



Consultation on the Draft Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education – Staff and student services

Draft Action Plan and National Code

The Action Plan should address the needs of specific cohorts

Stakeholders noted the importance of acknowledging challenges for specific groups that experience gender-based violence and barriers to reporting and support-seeking, and that support given by higher education providers must recognise intersectionality.

Consequences of non-compliance should be clear

The standards against which providers will be assessed, and the consequences for non-compliance, should be clarified. When conducting compliance activity, the size and scope of a provider should be considered. The balance of transparency, privacy and confidentiality of victim-survivors of gender-based violence must also be a priority.

Greater inclusion of staff

Regular surveys of staff, similar to the National Student Safety Survey, are needed. This would create a clearer picture of gender-based violence perpetrated against staff in the higher education sector. Stakeholders highlighted structural employment issues in the sector act as a barrier to reporting.

Increasing staff awareness of internal and external pathways for support and reporting was considered critical as well as greater consideration of sexual harassment perpetrated by students towards staff. The role of unions should also be reflected in the final Action Plan.

Trust in institutions and training/resourcing of support areas are critical

Stakeholders highlighted that confidential and responsive support mechanisms are required for staff to have confidence in disclosure processes. Many stakeholders raised the need to upskill human resources units to ensure victim-survivors receive an appropriate, timely response. The use of non-disclosure agreements was highlighted as an area of concern.

National Student Ombudsman

The Student Ombudsman must be student-centric and have sufficient resourcing

Stakeholders shared that the Student Ombudsman must be student-centric and needs to uphold procedural fairness. Stakeholders raised that the Ombudsman is likely to be accessed by both victim-survivors and alleged perpetrators.

Stakeholders noted the Student Ombudsman must be given the resourcing to appropriately carry out all the proposed functions and should have suitably experienced and trained staff.

Stakeholders also suggested the Ombudsman should seek feedback after individual cases had been resolved to identify areas for improvements.

Complaints processes at higher education providers need to be improved

Stakeholders highlighted that students can receive inconsistent responses and unhelpful and conflicting information from their provider, which means they may not raise a formal complaint. Certain environments in particular, such as work placements, are very high risk for gender-based violence, bullying, discrimination and other forms of harassment.

Stakeholders emphasised the role of the Student Ombudsman in providing best practice guidance to ensure providers are proactive and consistent in their approach.

Consideration of dual sector providers

Stakeholders requested further consideration be given to the impact of the National Student Ombudsman on dual sector institutions. Stakeholders emphasised the need for the Ombudsman to be accessible to students on study abroad programs and students based offshore.

