The University of Queensland Union College
Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy

Statement of Commitment

We are committed to providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for everyone in the Union College community, free from free from gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment. Gender-based violence and sexual misconduct harms physical and mental health, undermines learning and participation, and directly conflicts with the goals of the Australian Universities Accord on student safety, wellbeing and success.

Introduction

We want Union College to be a community where you can stay, study, and socialise in a safe, respectful environment free from sexual misconduct and gender-based violence. This policy guides and governs conduct within and affecting Union College that falls within the definitions of a sexual nature including sexual misconduct, sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

Our policy centres the voices and needs of victim-survivors. It recognises that people are affected differently by intersecting factors, including gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural background, disability, age, religion, and other attributes.

We acknowledge that First Nations people, LGBTIQA+ communities, people with disabilities, international students, and others experience gender-based violence at higher rates and in different ways. We encourage members of these communities to provide any feedback on this policy and other Union College policies.

Purpose

This policy:

- Sets out the expected standards of behaviour in addition to the Resident Code of Conduct, Resident Handbook and other relevant policies.
- Clearly explains the concepts of sexual misconduct and Gender-Based Violence in plain language.
- Sets out Union College's approach and commitment to addressing the causes and effects of Gender-Based Violence and/or Sexual Misconduct.
- Encourages you and visitors to seek help for yourself or others if any situation makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, and to report any concerns or breaches of any Union College policy
- Guides you in creating a community where informed consent, respect and equality are actively upheld
- Explains the procedures we will follow when responding to disclosures or reports
- Outlines the support available on and off campus.

Where conduct constitutes sexual misconduct and/or Gender-Based Violence (as defined in this policy), this policy prevails over the Resident Code of Conduct to the extent of any inconsistency. Sexual misconduct is a form of Gender-Based Violence. Technology-facilitated abuse, including image-based abuse, can occur via social media and is also covered under our Acceptable Use of ICT and Social Media Policy.

We will act on all reports of sexual misconduct and Gender-Based Violence and take appropriate, proportionate action with impartiality, sensitivity and a trauma-informed, survivor-focused approach whenever reasonably possible. This approach is designed to be consistent with the National Action Plan and the forthcoming National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence.

Scope

This policy covers behaviours that constitute sexual misconduct, as well as the procedures we follow when such incidents are reported.

It applies to conduct by residents and visitors that:

- Occurs on land or property owned or occupied by Union College
- Occurs during or in connection with any function, activity or event we sanction
- Occurs online or in digital spaces (for example, social media, messaging platforms) that connect to Union College or members of our community. Online sexual misconduct on social media platforms is specifically addressed in our Acceptable Use of ICT and Social Media Policy, which complements this policy.
- Occurs off campus and has a clear connection to the college community or significantly affects safety, wellbeing, study or participation in College life.

This policy also covers any behaviour that constitutes Gender-Based Violence which may include, but is not limited to:

- Sexual assault and rape
- Sexual harassment (unwanted sexual comments, touching, advances or messages)
- Intimate partner or dating violence
- Drink-spiking
- Stalking (online or offline)
- Image-based abuse (sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent)
- Bullying, vilification or threats based on gender, sexuality or gender identity
- Coercive control and patterns of controlling behaviour in relationships.

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images via any ICT resource is also covered under Our Acceptable Use of ICT and Social Media Policy and this policy.

Principles

This policy is based on the principles that:

- All forms of sexual assault, sexual harassment and gender-based violence are unacceptable
- Everyone has the right to be and feel safe where they stay, study, socialise, and work
- Gender equality, respect and inclusion are essential to both Union College values and the prevention of sexual misconduct
- We hold a zero-tolerance approach toward sexual misconduct and Gendcer-Based Violence in any form. These behaviours are strictly prohibited.
- Trauma-informed practice: All responses prioritise physical and emotional safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, choice and respect for diversity. We aim to minimise re-traumatisation, promote healing and support victim-survivors' self-determination.
- Procedural fairness: Investigations and outcomes are conducted impartially, with sensitivity, confidentiality and procedural fairness for all parties.
- Whole-of-community responsibility: Prevention and response are shared responsibilities of leaders, staff and residents. Everyone has a role to play in creating a culture where gender-based violence is unacceptable and gender equality is promoted.
- We will respond to disclosures and reports in ways that prioritise safety, support, choice, and procedural fairness.

"Zero tolerance" means that all concerns are taken seriously, investigated appropriately, and addressed promptly with proportionate consequences and support, not that every incident will result in the same outcome.

This policy works alongside all other Union College policies, including the Responsible Consumption of Alcohol Policy, Drugs other than Alcohol Policy, Acceptable Use of ICT and Social Media Policy, Child and Young Person Policy and the Resident Code of Conduct. Any report raised relating to this policy or those listed above will be responded to under the Addressing Complaints and Concerns Policy.

Expected conduct

You are expected to:

- Treat others with respect and dignity in all interactions
- Obtain and maintain free, informed, enthusiastic and ongoing consent for any sexual activity
- Respect others' decisions and boundaries, including "no" and withdrawal of consent at any time
- Refrain from any behaviour that constitutes sexual assault, sexual harassment or sexual misconduct

- Be aware of your partner's level of intoxication and consider not engaging in sexual activity if they are intoxicated. For detailed information about alcohol, intoxication and informed consent, see our Responsible Consumption of Alcohol Policy (RES0301). See also our Drugs Other Than Alcohol Policy (RES0302) regarding the impact of other substances on the capacity to consent
- Be an active bystander by recognising risks, intervening safely where you can, and seeking help when you or others feel unsafe.
- Contribute to a College culture that actively denounces sexual misconduct.

Definitions

Sexual assault:

- Any sexual act performed against a person's will without their free and informed consent, including when they are asleep, unconscious, affected by alcohol or other drugs, or coerced through threats, force, intimidation or abuse of power.

Sexual harassment:

- Unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favours, or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that a reasonable person would expect to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation. This can be verbal, physical, written, visual or online.

Sexual misconduct (broader term):

- Includes sexual assault and sexual harassment
- Also covers other inappropriate sexual behaviours, including non-consensual sharing of intimate images, voyeurism, technology-facilitated abuse, sexually explicit comments or jokes that create a hostile environment, and behaviour that undermines safety or equal participation.

Gender-Based Violence:

Means violence that is used against someone because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression, sex or sexuality, or that disproportionately affects people of a particular gender. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, financial, and technology-facilitated abuse (including image-based abuse and online harassment), and stalking.

Examples of gender-based violence scenarios

The following examples illustrate situations that may constitute gender-based violence in a college setting. They are not exhaustive.

Examples:

- A group of residents repeatedly taunt and isolate a non-binary resident, using slurs and mocking their pronouns in the dining room and in online group chats.

- A resident shares, without consent, a private or intimate photo of their partner in a group chat, encouraging others to comment on their partner's body.
- A person repeatedly follows a resident between campus and college, waits outside their room or study areas, and sends unwanted messages despite being told to stop, focusing on their gender or sexuality.
- During a college event, a resident pressures another resident to drink heavily, then touches them while they are clearly intoxicated and unable to consent.
- A resident repeatedly makes “jokes” about women not belonging in certain courses or about queer residents being dangerous in shared bathrooms, creating a hostile and unsafe environment.
- A student in a casual relationship threatens to “out” their partner’s sexuality or gender identity to their family and community if they try to end the relationship.

Depending on the circumstances, these behaviours may also be covered by our Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy, Acceptable Use of Social Media Policy, Acceptable Use of IT Policy, Child and Young Person Protection Policy, Resident Code of Conduct, and relevant laws.

Investigations will follow the procedures outlined in our Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy, adapted as necessary to ensure trauma-informed, victim-survivor-centred practice in line with the Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education.

Prevention, education and co-design

We focus on prevention and response. In line with national expectations and our values:

- All residents and staff receive regular training in gender-based violence prevention, trauma-informed practice, intersectionality, cultural competency, anti-discrimination, and respectful relationships
- We co-design policy, prevention initiatives and communication materials with diverse students and staff, including First Nations and LGBTIQA+ residents, people with disabilities, international students and other groups
- We embed prevention into orientation, leadership programs, social events, online conduct expectations, Union College culture and everyday college life.

Active bystander intervention

We encourage you to be an active, ethical bystander.

This means:

- Noticing situations that may be unsafe or escalating (for example, someone very intoxicated being led away or persistent unwanted advances)

- Taking responsibility for doing something safe and reasonable, such as checking in with the person, distracting, getting friends or staff to help, or calling emergency services if needed
- Volunteering to be the sober friend who keeps others and their drinks safe
- Reflecting on your own assumptions and behaviour and being prepared to challenge harmful attitudes or comments.

We recognise that your safety matters too. You should never put yourself at serious risk. Seeking help from staff or emergency services is a valid and essential form of bystander action.

Legal context and our role

As a standalone student accommodation provider, we understand that we will be individually accountable under the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence and any associated regulatory framework.

We will:

- Align our policies, processes and practices with the Code and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children
- Collaborate with universities and regulators to reduce duplication and minimise the need for victim-survivors to retell their experiences multiple times
- Monitor, evaluate, and publicly report on our progress, including prevention initiatives, reporting mechanisms, and response data. We will also strive to obtain feedback from residents at regular intervals throughout the year.

We acknowledge that sexual misconduct under this policy may constitute criminal conduct under Queensland and Commonwealth law, including offences such as sexual assault, image-based abuse, stalking, and other forms of gender-based violence.

We:

- Encourage you and visitors to report any possible crimes to Queensland Police Service (QPS)
- Will support any resident or staff member who chooses to make a police report at any time, including by helping you access information and by accompanying you where appropriate
- Will not compel anyone to make a police report if they do not wish to, except where we are legally required to act to protect safety.

We cannot and will not decide whether a crime has been committed. That is the responsibility of the justice system.

We can, however, investigate allegations of sexual misconduct as a potential breach of the Code of Conduct and as behaviour contrary to our values. We will act on violations of our rules, policies and procedures, including this policy and the Resident Code of Conduct. Out investigations will not be

provided to police, excepting where legally mandated or in the interests of individual and community safety.

Findings under this policy are made on the balance of probabilities (that is, whether it is more likely than not that the behaviour occurred).

We provide trauma-informed, culturally appropriate and language-accessible support to victim-survivors, including referrals to external therapeutic, legal and advocacy services. Where a disclosure is made, we will assess the risk of harm to the individuals and the community at large within 48 hours and implement risk mitigation measures. We may be obligated to investigate after a disclosure if safety (including the safety of the community) is assessed as medium to high risk. We also offer proper support and referrals to respondents.

Reporting, investigations and confidentiality

Investigation, Support and Procedures

All reports of sexual misconduct will be investigated in accordance with the procedures outlined in our Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy, guided by the framework outlined below and that policy.

If you experience, witness or become aware of sexual misconduct or Gender-Based Violence, you are encouraged to:

- Seek support from the Resident Wellbeing Lead as soon as you feel able
- Make a disclosure (sharing information to seek support) and/or a report (asking us to act).
- You can make a disclosure/report (anonymously or using your name) of what you have witnessed via
    - RespectX (anonymous option should this be preferred);
    - via a Reporting Form – found in the Office and dropped into the lock box outside the main office entry opposite the fire panel (a secondary anonymous option should this be preferred)
    - in person to the Resident Wellbeing Lead or the Deputy Head of College/Deputy CEO
    - Or to the On-call team member (if reporting is made in-person and out of business hours).

They will listen without judgement, provide support, explain options, and help you access internal and external services. You can choose:

- Whether to make a formal report to Union College
- Whether to report to the police, your university or other bodies
- Whether you want informal support, formal action, or time to decide.

We design reporting pathways to be:

- Accessible (multiple options, including in-person, online or by phone)

- Confidential (information shared only with those who need to know to provide support, manage risk or meet legal obligations)
- Responsive to diverse needs (including cultural, disability and language access).

We handle information as confidentially as possible, sharing it only with those who need to know to provide support, manage risk, or meet legal and regulatory obligations. If there is a serious or immediate risk to you or others, we may need to act even if you do not request it. We will explain what we are doing and why, as far as we can safely do so.

To ensure safety while investigations or external processes are underway, we may implement interim measures such as:

- Changes to rooms or living arrangements
- Restrictions on contact, activities or areas
- Temporary exclusion from certain activities or from the premises.

Allegations of gender-based violence and sexual misconduct will be:

- Taken seriously and acknowledged promptly
- Investigated as appropriate in a timely, impartial and trauma-informed way
- Managed in a way that minimises repeated retelling of traumatic experiences and prioritises safety and wellbeing, while upholding procedural fairness for all parties.

Decisions may be reviewed internally by college leadership and may also be subject to external review by our Board or the National Student Ombudsman, in line with national arrangements. Our actions do not replace or limit those of the police, universities, or other authorities.

We collect and report de-identified data on disclosures, reports, outcomes and prevention activities in line with national standards, contributing to sector-wide transparency and improvement.

No victimisation; acting honestly and with integrity

You must not victimise or retaliate against anyone because they:

- Make a disclosure or report of sexual misconduct or Gender-Based Violence
- Participate in a process as a witness, support person or respondent
- Support someone else to seek help or report.

Any victimisation may result in serious consequences under this policy and the Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy and Resident Code of Conduct.

You are expected to act honestly and with integrity.

Vexatious or malicious complaints—those that are knowingly false or made with the intention of harming another person or Union College—are serious breaches and may be dealt with under this policy and the Resident Code of Conduct.

Consequences and safety measures

If we determine that your conduct has breached this policy, we may implement consequences, considering:

- The seriousness of the conduct
- Any pattern of previous behaviour
- The impact on others
- Other information available to us, both via formal and informal reports
- Safety and risk considerations.

Possible consequences include, but are not limited to:

- Removal of rights or privileges (for example, access to facilities or activities, or eligibility for leadership or other positions of responsibility)
- Relocating you within the college to create physical separation and improve safety
- Reprimand or written warning, with clear expectations for future behaviour and, where appropriate, an apology to affected persons
- Education, reflective work or counselling requirements
- Conditions on continued residence or participation in activities
- Compel you to undertake further training, at your expense
- Suspension from Union College for a defined period
- Expulsion from Union College, including permanent removal from residence and loss of alumnus/alumna privileges.

For former residents, invited guests, or other visitors, consequences may include a permanent ban from Union College grounds and events.

Any action we take does not replace or prevent separate action by the police, universities or other authorities.

Support and external referrals

We encourage anyone who has experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct to seek support as early as they feel able.

The Resident Wellbeing Lead can:

- Listen and provide immediate emotional support
- Help you access counselling, medical care and other supports
- Help you consider study arrangements or safety plans (for example, room changes or adjustments).
- Help you consider the above listed courses of action.

We provide referrals for both complainants and respondents to external services, which may include:

- University counselling and wellbeing services
- Sexual assault support services
- Medical and mental health services
- Legal advice services.

If you feel unsafe at College, we recognise you may also feel unsafe in other settings (for example, on your university campus). We can support you in informing your university or other relevant organisations, if you wish.

Examples of trauma-informed, survivor-focused phrases

When responding to disclosures, we are committed to using language that:

- Centres your experience and choices
- Avoids blame or judgment
- Acknowledges the courage it takes to speak
- Is consistent with trauma-informed, victim-survivor-centred practice in the Action Plan.

Examples of phrases we might use include:

- “Thank you for telling me this. It takes a lot of courage to share something like this.”
- “I am sorry that this happened to you. You did not deserve to experience this.”
- “What you are feeling is understandable. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to feel after something like this.”
- “You are in control of what happens next. We can talk through your options, and you can choose what feels safest and most helpful for you.”
- “You are not to blame for someone else’s decision to harm you.”
- “You can stop this conversation at any time or take a break if you need to.”
- “Would you like a support person with you, or for us to move to a different space that feels more comfortable?”

- "I will keep what you have shared as private as I can. There are some situations where I may need to share information to keep you or others safe, and if that happens, I will explain what I am doing and why."
- "If and when you want to talk to police or your university, we can help you understand what that might involve and support you through the process."

These examples can be adapted to different roles and situations and will be supported by staff training and supervision to ensure consistent, sensitive practice across the College.

Review and continuous improvement

We will review this policy regularly, and sooner if:

- Laws, regulations or regulatory expectations change
- New requirements arise from the Australian Universities Accord, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence or related frameworks
- Feedback, data or experience show that improvements are needed.

Document Number: POL005
Topic: Behaviour when engaging in sexual activities, informed consent, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct
Approval Authority: Head of College & CEO
Last Approval Date: January 2026
Review Date: December 2027 (or earlier if legislation or sector expectations change)
Audience: Current and future residents, parents and carers, Union College workers and Board, key stakeholders and regulators

DISCLAIMER: Union College's policies and procedures for the prevention of and response to gender-based violence, including sexual misconduct, are designed to be consistent with and aligned with The University of Queensland's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and associated procedures, as well as UQ's broader frameworks and commitments relating to gender equality, respect, and safe, inclusive campus communities.