



# Recommendations for Victoria University of Wellington

From the Participants of the Sustained Restorative Dialogue on  
Understanding and Preventing Sexual Harm



## Introduction

During July 2018, the participants of the Sustained Restorative Dialogue met for four sessions in order to discuss and better understand the broader climate that gives rise to sexual harm in the campus setting and beyond and to explore possible solutions. The dialogue moved in sequential sessions through the main steps of a restorative analysis: What is happening? What are the impacts? What is needed to make things right?

In September, the group met again to continue the discussion of what is needed to make things right in our university community, based on the depth of understanding gained through the dialogue process. These recommendations are the outcome of that conversation.

## Increase Consent Education and Knowledge about Available Resources, Especially for First-Year Students

Participants expressed that there is a general lack of education about consent issues, particularly for first-year students, and limited awareness about where you can go for help if something goes wrong. One dialogue participant described the first year of university as “one big red flag” in relation to the social encounters that occur and the lack of awareness and open dialogue about these issues. The following measures were suggested in order to increase consent education and knowledge about available resources.

- Provide mandatory consent education for first-year students. Participants suggested an online consent module (like that offered by Community Law) in addition to a mandatory seminar during O Week that is honest and transparent about the issue. This education should engage with “grey zone” scenarios (perhaps the things the students were “not sure” about in their responses in the online module) to help students understand consent in different contexts. The tone should be engaging and approachable, but not skip over the difficult issues. It should be compulsory, but cool.
- Hold an event like Sex in the Hub every year at the beginning of the year, possibly right after O Week. This will communicate the message right from the beginning that the university cares about these issues and is open to talking about them. The event could be framed as “look at all the cool stuff we are doing to address this important issue and create culture change.” Dialogue participants expressed the impression that VUW doesn’t talk about the issue of sexual harm because they don’t want to acknowledge it, but said that having it acknowledged and knowing it was safe to discuss would be a relief to students.
- Provide readily available and well-advertised information about who you can talk to if something goes wrong. This could be a group of “First Aid” style contact people across the university of different genders, races, etc., who you could trust to help you. The group stressed the importance of these people being familiar faces in different spaces on campus.
- Advertise that VUW is a Restorative University and what that means. More widely distribute the Restorative University posters.
- Increase opportunities for education about sexual harm for all faculty and staff (not just those in student support roles). Participants expressed the hope that this would help address some of the small comments and behaviours that can contribute to those who have experienced sexual harm being disregarded.

## Increase Opportunities for Students to Participate in Circle Processes like the Sustained Restorative Dialogue

Participants expressed that the learning from participating in the Sustained Restorative Dialogue could not be marketed, or printed on a pamphlet; the primary learning was in the experience. In order to shift the wider culture, it would be beneficial to extend this experience, as well as the experience of circle processes more generally, to the wider university community. Several participants remarked that it is the method of communication (the circle process) that they would most like to share with others, and that needs to be experienced in order for people to understand its impact.

- Create opportunities to use the circle for dialogue and reflection throughout the year.
- Offer the Sustained Restorative Dialogue experience to more students on campus.
- Encourage the use of the circle process in other contexts (for example, as a classroom tool), so that it is a familiar way of communicating for students.
- Consistently use the circle process in the Halls to build relationships.
- Host events to discuss other major issues on campus (such as mental health) using the circle structure.
- Provide circle dialogue opportunities for students and university staff to connect so that staff has a better understanding of the student experience.
- This is a great way to get a real understanding of student perspectives (far superior to simplistic surveys).