

Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy and Procedure HEPP60

PURPOSE

This policy describes the rules by which staff and students are expected to abide to ensure a safe, supportive and respectful environment during their work and study at Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education). The Institute is committed to ensuring a workplace and study environment free of sexual harassment, the threat of sexual assault and other offensive and illegal behaviours, including in both physical and digital environments.

OBJECTIVE

Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) will:

- create a working and learning environment that is free from sexual harassment and where all members are treated with courtesy, dignity and respect;
- promote appropriate standards of conduct at all times;
- ensure that all students and staff are made aware of their rights and the processes and channels of communication through which they may report in the event of observing or experiencing sexual harassment, including accessible and regularly updated information available via multiple platforms (e.g., Moodle, website, and induction materials);
- provide an effective complaints procedure based on principles of natural justice;
- treat all complaints in a serious, sensitive, fair, timely and confidential manner; and
- guarantee against victimisation or reprisals for reporting instances of sexual harassment.

PRINCIPLES

The Institute is committed to the following principles in addressing sexual assault and harassment:

- Zero tolerance for sexual assault and harassment.
- Trauma-informed, victim-centred responses.
- Fair, impartial, and timely procedure.
- Continuous review and improvement of policy effectiveness.
- Upholding legal obligations and human rights standards.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all students, staff and other stakeholders of the Institute, including contractors, service providers, clients and visitors who undertake activities on the Institute's premises or in any Institute-related activities, including online platforms and off-campus events. All staff and students must understand:

- behaviours that constitute sexual harassment;
- behaviours that constitute sexual assault;
- their responsibilities in the event of sexual assault or harassment;
- where to get support for victims of sexual assault or harassment; and
- to whom to report.

DEFINITIONS

Not sexual assault or harassment	Australian Human Rights Commission stresses that sexual harassment is not a behaviour that is based on mutual attraction, friendship or respect ¹ . If the interaction is consensual, welcomed and reciprocated, it is not sexual harassment or assault.
SCEI-HE	Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education)
Sexual Assault	Illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent or is inflicted upon a person who is incapable of giving consent (as because of age or physical or mental incapacity) or who places the assailant (such as a doctor) in a position of trust or authority. (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexual%20assault) The definition of sexual assault, as a criminal offence, differs between Australian state and territory legislation. Generally, sexual assault is defined as unwanted (non-consensual) sexual contact and/or penetration, according to state legislative definitions.

¹ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-justice/rights-education/tackling-sexual-harassment-resource-sheet-developing-sexual-harassment-policy>

Sexual Harassment (by the Australian Human Rights Commission)	Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual behaviour which a reasonable person would anticipate would make someone feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. It has nothing to do with mutual attraction or consensual behaviour. Examples of sexual harassment include: • staring, leering or unwelcome touching; • suggestive comments or jokes; • sexually explicit pictures or posters; • unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex; • intrusive questions about a person's private life or body; • Unwelcome sexual comments, images, or messages shared via digital platforms (e.g., email, social media, or learning management systems), including persistent unwanted contact after withdrawal of consent.
POLICY	
1. SCEI-HE takes anti-sexual assault or harassment seriously and any reports of this nature will become the subject of a thorough investigation. 2. Sexual assault or harassment has no place at SCEI-HE and no teacher or student is permitted to engage in any behaviour that can be construed as either. 3. Sexual harassment is against the law. S 3(c) of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 identifies one of the objects of the Act is "to eliminate, so far as is possible, discrimination involving sexual harassment in the workplace, in educational institutions and in other areas of public activity"². 4. Sexual assault is a criminal act under Australian law; https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justice-system/laws-and-regulation/criminal-law/victorias-new-sexual-offence-laws-an-introduction. 5. As such, SCEI-HE is compelled to report any act that can be defined as sexual assault to the Victorian Police. 6. SCEI-HE encourages active bystander intervention and provides training to equip staff and students with safe, appropriate ways to respond when witnessing incidents.	
PROCEDURE	
1. Reporting Sexual Harassment or Assault – Student Complainant 1.1 Any incident of sexual assault/harassment affecting students should be reported in the first instance to SCEI-HE Counsellors. The SCEI-HE Counsellor, who operates independently of academic and disciplinary decision-making, will provide confidential support and guidance. This will allow for questions to be asked and the incident to be clarified; at all times, discussions will remain confidential. 1.2 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will record the student's statement and counsel the student on the appropriate course of action, according to the nature of the reported offence. Students will be informed of their right to involve external authorities, including the police, at any stage. 1.3 If the incident involves a staff member, either teaching or administrative, the matter will also be referred to the Manager of Human Resources (HR), or a delegated HR Officer. The student will be informed about the process and timeframe, and kept updated throughout the investigation. 1.4 Concerns and complaints of sexual assault/harassment will be managed in accordance with the Workplace Investigations Policy and Procedure HEPP10, with a complainant and respondent being made aware of all allegations and counter-allegations under consideration and being given the opportunity to rebut information relied upon by decision makers. 1.5 The identity of the reporter will remain confidential and will not be released under any conditions unless it is required by law. 1.6 A student may be accompanied by a support person of their choice during any part of the reporting or investigative process. 1.7 At any point, a student may choose to report directly to an external agency, such as the police or Equal Opportunity Commission, without first reporting internally. 2. Reporting Sexual Harassment or Assault – Staff Complainant 2.1 Any incident of sexual assault/harassment affecting staff should be reported in the first instance to the complainant's direct line manager, who will determine if an incident has occurred. Alternatively, staff can report directly to HR or a designated contact officer to avoid perceived or actual conflicts of interest. 2.2 Concerns and complaints of sexual assault/harassment will be managed in accordance with the Workplace Investigations Policy and Procedure HEPP10, with a complainant and respondent being made aware of all	

² http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/cth/consol_act/sda1984209/s3.html

allegations and counter-allegations under consideration and being given the opportunity to rebut information relied upon by decision makers.

- 2.3 If the incident cannot be resolved by the staff member's direct line manager, to the complainant's satisfaction, then the matter will be referred to the Manager of Human Resources (HR), or a delegated HR Officer.
- 2.4 The identity of the reporter will remain confidential and will not be released under any conditions unless it is required by law.
- 2.5 Staff also retain the right to lodge complaints directly with external authorities.

3. Investigation Process

- 3.1 An Investigation Officer (IO) will be appointed by the HR Manager to investigate and report on the matter of concern. The Investigation Manager, in the case of a student complainant, will be the SCEI-HE Counsellor, unless otherwise negotiated in discussion with the HR Manager. The Investigation Officer must have no prior involvement in the matter and must declare any potential conflicts of interest.
- 3.2 In all other cases, the HR Manager will appoint the most appropriate person they see fit to conduct the investigation and this person may be appointed from either an internal or external source. The IO will be independent of the incident in question.
- 3.3 The HR Manager will base their appointment of the IO on:
 - 3.3.1 The level of seriousness of the reported misconduct;
 - 3.3.2 The impartiality of the investigator; and
 - 3.3.3 The skill, experience and availability of the investigator.
- 3.4 If the complainant is a student, then the Academic Director and the CEO will be informed of the incident.
- 3.5 Once the IO is appointed, the following investigation process will take place in a timely manner.

4. Preparation and Information Collection

- 4.1 Review any reports made and determine the most appropriate manner of investigation
- 4.2 The IO may seek further information from the complainant or other persons during the course of the investigation, ensuring at all times that the complainant's identity remains protected and confidential.
- 4.3 Obtain relevant background information, including:
 - 4.3.1 Relevant policy and procedure;
 - 4.3.2 Codes of conduct;
 - 4.3.3 Relevant legislation;
 - 4.3.4 Complaint documents and records;
 - 4.3.5 Interviewing the relevant parties, including complainant and respondent;
 - 4.3.6 Digital evidence (e.g., emails, social media posts, or learning management system interactions); and
 - 4.3.7 The IO may liaise with external organisations such as the Police, regulatory bodies or accreditation bodies depending on the exact nature of the investigation. In the event of serious offences, the IO must, in the first instance, report the matter to the HR Manager and the CEO, and advise that the matter is to be reported to the police to avoid any unintended consequences.

5. Making a Finding

- 5.1 The IO will assess all the evidence collected and consider:
 - 5.1.1 The strength and reliability of the evidence;
 - 5.1.2 Impact on the complainant and SCEI-HE;
 - 5.1.3 Wishes of the complainant;
 - 5.1.4 Policy and procedure of SCEI-HE; and
 - 5.1.5 Legal and professional considerations.
- 5.2 The IO will make a finding on the facts and the evidence gathered and considered.

6. Resolution Activities

The resolution activities will be appropriate to the matter under investigation. Resolution actions may include:

- 6.1 Counselling;
- 6.2 Mediation;
- 6.3 Disciplinary action e.g., warning;
- 6.4 Dismissal from employment;
- 6.5 Organisation communication and training to employees on relevant policy and procedure;
- 6.6 Police being notified of the incident;
- 6.7 Legal action; and
- 6.8 Restorative justice approaches, where appropriate and agreed upon by the complainant.

7. Reporting

Upon finalising a detailed investigation, the IO will be responsible for compiling a report outlining the following:

- 7.1 the allegation;
- 7.2 account of relevant information received as well as information rejected, as why rejected;
- 7.3 conclusions reached and reasons why;
- 7.4 recommendations arising from conclusions;
- 7.5 remedial action to be taken; and
- 7.6 the report should also include any transcripts, statements and/or evidence obtained in the course of the investigation.
- 7.7 A summary report on incidents and outcomes will be presented (de-identified) to the Corporate Board annually, to support institutional monitoring and improvement.

8. Protection of Complainant

- 8.1 SCEI-HE is committed to encouraging the reporting of unacceptable conduct and will ensure that any person making a report in good faith will not be penalised or personally disadvantaged as a result of their disclosure by:
 - 8.1.1 Dismissal;
 - 8.1.2 Demotion;
 - 8.1.3 Any form of harassment;
 - 8.1.4 Discrimination; or
 - 8.1.5 Current or future bias.
- 8.2 All parties involved will maintain the strictest confidentiality regarding the complainant and/or informants; they will treat the disclosure with objectivity, be trustworthy and handle the matter with diplomacy and tact.
- 8.3 Interim measures (e.g., adjusted class schedules or work arrangements, no-contact directives, temporary suspension of the respondent, or online learning options) will be implemented to protect complainants during investigations.

9. False Sexual Assault/Harassment Reports

SCEI-HE relies on the good faith and high ethical standards of its employees and stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness of this policy and procedure. False reports may lead to disciplinary action, but investigations will avoid prematurely assuming falsity to prevent discouraging genuine complaints.

10. Supportive Services

10.1 For all staff:

- 10.1.1 All staff and students will receive mandatory annual training on recognising and responding to sexual assault and harassment, including trauma-informed practices and digital safety.
- 10.1.2 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will provide mental health workshops and activities, tailored specifically to staff members, geared towards sexual assault/harassment. The SCEI-HE Counsellor will train staff on:
 1. Identifying words and actions that constitute sexual assault/harassment;
 2. Recognise and understand the nature and repercussions of sexual assault/harassment;
 3. Trauma-informed approaches to sexual harassment; and
 4. Considering the challenges that contact officers might face and how to manage these, including potential impacts on the mental health of contact officers.
- 10.1.3 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will take appropriate courses of action, according to the nature of the defence.
- 10.1.4 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will always ensure confidentiality and autonomy, unless the individual is in high risk of danger to themselves or to others.
- 10.1.5 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will share useful resources and tools to staff on how to handle mental health effects of sexual assault/harassment. These resources will be accessible at all times, to all staff.
- 10.1.6 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will have a referral system in place for all staff members who are in need of ongoing mental health support management.

10.2 For students:

- 10.2.1 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will work with students in assisting them to recognise, understand and deal with sexual assault/harassment.
- 10.2.2 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will provide ongoing emotional support to all students on a one-on-one basis.

- 10.2.3 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will assist students in creating personalised action plans and strategies to help them through their trauma.
- 10.2.4 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will share useful mental health self-management resources and tools to students, relative to sexual assault/harassment. These resources will be accessible on Moodle at all times, for all SCEI-HE students.
- 10.2.5 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will have a referral system in place for students who are in need of further, professional, external mental health care.

10.3 External Support Services:

Information on external support services (e.g., 1800RESPECT, local sexual assault services) will be prominently displayed on campus, the SCEI-HE website, and Moodle, with 24/7 contact details.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Procedure HEPP13
Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy and Procedure HEPP14
Sexual Assault and Harassment Complaint
Staff Code of Conduct Policy and Procedure HEPP27
Staff Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure HEPP11
Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedure HEPP03
Workplace Investigations Policy and Procedure HEPP10
SCEI-HE Student Orientation and Staff Induction Materials

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/protected-disclosure-act-2012>
Sex Discrimination Act 1984 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A02868/latest/text>
Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) (for staff-related complaints)
Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) and Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 (SA)

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Quality Assurance and Compliance Unit will monitor policy implementation and report annually to the Corporate Board.

The HR Manager and Academic Director will ensure staff and student training compliance.

The CEO will oversee policy enforcement and resource allocation.

DOCUMENT AND RECORD CONTROL

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