

Students at the Centre:

Partnering with university students to prevent gender-based violence

July 2026



**Our
Watch**

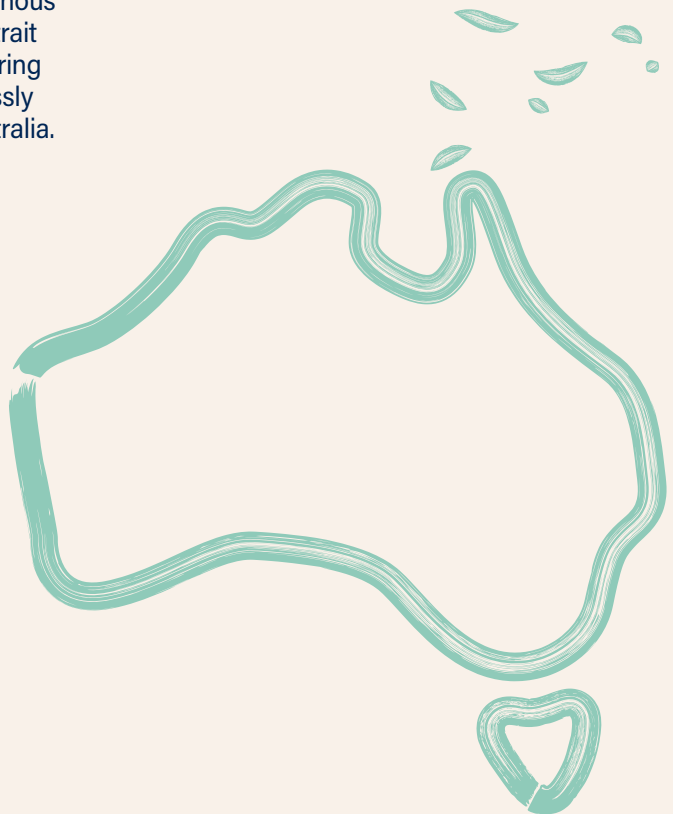
Preventing violence
against women

Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Indigenous organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is not an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander problem.' As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, there is an intersection between racism, sexism and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to experience violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Indigenous women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.



About Our Watch

Our Watch is Australia's leader in the primary prevention of gender-based violence, that is, stopping violence before it starts. Our Watch's vision is an Australia where all people live free from violence.

Guided by robust national and international research and evidence, Our Watch works to embed gender equality and address the drivers of violence wherever people in Australia live, learn, work and socialise.

Our Watch works in partnership with governments, communities, the prevention workforce, and leaders across a wide range of sectors to create change across Australia.

This resource was developed in consultation with students and staff from the following universities and organisations:

Bond University

Edith Cowan University

Flinders University

RMIT University Student Union (RUSU)

The Line Campaign

The STOP Campaign

University of New South Wales

University of Technology Sydney

For more information on the prevention of gender-based violence in universities, visit

ourwatch.org.au/universities

This guide was published on Wurundjeri country in Victoria, Australia, in July 2026.

Educating for equality

The *Educating for equality* model provides Australian universities with a whole-of-university approach to guide, support and build upon existing work to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence in universities. It draws on the national and international evidence base, including *Change the story* - Australia's national framework for the primary prevention of violence against women, including gender-based violence.

The model offers practical tools and resources to support a holistic, primary prevention approach in universities, underpinned by long-term strategy and coordination across all 'domains' of a university. It highlights the role everyone within a university must play in creating a culture where rigid gender stereotypes are challenged, gender-based discrimination is unacceptable, and gender equality is actively promoted and modelled.

Within Educating for Equality, Student Life is identified as one of the five key domains where work to prevent gender-based violence should occur. For the Student Life domain to be effectively incorporated within a whole-of-university approach to prevention, best-practice student engagement is essential.

This practice guide can be used to support current and future efforts to implement *Educating for equality* within the Student Life domain, or as a standalone prevention resource for university staff.

The five *Educating for equality* domains are:



Governance, business and operations



Student life



Workplace



Teaching and learning



Research



National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence

Under the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* (effective January 1, 2026), higher education and student accommodation providers must adopt a whole-of-organisation approach to preventing gender-based violence that actively involves students. Providers must demonstrate and report on how they engage and collaborate with students to develop, implement, and review prevention policies, strategies, programs and training. There are also specific requirements for engaging and collaborating with people with lived experience of gender-based violence and groups disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.ⁱ

Summary of this resource:

This resource is designed to support anyone working to respond to and prevent gender-based violence in higher education, including prevention teams, educators, student support staff, leaders, policymakers, and administrators. It draws on contemporary practice and evidence-based approaches to provide guidance on ensuring students are actively involved in the design, implementation and refinement of an ongoing whole-of-university approach to preventing gender-based violence.

For more information and support on preventing gender-based violence in higher education, Our Watch has developed a suite of resources including webinars, practice guides and implementation tools:

ourwatch.org.au/universities



ⁱ See standards 1.4, 1.5, 2.5, 2.6, 3.3, 3.4, 6.8 and 7.2 for examples of student engagement requirements in the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent & Respond to Gender-based Violence 2025*

Practice principles at a glance

This resource will embed the following practice principles to support considered and effective student engagement:

1 Trauma-informed

Many students will have experience, of or may currently be experiencing, **gender-based violence**. This makes it essential to ensure all student engagement practices are trauma-informed, person-centred and prioritise the safety and choice of students, particularly those with lived experience of violence.

2 Share power, dialogue, and respect through co-design and collaboration

Student-centred work means understanding what authentic co-design looks like. This requires a willingness to challenge established power dynamics and decision-making processes and be open to different and innovative forms of collaboration.

3 Use a gender lens

Consider how **gendered norms, practices and inequalities** can impact the student experience and student participation, to make sure your student engagement practices are equitable and inclusive.

4 Be intersectional, culturally informed and accessible

Understand the demographic make-up of your student population and include a **diverse range of students in decision-making and consultation**. Understand how structural discrimination and inequality can be experienced by students, and ensure participation is culturally appropriate, inclusive and accessible.

5 Support formal student representative structures

Engage with and empower formal student groups such as **academic senates, student unions, and student councils in decision-making**. These groups give students a formalised voice in how their institution is run, which helps make universities more inclusive, responsive and accountable. Research shows that when student representation is genuinely valued, it leads to greater civic participation, higher satisfaction, and a stronger sense of belonging - all important signs of effective engagement.

6 Meet students where they are

Develop effective approaches to reach and **target your students effectively**, including peer-to-peer engagement, social media interaction, anonymous student surveys or input, and participation opportunities beyond elected representatives or formal roles.

7 Recognise and remunerate

Provide a variety of **recognition and remuneration opportunities** to generate diverse and ongoing student engagement and to demonstrate value for students' experience and expertise.

8 Check if what you're doing works

Regularly review, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of your approaches to centring student voice.

Why is student engagement important for the prevention of gender-based violence?

Universities are educators of around 1.5 million students and have the power to shape generations of researchers, leaders, workforce participants and civic-minded citizens who can be part of the solution to end gender-based violence.

Universities also have an obligation, including under the *National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence*, to ensure that everyone has a safe, respectful and meaningful university experience. This means everyone has a role to play and that students, staff and leaders should be empowered to be part of the solutions and lead change.

Students are key stakeholders in the prevention of gender-based violence at universities, and should be provided with ongoing opportunities to engage, contribute, and show leadership. Without their support and participation, prevention outcomes will be limited. Engaging students in the design, development and implementation of prevention activities, and ensuring opportunities to elevate students' voices in governance and decision-making, is essential to driving long-term, sustainable change.

Students not only contribute important lived experience and expertise to university governance and decision-making but also help develop the capacity of a thriving prevention workforce and professionals beyond the university, who understand and can respond to gender-based violence in a variety of careers. Involving students and incorporating their views and experiences can directly influence the trajectory of future communities and broader society.



The evidence base

There is a growing national and international evidence base of best-practice student engagement mechanisms that contribute to student success, retention, and overall student wellbeing in higher education.

Practices that foster a supportive learning environment and tailored support for students are linked to higher levels of engagement and a more positive student experience, especially among underrepresented student populations.¹ These include strategies that build active engagement opportunities between staff and students, such as collaborative learning, reflective assignments, and co-design processes.²

Therefore, student participation in prevention initiatives not only supports a positive higher education experience but also advances your whole-of-university approach to preventing gender-based violence. Student participation in activities like gender-based violence awareness campaigns, peer-led interventions, and inclusive curriculum design has been shown to increase uptake and engagement with prevention projects and challenge harmful gender stereotypes and norms.³

Engagement strategies that centre student voice, such as committees, collaboration with student representative structures, and *Students as Partners* approaches, are recognised as mechanisms for strengthening institutional accountability, enhancing student engagement, and supporting the development and implementation of prevention initiatives⁴, while the integration of gender-based violence prevention content into teaching practice and curriculum can significantly shift student attitudes and behaviours, especially when supported by institutional policies, and staff and leadership commitment.⁵

Critically, the existing evidence base also highlights the importance of intersectional approaches, recognising that engagement must consider diverse student experiences and potential barriers to participation. For example, when developing student engagement approaches, it is important to consider how students' access to participation is shaped by systems and structures of power and privilege that intersect with gender, race, sexuality, ability, class, and other identity categories⁶. Student engagement must therefore consider these barriers and work to address them.

Effective student engagement moves beyond compliance, one-way feedback, or one-off campus activities. It prioritises their active participation in shaping the communities, learning environments, operations and governance of their institutions. When students are empowered to contribute their perspectives and ideas, participate in the decision-making process, and support the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives, they become more invested in advancing their university's values and contribute to a positive academic and social experience for all.

Complexities of student engagement

Meaningful and sustainable student engagement approaches remain a key challenge for the higher education sector. Universities operate not only as educational institutions but also as businesses, community hubs, and residential accommodations. Engaging students in governance and decision-making across all facets of these institutions can therefore be complex.

In a post-COVID and increasingly tech-based landscape, ways of engaging students have also evolved. While online study options have increased access to higher education, they have also reduced or altered on-campus engagement and direct access to students, particularly regarding extra-curricular activities. This is compounded by changes in preferred communication channels (for example, the reduced effectiveness of emails, newsletters and on-campus promotions), as well as the time and financial constraints currently facing many students.

At times, the hierarchical nature of higher education institutions, including power dynamics between staff and students, can affect students' willingness to share their experiences. For some students, the institution's culture, and at times the adversarial nature of these dynamics, can be alienating or uninviting, resulting in reduced engagement.⁷

When students do not feel represented or believe their voices do not carry equal weight in processes and outcomes, this can deter them from engaging in university-led activities. Less effective practice in the form of tokenistic consultations; methods not grounded in trauma-informed approaches, irrelevant or culturally inappropriate questions, and an over-reliance on victim-survivors to always lead this work can all contribute to an environment of distrust in institutional culture and practices relating to the prevention of gender-based violence.



PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

1. Trauma-informed

Every university student community will include victim-survivors of gender-based violence. Under the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence*, higher education providers (including student accommodation providers) will be required to actively engage in preventing and responding to this violence, using trauma-informed and person-centred approaches.

The *National Higher Education Code* also requires that plans, policies, education and training be designed and implemented through collaboration and engagement with those who have experienced gender-based violence.

It is therefore essential to ensure all student engagement practices are trauma-informed, person-centred and prioritise the safety and choice of students, particularly those with lived experience of violence.

Trauma-informed practice is an approach that understands the widespread impact of trauma in our communities. The approach is designed to be holistic, empowering, strengths-focused, collaborative and reflective, promoting physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural safety to prevent re-traumatisation and support recovery and healing through effective, survivor-centred processes.

Embedding trauma-informed practice into student engagement helps ensure that violence prevention and response efforts don't repeat patterns of control or doubt. Trauma-informed practice should be embedded in all forms of student engagement, including when developing consultation questions and delivery methods, setting up focus groups or interviews, and providing feedback or information. This approach supports student engagement that consistently respects people's lived experiences and establishes safety as the foundation.

By creating safe and inclusive student engagement spaces, policies, and mechanisms for input and feedback, we can support all students in sharing their views and include victim-survivor voices in decision-making. This helps ensure the institution's actions are based on people's real experiences, not just policy on paper.⁸

For more information on taking a trauma-informed approach, refer to regulatory guidance on Standard 4 (Safety and Support) and Standard 5 (Safe Processes) from the [Gender-based Violence Regulator](#). You can also engage your local, state and federal specialist services for support and guidance on taking a trauma-informed approach to engaging with individuals and groups on gender-based violence.



Key takeaway

Trauma-informed practice is an approach that understands the widespread impact of trauma in our communities.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

2. Share power, dialogue, and respect through co-design

Efforts to prevent gender-based violence falter when institutions exclusively adopt compliance-based approaches, which fail to identify or challenge underlying power structures or the barriers to student collaboration and engagement. For this reason, student engagement mechanisms must prioritise relationship-building, authenticity, communication, transparency and accountability.

Establishing strong and authentic connections with students requires staff at all levels of a university to know and understand the cohort they are trying to engage. Universities benefit from student input that reflects diverse perspectives, as such input contributes to more effective and representative policy development, improved prevention initiatives and responsive support services.⁹

In practice, this could mean:

- **Building trust and transparency** through conversations with students about what has been done well in the past, but also where there are areas for improvement.
- **Undertaking gender-impact and equity assessments** on governance and decision-making procedures that involve students.
- **Employing students to co-design** engagement campaigns, with a particular focus on engaging diverse and intersectional cohorts.
- **Increasing accessibility of resources and engagement opportunities**, like running sessions outside of class hours or with multilingual facilitators.
- **Embedding ongoing, two-way feedback** across all stages of program or project design, implementation and evaluation by continuing to listen and ask for feedback from students.

Understanding and unpacking power dynamics between university staff and students also requires a critical examination of the structural, cultural, and interpersonal forces that shape higher education. Universities are historically and structurally hierarchical and are increasingly positioned as businesses as well as educational institutions. This repositioning of students as consumers and staff as service providers can intensify power dynamics around who has authority, access, and voice, risking the marginalisation of student and staff agency and shifting educational priorities.

Best-practice models of student-staff partnerships challenge these hierarchies by foregrounding collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility in institutional change. This involves understanding how systemic factors, such as governance structures, policy frameworks, and equity initiatives, influence everyday interactions amongst students, and creating more democratic and inclusive environments where power can be challenged, and people feel safe to speak.

For example, if a staff-led committee has a student representative position, consider:

- How are power dynamics within the group structure considered?
- What information or context does the student representative have access to?
- How have you recruited and supported that student to participate equitably and safely? This is particularly important to consider with student governance roles, such as on University Councils.
- Is there an executive leader who might be willing to provide mentorship and support to the student in preparing for and debriefing after meetings?
- Is it possible to have an undergraduate and a postgraduate position to increase student representation if that has not already been established?

A useful, tested approach to student engagement is the *Students as Partners* approach. It is a transformative model of student engagement, positioning students not as passive recipients of education¹⁰ but as active co-creators in institutional development. In contrast to traditional top-down approaches, the *Students as Partners* approach fosters reciprocal partnerships where power and responsibility are shared between staff and students.

Many Australian universities have pioneered successful *Students as Partners* initiatives, including co-design of curriculum and assessment practices, and contributions to student-led research and governance. By cultivating mutual respect, dialogue, and shared ownership of university processes, these approaches help establish a university culture in which students feel heard, valued, and empowered. When implemented effectively, this approach challenges traditional power hierarchies and fosters a more democratic and accountable institutional culture for all.

As a result, the *Students as Partners* framework lends itself well to engaging students for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence initiatives. Opportunities to put this model into practice at your university might include introducing restorative practice methods to committee meetings; quarterly co-design workshops exploring gender equality campaigns, or collaborating with students to identify avenues for consent and relationships, gender equality and behaviour and attitude change to be examined through the curriculum.



Key takeaway

Create more democratic and inclusive environments where power can be challenged, and people feel safe to speak.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

3. Use a Gender Lens

When doing work to prevent gender-based violence, it is important to think about how gendered power dynamics shape not only institutional hierarchies but also the social and cultural conditions that drive gender-based violence, how it is responded to and – critically – how it can be prevented.

Gender inequality creates environments where patriarchal norms and power imbalances can go unchecked. In Australian universities, this can be reflected in male-dominated leadership; rates of gender-based violence in colleges and residential accommodation, and stereotyped attitudes and norms which can influence the academic and career pathways for women and gender-diverse students and staff.

Research indicates that a failure to consider these gendered power dynamics can lead to resistance or refusal to engage in university-led mechanisms, given the unequal and unsafe behaviours associated with university power structures. This is particularly important when considering the nuances and

complexities of Higher Degree by Research students and supervisory relationships, and experiences of those who may face additional forms of discrimination, including international students, LGBTIQA+ students, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

So, when taking a gendered and intersectional lens to student engagement, consider whether your institution has developed policies or training to address power imbalances (including gendered power dynamics) and appropriate boundaries between students and staff. Additionally, make sure your policies reflect an understanding of gendered power dynamics and their impact on staff and student environments.



PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

4. Be intersectional, culturally appropriate and accessible

The *National Higher Education Code* requires universities to take an intersectional approach to student engagement by demonstrating how they are engaging and collaborating with groups who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, including women, First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disabilities, and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. Students who face intersecting forms of oppression are the most likely to have lived experience of gender-based violence or discrimination within university settings, so their perspectives are important to include, while prioritising their safety and needs.

Taking an intersectional approach to engaging with students is also critical to increasing the interest and authenticity of prevention activities and strengthening input and collaboration on issues that matter to your institution. It requires consideration of the barriers that may prevent a diverse range of students from being or feeling able to participate in engagement.

Before developing prevention plans or engaging students in prevention work, be sure to understand the student population's composition and include a diverse range of students in decision-making and consultation. **Understand how structural discrimination and inequality can be experienced by students and ensure access to participation is culturally appropriate and inclusive.**

For guidance, consider the following:

- Have you used images and perspectives that reflect your diverse student demographic in all your student marketing and communications materials? Not only does this demonstrate inclusivity, but it also makes people more likely to resonate with materials and messaging that reflect themselves or their experiences.
- How can you ensure there is a balance of students that represent your diverse communities? Are all students aware of opportunities for input and engagement?
- How can you centre and value the voices of groups who experience the highest rates of violence? For example, how are the voices of international students, female students, LGBTIQ+ students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students with disabilities included in decision-making?
- How can participation be made more accessible for marginalised groups and individuals? For example, are the questions you are asking accessible, culturally appropriate, in plain English and translated (as required by the *National Higher Education Code*)?
- Are there cultural safety or other safety considerations to make when engaging students in the topic of gender-based violence?
- Is student participation remunerated so that students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds can participate?

To be effective, prevention and response initiatives need to move beyond one-size-fits-all or reactive policies. They should take a proactive, inclusive, and culturally aware approach that listens to survivors, focuses on longterm cultural change, and addresses the power imbalances throughout the university.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

5. Support formal student representative structures

Formal student groups such as Academic Senates, Student Unions, and Student Councils are examples of how universities can involve students in decision-making. These groups give students a formalised voice in how their institution is run, which helps make universities more inclusive, responsive and accountable. Research shows that when student representation is genuinely valued, it leads to greater civic participation, higher satisfaction, and a stronger sense of belonging - all important signs of effective engagement.¹¹

It is important to recognise that student representative groups and roles have limits — they can sometimes be competitive, and representatives don't speak for every student. Still, these groups play a vital role in promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. Student leaders often run awareness campaigns and peer education programs that help change campus culture and challenge attitudes that allow inequality and violence to continue.¹²

Elected student representatives can become champions and allies for promoting and modelling safe, equal and respectful institutions. They can also help bridge the gap between university leaders and the wider student community. For instance, they may encourage greater student participation and feedback or provide key insights into the interests and needs of the student community.

University staff can support this work by participating in student engagement and decision-making — for example, adding gender-based violence prevention activities to student council agendas and co-designing with student representatives on related issues, such as improving reporting systems and student-led campaigns. **This form of shared decision-making builds mutual accountability, strengthens relationships between staff and students, and promotes a culture of collective responsibility for preventing gender-based violence.**



Key takeaway

Shared decision-making builds mutual accountability, strengthens relationships between staff and students, and promotes a culture of collective responsibility for preventing gender-based violence.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

6. Meet students where they are at

In addition to formal student representative structures, it is also critical to provide mechanisms and opportunities for students who do not wish to be part of formal structures but still want to contribute their perspectives and lived experiences. This requires flexibility, inclusivity, and student-centred practices that continually evolve with changing demographics and student needs.

To support engagement with diverse cohorts, **aim to establish effective communication channels that meet students where they are** in terms of their availability and accessibility, lived experience, interests and motivations. It is imperative to prioritise relationship-building by creating authentic opportunities for connecting staff and students through mentorship, peer support programs, and inclusive governance structures that invite student voices into decision-making.

Communicating with purpose



See [*Our Watch's Communications Guide*](#) for more information on effective violence prevention communications in universities.

For guidance, consider the following:

- Are there less informal ways that staff and leaders can connect and consult with students, like a student-staff free lunch event, or staff attending student-led club initiatives?
- Do you have feedback mechanisms like surveys or portals that ask for anonymous input on the issue of gender-based violence?
- Can you use social media channels to gather interest or feedback on a topic, or engage students in co-design of digital campaigns or platforms?



Peer-to-peer programs and initiatives are often an effective way to support student engagement, as students may feel more comfortable sharing their opinions and ideas with peers than with staff or leaders. Consider ways to up-skill students to lead those engagements safely and effectively.

Leveraging existing student touch-points and networks to foster meaningful connections can increase reach and engage students more effectively, for example, through free meal programs, in-house volunteer programs or quarterly student forums. These opportunities can foster democratic, ethical and authentic ways for students to contribute their input and perspective on their campus experiences.

Embedding engagement throughout the course curriculum also presents a powerful opportunity to influence students' attitudes and knowledge around respect, power, gender, and consent. Connecting the issue of gender-based violence to student learning and their subject area can drive participation and understanding of the issue. Our Watch has developed a suite of [*Prevention in Teaching and Learning*](#) resources to support the integration of prevention content into the curriculum, available here. This can also be used to design course curriculum through a *Students as Partners*-led approach, or to consult with students through the relevance of their studies.

Student-facing staff are a critical component in integrating student engagement using existing frameworks and structures to work closely with diverse groups, including academic and teaching staff, counselling and academic support staff, student associations, and staff in residential accommodation settings, to advance cultural change.

In essence, taking every opportunity to let students know that they play a role in preventing gender-based violence and that their voices, perspectives, and experiences are both wanted and needed by the institution is key to any meaningful engagement process.



Did you know about The Line campaign?

This primary prevention, social marketing and behavioural change campaign developed by Our Watch helps young people negotiate healthy, respectful and consensual relationships.

Campaign content is co-designed with young people to ensure relevance and strengthen impact.



PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

7. Recognise and remunerate

Remuneration and recognition policies and practices can demonstrate an institutional respect for the time, effort and expertise students provide when engaging with university-led initiatives. While many students will support gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence, they may face financial or other barriers to being able to provide input or participate in volunteer activities that support this work.

Ethical remuneration requires a consistent, university-specific framework which considers the type of activity, the time committed and the individual contribution. Be sure to clearly define the expected contribution from students, for example, if it is an ongoing co-design process or a one-off consultation. This will not only help to determine appropriate baseline remuneration but also help retain student commitment.

When developing processes or policies for remuneration and recognition, you can collaborate with or align with other university-led initiatives, such as community research participation or formal paid student roles, to ensure consistency and support increased engagement and participation by sharing opportunities and networks.

Where financial remuneration is not possible or appropriate, consider alternative forms of recognition, for example, through academic credit, letters of recommendation, professional training and development opportunities, food and drink vouchers, or stationery/merchandise. What is important to consider is the equitable and fair recognition for their respective time and input.

As much as possible, ensure these opportunities are promoted to the entire student population, not just to formal student representatives or the same cohorts every time. This might mean adapting your promotional approaches and ensuring a mix of online and in-person communications and opportunities. **These processes will continue to build trust between students and university administration, which is essential.**



PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

8. Check whether what you're doing works

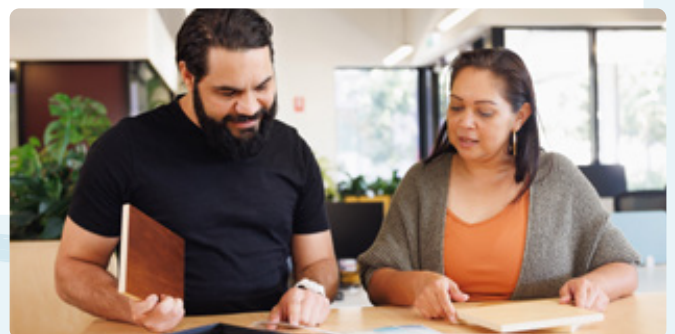
Monitoring and evaluating your student engagement provides a structured way to assess your progress and impact, ensuring that you are achieving intended outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. This involves monitoring progress, seeking feedback, conducting process and impact evaluations, and using the findings and learnings to refine your approach to student engagement.

This aligns with requirements under the *National Higher Education Code*, including monitoring and reporting on student engagement on how engagement with and feedback from students have informed the development of prevention and response plans, policies, and training and education.

Tracking and reviewing your progress also allows you to celebrate your successes and share good practice approaches with your community and the higher education sector. This means understanding what engagement is already happening, how it can be improved, and, as you implement changes, understanding if these changes are effective.

Monitoring and evaluating will vary between all institutions, but it may look like:

- **Including and expanding on key indicators for student engagement and collaboration** in your Outcomes Framework as required under the *National Higher Education Code*.
- **Creating a university-wide student engagement plan** with SMART objectives and aims (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound).
- **Surveying and mapping what student engagement is currently occurring** and identifying gaps in achieving objectives and aims.
- **Creating diverse methods of collecting** qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. surveys, focus groups, research).
- **Enabling a diversity of students to contribute** to evaluations, including data analysis, interpretation and recommendations for improvement.
- **Embedding feedback loops with students** to allow continuous input and demonstrate how you are using that to inform continuous improvement.
- **Scheduling time to assess progress and achievements** of student engagement at regular intervals with key stakeholders and leaders.
- **Including data on student engagement in agenda items** relating to the prevention of gender-based violence in leadership and governance meetings.
- Conducting independently conducted longer-term evaluations to **measure the sustainability of outcomes** and build the evidence base around best practice prevention work.
- **Sharing learning and disseminating findings** to stakeholders (internal and external) to promote transparency and accountability and build understanding of best practice student engagement in higher education.





Conclusion

The prevention of gender-based violence within higher education requires a whole-of-university approach, where students are recognised not as passive recipients of policy but as essential partners in driving cultural change. The evidence base demonstrates that meaningful student participation is a key factor in successful gender-based violence prevention strategies in higher education.¹³

By embedding students in decision-making processes, co-designing initiatives, and leveraging a variety of engagement mechanisms, universities can collaborate with students to foster environments which challenge harmful gender norms, promote equity, and cultivate belonging. This engagement must reflect trauma-informed, intersectional, and culturally responsive practices that prioritise and build safety, trust, and authenticity. Sustaining these efforts will depend on institutional commitment and adaptability to student voice, equitable representation, and adequate recognition of student contributions.

When students are empowered and supported, they not only help shape safer campus communities but also carry forward the values of gender equality into broader society. This also helps your students to thrive in your institutions. Research affirms that sustained engagement is more likely when students feel a sense of belonging and see their identities reflected in

campus life and policies.¹⁴ This is especially true within the context of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence, given the wide-reaching, often personal, and always urgent nature of these issues.

By taking the time to understand and respond to your unique student cohorts and investing in dynamic engagement models and inclusive practices, universities can create lasting impacts on individual students, their institutions and their communities long after they have graduated.

Endnotes

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