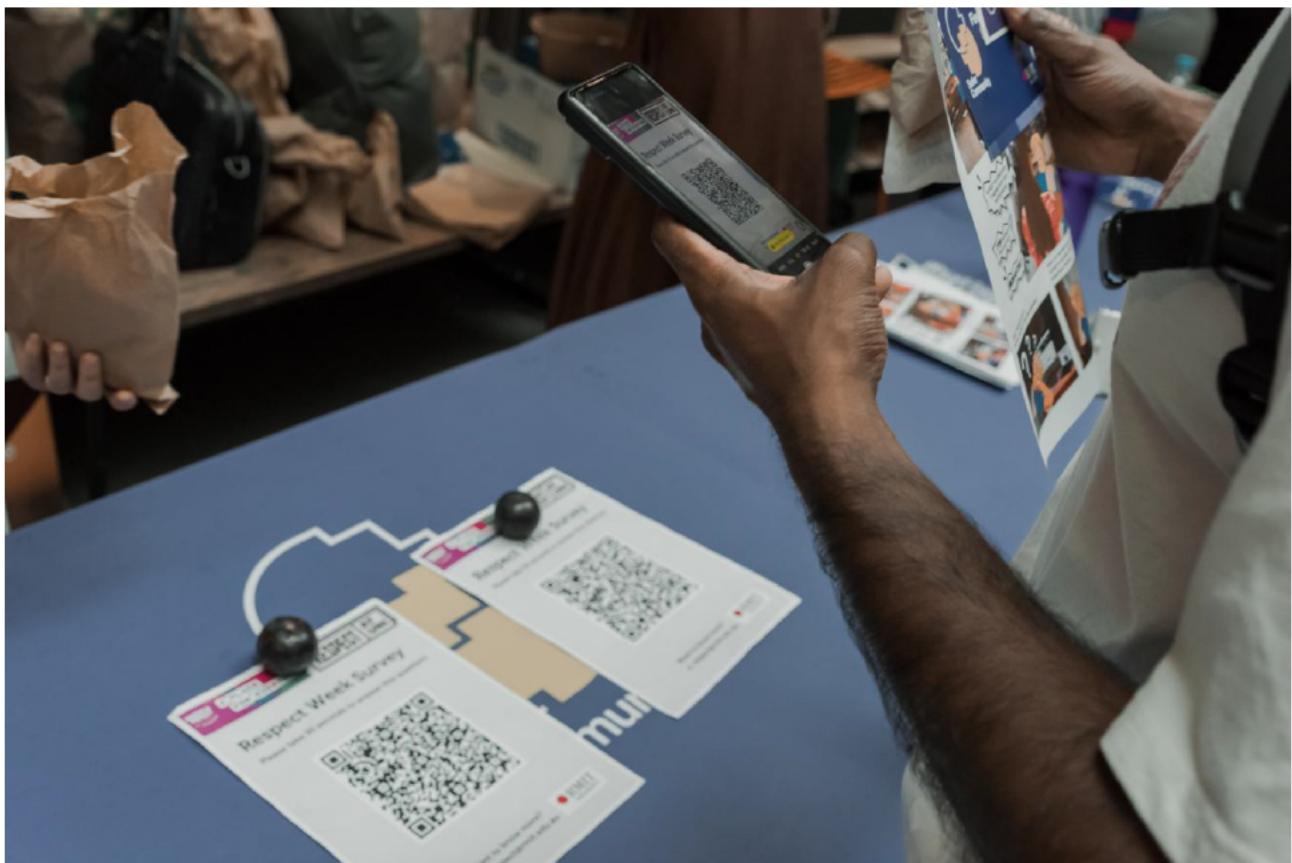


Figure 5: Student engaging at a "Snack Cart" stall as a part of Respect at Uni campaign 2025

In July and August 2025, a further student survey was conducted to understand awareness of gender-based violence, the Prevention and Respect team, help-seeking behaviours and to identify opportunities for stronger engagement. The survey attracted 595 responses, with 241 students volunteering to actively participate in prevention initiatives. Figure 6 shows students' self-reported levels of understanding of gender-based violence.

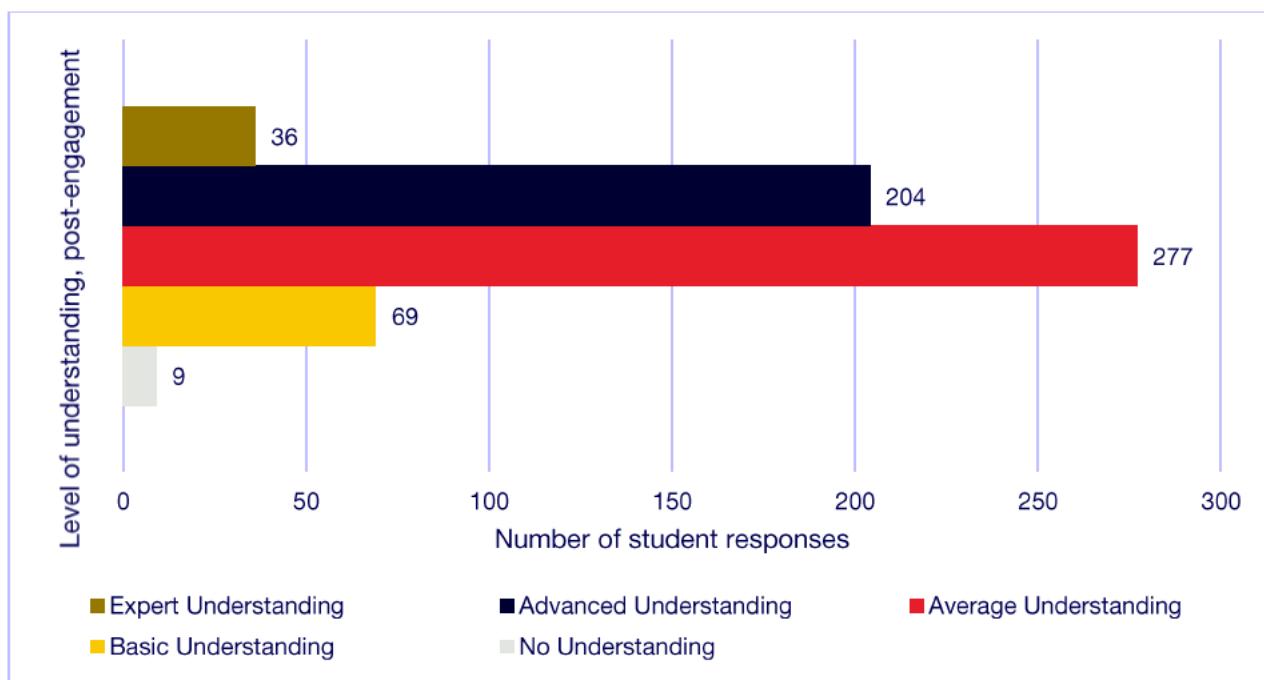


Figure 6: Student responses to GBV prevention survey 2025 - how do you rate your understanding of GBV?

Figure 7 sets out student responses to the question ‘*where would you go to get support for gender-based violence?*’ and reflects students’ awareness of the Safer Community team.

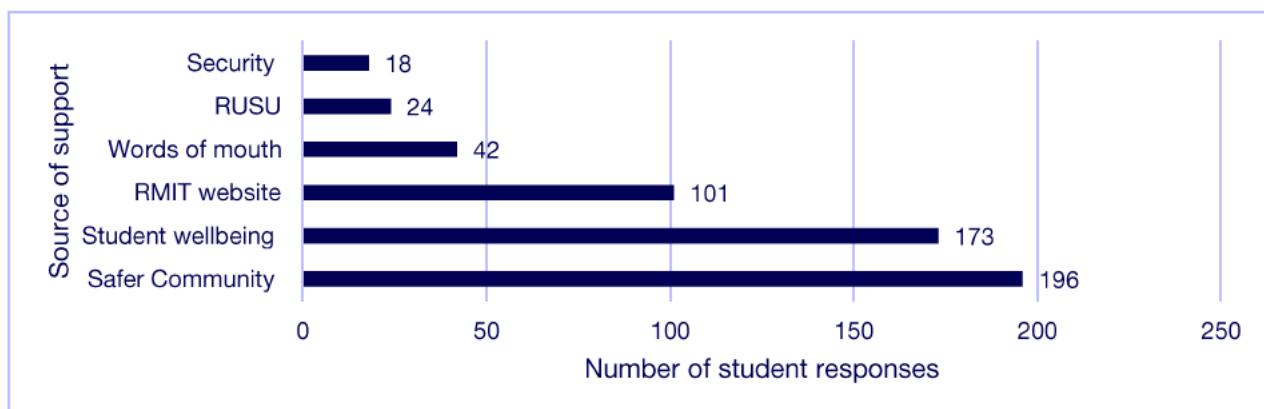


Figure 7: Student responses to GBV prevention survey 2025 - where would you go to get support?

### Sub-barrier 5.2: A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources

Since its introduction, the Safer Community team has seen an increase in case work, engaging over 1,600 individuals throughout 2024. There has been a particular increase of staff engaging with Safer Community for support and formal reporting through 2024, which could be attributed to the service’s increased visibility through training—indeed, as of 2024, there was a 93% staff completion rate for the Sexual Harm and Responding to Disclosures e-learning module.

The availability of data also significantly improved since 2019. 2024 was the first full year of contemporaneous record keeping through the Salesforce Case Management system. In 2024, the total number of inquiries to Safer Community increased by 16% compared to 2023—this is something we would expect to see, alongside greater awareness of the

issues and supports available, and greater trust in the system. Of all inquiries received by Safer Community, 28% involved gender-based violence, with 16% related to sexual harm. There was a 10% increase in sexual harm-related inquiries compared to 2023.

It should be noted that, due to confidentiality, no gender-disaggregation is available for the staff and student disclosure and reports data discussed, below.

### *Staff disclosures and formal reports*

Figure 8 shows the number of staff disclosures in 2023-24. In 2024, 24 reported incidents occurred within an RMIT context and 19 occurred outside the RMIT context. Of these 43 disclosures, nine were sexual assault, 10 were sexual harassment and 24 were other forms of violence, such as stalking. It should be noted that only sexual assault and harassment were recorded in 2023.

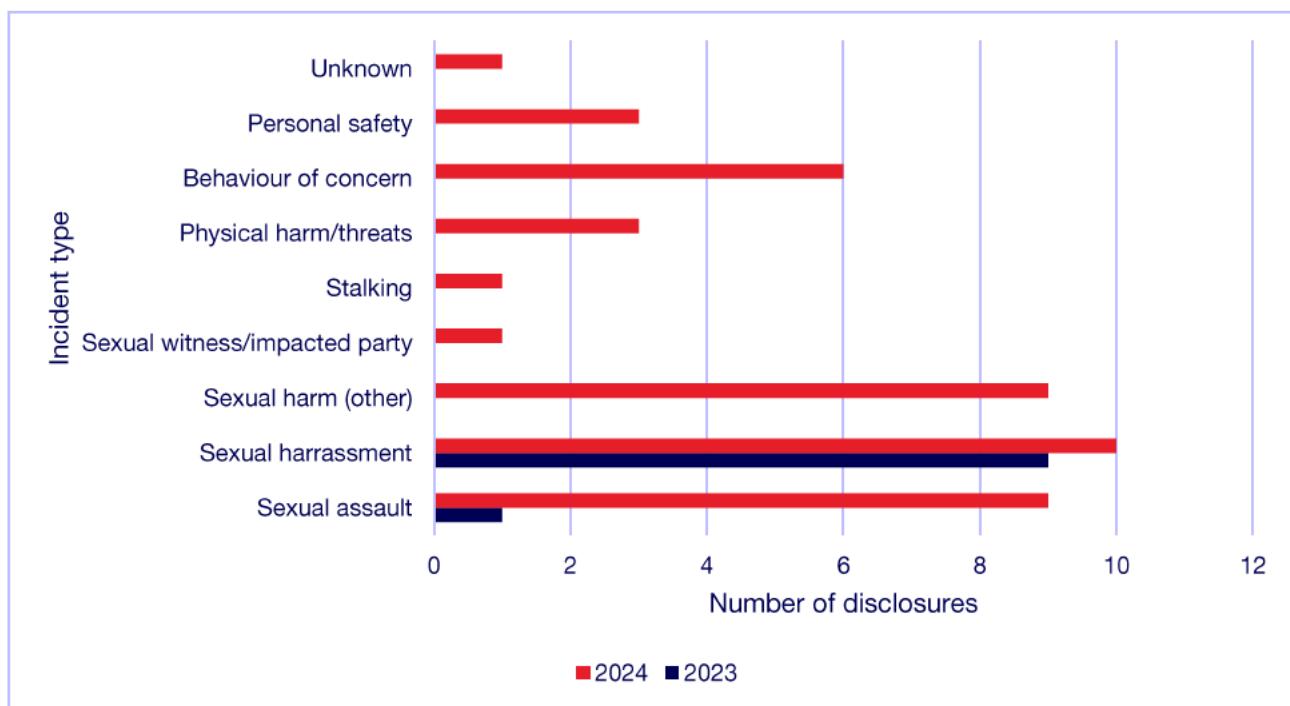


Figure 8: Staff disclosures of gender-based harm, 2023-24

RMIT supports victim/survivors to make informed decisions about their options following an incident. The University offers victim/survivors a range of support options, regardless of where the incident occurred. Supports available include access to wellbeing support, including counselling and financial assistance, as well as the option to formally report an incident. While not all victim/survivors decide to formally report incidents, those that do have the option to instigate a trauma-informed investigation.

Figure 9 shows the number of formal reports made, as well as the number for which there were disciplinary actions taken, for 2023-24. In both 2023 and 2024, one report was later withdrawn at the request of the discloser. 'Ongoing' reports were ongoing at the time this data was exported.

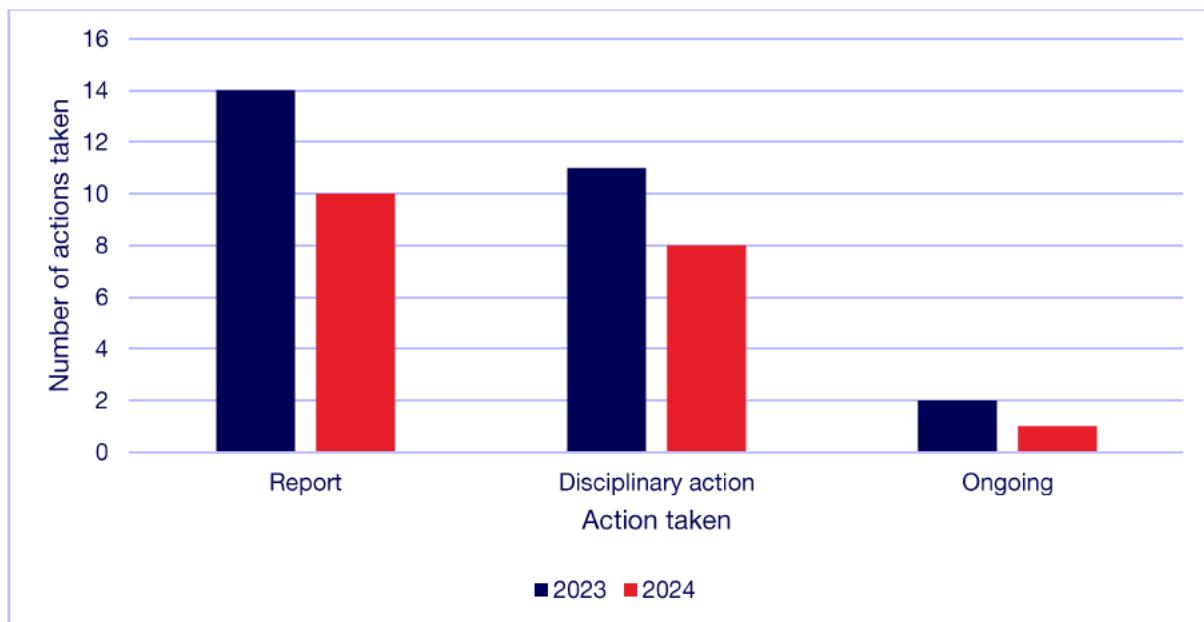


Figure 9: Staff formal reports of gender-based harm, and resultant disciplinary actions, 2023-24

The data show that, while more cases were supported by the Safer Community team, less formal reports were made and, therefore, less disciplinary action was taken in 2024, compared with 2023. As this is only two years of data, care should be taken in interpreting the results. The University will keep an eye on trends in this space to ensure greater awareness of the supports available continues to translate to increased enquiries and reports, as we would expect to see.

#### *Student disclosures and formal reports*

Figure 10 shows the number of student disclosures for 2023–24. In 2024, 63 of the reported incidents occurred within the RMIT context and 74 occurred outside of the RMIT context. Of these 137 disclosures, 18 were sexual assault, 48 were sexual harassment and 71 were other forms of violence, such as stalking. It should be noted that only sexual harassment and assault were recorded in 2023.

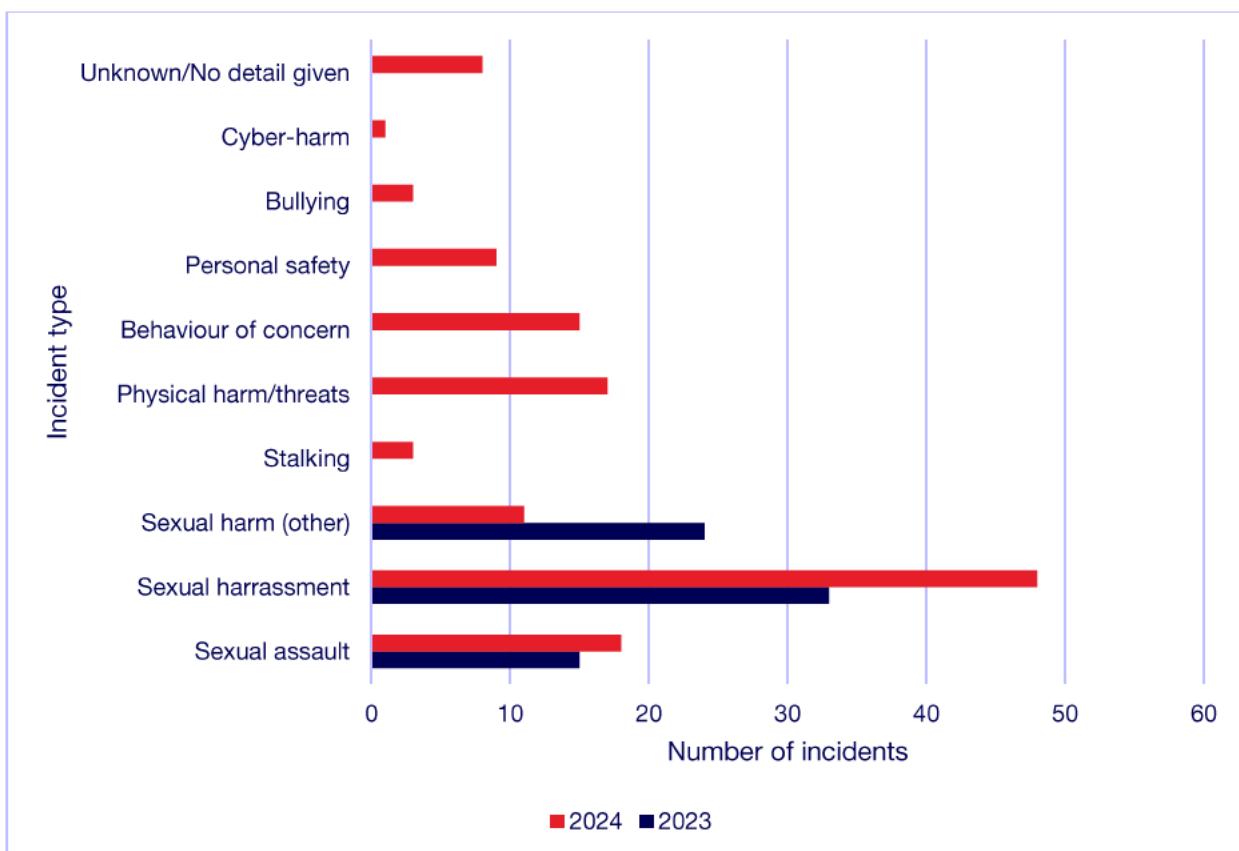


Figure 10: Student disclosures of gender-based harm, 2023-24

Further to this, Figure 11 shows the number of formal reports made, as well as the number for which there were disciplinary actions taken. 'Ongoing' reports were ongoing at the time this data was exported.

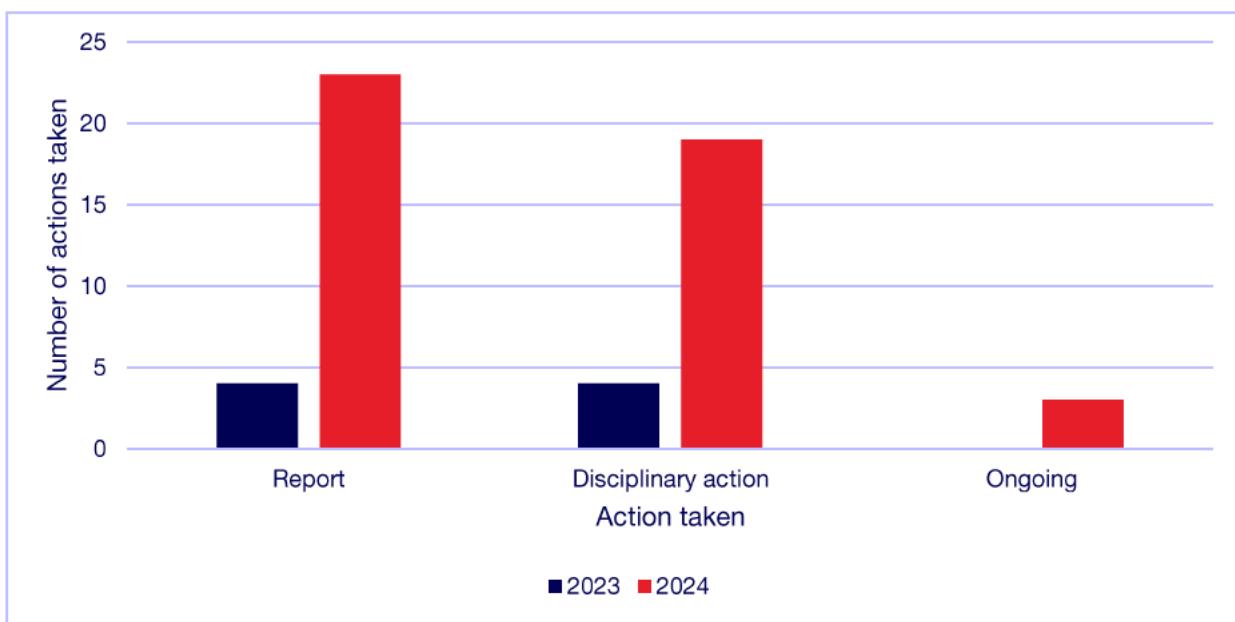


Figure 11: Student formal reports of gender-based harm, and resultant disciplinary actions, 2023-24

The data show that both the number of cases being supported and the formal reports made/disciplinary actions taken increased from 2023 to 2024. Again, as this is only two years of data, care should be taken in interpreting the results—we will keep an eye on trends to ensure greater awareness continues to translate to increased enquiries and reports, until these reports reach a plateau. Items 3-5 in the Further action plan respond to this ongoing need.

This data is shared, each year, through the University's *Gender-Based Violence Annual Report*. The communication of this data is a key part of the University's drive to be accountable and keep our communities informed of our progress towards the goals set out in our *Strategic Action Plan*.

### Sub-barrier 5.3: Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students

The Respectful Research Training program had two evaluation mechanisms: post-seminar supervisor evaluations and a comprehensive participant evaluation. Results are promising, but it is too soon to know whether the cultural changes sought will be fully realised, in terms of measurable outcomes. Data have shown, however, that enquiries by candidates to the counselling service about supervisory issues are down slightly from 2021, despite a slight rise in enquiries in 2022 (see Table 3).

Year	Total number of HDR students	Number of enquiries about supervisory issues	Of enquiries, number that concerned bullying
2021	2,446	33	NA
2022	2,458	47	6
2023	2,558	32	6

Table 3: Enquiries about supervisory issues made to counselling service, 2021-23

RRT evaluation outcomes are discussed, below.

#### Post-seminar supervisor evaluation

Evaluations were completed by 240 participants, from 2020-23. Results suggest high levels of satisfaction with the program, with over 90% of participants 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the program facilitators, content clarity and delivery mode (see Table 4)—note that gender disaggregated data is not available.

Aspect of the program	Percentage of evaluation respondents		
	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Facilitators	4%	17%	80%
Content clarity	5%	21%	75%
Delivery mode	5%	32%	62%
Registration	13%	30%	55%

Table 4: Respectful Research Training post-seminar evaluation results, 2020-22

### Participant evaluation

This evaluation comprised a base-line survey designed to elicit pre-and post-training levels of understanding and confidence. The pre-training survey was completed by 360 participants in 2020 (42% women-identifying, 55% man-identifying and 1% gender diverse-identifying). The post-training survey was completed by 226 in 2022 (50% woman-identifying, 46% man-identifying and 1% gender diverse-identifying). Survey results showed improvement across every item tested. The standout area of improvement was confidence, with a high proportion of participants who report being 'confident' or 'very confident' about practising key elements of Respectful Research Training (see Figure 12, below).

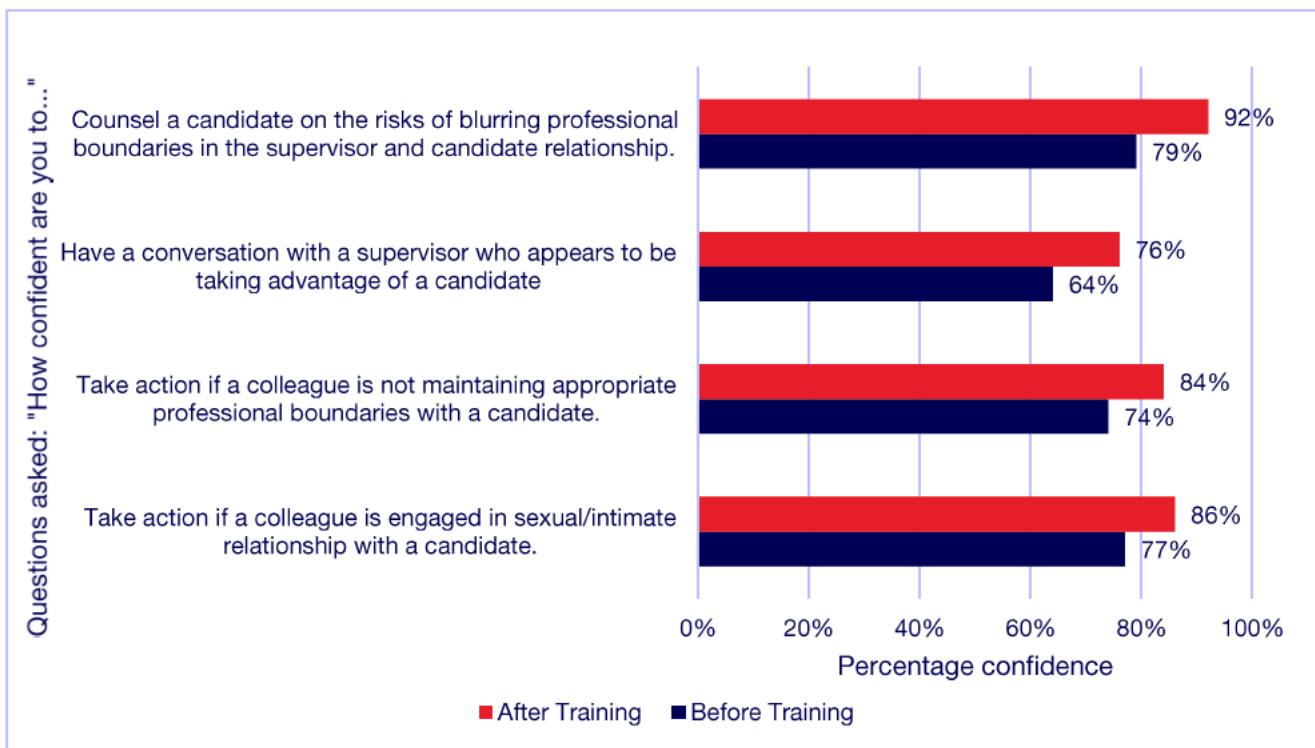


Figure 12: Participants' self-evaluated confidence before and after Respectful Research Training, 2020-2022

Now that Respectful Research Training has been fully integrated into business as usual at RMIT, the program is moving into a cycle of reflection and renewal. This will involve the development of new learning assets, such as masterclasses, that will provide opportunities for deeper engagement with core concepts. Item 6 in the Further action plan reflects this ongoing work.

RRT is showing promising progress in supporting HDR supervisors and candidates.

However, anecdotal evidence, gathered during development of this Cygnet by the working group, highlighted a recent concerning upward trend in aggressive behaviour by students in teaching and learning programs (programs outside of research training), leading to anxiety in some educators and nervousness to enter the classroom. Other anecdotal evidence suggested that students have been using AI to share inappropriate imagery on University learning platforms. This is an emerging area for RMIT to investigate and address through future initiatives. Items 11-13 in the Further action plan respond to this emergent need.

## Sub-barrier 5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability

In 2024, 107 of RMIT's 140 senior leaders (75%), including representatives from all Colleges, Portfolios and the RMIT Council, participated in VEOHRC's training on sexual harassment and responding to disclosures. Of these, 84 leaders completed a post-training survey—around half of respondents reported that their understanding and confidence has increased 'a lot'. Findings from the survey can be found in Figure 13.

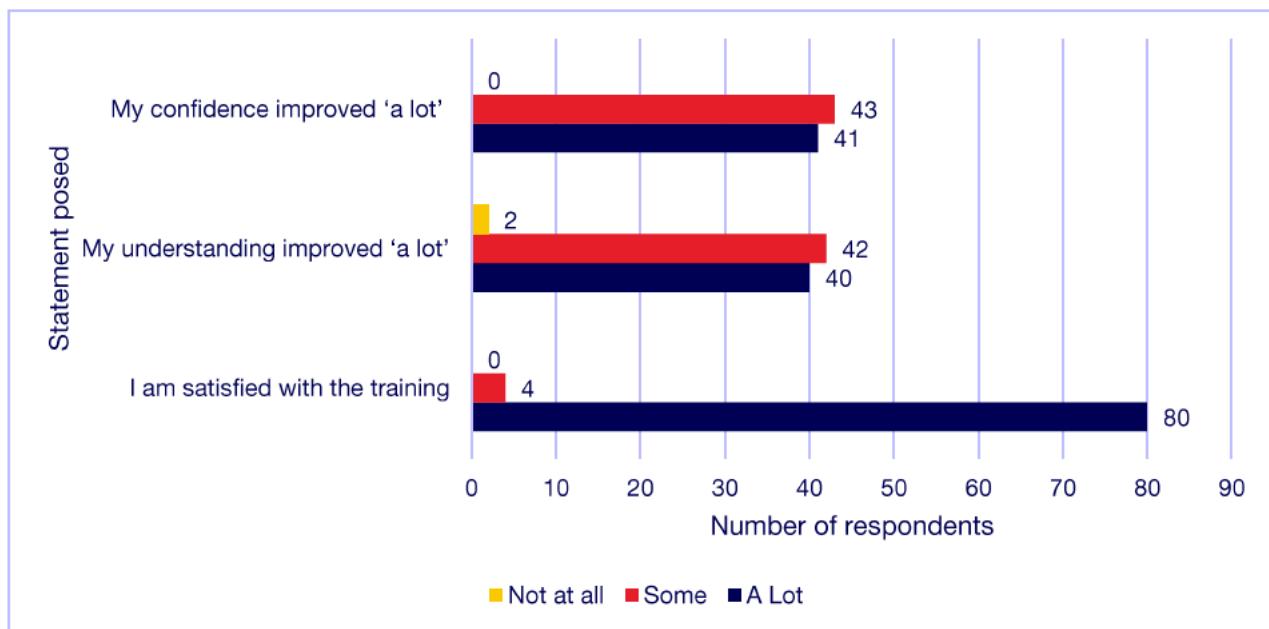


Figure 13: Executive leaders training survey outcomes 2024

In 2025, 15 executive leaders, including the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors and Associate Deputy Vice Chancellors, attended training on preventing gender-based violence, delivered by sector-leader Our Watch. Nine participants completed pre- and post-training evaluation surveys. Results from the post-training surveys indicated that 67% of respondents rated the session as 'good' or very good. Overall, post-session surveys indicated that the training increased skills and confidence in preventing violence against women. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents indicated a slight, moderate or major increase in skill and 56% of respondents indicated a slight, moderate or major increase in confidence, as shown in Table 5.

Statement	Number of survey respondents					Total number of responses
	Decrease	No change	Slight increase	Moderate increase	Major increase	
<b>Skill</b>						
<b>Identifying your role and influence in prevention gender-based violence at your university</b>	<6	<6	6	<6	<6	9
<b>Identifying action you can take, as a leader, to create an enabling environment for the Educating for Equality model</b>	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	9
<b>Confidence</b>						
<b>Take individual and organisational action to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women</b>	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	9

Table 5: Participant post-Our Watch training survey results 2025 (skill and confidence)

In April 2025, two articles promoting gender-based violence policies and training in our leadership staff newsletter, *Leader Life*, achieved open rates of 60%<sup>5</sup>, ensuring prevention messages and key resources reached leaders across the University.

In relation to the Working Together with Men (WTWM) program, male allies and “accountability panellists”<sup>6</sup> were asked for their feedback, after their participation in the pilot. Responses were collected via an online survey conducted by an independent consultant. Out of 14 allies that completed the program, ten gave feedback via the survey. Allies were asked to rate how they felt the training had impacted them in a number of areas. Overall, allies were positive about the impact of the training. As shown in Figure 14, below, all ten allies agreed that they felt more confident to promote gender equality in their work at RMIT after the training.

<sup>5</sup> This open rate is on par with global education sector internal comms averages (≈65%), and well above typical external marketing email benchmarks (≈30–35%).

<sup>6</sup> As a part of the WTWM program “accountability panellists” were engaged to give the male allies feedback on their gender equality project ideas.

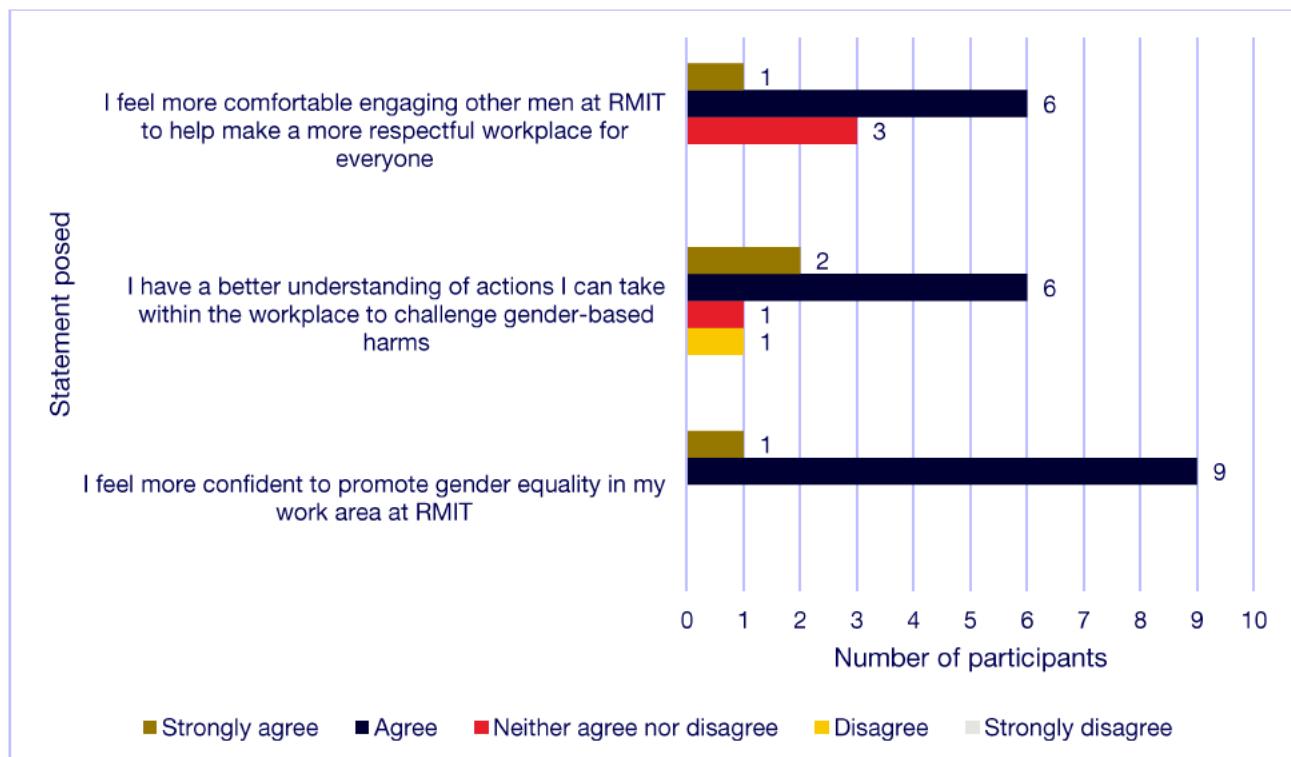


Figure 14: WTWM allies training outcomes

Allies and accountability panellists were asked to give feedback on the WTWM model into the future. As seen in Figure 15, below, nine out of the ten allies and all six panellists indicated both that they would like to see additional adaptations of the model at RMIT, and that they would recommend the model as a professional development opportunity to other senior leaders.

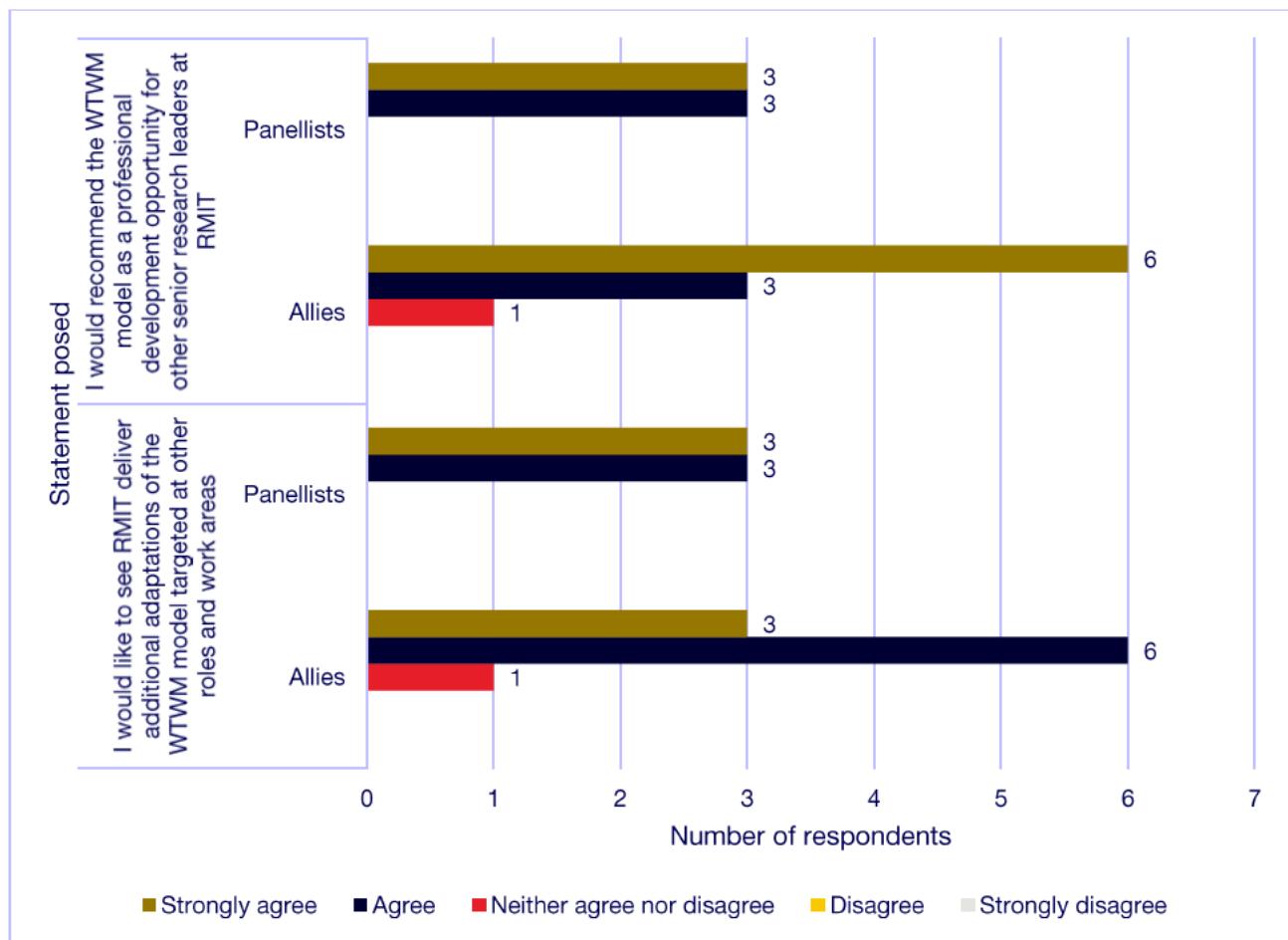


Figure 15: WTWM ally and panellist feedback for the future

While the outcomes the WTWM program have been positive, efforts to further embed leadership for gender-based harm prevention—and promote a culture of accountability—must and will continue, in order to embed generational change. To this end, the allies will continue to deliver the projects they devised as a part of the WTWM pilot, and WTWM will also be expanded to other academic and professional senior leaders, as highlighted in item 19 of the Further action plan. Items 14-18 concern RMIT's other efforts to further strengthen leadership and accountability.

### Sub-barrier 5.5: Social and cultural norms that undermined respect

A range of the University's learning and development offerings aimed to address the broad social and cultural norms that undermined respect, amongst both staff and students.

#### Staff

In 2024, the *Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* mandatory e-learning module achieved a 97% staff completion rate.

With respect to the Academic Integrity Senior Officers training, three officers participated in the 2024 pilot, followed by 43 in 2025. Pre- and post-training surveys were conducted. Of the participants, 23 completed both pre- and post-training surveys. Findings included that, following the training, all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt

*'confident to respond appropriately to sexual assault and sexual harm (SASH) disclosures'*—prior to the training, 11 respondents were either neutral about or disagreed with this statement. Survey findings can be found in Table 6, below.

Statement	Number of survey respondents								
	Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
I feel comfortable navigating conversations related to sexual assault and sexual harm (SASH) or disclosures in my role.	<6	<6	<6	<6	16	21	,6	<6	
I feel confident to respond appropriately to sexual assault and sexual harm (SASH) disclosures in my role at RMIT.	<6	<6	8	<6	10	20	<6	<6	
I feel confident in applying a trauma-informed approach when supporting a student or staff member in my role.	<6	<6	10	6	9	12	<6	<6	
I feel familiar with my responsibilities as per RMIT's reporting pathways and procedures for SASH.	<6	<6	8	<6	11	18	<6	<6	
I am aware of my own personal biases and how these may impact my response to disclosures of harm.	<6	<6	<6	<6	13	14	<6	<6	

Table 6: Academic Integrity Senior Officers training survey outcomes, pre- and post-training

Feedback from the 23 participants also included that:

- participants felt they got what they wanted from the session (n=17)
- as a result of the session, participants said they would start referring to and consulting with the Safer Community team (n=14) and
- as a result of the session, participants said they would be more aware of their own biases (n=12).

As highlighted in item 12 of the Further action plan, upskilling for Senior Officers in managing student conduct issues will continue, moving forward.

Feedback was also collected following the May 2025 face-to-face pilot of the Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence training for staff. Participants noted that they valued the clear, inclusive training content—particularly the focus on intersectionality, disclosures and real-life RMIT scenarios, along with impactful videos on structural harm. Participants also committed to undertake a range of actions, following the training, including: promoting the training within their leadership teams; responding to disclosures

more confidently and in a trauma-informed way; advocating for cultural change and increased awareness in teams and student-facing environments; incorporating GBV-related information in materials for under-18 international students; and being more conscious of tone, body language, and role-modelled behaviours. These insights are informing training program refinement. The training will be delivered on a regular basis from September 2025.

Finally, with respect to the targeted training for educators from the Built Environment and Sustainability program, across two sessions held between July and September 2025, a total of 55 educators were engaged. Evaluation data were collected through 45 pre-training surveys and 36 post-training surveys. Two different versions of the pre- and post-training surveys were used, as the content and questions were refined and updated based on feedback and qualitative insights from the first session. Post-training results showed increased confidence, stronger awareness of supports and responsibilities and improved recognition of gender bias, as shown in Table 7 and Table 8.

Statement	Number of survey respondents										
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
I am comfortable having conversations about mental health and wellbeing?	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	7	6	<6
I am familiar with the supports available to assist with students' safety and wellbeing.	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	9	8	<6	<6
I am familiar with my responsibilities as outlined in the Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response policy and procedure.	<6	<6	<6	<6	6	<6	<6	8	<6	<6	<6
I agree that multiple factors influence students' wellbeing and sense of safety.	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	7	6	8	7
I am aware of how gender bias can affect the way students' safety and wellbeing is supported.	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	6

Table 7: Built Environment and Sustainability educator pre- and post-training survey responses 2025 (first session, 20 participants)

Statement	Number of survey respondents										
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
I am comfortable having conversations about mental health and wellbeing?	<6	<6	<6	8	<6	<6	14	<6	<6	<6	<6
I am familiar with the supports available to assist with students' safety and wellbeing.	<6	<6	<6	<6	7	<6	10	7	<6	7	
I am familiar with my responsibilities as outlined in the Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response policy and procedure.	<6	<6	6	<6	7	<6	<6	15	<6	<6	
I agree that multiple factors influence students' wellbeing and sense of safety.	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	10	10	10	10	
I have good level of understanding of what "gender-based violence" is.	<6	<6	<6	<6	10	<6	7	14	<6	<6	
I am comfortable responding to a student who shares with you an experience of gender-based violence.	<6	<6	<6	<6	8	<6	10	16	<6	<6	

Table 8: Built Environment and Sustainability educator pre- and post-training survey responses 2025 (second session, 35 participants)

In a final session, held in September, 52 people leaders from the College of Vocational Education came together for a dedicated professional development session on gender-based violence prevention and response. The session strengthened leaders' knowledge of gender-based violence, clarified legal and policy obligations under the new *National Code* and provided practical skills through interactive activities and case scenarios. Leaders left with greater confidence, increased awareness of their responsibilities and tools to model safe, respectful behaviour.

### *Students*

By the end of 2024, 96.3% of all undergraduate and postgraduate first-year students had completed the student e-learning Sex and Consent module, supported by the requirement to complete it before re-enrolling for 2025. For Vocational Education students, where re-enrolment was not linked to module completion, the completion rate was 23.4%.

In August 2025, RMIT delivered its first face-to-face pilot of the Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence training for student leaders to students from RMIT Active (RMIT's sport, fitness and wellbeing services). Seventeen student leaders attended, with 11 completing the pre-training survey and 12 completing the post-training survey, providing insights into their knowledge, confidence and competence. Pre-training, when asked whether they understood how gender norms contribute to gender-based violence, one participant strongly disagreed and none strongly agreed. Post-training,

none disagreed and five strongly agreed, showing the training's effectiveness in shifting attitudes in the short-term. Table 9 shows the pre- and post-training survey results.

Statement	Number of survey respondents											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree			
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I understand how gender norms contribute to GBV	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	8	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6
I can recognise different types of GBV	<6	<6	<6	<6	9	<6	8	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6
I understand how discrimination can increase someone's risk of experiencing GBV	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	7	3	<6	7		
I can apply an intersectional lens to understand power and identity	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	6	<6	<6	<6	<6
I know how to use active bystander strategies	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	6	<6	6		
I feel confident helping to prevent GBV and build a respectful environment	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	<6	6	<6	6		

Table 9: Student leaders pre- and post-training survey responses 2025

As with RRT, it is too soon to know whether the cultural changes sought through these trainings will be fully realised in terms of measurable outcomes in the longer-term. One way we are seeking to assess this is through comprehensive evaluation, as noted in items 7 of the Further action plan. RMIT's Prevention and Respect team has partnered with RMIT's Centre for Organisations and Social Change to assess training participants' knowledge, competence and confidence in preventing and responding to gender-based violence and any short-term changes in behaviour and decision-making. The research team has proposed a multi-phased approach, underpinned by evidence from academic and grey literature, as well as insights from multiple stakeholder groups. An academic paper will be prepared as an output of the project to disseminate the knowledge gained in early 2026.

One proxy for understanding the cultural changes sought is responses to the Staff Survey 2025. There were 5,370 respondents to the survey in 2025. Of these, 2,868 reported that they identified as heterosexual and 433 reported that they were lesbian, gay, bi+, queer or asexual (LGBQA)—the remainder did not report their sexuality.

Both heterosexual women/female- and man/male-identifying staff were about as likely to agree that '*People from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at*

RMIT in 2025 as they were in 2019. Both were more likely to agree that '*My immediate manager/supervisor genuinely supports equality between the genders*'—with heterosexual male-identifying staff recording the bigger increase (6 percentage points, compared to 5 percentage points). As non-binary gender was not recorded in 2019, no comparison can be drawn, here.

With respect to LGBQA staff, woman/female-identifying staff were less likely to agree with the statement '*People from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT*' in 2025 than in 2019, while man/male-identifying LGBQA staff were more likely to agree. Both were more likely to agree that '*My immediate manager/supervisor genuinely supports equality between the genders*' in 2025, compared with 2019. Non-binary LGBQA staff and those who recorded 'other' as their gender identify were much less likely than all other cohorts to agree that '*People from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT*'.

These results are shown in Figure 16.

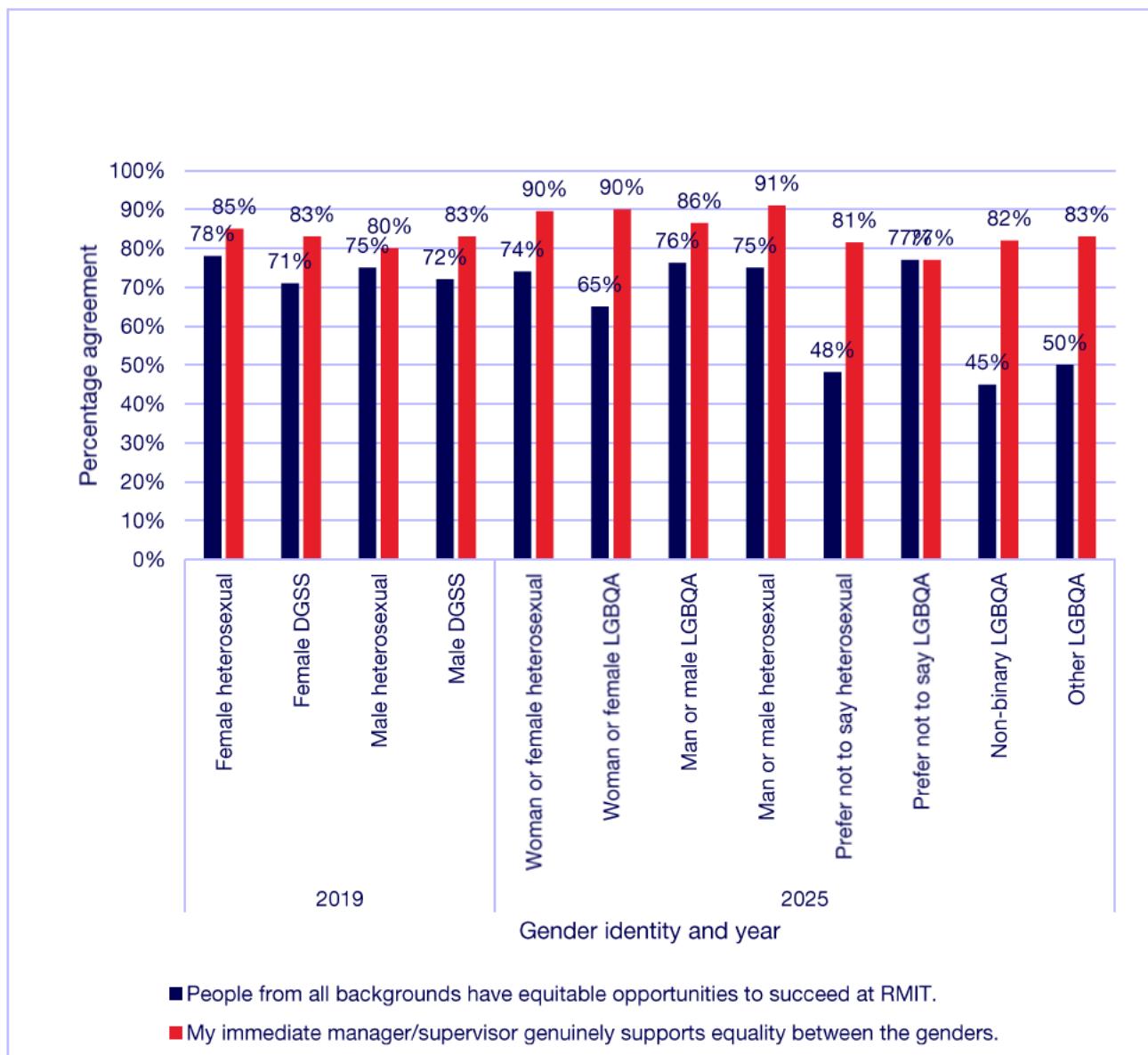


Figure 16: Staff Survey 2019 and 2025 – perspectives on gender equity, by gender identify and sexuality

In the Evidence of barrier chapter, we hypothesised that man/male-identifying staff may have been less likely to agree with the above statements than woman/female-identifying staff because they felt threatened by gender equality efforts and were not adequately supported to take up roles as allies. If this were the case, it appears RMIT's efforts to equip leaders and staff with knowledge and skills in relation to gender equity has had some effect, with man/male-identifying staff—both LGBQA and heterosexual—responding more positively to the relevant Staff Survey questions in 2025. Items 10 and 20-24 of the Further action plan set out how we are going to continue to progress this important culture change.

## Impact

The impacts of the University's work to promote respectful cultures and behaviours have been assessed through a range of qualitative inputs, including participant feedback from: Respectful Research Training, VEOHRC Executive Leader Training and the Working Together With Men program, as well as the student survey on gender-based violence awareness, conducted in July-August 2025, completed by 595 students.

Further evidence of impact was gathered through dedicated focus groups with HDR student representatives. HDR student representatives were invited to attend one of two focus groups to understand how they perceived the University's efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based harm. The two sessions were attended by a total five students—three man/male-identifying one woman/female-identifying and two that did not respond regarding their gender identity.

The below questions were asked:

1. How would you describe the culture of your School?
2. Are you aware of any programs or initiatives the University has introduced to promote respectful behaviour or prevent gender-based harm? Which ones come to mind? What are your perceptions of them?
3. Do you feel the University communicates clearly about expectations for respectful behaviour and consequences for misconduct?
4. Have you participated in online or face-to-face training modules or awareness events or campaigns? What was helpful or unhelpful about them?
5. If you (or a peer) experienced or witnessed inappropriate behaviour, would you know what to do or who to speak to? What factors might stop someone from reporting?
6. Do you trust that complaints would be handled fairly and safely?
7. In your view, have University programs or changes had any impact on the culture or behaviour in your research environment? Have you noticed any shift in attitudes, conversations, or safety?
8. Do you think senior leaders (e.g. Deans, Heads of School) are genuinely engaged in promoting respectful culture? Why or why not?
9. Are supervisors and research leaders modelling respectful and inclusive behaviour? Do they know how to respond if something goes wrong?
10. What's missing from the university's approach to creating respectful research environments?

The findings from all of these sources are discussed, below.

## Sub barrier 5.1: Limited staff and student reporting and awareness of supports

Students surveyed about gender-based violence awareness in July-August 2025 expressed support for RMIT's existing prevention efforts (including the Sex and Consent e-learning module) and called for more visible, peer-led initiatives, such as support groups, digital campaigns and posters.

*'I think the steps that have been taken were great, specifically the compulsory modules on Canvas we took about consent. It might be good to have student-led support groups or events in [collaboration] with clubs to make the topic more approachable.'*

Student survey participant 1

*'Short videos (like advertisements) of awareness campaigns on campus digital screens might be helpful. Because I personally will read the content on them when passing by and sometimes.'*

Student survey participant 2

Students highlighted that they want tutors and lecturers to discuss gender-based violence as part of class orientations.

*'I think more could be done in actual classes where tutors talk about it as part of their orientation.'*

Student survey participant 4

*'Tutors and lecturers talking about it at the start of a tutorial/lecture to inform the class what RMIT is doing to spread awareness, posters in toilet stalls, posts on the main website with information, free modules/lectures with information on the topic.'*

Student survey participant 5

Students also voiced support for building staff and student leader capability to set clear expectations, challenge poor behaviour and respond consistently to gender-based violence and disrespect.

*'Through equipping and providing the necessary additional resources to our lecturers, tutors and student leaders so they are able to direct us to the necessary resources or intervene when necessary and they are always advocating for an end to GBV.'*

Student participant 7

These responses highlight a depth of engagement and awareness with the issues, likely supported by RMIT's consistent efforts in promoting awareness since 2021. They also highlight opportunities for awareness messaging to be reinforced in a range of settings—particularly, in classrooms. Items 2 and 4 in the Further action plan go to further

embedding awareness initiatives, while items and 10-13 go to supporting staff capability to reinforce this messaging.

### Sub-barrier 5.2: A lack of policies, processes/systems and resources

HDR students highlighted that they had ongoing concerns about processes for handling complaints.

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This feedback highlights that action taken to improve complaints handling processes, while important, have either not gone far enough for some cohorts, or that the changes have not been communicated effectively. Items 3-5 in the Further action plan address the need for continued complaints management process improvements and communications.

### Sub-barrier 5.3: Problematic interactions between academics/supervisors and students

Qualitative feedback from Respectful Research Training participants highlighted the impact of this work on HDR supervisors. As one participant noted:

*It was insightful to hear from so many colleagues who have first hand experienced the challenges of addressing workplace issues related to [in]appropriate behaviour, issues with calling it out, and the challenges of power imbalance within the workplace.*

RRT participant 1

Others were interested in the University exploring more complex issues through the training:

*The scenarios I suspect were designed to demonstrate the issues blatantly, but quite often in the workplace are more subtle, subversive or behind people's backs than that. Maybe add some of the more subtle ways in which issues arise.'*

RRT participant

In relation to emergent issue of challenging student behaviour, then, one senior leader who participated in VEOHRC training on Sexual Harassment and Responding to Disclosures in 2024 noted:

*'Culture change is slow and incremental. It is a communication challenge to get this message out to everyone, but everyone needs to be onboard for culture change to happen. A piece for students that outlines their responsibilities and rights is important to build a whole of University culture of expected behaviour.'*

VEOHRC training participant 1

These reflections highlight that training is having some impact in addressing workplace power imbalances—but that there is an ongoing need to mature the training content and reinforce training messages in a range of settings. Item 6 in the Further action plan reflects ongoing work to review and strengthen training and items 10-13 respond to the need to reinforce training messages, particularly in classroom settings.

#### Sub-barrier 5.4: Opportunities to strengthen leadership and accountability

Qualitative insights from senior leaders who completed the 2024 VEOHRC training also provided evidence of strengthened leadership commitment. As one participant noted:

*'Practical application of the content to the people manager role is important for capability uplift—being "upstream" and intervening early is what I take away'*

VEOHRC training participant

Participants also noted the importance of continuing these conversations, outside of training, and implementing accountability measures in leaders' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

*'It would be good if we have opportunities to continue conversations with peers and experts to deepen expertise, embed practice and keep this content front of mind. It's easy to forget, and it's not a set and forget exercise.'*

### VEOHRC training participant

*What gets measured gets done. Consider how accountability for culture can be built into manager performance .g.: KPIs '*

-VEOHRC training participant 4

Items 14-19 in the Further action plan respond to the need to further promote leadership commitment and accountability.

Further to this, many allies who participated in the WTWM program were supportive of the model. One ally commented that '*overall, it was a great experience, lots of insightful sessions, and led to a lot of reflection*'. Another said that they '*would strongly encourage other colleagues to participate*'.

Accountability panellists were also supportive, with one suggesting that all male Deans should complete the program, and another suggesting gender equity be incorporated into performance evaluations for research leaders. Panellists also made some suggestions for areas for improvement, including engagement with marginalised groups and trauma-informed facilitation. One panellist said:

*There might need to be a workshop in the program that specifically focuses on how more marginalised people can contribute in ways that are safe and meaningful to them. This would be core in terms of any systems change ... so it would be excellent to see more about lived experience and potentially trauma informed facilitation included in the training '*

WTWM program participant 1

Some recommendations for the future of this model included that RMIT seek and commit resources to enable the continuation of WTWM, including ongoing support for and engagement of current allies as a growing community of practice, and the subsequent training of more men as allies across RMIT. This has been committed to in item 19 of the Further action plan.

### 5.5 Social and cultural norms that undermined respect

One HDR focus group participant questioned the intersectionality of RMIT's efforts, saying:

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This focus group participant also noted that initiatives may not be reaching local students, highlighting that it is often international students who attend awareness-raising initiatives related to cultural diversity and inclusion. Item 2 in the Further action plan will go some way to addressing these concerns.

Another focus group participant noted that undergraduate students and staff are often the focus of events and training, with HDR students not feeling that they belong or that these initiatives are relevant to them:

*'The HDR community are "between" undergraduates and staff so they are isolated and busy and do not have time to participate in events. They don't feel those events are important to them. They feel that they are a waste of time. HDR community should have events that are particular to them that are more inclusive, not just related to undergrad students or staff '*

ant (female-identifying)

This feedback reflects the need to have a stronger HDR voice and presence in efforts to promote respectful cultures and behaviours across the University—items 9 and 22 from the Further action plan respond to this need.

Finally, one WTWM accountability panellist spoke to the need to trace impact across a longer time horizon:

*It's clear that funding for multi month/multi-year supports are needed. Culture change takes time and ongoing interventions and this needs to be appropriately resourced. We can't fix a broken system with a morning tea or by expecting senior (women) leaders to do extra work to support their (male) colleagues in bringing about change.*

WTWM panellist 1

The Further action plan—and items 7 and 20, in particular—reflect the University's ongoing commitment to evaluated, multi-year effort to promote cultures of respect at RMIT.

## Further action

RMIT identified key barriers to the University fostering respectful cultures and behaviours, particularly in relation to gender-based harm. The University identified five sub-barriers: limited awareness and reporting, lack of policies and systems, problematic academic-student interactions, weak leadership accountability, and harmful social norms. Drawing on national surveys, internal audits and staff/student feedback, we identified evidence of systemic gaps and cultural challenges.

Since 2021, RMIT has implemented a whole-of-institution approach to promoting respectful cultures and behaviours, launching the *Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan* and embedding a Theory of Change. Key initiatives included introducing the Safer Community team, trauma-informed policies, mandatory training modules and innovative initiatives like the Soy Boy and Friends comic and Working Together With Men pilot. Evaluation data shows increased engagement, reporting and awareness. However, challenges remain, particularly in relation to reinforcing messages in a range of settings, student behaviour and sustaining long-term, cultural change. To address these challenges, we have outlined a comprehensive Further action plan to strengthen systems, leadership and culture.

Overall, RMIT demonstrates significant progress in creating a safer, more respectful university environment, while acknowledging the need for continued investment and refinement.

Ref	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/ Success Indicators
<b>Improved awareness, reporting and systems</b>						
1	The data show that both the number of cases being supported and the formal reports made/disciplinary actions taken increased from 2023 to 2024. As this is only two years of data, care should be taken in interpreting the results—we will keep an eye on trends to ensure greater awareness continues to translate to increased enquiries and reports, until these reports reach a plateau.	Update University policies and processes in the context of the <i>National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence</i> (the <i>National Code</i> ).	Q1 2025	GBV Advisory Group	Vice Chancellor	Policies meet the requirements of the National Code.
2		Include student voice and intersectional perspective into GBV prevention efforts.	Q2-Q4 2025	GBV Advisory Group	Vice Chancellor	Student voice and intersectional perspective reflected in GBV prevention efforts.
3		Review and update GBV response processes for consistency with other areas.	Q4 2025-Q1 2026	Safer Community Central Complaints	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	GBV response processes are consistent with Central Complaints processes and processes are streamlined for complainants.
4		Embed visibility of Safer Community as a resource for staff and students through ongoing communications campaigns.	Ongoing	Safer Community University Communications Executive Director, Communications	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk Executive Director, Communications	Safer Community is seen as a go-to service for staff and students.
5		Adopt centralised SharePoint site for all complaint handlers.	Q4 2025	Central Complaints	General Counsel	Key materials are shared amongst Complaints staff, enhancing seamlessness of experience for complainants.
6		Review and implementation of learning and development (e.g., mandatory e-module and trainer facilitated training) on preventing and responding to GBV.	Q3 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	All learning and development reviewed and meeting best practice standards.
7		All relevant GBV learning and training opportunities to embed evaluation protocols.	Q3-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	All learning and development embed evaluation protocols.

8		Expand partnerships for awareness raising activities across RMIT.	Q1-Q4 2025	GBV Advisory Group Prevention and Respect	Vice Chancellor Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	Awareness of GBV and supports across the University deepened.
9		Seek HDR student feedback on prevention and response at RMIT through Athena Swan HDR representative.	Ongoing	Athena Swan team	Associate Deputy Vice Chancellor, Gender Equity	HDR student needs better met by prevention and response initiatives.
<b>Respectful academic/educator and student interactions</b>						
10		Promote a culture of respect and professionalism through campus-wide campaigns.	Ongoing	Communications	Executive Director, Communications	RMIT culture typified by respect and professionalism, as reflected in Staff Survey outcomes.
11		Increased training for staff around responding to students' distress and challenging behaviours, as well as reporting procedures.	Q3-Q4 2025	Safer Community Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	Staff report that they are better equipped to handle challenging behaviours from students.
12	RRT is showing promising progress in supporting HDR students and supervisors.	More upskilling for Senior Officers in managing student conduct issues.	Q2-Q4 2025	Safer Community Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	Senior Officers report improved knowledge, skills and confidence in preventing and responding to GBV.
13	With respect to <i>coursework student</i> behaviour, evidence gathered to support the development of this application included that some academics/educators have expressed that they are nervous to enter classrooms due to hostile behaviour from students. Other anecdotal evidence suggested that students have been using AI to share inappropriate imagery on University learning platforms. This is an emerging area for RMIT to investigate and address through future initiatives.	Addressing use of inappropriate imagery, and use of AI (e.g. fake and graphic imagery).  Workshops and training for staff to understand the imagery that may come up in the classroom and online, how to respond to this and how to manage psychosocial risk.  Design of course resources and assessment materials to support professional behaviour development in students.	Q2 2025 – 2027, and then ongoing	College Learning and Teaching Specialists  College Dean & Associate Dean Networks	College Deputy Vice Chancellors  Associate Deputy Vice Chancellors, Learning and Teaching Quality	Staff and students are supported and have an understanding of the psychosocial impact and risk of being exposed to inappropriate imagery. Students have guidelines on what is appropriate or not, whilst respecting innovation and creative practice.  The use of AI for promoting graphic imagery is curbed and responded to appropriately when it occurs.  The development of professional behaviours in students together with an understanding of psychosocial and environmental risk in student's destination industries, incorporated in classroom education and rubric course assessment tools.

Strengthening leadership and accountability frameworks					
14	While the outcomes of leadership programs have been positive, efforts to further embed leadership for gender-based harm prevention—and promote a culture of accountability—must and will continue, in order to embed generational change.	Further University senior executive training on leadership for the prevention of GBV.	Q3 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
15	Qualitative insights from senior leaders who completed the 2024 VEOHRC training on Sexual Harassment and Responding to Disclosures provided strong evidence of strengthened leadership commitment. As one participant noted:	Extending approach of tailored GBV prevention training specific to different areas of the University to further groups.	Q2-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
16		Leadership communications to explicitly talk to accountability and increased visibility of different executives in the communications around GBV.	Q3-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
17	'Practical application of the content to the people manager role is important for capability uplift—being "upstream" and intervening early is what I take away.' -VEOHRC training participant 2	Continual refinement and improvement of people leader programs (e.g. compliance) around respectful behaviours and related issues.	Q2 2026 – ongoing	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture
18	Participants also noted the importance of continuing these conversations, outside of training, and implementing accountability measures in leaders' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):	A face-to-face session on GBV prevention to wider leadership members with focus on committed actions.	Q3-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
19	'It would be good if we have opportunities to continue conversations with peers and experts to deepen expertise, embed practice and keep this content front of mind. It's easy to forget, and it's not a set and forget exercise.' -VEOHRC training participant 3	Continuation and expansion of Working Together With Men to academic and professional senior leaders.	Q3 2025-Q3 2028	WTWM team	ADVC, Gender Equity
	'What gets measured gets done. Consider how accountability for culture can be built into manager performance, e.g.: KPIs.' -VEOHRC training participant 4				Senior research leaders who identify as men deepen their knowledge and skill in allyship for gender equality and harm prevention.

Respectful social and cultural norms					
20	It is too soon to know whether the cultural changes sought through these trainings will be fully realised in terms of measurable outcomes. One way we are seeking to assess this is through comprehensive evaluation. RMIT's Prevention and Respect team has partnered with RMIT's Centre for Organisations and Social Change to assess training participants' knowledge, competence and confidence in preventing and responding to gender-based violence and any short-term changes in behaviour and decision-making.	Implementation of the <i>National Code</i> as a whole-of-institution commitment.	Q3 2025-ongoing	GBV Advisory Group	Vice Chancellor
21		Values/behaviour expectations embedded in performance and learning processes.	Q1 2027 – ongoing	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture
22		Explore ways to hear students and staff voices on respectful cultures (e.g., focus groups, targeted surveys).	Q3-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
23		Expand trainer facilitated training to wider group of students and staff.	Q3-Q4 2025	Prevention and Respect	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk
24	Indeed, one WTWM program panellist spoke to the need to trace impact across a longer time horizon:  <i>'It's clear that funding for multi-month/multi-year supports are needed. Culture change takes time and ongoing interventions and this needs to be appropriately resourced. We can't fix a broken system with a morning tea or by expecting senior (women) leaders to do extra work to support their (male) colleagues in bringing about change.'</i> -WTWM panellist 1	Prevention focused branding, communications and messaging across RMIT.	Q3-Q4 2025 to Q1 2026	Prevention and Respect  University Communications	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk  Executive Director, Communications