

Response to the Consultation for Sexual Harm Good Practice Note Submission by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)

CAUL Council Members are located throughout Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. CAUL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and the contributions made by Indigenous people to both CAUL and CAUL Member institutions in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. We pay our respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging, and all Indigenous people. CAUL is committed to partnering with Indigenous people for positive outcomes.

About the Council of Australian University Librarians

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak collegiate body for the leaders of university libraries in Australia and New Zealand. CAUL facilitates connection and collaboration, and optimises its collective knowledge, expertise, and resources, to achieve strategic outcomes at scale in priority areas for the university library sector. CAUL is the trusted voice of the university library sector in the region.

CAUL welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Consultation for Sexual Harm Good Practice Note.

University libraries sit at the centre of university life. They are spaces open to all students and staff and, at some campuses, community members, and they are open for longer hours than most other spaces and services on campus. Many libraries open after hours or even 24 hours, often without security personnel or library staff supervision. In the 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS), students reported university libraries as places where incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault occurred. In response to the Survey, CAUL members committed to working to ensure that students both *feel* safe and *are* safe when they choose to spend time in university libraries, and that university library staff are able to sensitively and appropriately assist students who are subject to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Following the release of the report on the NSSS, CAUL issued a [response](#) on behalf of all university libraries, and committed to working collaboratively both within and across universities to ensure that university library spaces are safe for all students. In line with this commitment, CAUL organised a virtual event for universities to share initiatives that work towards the achievement of this goal, [Making University libraries safe spaces for all students](#). This webinar was attended by nearly 300 library staff members from across Australia and New Zealand.

CAUL's submission focuses on Question 5 of the consultation: *What recent examples of good practice in preventing and/or responding to sexual harm in higher education can you cite?*

CAUL members have provided the following good practice examples to demonstrate the commitment of leaders and staff in Australian university libraries to better understand, prevent, identify, and respond to sexual assault and sexual harassment, and to safeguard the wellbeing of students and staff using library spaces.

Initiatives common across these good practice examples include:

- the enhancement of physical spaces to make libraries safer, more inclusive, and more welcoming;

- the development of training for staff around cultural and sexual safety;
- collaboration with other work units as well as with the student body; and
- the rolling out of promotional awareness campaigns across the libraries.

Griffith University Library

The Griffith University Library undertook a project to complete a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) space survey of all Campus Libraries to assess and improve safety from a prevention perspective. The CPTED space surveys resulted in a lengthy report and action list to improve elements of safety across Griffith's six campus library spaces.

Resulting safety improvements included improved visibility of group study rooms, relocation of furniture that could create 'hiding spots' and lighting upgrades. Safety improvement works were undertaken in collaboration with Griffith's facilities team.

Undertaking CPTED has enabled Library staff to gain confidence in creating and maintaining safe spaces. The Griffith University Library is involved in continual engagement around safety in our spaces and collaborate with counselling and security on processes to support clients. The completion of CPTED audits and improvements within Griffith's library spaces also enabled an efficient transition to a 24/7 centralised study safe model using these spaces.

Murdoch University Library

In response to the National Student Safety Survey, Murdoch University Library, in collaboration with Access, Wellbeing and Equity, created a series of posters about sexual harm. The posters address issues including bystander behaviour, available supports, and consent. They are displayed in digital and print form across the library spaces. Staff also conducted an activity to gather feedback from students on the posters. This feedback showed that women especially felt reluctant to disclose incidents, and that they continue to be subject to sexual harassment and assault. This has led to further training for library staff to increase their ability to support students, particularly after hours.

Future plans for preventing and responding to sexual harm in libraries include an online training module for after-hours library staff to complete annually, and a demonstration and practice session of using the emergency button at the library desk for staff. The Library will continue to prototype new awareness methods and evaluate in line with special dates in Australia, such as the upcoming campaign, 16 Days in WA.

Queensland University of Technology Library

Following the plebiscite on marriage equality, Queensland University of Technology formed the LGBTIQ+ Working Group. Its first action was to ensure that the University's libraries were safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ students and staff. Students and staff are able to walk into library spaces and find places where they feel psychologically, emotionally and physically safe to be seen, and celebrated, in places where they are welcome and belong.

The Library partnered with the University's Student Success Group to develop an online training module that allows for scalable, accessible training to increase staff awareness and knowledge of issues impacting LGBTIQ+ communities. This training was recognised with the Vice-Chancellor's award for Inclusion and Diversity Excellence in 2021. QUT has also since joined the Welcome Here Initiative, enhanced by a concerted communications plan and collaboration with Security to ensure that QUT Library spaces are safe and welcoming.

The University of Melbourne Library

In response to the 2021 NSSS, the University of Melbourne Library has implemented a number of initiatives. All frontline staff are required to complete Respect training which assists frontline staff in responding to sexual harm, including handling disclosures. Upcoming training on 'trauma-informed librarianship' will also be delivered.

The SafeZone app is promoted in all library spaces as is the availability of a Security escort service. An audit to increase security cameras has been conducted, and there are increased Security patrols in the lead up to exam period, as well as emergency phones in After Hours Zones of larger libraries. Inclusive and safe spaces have been developed, such as all-gender bathrooms, increased line-of-sight and transparency in library spaces. Frontline staff are encouraged to proactively rove in library spaces to increase staff visibility.

Additionally, the University of Melbourne Library has implemented accessible facilities in specific libraries, including assistive technology, sensory supportive spaces, accessible bathrooms, hearing loops, height-adjustable desks in public spaces, chill-out pods, adjustable lighting, and improved lift access. The Library is also working on relationship building with students with a disability, creating an avenue for support and disclosure of sexual harm. Future training from the Student Equity and Disability service is also planned for frontline library staff.

University of New South Wales Library

The University of New South Wales is implementing its [UNSW Stop. Empower. Support Strategy and Action plan 2022-2025](#). This plan expands the scope from sexual misconduct to gendered violence, and to being committed to a safe and respectful university environment. This includes being aware of gendered violence, reporting incidents, raising matters of concern to increase confidence, taking action, and providing training for the university community. UNSW Library is a partner to this plan and is implementing gendered violence training for staff.

The ELISE mandatory online induction modules and quiz for commencing coursework students includes modules on respect and gendered violence. Through operational improvements, the Library is also making its spaces safer for their students.

University of Newcastle Library

In response to the 2021 NSSS, the University of Newcastle developed a coordinated action plan, Safe and Respectful Communities, to make their spaces both physically and culturally safer, with the Library as a key partner. This plan included rolling out two training programs around cultural capability and ally training which have been completed by almost all library staff. In addition, all frontline staff have completed a module on responding to disclosures of sexual violence.

Identified as a safe space under the Welcome Here Initiative and as one of the only 24/7 spaces on campus, the Library has partnered with Security to proactively deal with any issues, including more roving staff to increase visibility to patrons. The Library has also worked in conjunction with the University's Indigenous Higher Education Framework to develop Indigenous-led projects to ensure that the Library is aligned with student needs, and addresses issues or barriers that prevent students engaging with the library and making them feel safer in library spaces.

University of Technology Sydney

In partnership with University of Technology Sydney's Respect.Now.Always program, UTS Library hosts student-centred activities and programs which aim to eliminate sexual violence through

education about consent. Events held at Open Day target future students as well as at Orientation and transition activities to onboard commencing students.

UTS Library's Creative-in-Residence produced consent cushions for the library and introduced furnishings which are more gender inclusive in their design and colours.

The University of Western Australia Library

The University of Western Australia Library has developed a local area action plan in response to the 2021 NSSS results. The Library has developed targeted safety campaigns, online support, and implemented a poster campaign supporting safe spaces. UWA Library buildings have been registered with the Welcome Here project, visibly demonstrating a commitment to an inclusive and welcoming environment for the LGBTIQ+ community. The Reid Library received a substantial upgrade of its CCTV cameras, and students are advised of the presence of CCTV cameras.

The Library is also a member of the UWA Safer Communities working group which ensures ongoing information sharing and collaboration with other areas. From 2023, the Library has mandated that all frontline Library staff complete a range of training including Bystander, Ally, Respectful Relationships, Mental Health First Aid, and Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Harm training. The Library has hosted a pop-up drop-in service which provides students with support for mental health concerns from trained UWA Peer Supporters and experienced clinical support leaders. The service will be given a more permanent location as part of the Library's refurbishment project.

University of Wollongong Library

University of Wollongong has implemented the Safe and Respectful Communities Unit (SARC) to respond to recommendations arising from the 2021 NSSS. The UOW Library is supporting this initiative with updated signage (physical & digital), the development of web content, [What to do if you feel unsafe](#), the creation of knowledge base articles for Tier 0 and Tier I services (including Chat), how to seek help, and regular public service announcements – raising awareness of the Library's commitment to safety and how seek help.

UOW Library is also fostering student-centric design for Library spaces through design principles, embracing Flexibility and Choice, Sense of Community, Well-being and Safety, Equity and Inclusivity, and Accessibility and Intuitiveness.

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CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia and the eight members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL).

13 July 2023

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