



The Hon Stuart Robert MP
Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business
Acting Minister for Education and Youth

Reference: MS22-000289

Professor Zlatko Skrbis
Vice-Chancellor and President
Australian Catholic University

Email:

Dear Professor  Skrbis

Following the release of Universities Australia's 2021 National Student Safety Survey last week, I am writing to all Australian Vice-Chancellors in recognition of the work universities have done to respond to the 2017 *Change the Course* report and its recommendations. While I acknowledge work undertaken to date, the new survey results make it clear that together, as a community we need to increase our efforts to keep young people safe both on and off campus.

Universities have a unique role in these efforts in supporting the communities you serve and Australian society as a whole. Your capacity to influence public action and opinion through example is considerable.

Universities also have a singular vulnerability, because campuses are places where young people live, work and socialise in close proximity. The lifelong impact for survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as the more immediate influence on affected individuals' academic performance and progression, are significant and concerning.

While universities are demonstrating significant leadership on this issue, it is clear that more needs to be done. You would be aware that the sector's efforts to date are yet to see a significant reduction in the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual assault in university settings. Of particular concern to the Australian Government, and I am sure also to you, are data suggesting that approximately half of students surveyed do not know how to report sexual harassment and sexual assault formally, or where to seek help.

In light of these factors, I ask that you continue to work closely with relevant community, state and local government sexual assault, counselling and health services, and law enforcement to ensure and publicise a 'no wrong door' approach. No matter where a victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault first seeks help, they should be referred to relevant and effective advice and support. They should also be encouraged to report their experience to relevant authorities to help identify and reduce the risk factors for such threats arising in university settings.

I also ask that each university continue to allocate significant dedicated resources and work with expert partners on prevention, education and support initiatives.

You are undoubtedly aware that student wellbeing and safety is an important element of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* and a matter that the higher education regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) considers as a key area of concern when assessing risks in the sector and compliance against the Standards. Among other initiatives, TEQSA provides a good practice note *Preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Australian higher education sector* on its website. You can find a statement from TEQSA on the release of the 2021 National Student Safety Survey at www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/articles/teqsa-statement-national-student-safety-survey-2021.

Thank you for your continuing and future efforts on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Robert

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