



Planning for change

A learning and development approach
for the prevention of gender-based
violence, sexual harm and harassment
at RMIT

Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

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Introduction

RMIT is committed to addressing gender-based violence (GBV), sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH), intimate partner violence (IPV), family violence (FV), and other related forms of violence and harm. This includes addressing the intersecting forms of inequality and disrespect that contribute to violence by attempting to build a culture of respect, collective care and safety.

Violence and harm is a significant issue globally and a recognised National Priority Area under [Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#) (DSS, 2022).

Current evidence tells us that those most impacted by these forms of violence and harm are all identifying women, with higher rates seen amongst First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and women with diverse abilities and neurodivergence (Our Watch, 2021). The evidence further shows that those who identify as gender and sexually diverse, including trans women and gender non-confirming people, also experience high rates of violence and harm (Hill et al., 2020).

Importantly, national and international data highlights that most people experience interpersonal and sexual violence by an identifying man, regardless of the victim-survivor's gender identity (Our Watch, 2021; ABS, 2023; Coumarelos et al., 2023).

As a dual institution, RMIT's students and staff are represented in this data, and we know that GBV and SASH have significant psychosocial impacts for students, staff, and the wider community (AHRC, 2017).

RMIT's overall current 10-year strategy, [Knowledge with Action](#), also makes clear the importance of consciously and ambitiously directing our learning and capability development towards tackling the complex challenges faced by our society and communities. The continued high prevalence of GBV, SASH and other related forms of violence and harm is one such complex challenge.

One key way that we can address this challenge is through learning and development, and making sure we plan for change. The planned learning approach summarised in this document is a critical opportunity for RMIT to build shared knowledge and inspire collective action.



Our Context

The RMIT Group is a global organisation and a dual-sector institution providing both higher education (HE) and vocational education (VE) to students across Asia and Europe, with two additional campuses in Vietnam and Spain. In Australia, [RMIT delivers](#) HE and VE across three campuses in the greater Metropolitan Melbourne area and two regional sites, in addition to online teaching and learning, and professional development for business and government clients.

Combined, RMIT Australia students and staff number around 100,000 people, with a wide diversity of backgrounds, identities and lived experiences. In short, we are a community that reflects the wider society and world in which we live, learn and create.

Like many Australian universities, RMIT has teams for both preventing and responding to violence and harm within our community. Our response team, [Safer Community](#), provides students and staff with a range of supports associated with all forms of violence and harm, such as hate crime, discrimination, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault and other associated safety issues, both on and off campuses.

Both the GBV Prevention and Safer Community teams sit within the Operations portfolio of Health,

Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) and are responsible for delivering RMIT's [Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027](#).

It is important to note for context that violence comes in many forms, which overlap in multiple and complex ways. The key forms of violence and harms that are the focus for this document and the prevention of GBV team more broadly are:

- Gender-based violence
- Sexual harm and sexual violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment
- Intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Family violence (FV)

Note: Sexual harm is an umbrella term that covers non-consensual behaviour of a sexual nature that causes a person to feel uncomfortable, frightened, distressed, intimidated, or harmed, either physically or psychologically. Sexual harm includes behaviour that also constitutes sexual assault and sexual harassment (sometimes referred to as SASH), as well as rape.

It is also important to note that gender inequality is a recognised driver of multiple forms of violence and harm (Our Watch, 2021), which means that much of our work aligns closely with other areas of work, such as RMIT's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access team and their current [IDEA Framework](#).

How we came to this approach

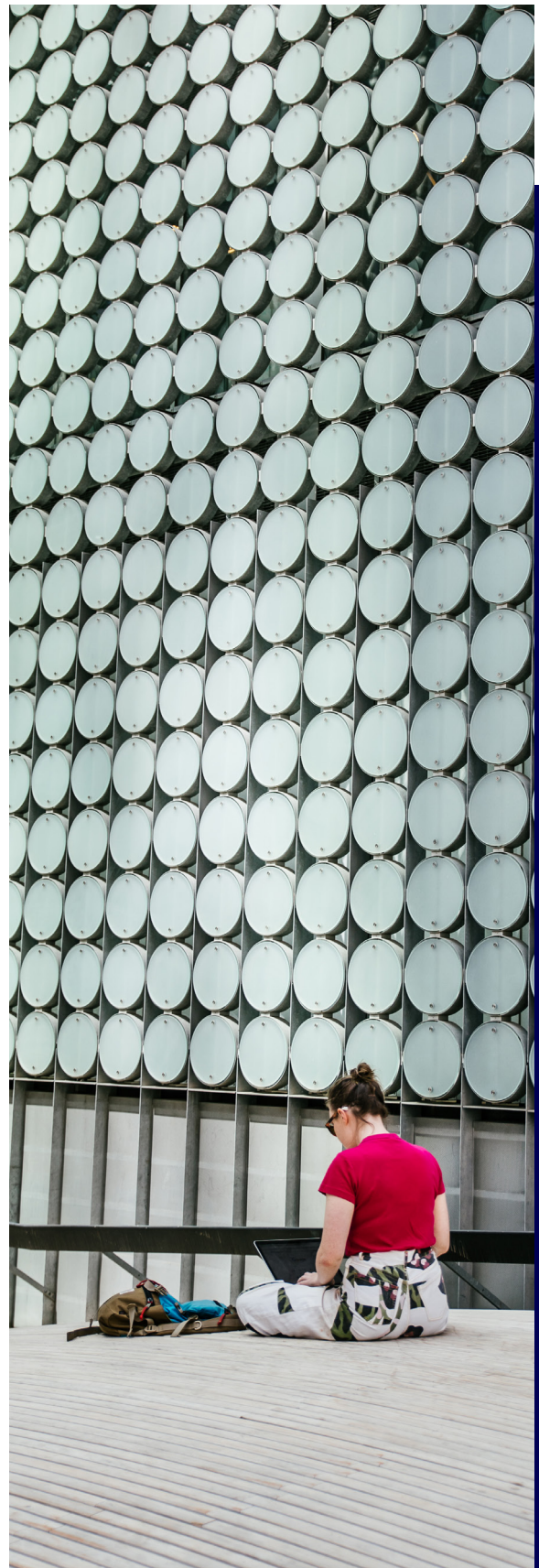
RMIT's GBV Prevention team conducted independent desktop reviews of learning and development offerings internally at RMIT, and externally through specialist prevention and response service providers. The first review was conducted in late 2021, and therefore reflected offerings available during the Covid-19 lockdowns and mobility restrictions, while the second review was completed in early 2023.

The purpose of this review was to inform the creation of a broader learning and development (L&D) plan that would guide our future workload and be reflective of our Theory of Change as outlined in our [Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027](#).

All identified trainings and programs were mapped against both the relevant compliance requirements, our internal, newly drafted Mental Wellbeing and Respect Capability Framework and its three core respect capabilities (see below) and the [Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027](#). External products or programs that did not align with the Mental Wellbeing and Respect Capability Framework were not included in the follow-up analysis.

External training offerings were reviewed in more detail when they met the following criteria:

- Modules or programs that had been evaluated or were evidence-based.
- Modules or programs that aligned with Our Watch's [Educating for Equality](#) and [Respect and Equality in TAFE](#) whole-of-organisation frameworks for addressing GBV among students, staff, and the wider community.
- Modules or programs that demonstrated best practice (e.g., blended learning) and that had potential to be engaging and accessible for RMIT students and staff.
- Recommendations were formulated based on the stated legislative and compliance requirements, national reports and frameworks, and published evidence reviews and evaluations of practice evidence (e.g., Hooker et al., 2020; Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020).



What guides us

A number of best practice elements were identified by the GBV Prevention team as part of the broader L&D gaps analysis and review process. These best practice elements have been translated into guiding principles to support all efforts of the larger L&D approach, outlined below.

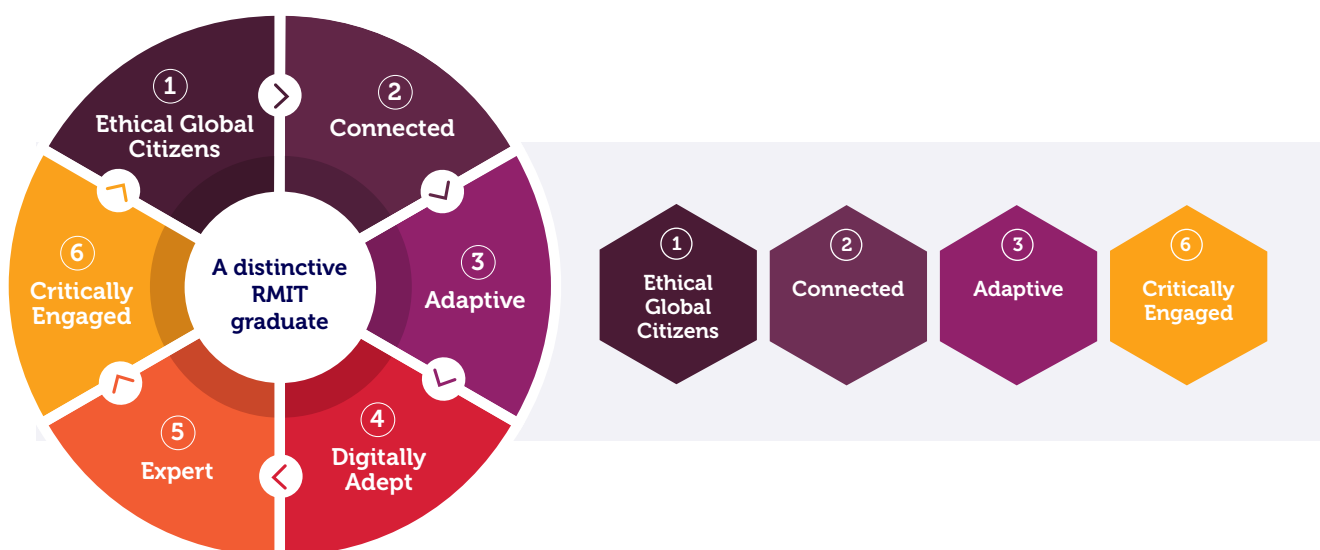
All student- and staff-facing offerings developed should be:

- Grounded in relevant theory (e.g., feminist and gender theory, intersectionality, systems thinking, social justice), evidence-based and evidence-building (built on what works, acknowledging what doesn't), and aligned to established legal and practice frameworks for preventing violence (broadly and in the HE and VE setting).
- Reflective of health promotion, community development, and gender and social transformative models, messaging and practices that challenge outdated stereotypes and norms.
- Trauma-informed and informed by a culture of collective care, health and safety for everybody.
- Identity and culturally safe, appropriate and responsive.
- Tailored, relevant, and inclusive by design for all target audiences, including English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and accessible language frameworks.
- Informed by understandings of adolescent development, adult education and community education.
- Where appropriate/possible, supported through strong partnerships, co-design and collective change.

What aligns us

RMIT's [Education Plan to 2025: Learning through Life and Work](#), aims to prepare students and staff to step into industry and their workplace ready to solve real problems with a critical and practical approach.

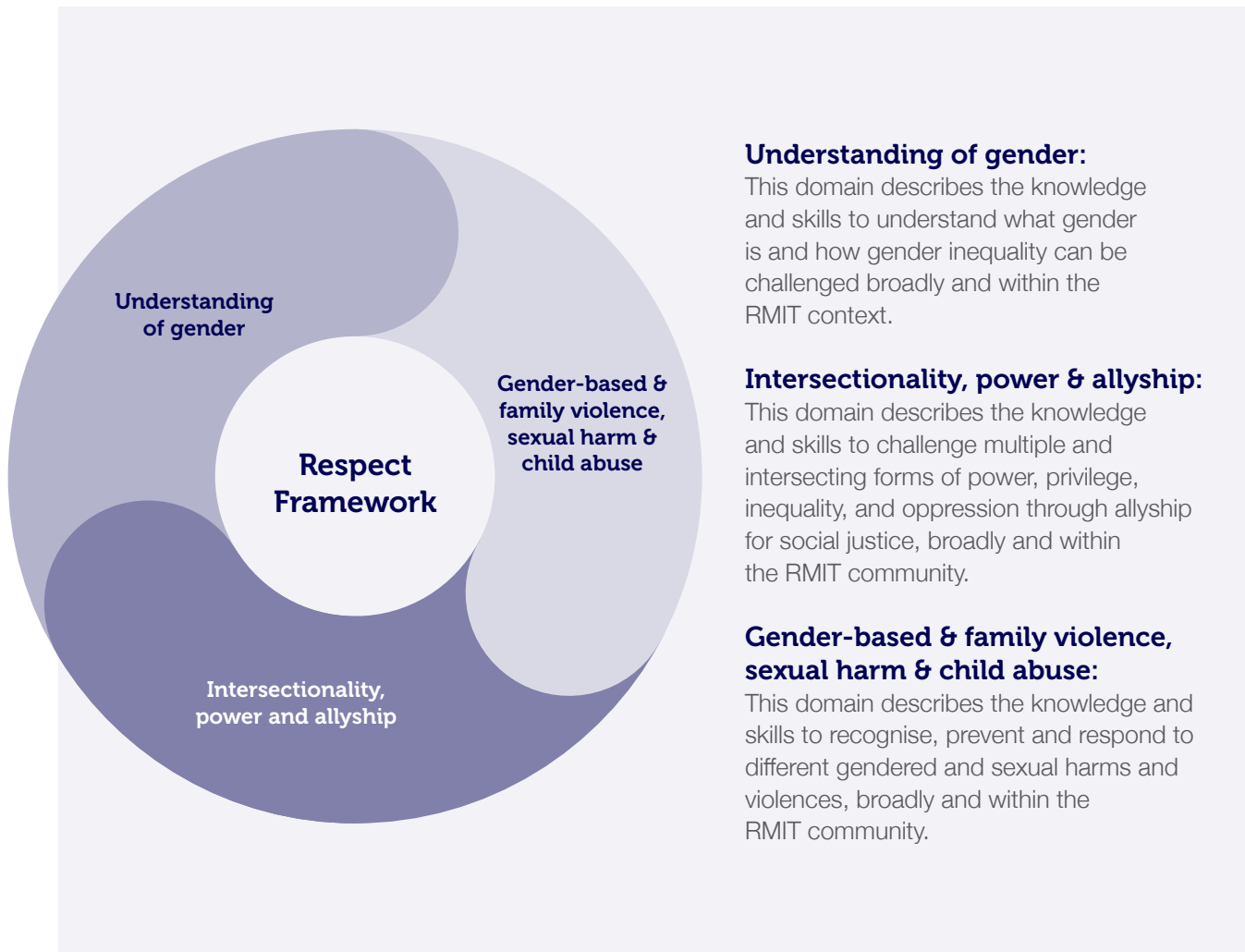
Across RMIT, the Capabilities set out in the Education Plan are intended to direct curriculum development and alignment of work and life skills, regardless of discipline or delivery platform. Ethical Global Citizens, Connected, Adaptive, and Critically Engaged were chosen as the most appropriate fit to guide our overall work.



Further to the larger overall curriculum alignment is the creation of the Mental Wellbeing and Respect (MWR) Capability Framework which has been developed internally by the prevention team and the broader RMIT's Health, Safety and Wellbeing department.

This framework provides the tailored foundations and scaffolding for our overall L&D approach and plan.

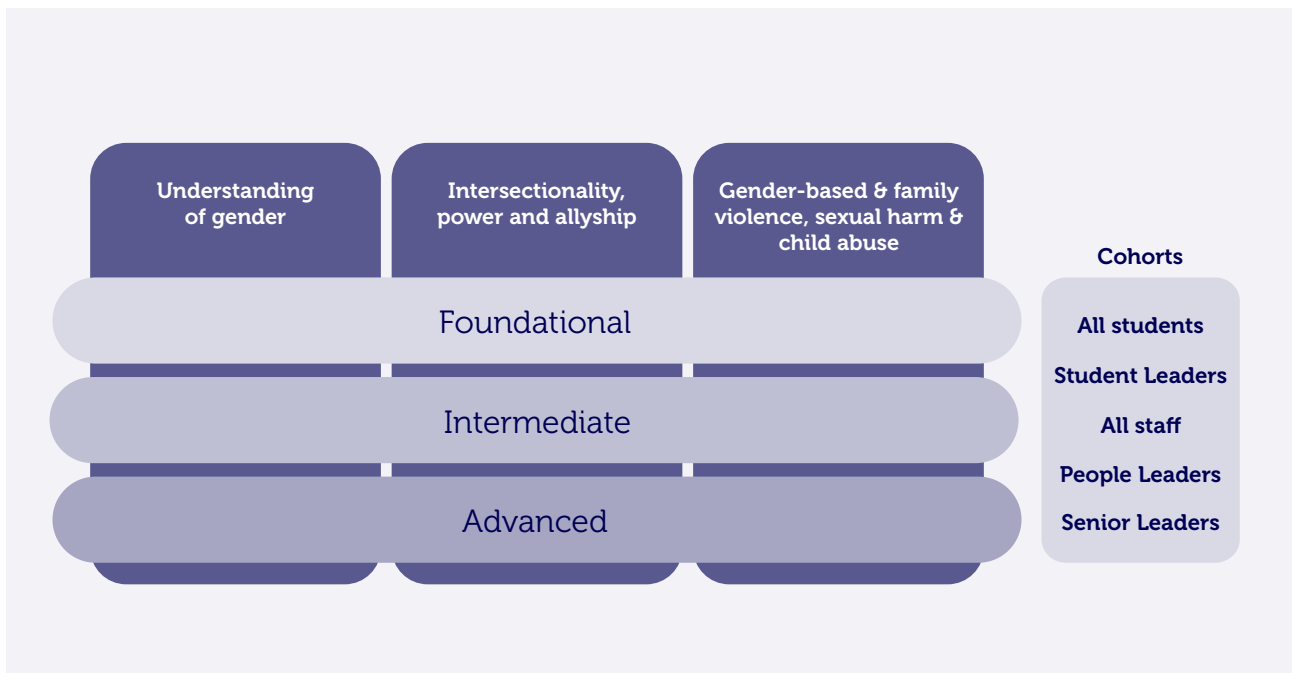
The three Respect Capabilities (listed below) for RMIT encapsulate the broader knowledge and skills required to address GBV, FV, SASH, and related forms of violence, harm and inequality over the long-term.



For each Respect domain of the MWR Capability Framework, there are competencies categorised across three levels: Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced. These competencies represent our aspirations and expectations for RMIT staff and students in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, and behaviours for creating a community of non-violence, safety, and respect for everyone.

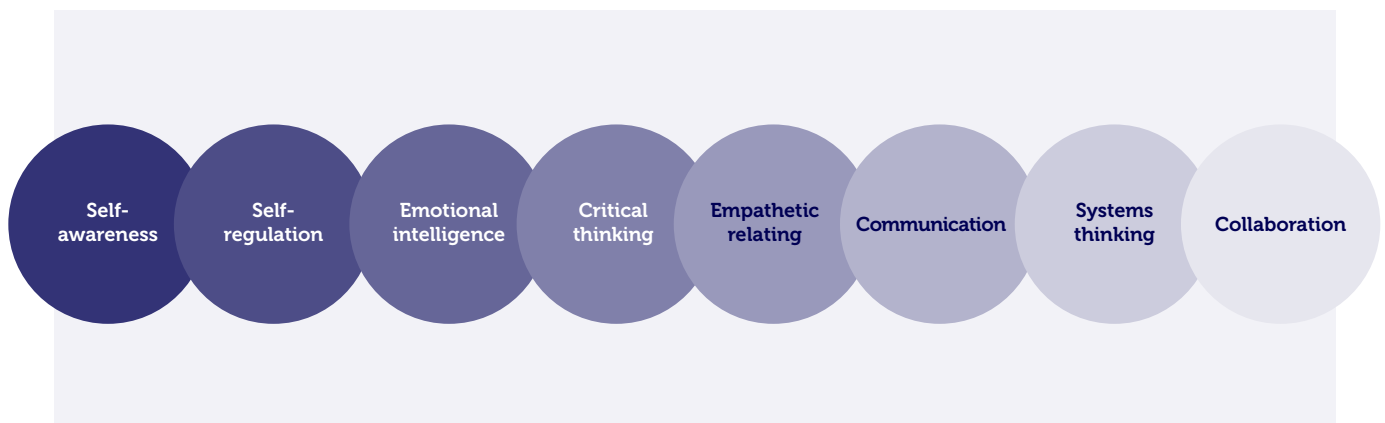
For those in positions of leadership (both staff and students), there are higher-level competencies that reflect the role modelling and contributions to systemic change expected of people with those responsibilities across RMIT.

These levels of competency are also designed to build upon each other, so that it is expected someone at the advanced level would be demonstrating the preceding key competencies at the foundational and intermediate levels.



However, we recognise that not all student leaders or staff will be starting with a comprehensive understanding of the foundational and intermediate competencies identified in the MWR Capability Framework. Therefore, a central priority with this L&D approach and plan is to establish foundational-level offerings for the core knowledge and skills of each Respect domain to support RMIT-wide capability development, and to provide the groundwork for all subsequent L&D work in this area.

Underpinning the three domains of our Respect capabilities and competencies are eight L&D capabilities that we consider to be core knowledge and skills for any work in this space:



These eight L&D capabilities are closely inter-related and also build on each other, so that strengthening capacity for self-awareness, then self-regulation, and so on, are all important precursors to strengthening capacity for systems thinking and collaboration.

Below is an example of how all the above is presented in a template to lead design and scaffolding.

EXAMPLE

Gender-based and family violence, sexual harm, and child abuse

Level	Competencies	Cohort
Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is aware of RMIT's commitments to addressing gender-based and family violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Demonstrates a capacity to engage in learning about what is, the prevalence of, patterns and impacts of gender-based and family violence, sexual harm, and child abuse in Australia. Demonstrates a capacity to engage in learning about affirmative consent, including key legal definitions and associated behaviours. Demonstrates a capacity to engage in respectful and safe relationships (intimate, sexual, or otherwise). Demonstrates a capacity to engage in learning associated with child abuse and child safety with the RMIT context and any future professional roles. Is aware of available RMIT support services (e.g., Safer Community, Security, Counselling) and reporting pathways (internal and external) for incidents of violence, sexual harm, and child abuse, for self and others. 	All students
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a capacity to actively bystand and respectfully call out violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Respectfully challenges resistance and backlash to change associated with addressing violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Collaborates with RMIT support and specialist services (e.g., GBV Prevention team) to ensure that student-facing activities, initiatives, and leadership roles are informed by RMIT's prevention and response frameworks, policies, and recommendations. Compassionately responds to and proactively supports students and colleagues who are victim-survivors or who have used violence to engage with RMIT support services (e.g., Safer Community). 	Student Leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands and adheres to RMIT's Code of Conduct, Domestic and Family Violence Procedure, Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Policy, and Child Safe Policy & Child Safe Code of Conduct, including mandatory reporting requirements. Demonstrates awareness of RMIT's policy and actions to address violence, sexual harm, and child abuse, including the <i>Addressing GBV Strategic Action Plan 2023–2027</i>. Actively co-creates a culture of safety and non-violence by normalising collective care and truth-telling, including challenging resistance and backlash. 	All staff
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes to broader systemic change (e.g., policy, procedure, practices) associated with their work area to prevent and respond to violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Inspires and leads by example by norming conversations and supporting RMIT initiatives that aim to prevent and respond to violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Proactively promotes available RMIT supports (e.g., Family Violence Leave) and specialist services (e.g., Safer Community) for both users and victim-survivors of violence, sexual harm, and child abuse. Demonstrates courage through listening to and believing victim-survivors, and respectfully addressing harmful behaviour and users of violence. Contributes to systemic change through embedding best practice policy, prevention and response systems into leadership and management commitments. 	People Leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embodies and inspires non-violence and actively leads with courage and accountability. Encourages and enables the development and implementation of policy, process, and organisational frameworks for addressing violence and harms, ensuring these are adequately resourced. Encourages and empowers staff and students to lead and contribute to RMIT and sector initiatives, research, and evaluation to address violence and harms. 	Senior Leaders

Below is an example of our L&D plan.

EXAMPLE

Focus area	Relevant MWR CF level	Detail	Potential partners	Est. budget	Est. timing	Priority
STAFF						
Sexual harassment and gender equality in the workplace – online module	Intermediate	In partnership Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission VEOHRC to adapt & provide on subscription basis a 30-min. online, self-directed module on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Ensure tailored & relevant content for specific staff groups. To be new compulsory module for all RMIT Australia staff (e.g., HE, VE, teaching, academic, professional, casual/sessional)	GBV Prevention team Safer Community Wellbeing? OD&T ITS VEOHRC (external)		Q3 – Q4	High Part of legal requirements under <i>Respect@Work</i> laws
Sexual harassment in the workplace – leadership training	Advanced	In partnership with (VEOHRC) to adapt & deliver a 2-hour in-person training on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace for People Leaders & Senior Leaders.	GBV Prevention team Safer Community OD&T VEOHRC (external)		Q3 – Q4	High Part of legal requirements under <i>Respect@Work</i> laws
STUDENTS						
Consent and respectful relationships – online module	Foundational	Co-design with student representatives and specialist services self-directed module for all RMIT Australia students, est. 20-30 min duration. To be new compulsory module for all RMIT Australia students (e.g., HE, VE, HDR, online)	GBV Prevention team RUSU Safer Community CEID ITS		Q3 – Q4	High TEQSA requirement
Permanent Canvas shell/shelf for student support services	Foundational	Establish a permanent shelf in Canvas for all students including links to key internal & external supports for HSW including Safer Community, counselling, welfare, student rights & representation, Gender Justice webpage. Add links to relevant L&D offerings once available including compulsory units.	GBV Prevention team CEID ITS		Q3 – Q4	High Part of internal communication & awareness raising
How2RMIT module	Foundational	Review How2RMIT content against current policy & update to include direct links and information to key supports & training for student HSW including new core modules. Develop new content with more tailored information for specific student cohorts (e.g., HE, VE, domestic, international, under 18). Confirm which student groups currently covered & whether compulsory.	GBV Prevention team CEID ITS		Q4	High Part of internal communication & awareness raising
CROSS-CUTTING						
Develop M&E plan to support L&D	N/A	As part of broader M&E framework for the Addressing GBV Strategic Action Plan, create a specific M&E plan to assess progress against the L&D tasks outlined in this document.	GBV Prevention team		Q3	High Aligns with GBV SAP actions & outcomes

Our L&D approach and plan are both inspirational and future-oriented, and they focus on sustainable application and broader cultural change. They intend to be flexible, responsive and adaptive based on the evolving landscape in which we operate.

Ultimately, both the L&D approach and plan are designed to be a living document and an iterative process that meet the changing needs of the RMIT community, and are reflective of our Theory of Change as outlined in our [Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027](#).

This living document will act as a guide as we attempt to co-create and embed change across our whole institution.

In closing

The above approach and plan highlight the grappling that is required to turn frameworks and evidence into action and the need for institutions to both attempt and share this process, to build on what we know works.

Throughout our own review process, at times it did feel impossible to map our findings against the current legislative and compliance context, to reflect existing evidence and best practice recommendations, and to present this information in a way that is logical and useful.

There are little to no publicly available examples of templates or processes that are contextual to the HE and VE settings, that can guide how an L&D review, plan or approach could possibly look or what might be helpful. So, we share our approach with the hope that it may support or inspire others attempting to undertake similar changes in their setting and institution and encourage others to keep sharing and improving, so we can all build on what we know works.

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