

Guide to implementing a university-wide bystander email campaign

Encouraging and empowering students and staff to be active bystanders against sexism and sexual harassment on university campuses has a positive and enduring impact. It protects and supports those targeted by the behaviour, discourages perpetrators from repeating the behaviour, and helps shape social norms around the acceptability of sexism and sexual harassment into the future.

Research trials have shown that sharing information on bystander action through university-wide emails is an easy and cost-effective way to drive an increase in bystander action on campus. This is a simple guide to implementing a university-wide email campaign.

It's also just a starting point. Every context is different and doing research to understand each new setting is always important. If you are running your own campaign, we'd love to hear about it. Get in touch with us at: [VicHealth](#) or [The Behavioural Insights Team](#).

Putting the foundations in place

Before you get started, it's important to make sure that the university has in place a good set of policies for responding to reports of sexism and sexual harassment, dealing with perpetrators, and supporting bystanders and targets. These should include:

- **Top-down organisational support** Support for tackling sexism and sexual harassment needs to be signalled from above. University leaders are important role models and can empower others to challenge sexist and sexually harassing behaviours.
- **A clear and enforced sexual harassment policy** Policies on sexism and sexual harassment should be specific about which behaviours are inappropriate, and clear about the actions bystanders can take and how their privacy will be protected. Policies also need to be consistently reinforced and understood by staff in order to be effective.
- **Key metrics used to track sexist and sexually harassing behaviours** Universities should actively collect and monitor information about sexist and sexually harassing behaviours, including self-reported and officially reported experiences, as well as differences in rates of pay, access to flexible work and parental leave entitlements, and patterns of employee retention.
- **An effective reporting and resolution process** Good reporting and resolution processes provide bystanders with tools they can use easily and safely, and ensure that all perpetrators are managed appropriately. Effective reporting and resolution processes:
 - provide clear and common descriptions of reportable behaviours
 - make it known that bystanders as well as targets can report incidents of sexism and sexual harassment
 - ensure that reports can be anonymous and that the privacy of anyone making a report is protected
 - make reporting easy and make it clear how the report will be used.

For more on how to prepare your organisation for bystander initiatives, take a look at [Take action: empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours](#).

Surveying staff and students

Begin your project by surveying staff and/or students about their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment, and about the different types of bystander action they have taken, or have intended to take, in the past. This will provide you with information about existing attitudes and behaviours so you can make the content of your emails as relevant and relatable as possible, and will generate 'social norm' data that can be used to demonstrate the group's commonly held beliefs and standards about bystander action. (It will also give you a baseline from which to measure the impact of your email campaign after it has been completed.)

The [Bystander behavioural survey tool for universities](#) has been specifically developed to provide you with the information and insights you need to run your email campaign.

What are social norms?

'Social norms' are an expression of what is widely understood to be the appropriate attitude or behaviour in a given situation. Humans are social creatures and can be strongly influenced by what they understand to be the social norms.

Plan your campaign

A five-email campaign, built on behavioural strategies and tailored to the experiences of the target audience, has been shown to drive a significant improvement in bystander action. Follow these steps to develop an email campaign for your staff and students:

- **Decide on your topics** The topics you cover should be familiar to your staff and students and relevant to what’s happening on campus. Resources like the Australian Human Rights Commission report, *Change the Course*, will give you information about sexist and sexually harassing behaviours that are common across Australian universities. Your survey will provide you with more specific information about experiences in your community.
→ We recommend that you collaborate with students and staff and make decisions together about which topics to cover.

Sample topics for an email campaign

A university-wide email campaign to promote active bystanding was trialled at the University of Melbourne in 2019. The content of those emails covered these topics:

- **Email 1** was an introduction to the series and described what sexism and sexual harassment looks like.
- **Email 2** was themed around sexist comments and jokes.
- **Email 3** was about unwanted sexual attention.
- **Email 4** was about inappropriate physical contact.
- **Email 5** was themed around inappropriate sexual communications.

- **Think about real life examples** For each of the behaviours you cover in your emails, aim to include one or two examples that specifically relate to university settings. Your survey will be a good source of examples.
→ We recommend that you collaborate with students and staff to ensure your examples are relevant and relatable.

What do sexism and sexual harassment look like on campus?

In December 2018, we carried out a survey in your faculty in which students and staff identified what sexism and sexual harassment may look like on our campus. Below are some examples of behaviours that people felt were not okay at The University of Melbourne.

WHAT’S NOT OKAY ON OUR CAMPUS?

Pestering someone to meet up or continuing uninvited sexual advances when they were clearly not interested.

Asking someone for a date when you are in a learning or work environment (e.g. lectures, tutorials, meetings).

Telling jokes that imply that members of one gender are somehow less able, less intelligent etc. than another or using sexual innuendo, insults or taunts based on gender.

Sending unwanted sexual jokes, pictures, GIFs, memes etc. to friends, other students or staff members.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

People interpret the terms sexism and sexual harassment differently, and often those who we want to target most may not know what constitutes sexism and sexual harassment. This is why we made sure to be behaviourally specific with our examples.

- **Provide specific strategies for action** Bystander action can be anything from a disapproving look to a formal report. For each of the behaviours you cover in your emails, offer some specific suggestions on things your staff and students could do or say in that situation. The publication *Take action: empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours* will provide you with information about the range of actions that bystanders can take depending on the situation and their level of confidence.
→ We recommend that you collaborate with students and staff so that the details and language you use in your examples feel authentic.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

In the moment: call out the joke or comment and let the person who made it know that it was unacceptable. You can also try asking a question, "Sorry, I don't get it, can you explain the joke?" or tell them how the joke made you feel. "Hey, what you said wasn't funny, it was demeaning to women/men and that really bothered me."

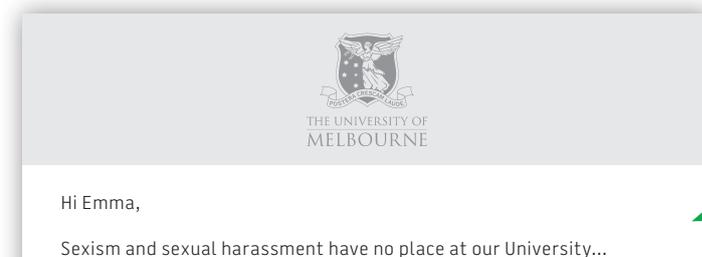
After the moment has passed: even if you didn't say in the moment, it's not too late to act. You can reach out to the person who made the joke or comment to let them know it was unacceptable. You can say something like "Hey, that joke you made really bothered me."

Click here for further suggestions on how you can take action when you witness sexual harassment.

PROVIDE THE KNOW-HOW

Often people want to act but aren't sure how to. It's important to provide people with the know-how to intervene when they see sexism and sexual harassment. Giving people specific examples reassures them that there are ways to take action against sexism and sexual harassment, both in the moment and after the moment.

- **Personalise the emails** Most email platforms allow you to address recipients by name. They can also be used to group recipients according to other characteristics, for example whether they are staff or students, which campus they use most frequently, and which faculty they belong to. Tailoring the content of your emails to these characteristics will make the emails feel more personal, more relevant and more engaging.
→ We recommend that you collaborate with students and staff to decide on the most useful groupings for your audiences.



PERSONALISATION

Personalising communications increases the salience of the message, and the likelihood that someone will read the content.

- **Select a messenger** Emails should ideally be sent from someone the recipient will view as credible and influential. That person could be someone senior in the administration, a faculty head, the respect taskforce or committee or a student leader.
→ We recommend that you collaborate with students and staff to determine the right messenger for each of your target audiences.

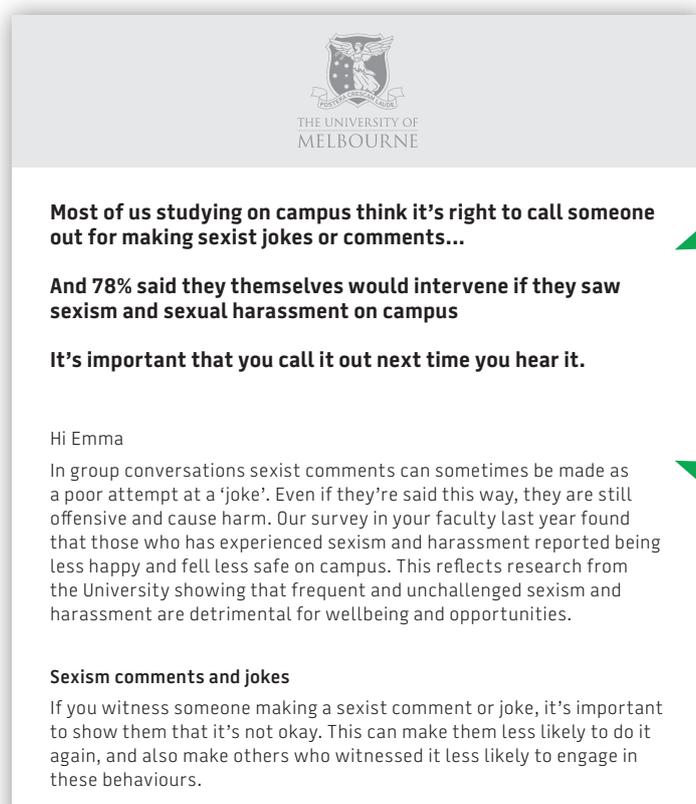
SENT FROM A CREDIBLE MESSENGER

The messenger of the information is critical, as people are more likely to read the message if it comes from someone with authority. These emails were sent from an individual within the recipient's faculty. We chose this messenger because they were:

- An authoritative source
- Relevant to the recipient, making the email more personal.

Thank you
[Faculty Contact's Name]

- **Highlight the social norms** Make social norm messaging a feature of each of your emails. Social norms demonstrating that most people think it's right to take action against sexism and sexual harassment, and that they themselves would take action, can be powerful influencers. Where possible, tailor the social norms to ensure they are relevant to the person receiving the email, for example students should be presented with social norms held by other students, and staff should be presented with social norms held by other staff members. Your survey will provide you with social norm data.



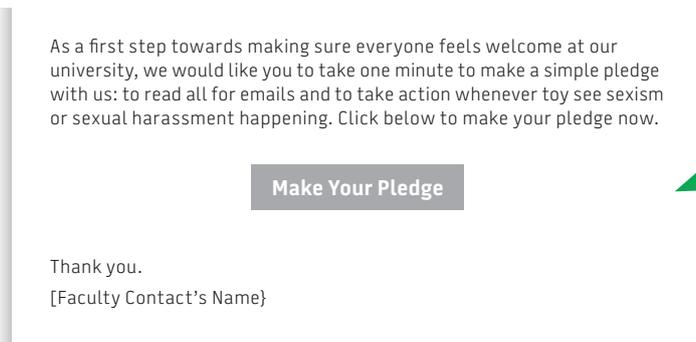
USE THE POWER OF SOCIAL NORMS
 Social norms communicate how one is expected to behave in a given situation. People are more likely to engage in behaviours that they think most other people already do or approved of.

MAKE THE NORMS RELEVANT
 The social norms need to be:

- Accurate (the norm information was derived from surveys conducted with students and staff at the university)
- Relevant to the individual (students received norm information about other students, staff received information about other staff).

In one of the research trials, the social norms messaging above was shown to have a significant impact on how participants thought about bystander action, and subsequently acted in response to incidents of sexism and sexual harassment. We have outlined some other behavioural strategies below that could also be used in your campaign to encourage bystander action.

- **Ask for a pledge** Good intentions don't always translate into actions, but securing a commitment can help. In your first email, ask participants to commit to reading all the emails in the campaign. In trials, participants who made this early pledge were also more likely to commit to a subsequent plan of action, like the one described below.



FOOT IN THE DOOR TECHNIQUE
 Good intentions don't always translate into action. We asked students and staff to make a small commitment to read each email we sent. This increased the likelihood that they would make a larger commitment four weeks later – an implementation plan for taking bystander action.

- **Conduct a quick poll** People are more likely to make small changes than big ones. In your first email, include a simple poll to assess your participants' current level of readiness to take bystander action. The results of this poll can be used to group participants so that, in future emails, they receive content tailored to their level of readiness, with examples and recommendations that feel relevant and achievable to them.

Quick Poll

If you heard someone making a sexist joke on campus, how would you react?
Click on the response you would be most likely to make below:

- Not say anything
- Not laugh to show I didn't approve
- Let the person know that making those kind of jokes isn't appropriate

SHORT SURVEY

People are most likely to make small changes to their behaviour than large ones. By embedding a survey question into the email, we could gauge how much people already acted. This then allowed us to provide personalised advice to each person in following emails.

- **Prompt a plan** Encouraging staff and students to develop a detailed plan for their own future active bystandering can help ensure that intentions are translated into actions. Towards the end of the campaign, ask participants to make an 'Implementation-Intention Plan'. The plan should include specific details about situations they might encounter, actions they would take, and how they would deal with any obstacles they might encounter.

IMPLEMENTATION-INTENTIONS PLANNING

Intentions don't always translate into action. Creating a detailed plan for achieving a goal is called 'implementation-intention' and can be a particularly effective way to encourage individuals to change their behaviour. In emails 3 and 4, we asked people to make an implementation-intention plan to call out sexist behaviour when they see it.

Thanks to the thousands of you who made a pledge. We have one more request...

Research shows that with a plan in place, you're more likely to take action when you see sexism happening. Last week, staff and students on campus made their plan on how they can take action next time they witness sexism or sexual harassment. Click below to create your plan now.

[Make Your Plan](#)

Make a Plan

With a plan in place, you're more likely to take action when you see sexism happening. Create one below and we'll email it to you so you don't forget it. This can either be something you've witnessed or heard about recently, or it can be a plan for the next time something like this happens.

Please read through the following questions, and then take some time to write your responses below.

1. **What is a sexist or sexually harassing behaviour that you would like to take action against?**
(Eg. A friend repeatedly asking someone for a date, despite the other person being uninterested)
2. **What action will you take against it?**
(Eg. I'll ask the friend why they think the person is interested in then, and challenge this thinking, and tell them they are being inappropriate)
3. **Write down an obstacle that might prevent you from taking action when you see this behaviour happening.**
(Eg. If I freeze up I will send the friend a text message or Facebook message later, when I've had time to write out a)

Your plan:

1. **The behaviour you will take action against**

2. **The Action you will take**

3. **A potential obstacle that might prevent action**

4. **Your 'If... Then...' plan to overcome obstacles**

Your University of Melbourne email address

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IMPLEMENTATION-INTENTIONS PLANNING

A detailed implementation-intention plan includes concrete details about the situation, method, and specific details by which an individual will execute a goal. The "if... then..." formulation is designed to help a person plan in advance for specific obstacles or situations, and deal with them more effectively when they arise.

Evaluate your campaign

New bystander initiatives should be trialed on a small scale and evaluated to see if they genuinely increase bystander action before being rolled out across campus.

The *Bystander Behavioural Survey Tool for Universities* you used to prepare for your email campaign has been built so that it can be repeated after the campaign to evaluate the campaign's impact. It will allow you to measure how the intention to intervene has changed, but importantly it will also measure whether it has changed the behaviour of participants, making them more likely to act when they witness incidents of sexism and sexual harassment.

Randomised Controlled Trials: the gold standard

Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT) are considered the gold standard for evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention. They involve the use of a randomly assigned control group so that you can compare the performance of an intervention against what would have happened if there had been no intervention at all. For example, it's just possible that over the period of your email campaign, attitudes and behaviours right across campus shift as a result of other factors such as a spike in media coverage of sexism and sexual harassment, or the introduction of a new policy at the university, or a piece of legislation in state or federal government.

Evaluating the attitudes and behaviours of staff and students involved in the campaign before emails begin and after the campaign has finished will help you evaluate the performance of the intervention. However, your results will be even more robust if you compare people who participated in the intervention against a control group of people who did not. It is important that your randomly assigned control group and the group participating in the email campaign have a comparable make-up in terms of gender, faculty-membership, staff or student status and other relevant factors.



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