
COMPANION PAPER

Accompanying the
Gender Equality Action Plan
2022–2025

March 2022

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Acknowledgement of Country



Victoria University acknowledges, recognises and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Bunurong/ Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land in Victoria, and the Gadigal and Guring-gai of the Eora Nation who are the traditional owners of University land in Sydney.

Gender diversity and equity has been embedded in First Nations culture for over 65,000 years. How to care for each other has been passed on throughout time, through law, culture, ceremony and language. We can learn these lessons from First Nations people today. At VU, we acknowledge this wisdom and commit to caring for Country in this way.

Responding to violence

This document is not about crisis situations or how to respond to disclosures of violence.

Please call 000 if you are in danger now.

If you need counselling or support or help to manage a disclosure of violence or to make a referral, please call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or [chat to someone online](#).

These services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Purpose

This **Companion Paper** (Paper) accompanies the Victoria University (VU) **Gender Equality Action Plan** (Plan). It details supplementary information to demonstrate how VU have met the legislative requirements for developing a gender equality action plan. It establishes the strategic evidence-based case for change, which underpin our approach for progressing inclusivity at VU.

This Paper is published alongside the Plan by the **Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector** (Commission) and VU. It also serves as an internal technical report to support implementation of the Plan. A revised **Companion Paper** will accompany each review of the Plan to reflect emerging knowledge and practice.

Overview

We are in an era of rapid change and shifting paradigms. At VU we know the world we want, and we know the time is here and now. We boldly embrace our leadership role as a dual sector institution bringing about sustainable and just equity for all.

We made an explicit commitment to progressive inclusivity in our **Strategic Plan 2022–2028: Start Well Finish Brilliantly**. To achieve this commitment, we have established a framework of interconnected streams that respond to inclusivity and justice in all forms.

The **Gender Equality Action Plan** and **Companion Paper** set out our commitment to normalising gender equity. An equality of rights, opportunities, responsibilities and outcomes between persons of all genders. To progress gender equity, it is essential our work explicitly occurs across the (oppression and privilege) junctions between gender **and**, race, culture, ability, sexuality, class and First Nations justice. This Paper explains our intersectional approach.

This Paper provides analysis of the baseline data and evidence we have used to determine what action to take right now. We have stated that **‘We are proudly progressive. We care – and we act’**. This tenet aligns perfectly with the gender equality and pay equity principles of the **Victorian Gender Equality Act** (Act). This paper details our commitment to a principles-focussed evaluation to understand how these principles are guiding our work and leading to real impacts in people’s lives.

We commit to working in solidarity with our diverse and vibrant communities across VU to progress equality and justice. The Paper provides a transparent governance, accountability, and reporting framework to do this work. We all play a role in fostering a society that is respectful, equal and free from violence.

Case for change

Normalising gender and diversity equality is a manifestation of living our core values at VU. It is a practice shaped by an ethics of care, which understands the human condition as concerned with connectedness and interdependence.

Always **Welcoming**
Ethical
Shaping the future
Together

Gender equality means upholding the rights of (all identifying) women and girls as codified in the [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#); the most comprehensive human rights instrument to protect women from discrimination and uphold our fundamental rights in all aspects of life.

Within the dominant public health paradigm in Australia, gender in-equality is recognised and evidenced as a driver of gender-based violence, often referred to ‘violence against women’.¹ VU have long been involved in primary prevention work and continue to do so. We acknowledge achieving gender equality is impossible without ending violence against (all) women and girls, and vice versa.²

Equally though, violence against First Nations women, including family violence cannot be confined within explanations of gender inequality, coercive control, and patriarchy. Rather, it stems from a legacy of colonisation, systemic racism, and the intergenerational impacts of trauma³ which must also be redressed.

In line with VU strategic commitment to prioritise **Protecting Country** in everything we do; this Plan respectfully supports the “shift [of] power from settlers to Aboriginal structures and acknowledges the salience of Aboriginal Law and Culture in creating healed communities”.⁴ We are committed to First Nations gender justice and equality.⁵

At VU we use the terminology ‘gender-based violence’⁶ because it is more inclusive of gender diverse people and makes space to challenge binary framing, which centres and privileges cisgender experiences and binary models of sex and gender. It makes visible and so allows us to address heteronormativity and cisnormativity as intersectional drivers of violence.⁷ All types of homophobia, transphobia or sexual identity discrimination are forms of gender discrimination and gender inequality.

At VU we reject essentialist approaches which assume all people fall into one of two distinct genders (woman or man). We use the term ‘women’, to include cis, trans and all people identifying as women. We recognise both VU and internal and external data sets and studies have not always adequately or safely supported people to disclose their gender identity, sex characteristics and sexuality.⁸ However, there is a growing body of important literature responding to this gap. We commit to building this evidence, research, and practice at VU.

Gendered oppression and discrimination are intimately interconnected with racism, colonisation, trans, bi and homophobia, ableism, cis-sexism, faith discrimination and class. The manifold and simultaneous oppressions form to create the conditions of our lives.⁹ None of these prejudices can be effectively redressed in isolation from each other.

An intersectional approach allows us to consider the collection of factors that affect a social individual **in combination**, rather than considering each factor in isolation. Our intersecting

and overlapping lived experiences and identities create different modes of oppression and privilege. These may be both empowering and oppressive.¹⁰

Intersectionality offers an analytical framework to explicitly demonstrate and purposefully respond to the structural, political, and representational aspects of gender inequality in the workplace and society.¹¹ It is a lens to critique society’s systems and structures, such as health, education, social security, immigration, and legal and justice systems which routinely privilege some over others.¹²

Therefore, and in line with the Act, the Plan aims to move beyond reductive and isolated understandings of and approaches to progressing gender equity (or preventing gender-based violence). Rather, we embrace decolonising methodologies, the social model of disability¹³ and critical race and queer theory, alongside feminist¹⁴ and public health approaches.

Intersectionality is not a pick-up and put-down tool, it permeates all aspects of the change journey at VU as we try to respectfully see all people, all the time, as whole and multi-identified social beings with the right to self-determination, justice, respect, and equality.¹⁵

The Plan uses both ‘gender equality’ and ‘gender equity’ terminology to align with both international human rights instruments and phrasing commonly used in the Victorian context. We understand ‘gender equity’ as it refers to the process of how we get there. We use the term ‘gender equality’ in the broadest sense – to encompass fairness of access, treatment, opportunities, and outcomes. It does not imply sameness. A focus on fairness, and on just outcomes, is important because many women and gender diverse people may not have the same advantages as white cis-men, and therefore equal treatment alone may not actually be fair or just.

Strategic context

In our **Strategic Plan 2022–2028: Start Well, Finish Brilliantly** we explicitly commit ourselves to being an institution that privileges **Protecting Country**. Country encapsulates people, place, and planet. At VU, this means an Indigenous-led and community-driven movement towards long-term social, cultural, physical, and economic prosperity and sustainability.

The **Gender Equality Action Plan** is scoped within our legislative responsibilities and guided by evidence, policy, and frameworks for action.

Our legislative guide

Context	Legislation	Frameworks for action
International	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDA’s)

Australian	Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 Sex Discrimination and Fair Work (Respect at Work) Amendment Act 2021	The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their children 2022-2032 Change the Story Changing the Picture Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)
Victorian	The Gender Equality Act 2020 The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 The Family Violence Act 2008 The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006	Everybody Matters: Inclusion & Equity Statement Free From Violence Safe & Strong Delk Dja Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan
Victoria University	VU Enterprise Agreement 2019 VU Vocational Teacher Enterprise Agreement 2019	Strategic Plan 2022–2028: Start Well, Finish Brilliantly Operational Plan & Budget People Scorecard Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy

The Plan builds upon the VU **Gender Equity Strategy 2017–2021** and seeks to enhance existing work across the university including the **Gender Affirmation Guide, Building Respectful Futures Together: 2020-2023** the **LGBTIQ+ Gender and Diversity Strategy** and **Cultural Inclusion and Racial Justice Plan** (in development).

Principles focussed approach

At VU, a principles-led culture, is given life through our people, policies, and practices. Our emerging change theory draws from Our Watch,¹⁶ sector research,¹⁷ the socio-ecological model of health,¹⁸ the RESPECT framework,¹⁹ and Pride in Prevention.²⁰ We acknowledge the logic underpinning the Plan is culture-specific and not universal.

At VU we are driving complex, long term social transformation through inter-related, mutually re-enforcing ways of working.

- ◆ We respect First Nations First and act in solidarity with self-determined, distinctive, strengths-based community-led solutions focussing on decolonising processes
- ◆ We work together and as active allies alongside each other and all our VU communities to 'build a movement' to achieve intersectional gender equality

- ◆ Our VU leaders lead and are accountable for the work and we are all, each equally responsible and accountable for our sphere of influence
- ◆ We interrogate, reflect on, and respond to the drivers of inequality, discrimination, and oppression to support truth telling and bring about change
- ◆ We use a variety of co-created strategies to generate momentum across all parts of VU, including at the levels of individual employees and students, VU as a whole community and the university in its role as an institution
- ◆ We commit to a long term, enterprise wide, diversity and equity program with activities that reinforce each other
- ◆ Our teaching and our research underpin this progressive approach. This is not a series of policies which will gather dust on a shelf.

The gender equality principles

VU have considered the gender equality principles and importantly intersectional inequality, when preparing the Plan. While the legislation applies the noun 'Victorians' to the group of people the Act concerns, the VU Plan is inclusive of all our staff, students and community regardless of whether they identify as a 'Victorian' or otherwise.

The principles as outlined in Part 1 (6) of the Act are:

- ◆ All Victorians should live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness
- ◆ Gender equality benefits all Victorians regardless of gender
- ◆ All Victorians should live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness
- ◆ Gender equality benefits all Victorians regardless of gender
- ◆ Gender equality is a human right and precondition to social justice
- ◆ Gender equality brings significant economic, social and health benefits for Victoria
- ◆ Gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls
- ◆ Advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the Victorian community
- ◆ All human beings, regardless of gender, should be free to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives without being limited by gender stereotypes, gender roles or prejudices
- ◆ Gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes
- ◆ Women have historically experienced discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of sex and gender
- ◆ Special measures may be necessary to achieve gender equality.

The pay equity principles

VU have considered the pay equity principles when developing the objectives and actions within the Plan. These principles were developed by the **Equal Workplace Advisory Council** for the purposes of section 10(1)(c) within the Act, and form part of the Amendment Regulations 2021 inserted under 5A of the Act, and which came into effect February 2022.

- ◆ Equal pay for work of equal or comparable value;
- ◆ Employment and pay practices are free from bias and discrimination;
- ◆ Employment and pay practices, pay rates and systems are transparent and information about these matters is readily accessible and understandable;
- ◆ Employment and pay practices recognise and account for different patterns of labour force participation by employees who undertake unpaid or caring work;
- ◆ Interventions and solutions are collectively developed and agreed to, sustainable and enduring;
- ◆ Employees, employee representatives and employers work collaboratively to achieve mutually agreed outcomes.

VU strategic principles

Our **Strategic Plan 2022–2028: Start Well, Finish Brilliantly** states core principles to guide our trajectory at VU. These include:

- ◆ We are a partnering institution – we cannot do it alone
- ◆ We honour Indigenous cultures and our roots in Greater Western Melbourne
- ◆ We are the university of inclusion, opportunity and success – enriching both lives and careers
- ◆ We are revolutionising tertiary education through the VU block model and using the power of our dual sector capabilities
- ◆ We are resourceful, creative, adaptive and excellent in all our learning and teaching and research
- ◆ We are digital learning leaders
- ◆ We commit ourselves to working for the health and sustainability of our planet
- ◆ We are proudly progressive. We care – and we act.

Building our story

Data helps us understand where change is needed and what is changing over time. Collecting and reporting the VU **Workplace Gender Audit** data has informed the **Gender Equality Action Plan**, including what actions to take and which measures may indicate impact.

We acknowledge though, our current data management system does not accurately capture the complexity of our identities, including race and culture, gender diversity, sexuality, faith diversity and diverse neuro-types and abilities. As such, the data can unconsciously silence the way some of us make sense of our world and know about our workplace. We have

further work to do, understanding who and why, and accordingly how to improve staff experiences. Relying on only (some) quantitative data, also further limits the stories heard, intersectional action taken.

VU vibrant and varied communities are the dynamic, interconnected expert/ participant/ recipients of this work. We are therefore committed to seeking evidence through mixed-method VU data sets, triangulated with practice wisdom, and lived experience. Re-affirming practices such as community-building and truth telling. We are respectfully building a regular reflection/action consultation practice. Upholding our intention and obligation to be transparent and accountable to each other – colleagues, students, the community, and the Commission.

Gathering evidence

We undertook an extensive **Workplace Gender Audit**²¹ and engaged the Voice Project to facilitate an all-staff **Employee Experience Survey** (the survey), in 2021. We also drew on the **Australian Workplace Equality Index** VU 2021 staff survey data. We conducted an internal desktop review of existing policies, plans,²² including the VU Strategic Plan & VU Operational Plan and Budget. These provided a baseline understanding of existing practice and performance metrics related to gender equality at VU.

We are informed by rigorous Victorian, national and international evidence, policy and frameworks for action, and our local community and sector partnerships, most notably [Preventing Violence Together: the Western Region Partnership to Prevent Violence Against Women](#).

We met and talked with staff teams and individuals and held a Challenge on **The Workshop**, to unpack and triangulate emerging findings from the data related to flexible work practices and staff with carer responsibilities.

We specifically met with networks including and representing people with lived experience to interrogate the survey findings through an intersectional lens. We wanted to raise up, respect and respond to multiple voices from our diverse communities. This is especially relevant on matters that directly impact or speak about our lives, identities, and experiences.

Leadership understanding & commitment

In 2020 the (former) Gender Equity Committee received a series of **Gender Equity Strategy** reports to support discussion of VU's intentions to meet the Act requirements.

In early 2021 a paper was presented to a VU Council Committee summarising VU's requirements under the Act effective from 31 March 2021. Verbal reports were also provided to Council regarding the Act.

Effective July 2021, the Gender Equity Specialist role was filled, to support the development of a gender equality action plan.

Between August – November 2021 the survey findings were presented to senior leadership groups and individuals. All union member staff and representatives were also invited to attend an information session held by the Commissioner to specifically talk about the gender equality action plans being developed.

Throughout 2021, the previous Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team received briefings, significantly as they relate to the Act and Plan, on the; Workplace Gender Equality Agency report, increasing the secondary parental leave provision, gender equality governance and reporting structure, workplace gender audit and Employer of Choice – gender equality citation.

Drafting the plan

We drafted a Plan which met all the requirements of the Commission. We sought advice from subject matter experts and key leadership on this draft. This led to the conceptualisation of the current **Gender Equality Action Plan** reflecting the VU style and strategic context, and this **Companion Paper** serving as a technical report, to provide further detail and required information.

All staff consultation

During February 2022, we ran a targeted consultation with all VU staff to seek feedback. This included Challenges on **The Workshop** introduced by the Vice-Chancellor, daily Global announcements, Yammer discussions and staff and networks previously engaged in the work personally emailed. The Gender Equality SharePoint page promoted a link to **The Workshop**, the full draft Plan and data. The *Gender Equality* email address was promoted as a private space to share ideas and ask questions. All staff teams, groups, networks and leaders were offered the opportunity to meet with the Plan authors for targeted conversation.

Leadership endorsement

The final draft Plan and Companion Paper were formally approved by our Vice-Chancellor's Group, 3 March 2022. Following this the papers were endorsed by VU Council, 18 March 2022 and submitted to the Commissioner through the Commission portal, 1 April 2022.

A leader's lunch is currently being planned (partnering with Our Watch) for April. VU leadership will meet and begin the implementation phase of the Plan.

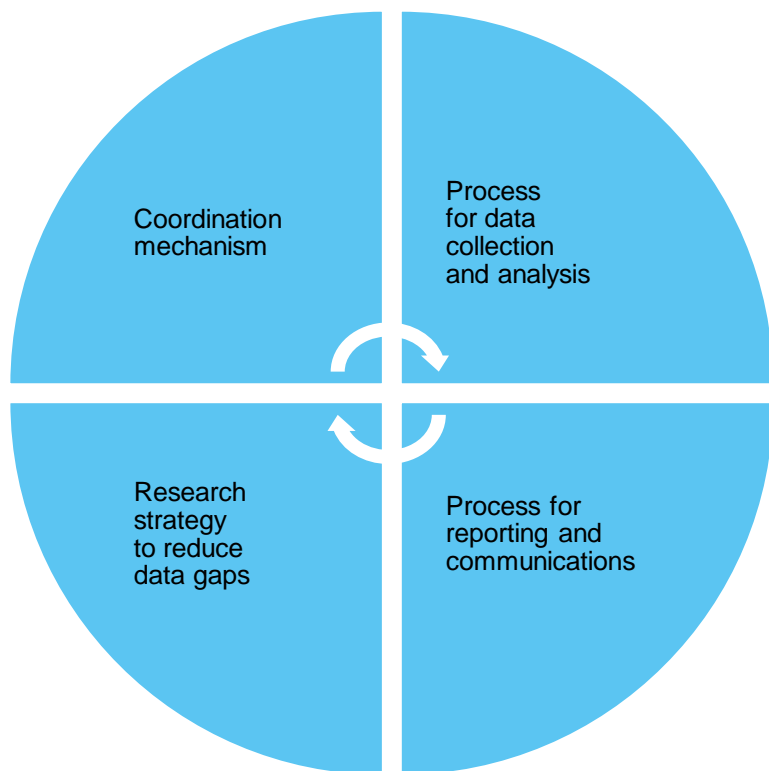
Building the evidence

We are committed to sharing stories together at VU, by:

- ◆ Ensuring transparency, accountability and data sovereignty across all aspects of knowledge generation and implementation.²³
- ◆ Conducting regular workplace gender audits using current VU data sources to collect and report data (including identity) to the Commission.
- ◆ Triangulating audits with lived experience, external data sets,²⁴ research and practice evidence.
- ◆ Building the capability of internal data collection systems and staff to collect identity data.
- ◆ Contributing to a culture of safety and belonging, to support staff to disclose (identity data) and ensure avenues are accessible and resourced to receive anonymous feedback.
- ◆ Applying and valuing multiple methods of evidence gathering and meaning making.
- ◆ Employing regular action/reflection staff consultative practices to inform the Plan implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review.

Data sets are selective stories and can only serve communities when the system for providing data is safe and beneficial and used to raise up voices and drive action. Unconscious bias can end up in data sets that intend to describe the world but in fact shape the world around false narratives and a particular lens.

We have adopted the four elements below to support us to effectively collect data, report on findings, and reduce gaps in the current body of knowledge.²⁵



Gender equality indicators

VU is committed to making reasonable and material progress in relation to the workplace gender equality indicators set out in the Act. These represent the key areas where workplace inequality persists and where VU will demonstrate progress.

VU will collect and report data against these indicators internally and to the Commission.

The workplace gender equality indicators are:

- ◆ Gender composition at all levels of the workforce
- ◆ Gender composition of governing bodies
- ◆ Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value across all levels of the workforce, irrespective of gender
- ◆ Sexual harassment in the workplace
- ◆ Recruitment and promotion practices in the workplace
- ◆ Availability and utilisation of terms, conditions and practices relating to-
 - Family violence leave; and
 - Flexible working arrangements; and working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities

◆ Gendered segregation within the workplace.

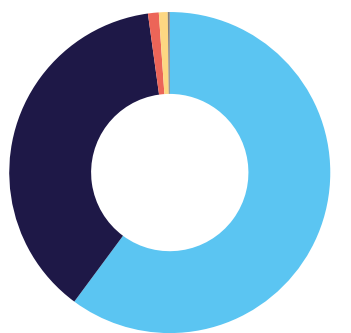
Our workplace gender audit and consultation process has provided a baseline understanding of the state and nature of gender inequality at VU in relation to the gender equality indicators. In response, we have designed 4 objectives and a set of actions, outlined in the Plan.

The following section positions a view of **What we know**²⁶ is happening at VU through the data and information we have currently, and the gaps we acknowledge.

Gender and diversity equity within all levels of our workforce

What we know

All VU Staff (2873)



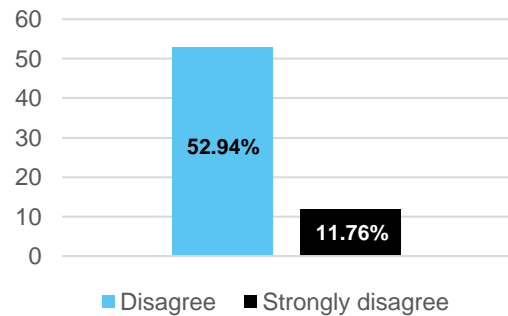
- Identified as a woman
- Identified as a man
- Identified as having a disability
- Identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Identified as gender diverse

Note: Data reflecting how staff identify culturally, is currently unavailable¹

Note: it is not always safe to disclose gender and therefore the following does not accurately reflect the full gender diversity at VU.

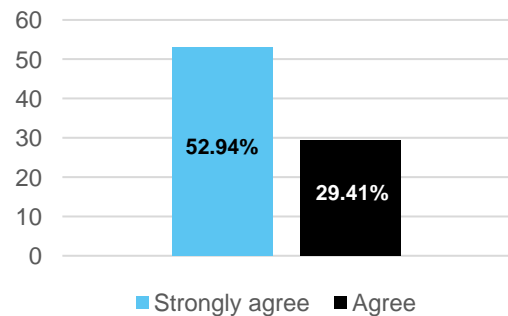
Staff response to...

'There are women of similar, or the same, identity as me who are out within senior leadership or executive positions'

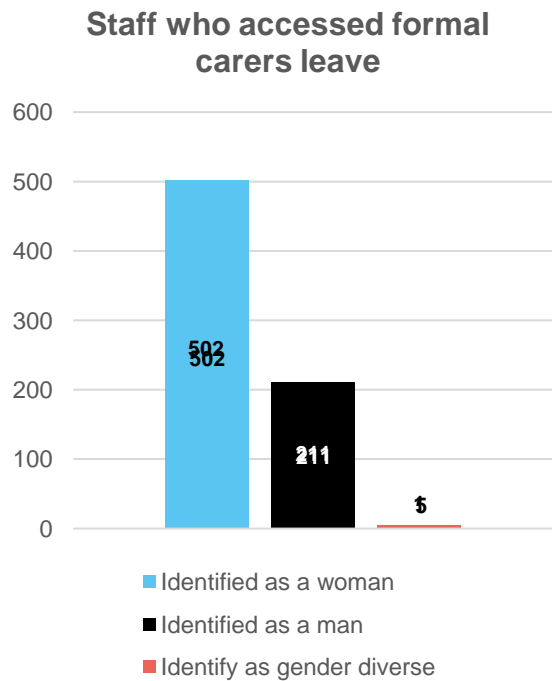
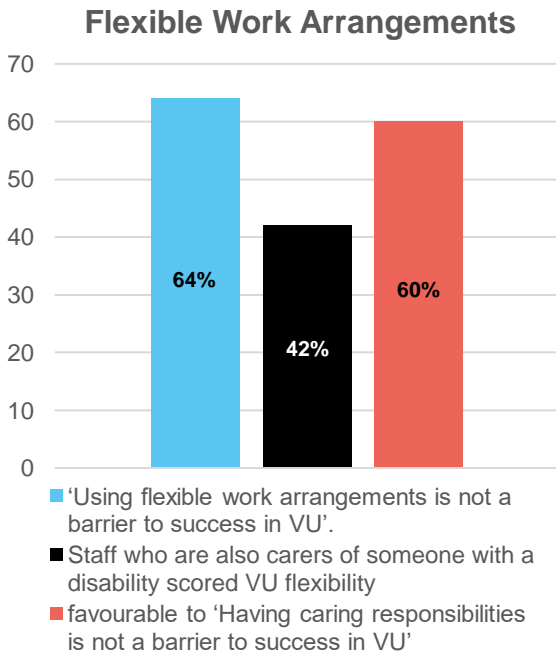
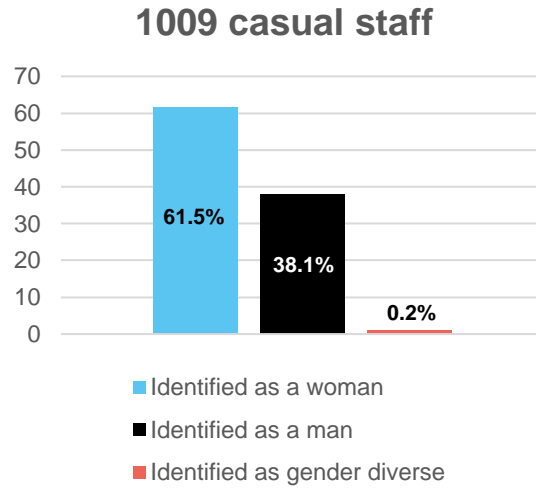
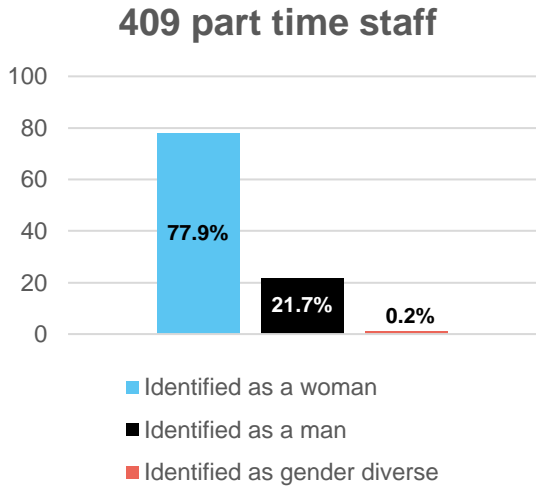


Staff response to...

'Having visible out women as role models of the same or similar identity is important to me'

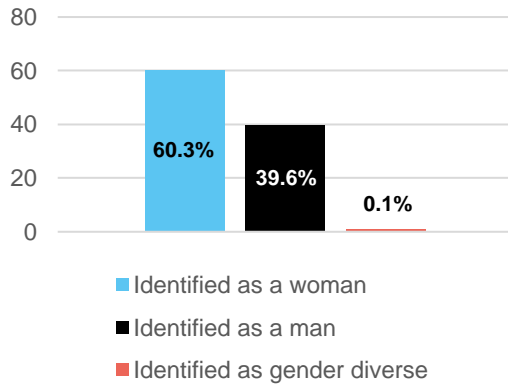


While this seemingly suggests women are well represented at VU, when we unpack the employment status of staff a gender segregated story emerges. Further data analysis is required to understand gender segregation in specific work areas within VU.

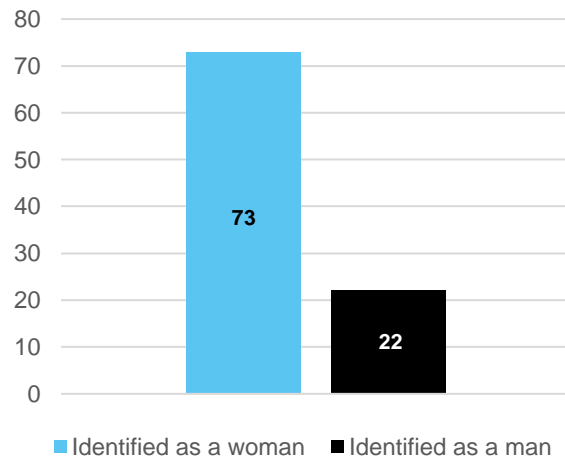


67% of men (70% of women) scored favourably to the question **'I have the flexibility I need to manage my work and non-work activities and other commitments'**.

Proportion of the FT/PT workforce using formal flexible working arrangements is 50.5%

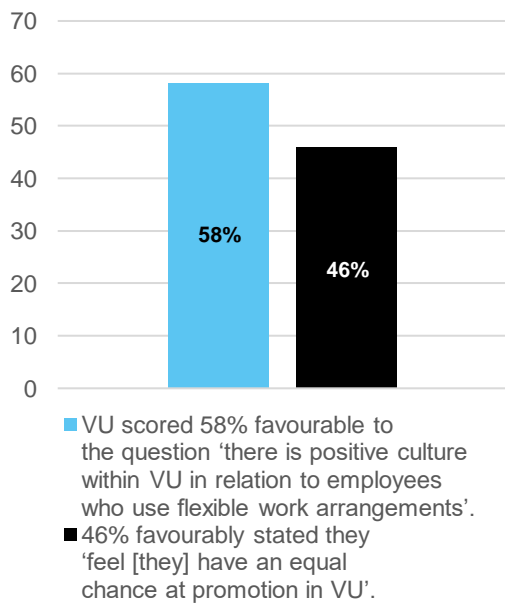


Parental leave between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

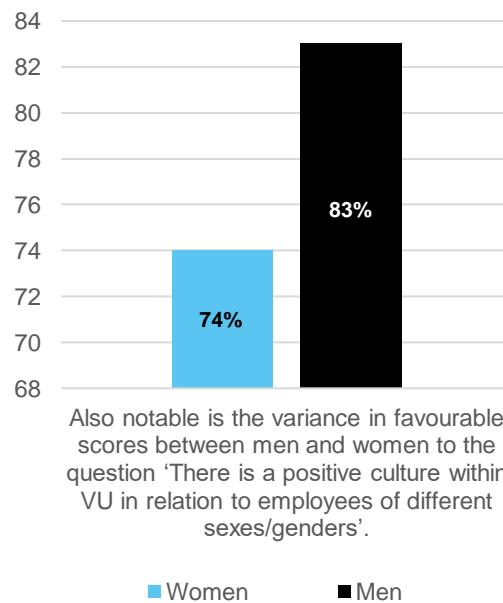


During parental leave 7 women exited the workforce, no men did.

Culture and chance at promotion results



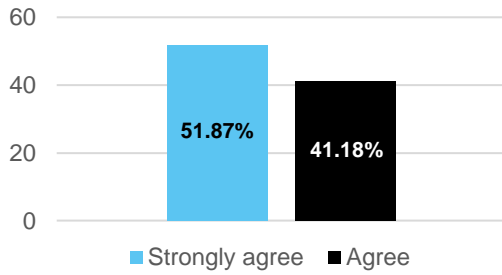
Positive culture gender results



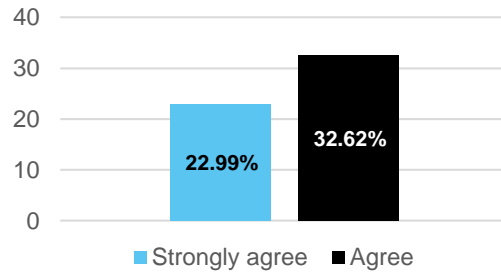
The Employee Experience Survey results

The **Australian Workplace Equality Index** staff survey 2021 results indicated that equity and diversity across the organisation is important to staff:

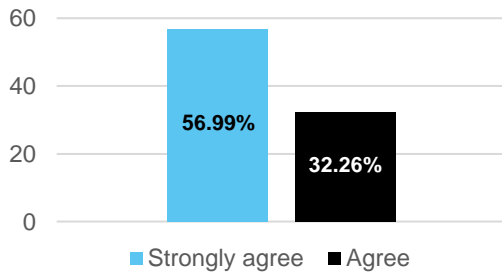
'I personally support the work my organisation does for the inclusion of employees of diverse sexuality and/or gender'.



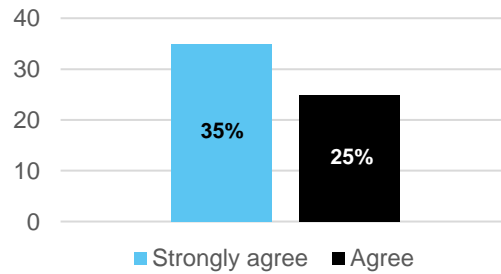
'I believe my organisation should put more effort into this aspect of diversity & inclusion'.



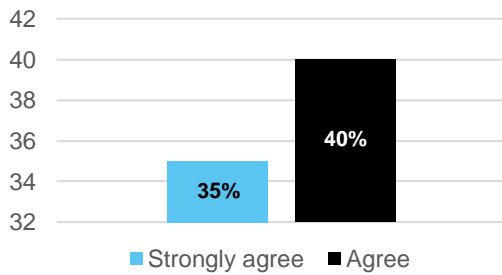
'I think it is important that employers be active in this area of diversity & inclusion'.



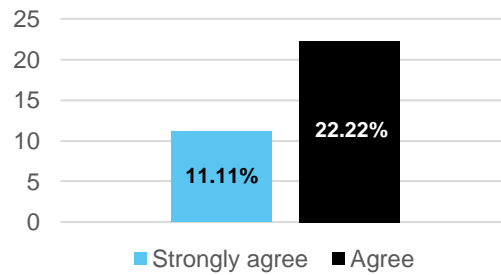
'I feel my performance is positively impacted by being out (as gender/sexuality diverse) at work'.



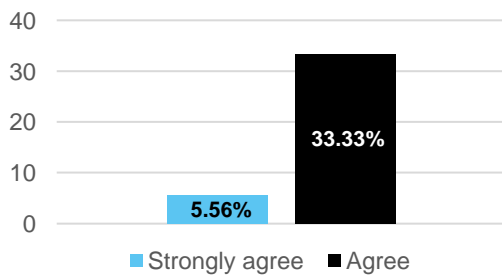
'I feel my overall engagement is positively impacted by being out at work'.



'I feel being out at work would be detrimental to my workplace experience'.



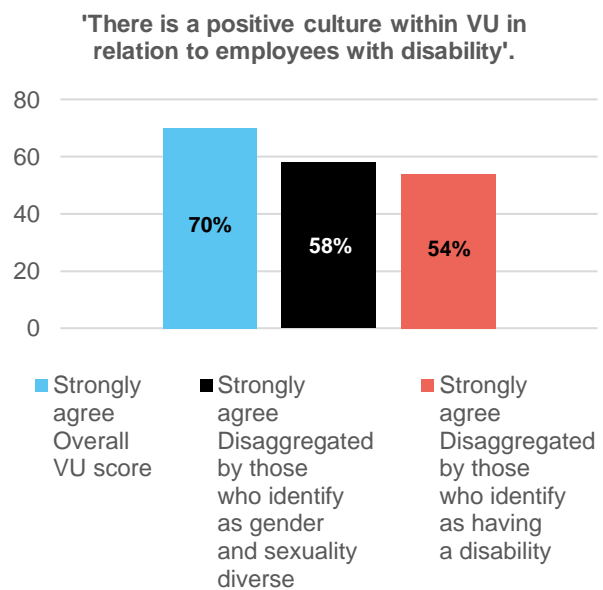
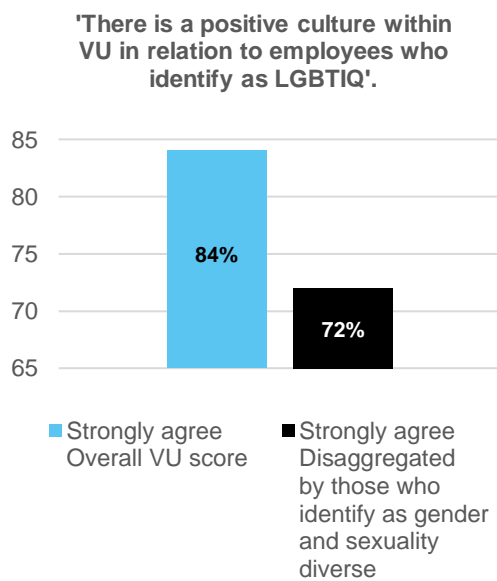
'I do not feel I would be accepted by some members of my team'.



The section of **Employee Experience Survey** questions asking about positive culture within VU, showed significant variances between overall very favourable employee responses and less favourable responses from people with lived experiences.

Questions were asked in relation to a positive culture for employees who are:

- ◆ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- ◆ from varied cultural backgrounds
- ◆ of different age groups
- ◆ identify as LGBTIQ+
- ◆ employees with disability.



Note, we cannot disaggregate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander responses because of the sample size.

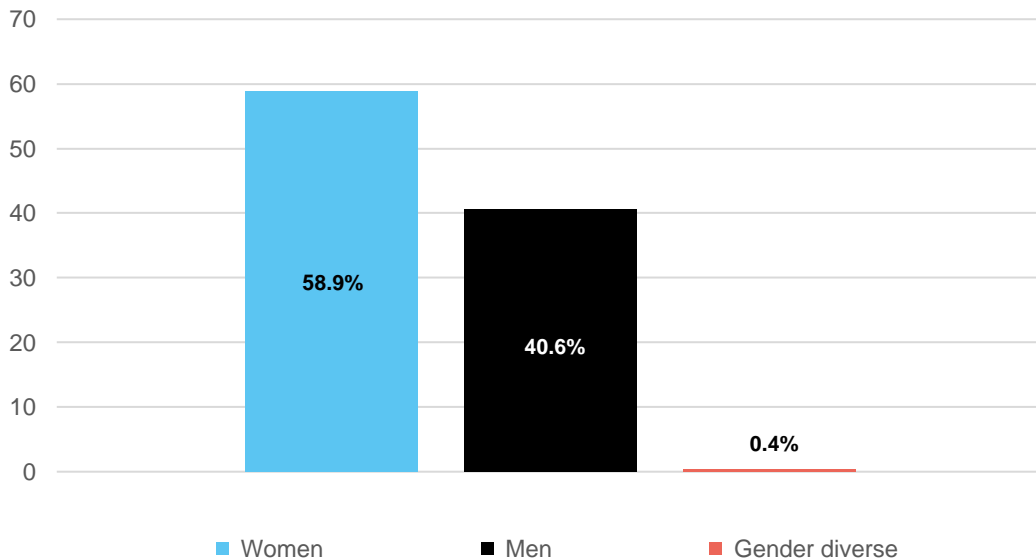
Gender and diversity equity within our leadership teams

What we know

'Women and girls have asserted that combating inequalities is fundamentally about self-determination in designing the policies and programs that respond and prevent these harms — harms which have their root causes in exclusion from the spaces of decision-making in the first instance.'²⁷

Gender breakdown of the 273 staff in leadership positions

(based on an understanding of leadership roles as less than 3 levels removed from the VC).



Note: the determination of ‘a leadership role’ is based on workplace gender audit reporting categories. At VU, who and where our ‘leaders’ sit across the organisation is more nuanced. Further bespoke analysis is needed to fully explore gender representation in leadership at VU.

While this number reflects a gender balance, only **51%** of women and gender diverse people scored VU favourably in making **‘fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit’** and only **41%** stating **‘I feel I have an equal chance at promotion in VU’**. When asked if age (61%), gender (60%) and disability (66%) are not barriers to success at VU, women and gender diverse people scored them all unfavourably (i.e., identified them as barriers).

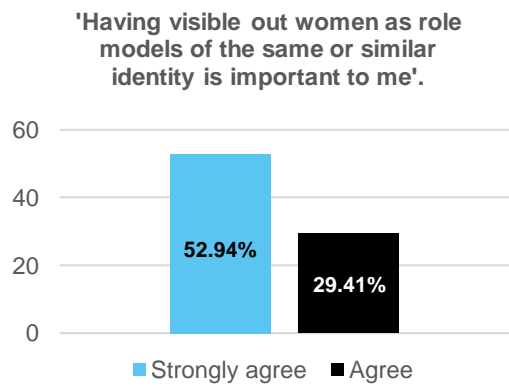
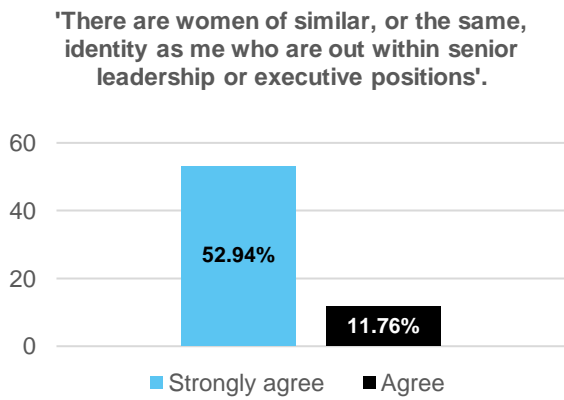
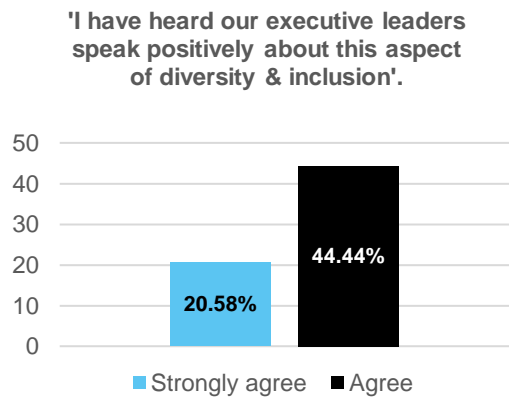
Across the entire university only 0.9% of staff identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 0.2% identify as gender diverse and 1.1% staff identify as having a disability.

Note: at VU we have only recently begun voluntarily collecting data on the cultural groups staff identify with. Data is currently unavailable. As stated elsewhere, we recognise these numbers misrepresent our staff. We expect the lived reality to be much higher.

We overwhelmingly heard in the **Employee Experience Survey** qualitative staff responses, it is essential VU **‘ensures that those employed at the most senior levels of the institution reflect the same level of diversity as that of the teaching staff and student body’**.

Unequal access to education or economic resources, or lack of control over finances or social independence, can increase the probability of gender-based violence by undermining women and gender diverse people’s participation in the public sphere, particularly in formal-decision making and civic action. This has a compounding impact because women in positions of power are more likely than men to act to secure women and gender diverse people’s freedom from violence.²⁸

The **Australian Workplace Equality Index** staff survey 2021 results indicated that being able to 'see yourself' in the leadership team is important to staff. Following are the responses to the statements:



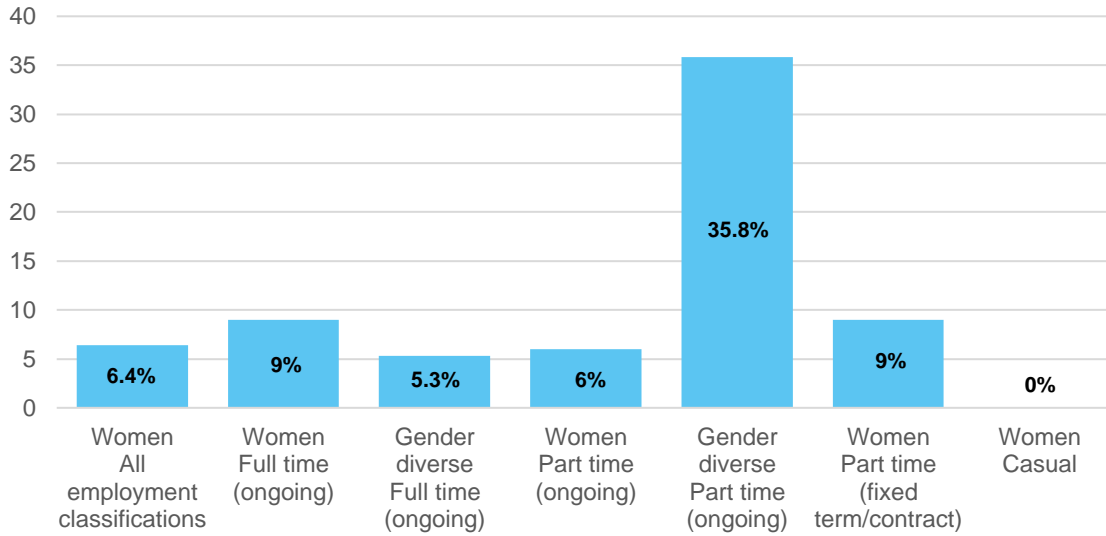
Pay equity across all levels of the workforce

What we know

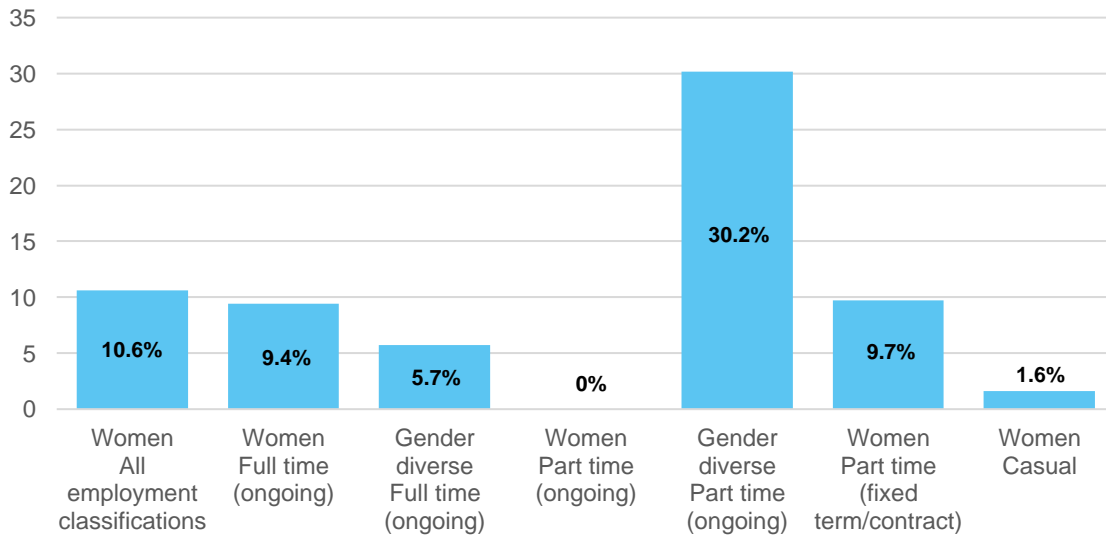
First Nations people, people from migrant or refugee backgrounds, with a disability, older people, solo parents, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are particularly vulnerable to gendered economic injustice.²⁹

When women and gender diverse people have access to more economic resources, they are better able to climb out of poverty and mitigate the risks associated with discrimination, oppression, and violence.³⁰

The median annualised base salary paygap for staff that identified as a woman or gender diverse



The median total remuneration pay gap for staff that identified as a woman or gender diverse



Redress sexual harassment in the workplace

What we know

At VU sexual assault and sexual harassment are unacceptable. VU leaders, students, staff and communities are united in their resolve to prevent these behaviours.

For work to be inclusive and beneficial to all, decent and safe work must be equally accessible to women, men, and those with diverse gender identities. Ending sexual harassment in workplace settings is a key component of achieving decent work and allowing women and gender diverse people to contribute fully to economic growth in a safe environment.³¹

Some of the groups of people most likely to experience sexual harassment or sexual assault in the wider community are the same groups that attend universities, particularly women aged between 18 and 34.³²

We know from VU's response to the **Change the Course Report**³³ in 2017 that 'only 5% of VU respondents sought support and assistance from VU after their most recent experience of sexual harassment, and even fewer made a formal complaint.'³⁴ This reluctance to report is reflected in victim/survivor surveys in Australia and internationally. Indeed, we know a too-low reporting rate suggests that people do not have sufficient confidence to make a report. At VU we have since seen an increase in students accessing counselling services, though this increase has not been matched regarding trust and access of institutional complaints systems. This experience is corroborated in the **Australian Women Against Violence Alliance; Young Women's Report** barriers to support findings.³⁵

Zero tolerance is not the same as zero incidents. Zero staff incidents *reported* does not mean zero incidents occurred.



It is important to distinguish between indicators of prevalence (the number of women experiencing violence and **reporting rates** of violence (the number of women who officially report violence). Increased rates of reporting of violence are an indicator of positive change.

Reports of incidents may increase as VU improve safeguards. Increasing reports may indicate growing awareness of sexual assault and sexual harassment and changing attitudes, with victims/survivors feeling informed, safer and more comfortable to report and VU more likely to take action. The reporting of incidents and responses is an indicator that the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment is being managed appropriately.³⁶

The Employee Experience Survey overall scores to the following safety questions saw no statistically relevant variance in the response from overall staff and disaggregating by gender:



60%

'My organisation takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination'²

These scores have dropped since 2019, where VU scored overall 85% favourable

VU are also below the external benchmark average, where all Australian universities scored an overall average of 88% favourable.

78%

'At VU, gender-based harassment and sexual harassment is not tolerated'

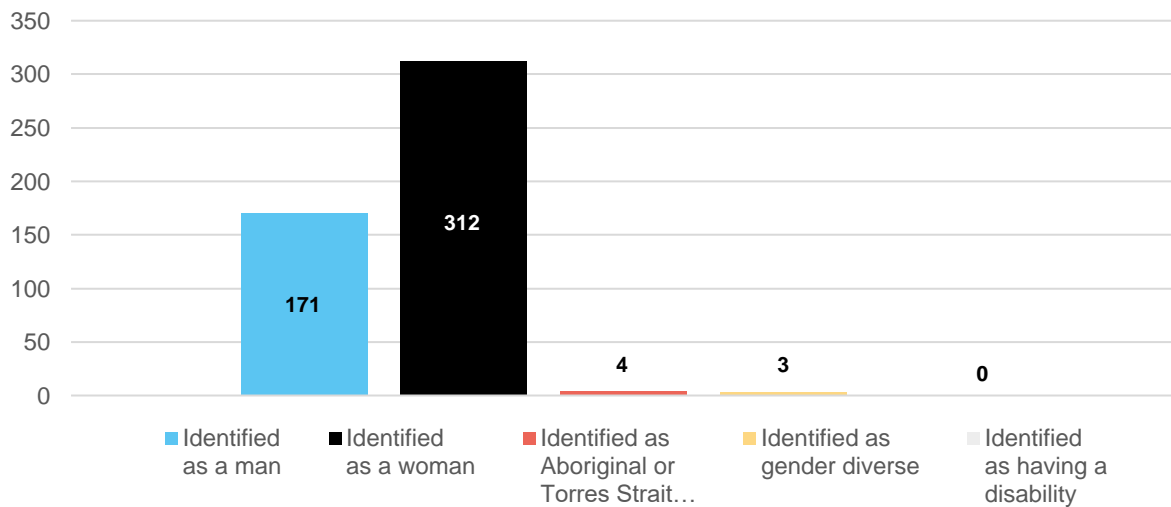
Disaggregated = 76% identified as women and gender diverse staff, and 81% identified as men.

Gender transformative recruitment & promotion practices in the workplace

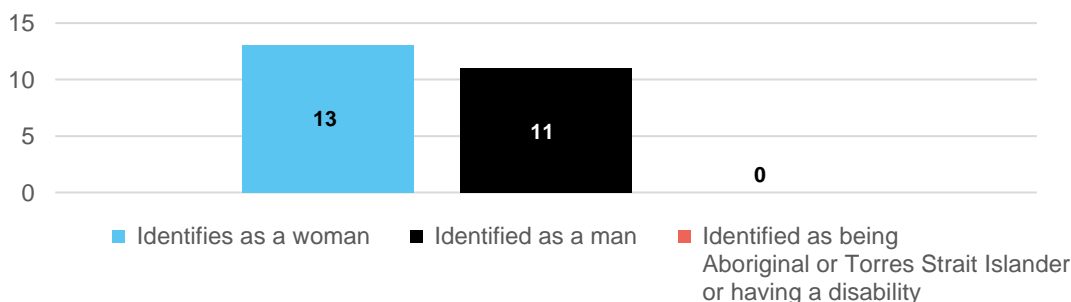
What we know

Addressing equality and creating safer spaces enables more social and economic participation and is key to achieving gender equality for all.³⁷

Staff recruited between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

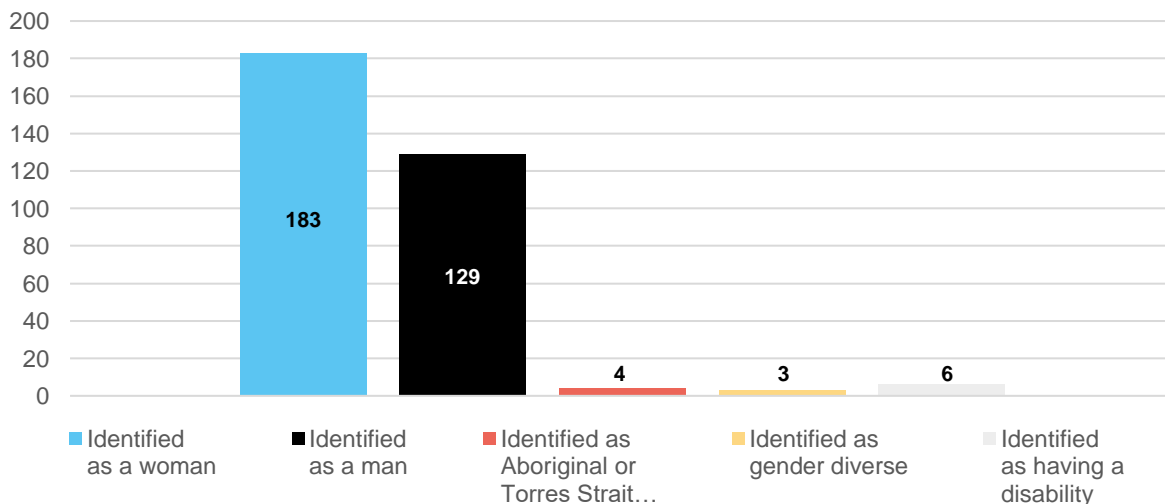


Staff given permanent promotions between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021



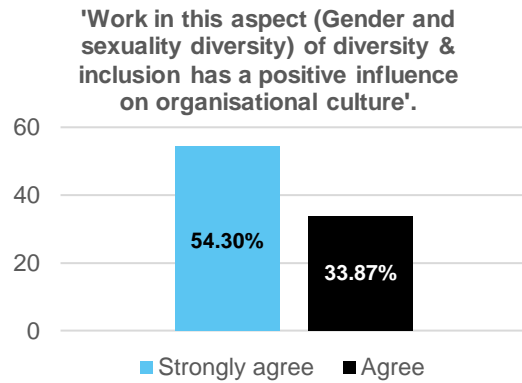
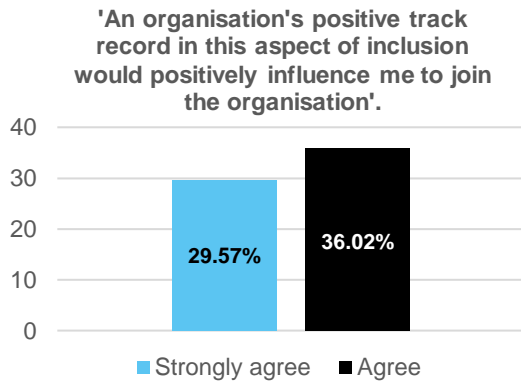
Of the 27 women and 9 men awarded an internal secondment, 1 of these employees identified having a disability and none as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Staff exits from VU between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021



<p>46% favourably stated they 'feel [they] have an equal chance at promotion in VU'.</p>	<p>56% overall responded favourably that 'there are adequate opportunities for me to develop skills and experience in VU'.</p>	<p>48% said they were 'satisfied with the way my learning and development needs have been addressed in the last 12 months'.</p>
<p>For staff with caring responsibilities this number dropped. Staff caring for someone with a disability scored 32%.</p>		
<p>Staff who preferred not to identify their culture scored this question favourably at 27%.</p>		
<p>877 women participated in formal career development training opportunities in contrast to 423 men.</p>		

Additionally, the **Australian Workplace Equality Index** staff survey 2021 results indicated:



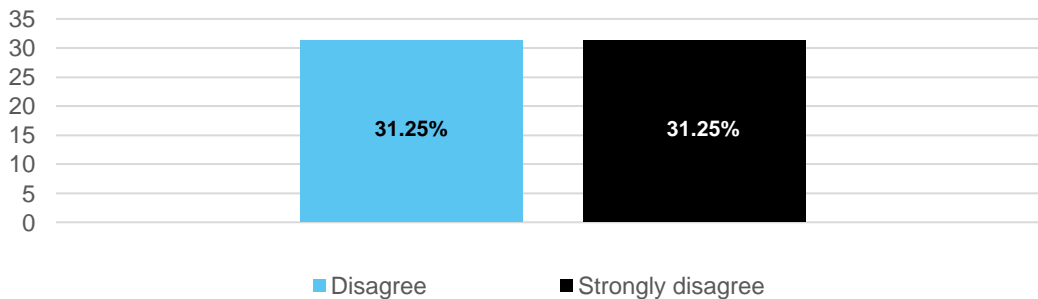
The survey asked:

'As someone of diverse sexuality and/or gender, how has your employer met your expectations concerning the following workplace practices?'

Communication of inclusion initiatives for sexuality and gender diverse employees during the recruitment process.

34.1% did not meet expectations.

'I disclosed my gender diversity during the application process'.



Supportive culture, conditions & practices for all genders staff to access leave & flexible working arrangements

What we know

86% overall favourable said **'VU would support me if I needed to take family violence leave'**.

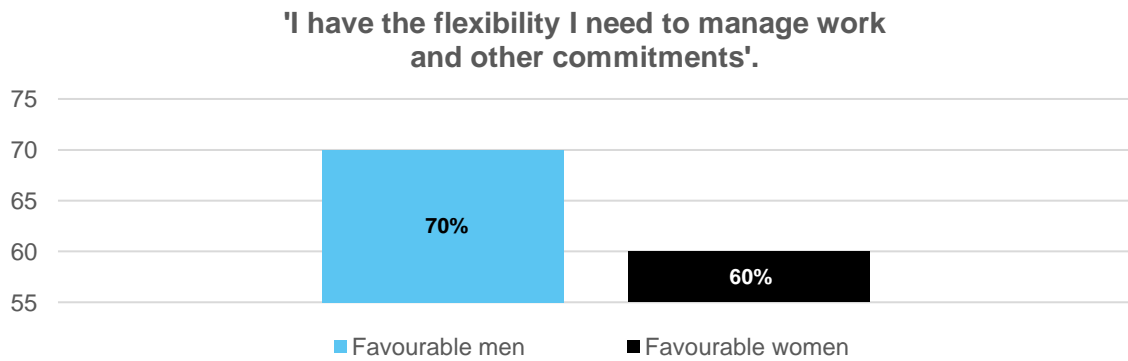
Note: This was the most favourable scoring in the survey across all staff cohorts.

This is significant since we know that family and domestic violence 'spills over to the workplace',³⁸ significantly impacting on women's health, safety, and economic security. For victim/survivors of family violence, employment is critical, providing an important source of economic and physical safety.³⁹ Thus, family violence is increasingly recognised as a workplace gender equality issue.⁴⁰

Between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021 4 staff used this leave at VU.

66% of overall staff (and disaggregated by women and gender diverse people) said **'VU supports employees with family or other caring responsibilities, regardless of gender'**, however this drops to 60% favourable to **'Having caring responsibilities is not a barrier to success in VU'**.

<p>69% of all staff scored favourably to say 'I am confident that if I requested a flexible work arrangement, it would be given due consideration'.</p>	<p>58% of all staff scored favourably to say that 'There is a positive culture within VU in relation to employees who use flexible work arrangements.'</p>	<p>64% of all staff scored favourably to say that 'Using flexible work arrangements is not a barrier to success in VU'.</p>
<p>Staff who are also carers of someone with a disability scored VU flexibility at 42%.</p>		
<p>502 women, 211 men and 1 gender diverse person accessed formal carers leave at VU.</p>		

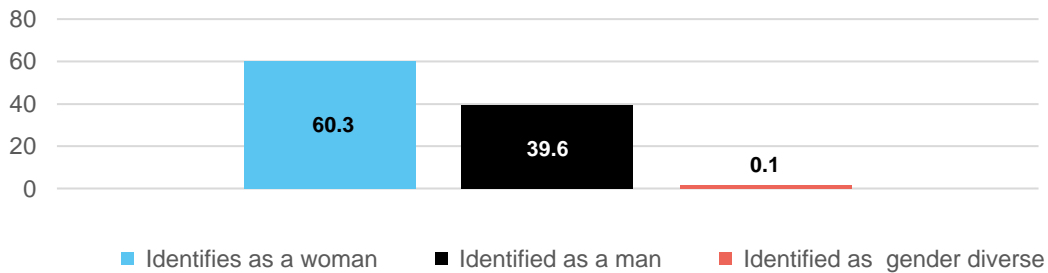


This variance is significant and specific actions and metrics are being developed to increase opportunity and culture for men to manage work and other commitments.

In the **Wiyi Yani U Thangani report**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls spoke of the immense value and importance of the caring labour they perform, and their desire for 'a holistic approach that recognises and values the work they do for society.'⁴¹ Importantly it also acknowledges many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are carers and are **more likely to be unpaid** than non-First Nations carers.

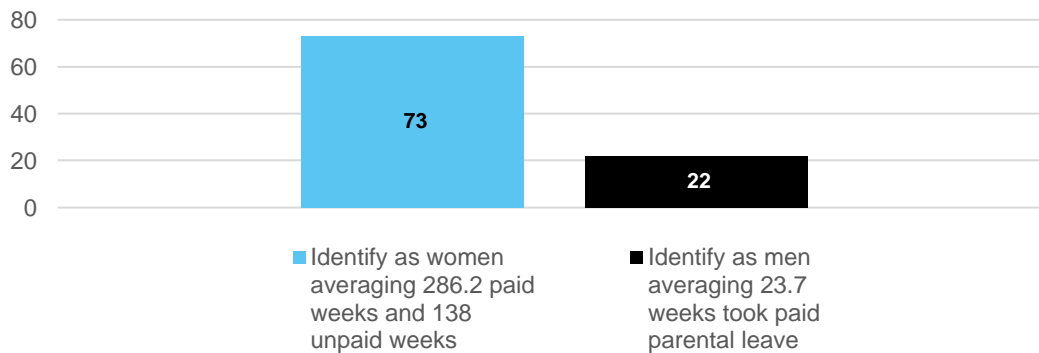
Proportion of the FT/PT workforce using formal flexible working arrangements is 50.5%

NOTE: this includes the COVID hybrid arrangement



Parental leave between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

Note: No gender diverse people used this leave.
During parental leave 7 women exited the workforce, no men did.



All genders integration within our workplace

What we know

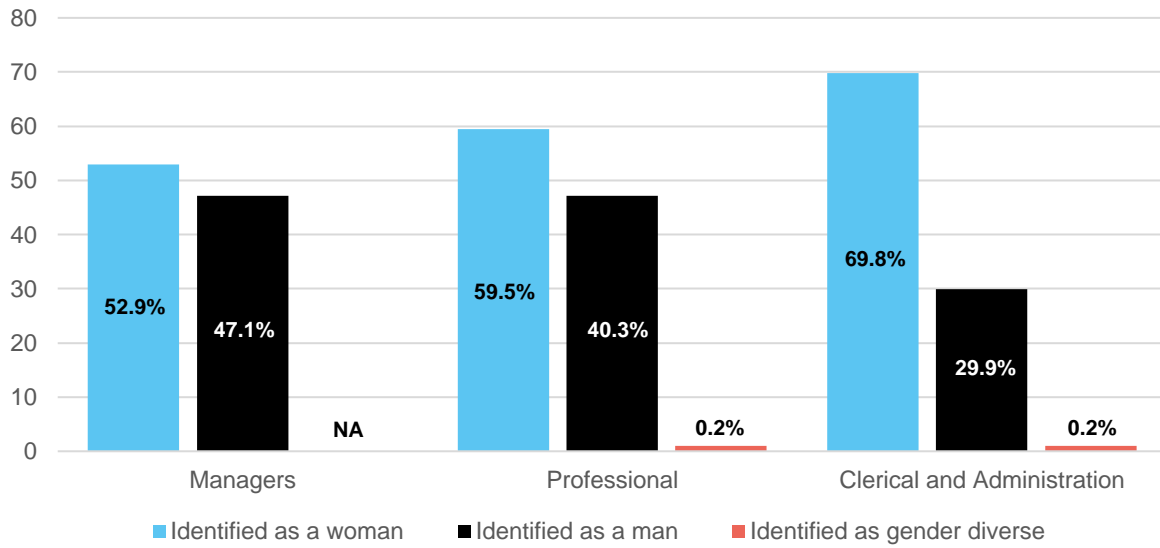
The UN Sustainable Development Goals tell us, strengthening and promoting peaceful, strong, and inclusive institutions, providing access to justice for all, and working collaboratively with civil society are key to ensuring gender-based violence is no longer perpetrated with impunity.⁴²

Significantly higher levels of violence against women are consistently found in societies, communities, and relationships where traditional and hierarchical interpretations of gender roles and responsibilities exist.⁴³ Rigid constructions of, and a strong belief in, gendered personal identities and distinct characteristics or what it means to be ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ are key drivers of gendered violence.

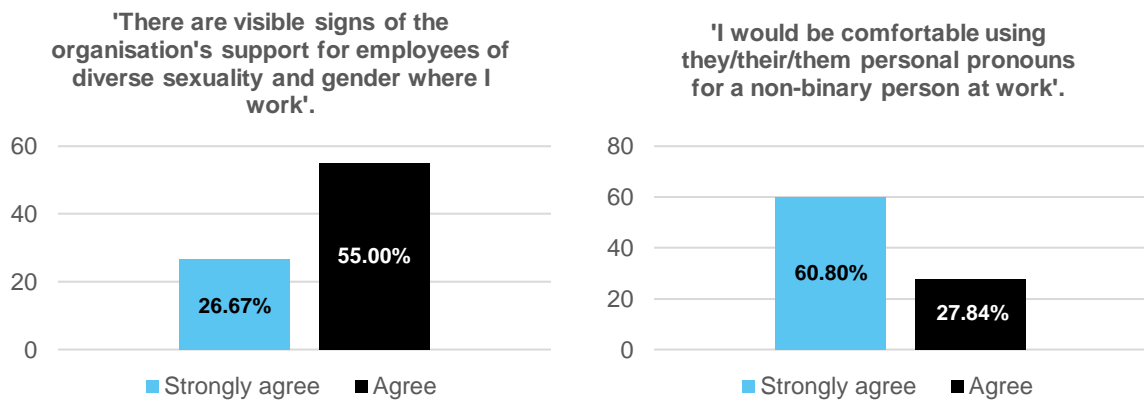
Overall responses to the employee experience survey scored 71% favourable to the question ‘**In my workgroup work is allocated fairly, regardless of gender**’.

84% favourably to the statement ‘VU uses inclusive and respectful images and language’.

VU gender composition of ANZSCO code major groups in the organisation



The **Australian Workplace Equality Index** staff survey 2021 results indicated that visible signs and language is important to staff:



Evidence shows that gender-based violence relates to poverty, hunger, poor health and wellbeing, maternal death, poor education, climate change adaptation, energy and environmental burdens, economic hardships, and societal insecurity. As such, progressing gender equality cannot be separated from actions that help tackle these issues.⁴⁴

The **Australian Workplace Equality Index** staff survey 2021 results indicated that current policies and practices are not meeting staff expectations:

Thinking about your gender identity, or where applicable, your trans experience, please indicate the degree to which your current organisation has met your expectations in regard to your organisation's POLICIES or WORK PRACTICES:

Visibility of organisational inclusion for gender diverse employees

40% DID NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS

Acknowledgement of gender diversity beyond the binary of male/female

53.33% DID NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS

Staff comment: 'I think that reversing the casualisation of the workforce would be a great way to foster genuine diversity, where people can feel safer to 'bring their whole selves to work'.

Governance & accountability framework

Evidence shows us that every aspect of our university needs to be actively involved, to bring about and reinforce sustainable systemic change.⁴⁵ This means working with and across the entire university population. Our students, teachers, researchers, professional staff, contractors, partners, and the wider community we are part of in Greater Western Melbourne.

Governing within an egalitarian model of operation, the **Vice-Chancellor's Group** hold joint responsibility for the Plan. Each of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors will be accountable to relevant aspects of our legislative requirements as it pertains to their specific portfolio business. As joint sponsors, the Vice-Chancellor's Group will submit six-monthly *Workplace Gender Equality* reports to University Council.

It is expected that staff regardless of their gender or diversity will accept ownership and responsibility for working toward gender and diversity inclusion and justice. This includes proactively responding to issues and opportunities as they are identified.

The **Inclusion & Belonging team**, **Capability & Culture team** and specifically the **Gender Equity Specialist** within the **People & Organisation Portfolio**, will provide subject matter expertise and support the implementation of the Plan.

Specific work area action groups are being established to provide a prism through which the Plan will become meaningful. These action groups will contribute to the Plan implementation specifically in relation to their roles and remit. This work will be reflected within staff workplans and operational budgets.

The groups may identify niche needs and solutions, make recommendations, advocate and report back to the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The groups will be networked through the **Gender Equity Specialist** to support collegial, productive and cumulative impact. Each groups' form and function will draw on the strengths and particularities of the work area represented. The **Gender Equity Specialist** will provide guidance, subject matter expertise, advice and technical support to the action groups.

The **Pride and Ally Network, Cultural Inclusion Advocates & Network, Joint Consultative Committee, Disability Employee Network** and **Moondani Balluk** will continue to be integral groups guiding, informing and holding us to account in this work.

Reporting timeframe

Reporting type	Submission date
Submit the Plan and Paper to the Commission	31 March 2022
VU to publish the Plan & Paper (and all subsequent) on website and notify governing body, employees, students, and union representatives of the Plan. Commission will also publish the Plan & Paper	Within a reasonable time, following Commission acceptance of the Plan & Paper
Establish data collection and progress monitoring system to inform progress reports	April – August 2022
6-monthly Vice-Chancellor’s Group and Council report	6-monthly
Establish Achievement Register to communicate progress with all staff	April – August 2022
Review Plan following the updated VU People Scorecard	August – October 2022
Resubmit Plan to Commission *VU may review the plan as frequently as needed	November/December 2022
Submit first progress report	31 October 2023
VU to publish progress report (and all subsequent) on website and notify governing body, employees, students, and our union representatives	Within a reasonable time, following Commission acceptance of the report
Undertake the workplace gender audit and employee experience survey	Data capture between 31 March 2024 – 1 April 2025
Develop the second Plan 2025–2029	January – October 2025
Second progress report,	31 October 2025
Third progress report 31 October 2027	31 October 2027

Monitoring & evaluation

We want to understand how change is happening and if gender relations have been altered at VU. To do this, we will monitor progress using SMART indicators and conduct a concurrent developmental principle-focussed evaluation.

The purpose of monitoring is to:

- ◆ Understand how work is being done, (document the process).
- ◆ Identify what is being accomplished (attributable achievements).
- ◆ Understand ‘have we done what we planned in the time we set for ourselves, and if not, what happened?’

It ensures accountability and credibility, provides opportunities for improvement, and contributes to the evidence base on what works to progress gender equality. It provides opportunities to interrogate why, including exploring assumptions underpinning practice challenges and successes, and so supports us to learn from our practice.

Monitoring will inform the stages of planning, especially how we can integrate practice wisdom with emerging knowledge, legislative requirements and community issues and understandings (shifting beliefs, attitudes, and norms), to move forward.

The intended primary users of the monitoring and subsequent progress reports are the gender equity action groups across university, Vice-Chancellor’s Group, VU Council and the Commission.

We recognise the limitations of proxy indicators of progress which are not precise or necessarily able to tell us what is really happening on the ground in people’s daily lives. They do not always make room to document unexpected change, or document processes that push back or shift the direction of a positive change trajectory. This work is nuanced, and our monitoring and evaluation is as much about telling stories as it is about collecting ‘hard data’. It is about capturing changes in the lived realities of the VU community.⁴⁶

Complex social change occurs in emergent and iterative ways, with unexpected impacts from the multiple components (activities), that are interrelated and interdependent. When working within systems; strategies that work in an emergent and iterative way can better respond to changes in the system. They adapt to the relationships of the system in an agile manner because they are not fixed ahead of time. As noted in **Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring**⁴⁷ the progress of gender equity (or violence prevention) initiatives is unlikely to be linear because of the complexity of such efforts and the long-term timeline needed to sustain their outcomes.

It is anticipated the Plan will iterate and evolve throughout 2022–2025. Specific timeframes are not designated to actions in recognition of the incremental and interdependent nature of the work and to allow for developmental and opportunistic responses. 6 monthly Vice-Chancellor’s Group reports will highlight reasonable and material impacts and achievements toward the Plan objectives. The ongoing developmental evaluation may also capture the evolution of the work and how practice and progress is responsive to the system change.

Monitoring questions

- ◆ What progress is being made in Plan objectives and action?
- ◆ What impacts and achievements are attributable to the Plan work?
- ◆ Why are systems and processes enabling the Plan to be actioned effectively?
- ◆ What is the significance of the Plan within VU, and is the Plan achieving positive change? (What is considered positive?)
- ◆ Where and how are the most important practice insights arising from the work?
- ◆ How is the Plan's progress being communicated?

Principles-focussed evaluation

VU is a complex system which continually changes and evolves. There are multiple, interrelated parts in which a perfect understanding of these parts does not automatically convey a perfect understanding of the whole system's behaviour.⁴⁸

Bringing about gender equality is therefore a complex dynamic intervention. It is important that the principles we use follow this flow and continue to adapt so they stay relevant, important, and useful to the changing times. Principles are the primary way of navigating complex dynamic systems and engaging in strategic initiatives. Principles underpin efforts at community change and collective impact. 'A good principle provides guidance for making choices and decisions, is useful in setting priorities, inspires, and supports ongoing development and adaptation.'⁴⁹

Given both our strategic work at VU and in response to the Act is governed by principles; a principle focussed evaluation is an appropriate approach for guiding adaptation. It supports us to understand if the principles are clear, meaningful and actionable, are being followed and are leading to desired impacts.

Evaluation questions

- ◆ To what extent have meaningful and evaluable principles been articulated?
- ◆ To what extent and in what ways are the articulated principles being adhered to in practice?
- ◆ If adhered to, what extent and in what ways are principles leading to desired progress?

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