

JOINT STATEMENT

All university students deserve a safe environment in which to learn and to lay the best possible foundations for their future careers and lives.

But for too many students, the vast majority of which are women, sexual violence will have a devastating and ongoing impact that limits their ability to complete the tertiary education they want and deserve.

A student affected by sexual assault will not only have their life and studies interrupted by the immediate medical and psychological needs that arise from this crime, they may also face lengthy police and court processes, and financial costs associated with dealing with the incident. They are also likely to experience ongoing impacts that will limit their capacity to maintain their academic performance. Without appropriate response and support, these ongoing impacts can be so untenable that a student affected feels forced to delay or drop out of their studies entirely.

After decades of student and survivor led advocacy, and years of media reporting shining a light on these serious and systemic problems, last year's Australian Human Rights Commission national student survey finally confirmed the scale of sexual violence on our campuses.

Many universities and residential colleges are now, belatedly, taking action in response to these survey results - but the depth of commitment to substantive change, and whether or not these existing commitments will deliver real improvements for student safety, remains difficult to assess.

That's why, as students return to University for 2018, Fair Agenda, End Rape on Campus Australia, the National Union of Students and The Hunting Ground Australia Project are launching a joint call for the Federal Government to establish an independent, expert led taskforce to track, assess and publicly report on university and residences' measures to prevent, and improve responses to sexual violence.

This taskforce should:

- Be comprised of independent experts in the field of sexual violence prevention (including sexual assault services and representatives from the Consortium of Sexual Assault Researchers);
- Regularly consult with student representative bodies;

- Require universities to regularly report on the measures they and their associated entities (including residences and colleges) are taking to address and prevent sexual violence - including the policies and procedures in place;
- Require universities and residences to regularly report on disciplinary measures taken against perpetrators;
- Assess whether or not university and residence policies and procedures to address and prevent sexual violence meet good practice, and if they are improving outcomes;
- Publicly report on these assessments and make public recommendations to strengthen university and residence policies and procedures;
- Publicly report on the number of complaints relating to sexual violence made to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency under the Threshold Standards, as well as their status and outcome/resolution; and
- Incorporate data from, and feed into, the next independent national survey of students.

If we are to ensure that the students who are about to attend their first classes – and those who will attend our universities in coming years – are not at risk of the same harms as previous cohorts, we need an independent, expert body that is resourced to assess outcomes in this area, and to hold universities and residences to account.

It is vital for the safety of current and future students that we ensure all universities are making substantive progress in addressing this problem as quickly as possible. Doing that requires an independent review mechanism to ensure that all policies being put in place to address this problem are good practice, and achieving their objectives.

All students deserve a safe environment to learn. For that to be possible, we must address the scourge of sexual violence on campus.

Dated 22 February 2018.