

EDUCATING FOR EQUALITY

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR ONLINE LEARNING

Many universities worldwide have invested in short online modules to improve students' knowledge of consent and sexual assault, and to encourage people to take action when they witness sexism and sexual harassment.

There is not yet enough evidence they have a lasting, positive effect on people's behaviour. We encourage universities to evaluate their online offerings for changes in attitudes, skills and behaviour to add to the evidence base.

Key messages in online modules need to be reinforced and reiterated through other channels and contexts in which students and staff study, work, live and play. To get the most out of online modules, they need to sit within a whole-of-university approach to prevent gender-based violence. Universities should also consider alternative formats for online learning and evaluating these.



Play to their strengths

Online modules are best used as part of a whole-of-university approach to:

- refresh material learned as part of other prevention training and programs
- reinforce university behaviours and expectations
- encourage people who are already motivated and engaged to consolidate their learning and take further action
- collect data for monitoring and evaluation.

It is not enough to rely on online modules to change attitudes and behaviours at the scale needed to reduce rates of gender-based violence. Research shows it is difficult to get students to engage with online modules, and training tends to

attract the already-motivated rather than students who the university may really want to target (see References for further information). There is no substitute for genuine engagement, and making the completion of online modules mandatory can backfire. Forcing uninterested individuals to undertake training can cause ill-will that is detrimental to the gender equality cause.

If the purpose is to reach as many people as possible and achieve meaningful change, universities can use lighter-touch forms of digital engagement – such as a digital communications campaign. *Educating for Equality: A Guide to Digital Engagement* can help ensure your university's digital engagement strategy is comprehensive and effective.

CONSIDER:

- How does your online module sit within your whole-of-university approach?
- What are the links between your module and other prevention activities, programs, training or curriculum across the university?

Use online learning as a scaffold for ongoing engagement and learning

There is a strong link between program duration, intensity and impact.

Although many online modules are designed to be completed in a single sitting, one-off interventions have not been shown to be effective at changing behaviour. The most promising results come from online learning tools (up to 36 hours of content that

encourage people to return for further learning and reflection across multiple sessions over a long period of time.

Consider using online tools and platforms to link to learning opportunities across a student's whole university degree – and across staff's professional careers – rather than as a one-time induction activity.

CONSIDER:

- How does your university build on content delivered in online platforms as students progress throughout their degree?
- How do you reinforce messages on campus, in curriculum, through campaigns and in other online forums?

Put user experience at the centre

Conventional online modules and learning management systems can limit your engagement with students and staff. Students report an inconsistent user experience, too much static content, crowded curriculum and interfaces, and inaccessibility through mobile devices.

At minimum, all online content needs to be accessible through mobile devices. Consider whether information conveyed in static text,

pre-recorded lecture or quizzes can be made more interactive and dynamic. Meaningfully engaging with students in the design of online learning modules can improve the relevance of online learning to their needs and experiences and increase the likelihood of success. It is important to consider users' needs and experience when designing the online learning tools and platforms, rather than retrofit user experience considerations.

CONSIDER:

- What are your key learning objectives? Can they be achieved within the module?
- Is there a way for content to be accessed via mobile devices? Can the content be accessed without logging in?

Tailor the content for your users

Create content that is personally relevant to the user or targeted towards specific groups, such as those who are more likely to experience or use violence. Many of our students are part of groups that experience other forms of inequality and discrimination that may affect their experience of violence – including young women, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Working in partnership with members of these groups and the broader university community ensures content is culturally appropriate, accessible and inclusive. It's important to do this at the outset, rather than adapt resources or approaches for particular groups retrospectively.

CONSIDER:

- How did you engage with students to develop content?
- Does your online module include representation of a wide range of student cohorts, including LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Can the content reflect the individual university environment?

NOTES

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