



Psychological Health and Safety at UQ

The University of Queensland is a leading top 50 University employing more than 8000 academic, research and professional staff (FTE), and over 55,000 students.

As detailed in the [Toward 2032 Strategic Plan](#), 'our success as a university is determined by our ability to attract and retain highly talented, committed people who are leaders in their field. For this reason, we are intent on embedding a supportive and inclusive culture built around UQ's values, where the many talents, passions and perspectives of our staff and alumni are encouraged and nurtured'

At UQ, we strive to ensure our campuses are a safe and respectful environment for all students and staff.

UQ continues to take steps to demonstrate and ensure compliance with the [Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at Work Code of Practice 2022](#), which came into effect on 1 April 2023, as well as the December 2022 Respect@Work amendments to the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination legislation. To ensure a comprehensive and externally assured approach, UQ engaged expert legal services to assess and advise on the governance frameworks for psychosocial risk management at UQ.

What are psychosocial hazards?

Common psychosocial hazards that arise from, or are related to work are outlined/referenced in the Code and may include:

- high and/or low job demands
- low job control
- poor support
- low role clarity
- poor organisational change management
- low reward and recognition
- poor organisational justice
- poor workplace relationships including interpersonal conflict
- remote or isolated work
- poor environmental conditions
- traumatic events
- violence and aggression
- bullying
- harassment including sexual harassment and/or gender-based harassment

Current managed risk

UQ Enterprise level psychosocial hazards are included in UQ's top health and safety risks. The current managed risk level for the common psychosocial factors at an Enterprise level are reviewed at least annually. When last reviewed in October 2024, the psychosocial risks with a managed risk level of medium were poor management of change, undertaking emotionally demanding work, excessive work demands, exposure to traumatic events and materials, and poor workplace relationships. Managed risk level at the enterprise level was low for other assessed hazards which included exposure to harassment, exposure to sexual misconduct, exposure to



work related violence and aggression, low role clarity, exposure to sexual misconduct, poor environmental conditions, remote or isolated work, exposure to bullying and poor support.

Business units have varying risk profiles depending on the design and management of work, the workforce profile, and the work environment. The existing risk controls in enterprise level risk assessment are applicable for all UQ work areas to mitigate exposure to psychosocial hazards (such as the requirements set out in policies, training and development, and recognition programs) with the effectiveness of these controls impacted by factors such as local manager/area implementation, and individual awareness, understanding and engagement with resources available.

In undertaking risk assessments at the business unit level, local areas consider how psychosocial hazards that are present in their areas may interact to increase the risk of harm. For example, high work demands and poor support combined expose people to greater risk of harm. Alternatively, high levels of support, positive workplace relationships, high levels of job control and satisfactory levels of recognition and reward may act as protective factors to exposure to some other risk factors such as high work demands (including emotional demands).

Strategic Frameworks

One of the strategies within the [UQ Health, Safety and Wellness Strategy 2022-26](#) is to “Implement psychosocial risk management processes to identify and address work related factors influencing the psychological health and wellbeing of our people”.

UQ’s Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) delivery plan consolidates key actions from our five current EDI action plans (Gender, Disability, Age, LGBTQIA+ and Cultural Inclusion) and priorities for our student and staff focussed activities. The plan is structured on five pillars that represent the main barriers to success and inclusion for our UQ community. Pillar 4 in the EDI plan requires the University to deliver on actions from the integrated project plan on psychosocial risks and Respect@Work.

[Read UQ’s Equity Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) plan](#)

[Read UQ’s Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response](#)

Current Activities to support Psychosocial Risk Management

Effective psychosocial risk management requires a coordinated approach at both the enterprise and business unit level. UQ has implemented a number of initiatives and working groups aimed at mitigating and preventing the risk of psychological harm.

Enterprise-level risk assessments have been developed for the various psychosocial risk factors in order to clearly outline the University’s assessment, approach and the available organisational high-level controls in place. In addition, and importantly, a number of role-based risk assessments have been completed with an emphasis on those roles where there may be a higher psychosocial risk. Work is also underway to continue to identify work groups and processes (e.g. staff that may be involved in incident or conduct investigations) that may benefit from risk assessment. In addition, a number of areas across UQ have established specific committees to oversee psychosocial risk at the faculty or the business unit level. Other areas incorporate these considerations into local health and safety consultative committees.

A suite of resources has been developed to support and build the capability of staff and their supervisors to understand, identify, monitor and manage psychosocial risks within the workplace. These resources are available [here](#). This work is on-going.

External Assurance

In late 2023, UQ engaged an external legal firm to provide assurance around UQ's compliance with legislation relating to psychosocial hazards and Respect@Work obligations. The firm reviewed a multitude of documents and initiatives provided by UQ, including policy, training, risk registers and programs (e.g. Discrimination and Harassment Contact Officers), and has provided feedback to UQ. The University also commissioned the firm to deliver a number of in-person information and awareness raising sessions with the following leadership groups:

- University Senior Executive Leadership Team (USET) – Vice-Chancellor and President, Provost, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Chief Operating Officer, Executive Deans and a representative Institute Director.
- Specialist leaders briefing – invitation to senior leaders
- Senior Leaders Forum (SLF) - the University's senior academic and professional staff leadership group.

The University developed an enterprise level Master Plan for further work in this area that integrates the inter-connected issues arising from positive duties associated with psychosocial risks, as well as Respect@Work.

This Master Plan incorporates actions already identified through internal gap analyses and subsequent internal Psychosocial Risk Management roadmap presented at the Vice-Chancellor's Risk and Compliance Committee (VCRCC) in July 2023. The Master Plan has been developed to operate as an overarching tool to monitor and track progress established under the aforementioned Psychosocial Risk Management roadmap and relevant items from the UQ Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Action Plan 2024-2027. The Master Plan will be monitored by the Psychosocial Integrated Working Group (current governance structures are noted below).

The Master Plan categorises action items into the areas of Leadership, Culture, Knowledge, Risk Assessment, Support, Reporting and response, and Monitoring, evaluation and transparency. This is to ensure that a holistic approach is taken by UQ, as suggested by the Australian Human Rights Commission*, to guide action planning and fulfil its obligations in relation to positive duty.

[Read UQ's Psychological Health and Safety Master Action Plan](#)

Across the seven areas, actions have been categorised as short term, medium term and long term with an anticipated final delivery date of December 2025 for the long-term items.



*Source: Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

[Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#)



Respect@Work positive duties

In December 2022, a new positive duty on employers and persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to eliminate workplace sex discrimination and harassment commenced. Compliance powers of the regulator came into effect 12 months later. [The Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment \(Respect at Work\) Act 2022 \(Cth\)](#) introduced a positive duty on employers of a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) to eliminate:

- workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and sex-based harassment;
- conduct that amounts to subjecting a person to a hostile workplace environment on the ground of sex; and
- certain acts of victimisation.

In addition to the work being undertaken by the working groups noted previously, the below outlines the activities and initiatives being led by UQ Respect in 2024:

- Evaluation of the First Responder Network
- Rollout of the Respect at UQ module for HDR Candidates
- Respect@Work legislation implementation
- Creation and publication of an annual report on sexual misconduct
- Finalisation and implementation of 2024-2027 Strategic Framework and Action Plan for sexual misconduct prevention and response at UQ
- Sexual Misconduct Support Unit (SMSU) awareness campaign

Governance

Psychosocial Risk Management Committee

The role of the Psychosocial Risk Management Committee is to provide strategic oversight, guidance and expertise in relation to the planning and delivery of appropriate interventions to support the management of psychosocial risk to staff at UQ. The Psychosocial Risk Management Committee is sponsored by the Office of the Provost. The committee reports into the Office of the Provost, VCRCC and USET.

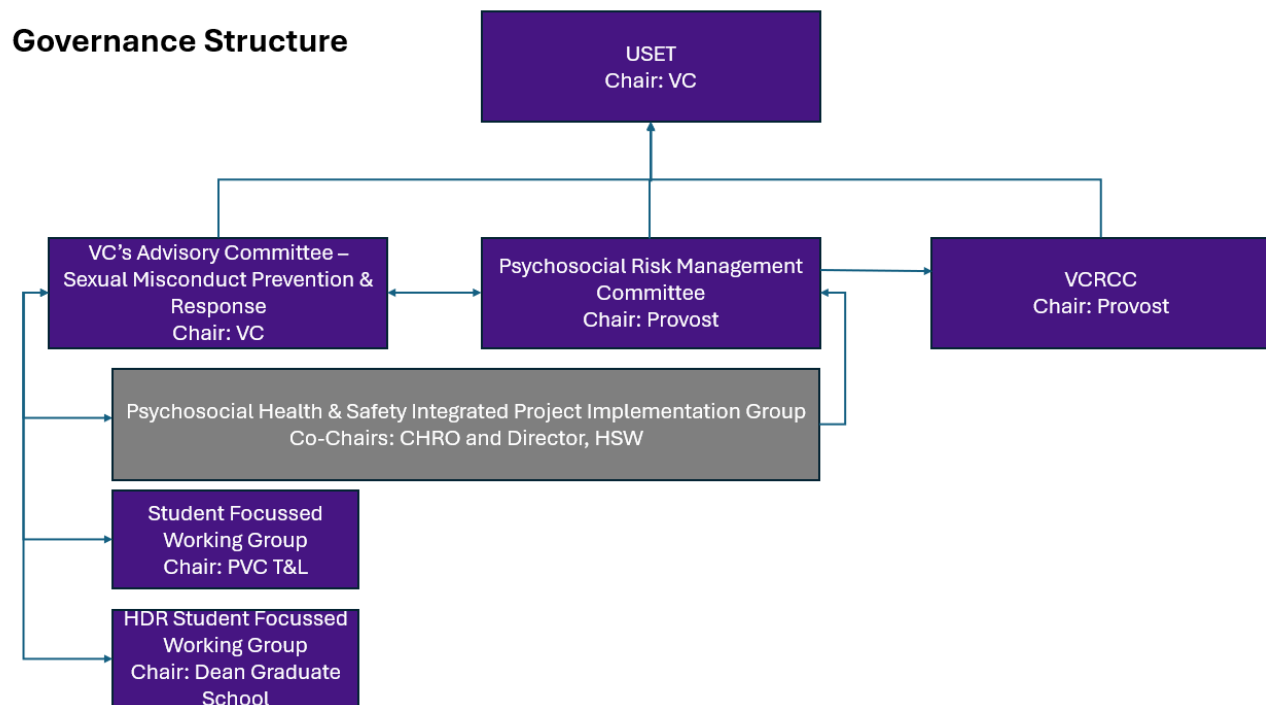
Psychological Health and Safety Integrated Working Group

The aim of this time-limited group is to review the work undertaken by the external legal firm and establish a detailed action plan to ensure UQ is compliant in relation to positive duty and the management of psychosocial health based on the feedback provided by the external legal firm. This group is co-chaired by the Chief Human Resources Officer and the Director, HSW and will report into both the Psychosocial Risk Management Committee and VC's Advisory Committee-Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response.

Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Sexual Misconduct: Prevention and Response

This committee oversees UQ's actions in relation to sexual misconduct prevention and response, as well the implementation of the Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response. This committee is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and reports into the University Senior Executive Team. At present, this committee is supported by three separate working groups, which look specifically at the needs of staff, students and HDR cohorts respectively.

Figure 1: Consolidated Governance Structure Psychosocial Health and Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response



Local Psychosocial Working Groups

In addition to the formalised governance committees, several areas across UQ are in the process of developing or have created committees to oversee psychosocial risk at the faculty or business unit level. These committees feed into the area HSW committee.

Continuing Work

UQ is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all in our community, and strives for best practice management of psychosocial risks. The outcomes of external legal assurance undertaken demonstrate that the university is in a solid position with regard to compliance with relevant WHS and Respect@Work legislation from a compliance perspective.

Based on the UQ experience to date e.g. our workers' compensation claims history, UQSafe incident reports, EAP information and to a certain extent, Pulse results; it is clear that future work needs to focus around how work is organised and how people are managed, and supporting a mentally healthy and safe workplace. Future work is envisaged around programs that build a positive culture in work areas where respectful and constructive workplaces are created and where people feel safe, included and valued; and poor behaviours which are detrimental to building positive team culture are effectively managed. Key focus areas to prioritise include:

- Ensuring that risk assessments align with the Psychosocial Code of Practice
- Reporting and complaints management pathways are clear and accessible
- UQ is applying trauma informed principles



- UQ leaders are skilled and equipped with knowledge to understand and manage psychosocial risk
- Identified risk controls are effective in eliminating or minimising risk
- supporting psychologically safe team;
- provision of proactive interventions for workers at higher risk
- establishing mechanisms to support effective information sharing between stakeholders
- continued targeted leadership development and supervisor and manager capability development

The focus areas and future work outlined above are addressed in the Master Psychosocial health action plan.

Monitoring and Reporting

There are a number of workplace data sets that can be used to assist in the identification of psychosocial hazards. These data sources sit within different areas of the university, including, but not limited to Health Safety and Wellness Division, Human Resources and Student Support and Wellbeing.

- UQ Safe
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Sexual Misconduct
- Pulse Survey
- Exit surveys
- Workers' compensation

There are a number of recommendations in the developed Action Plan that aim to enhance the consolidation of available data and enhance reporting.



Glossary

Abbreviation/Term	Description
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
Investigations	Enquiries into incidents or alleged behaviours that may involve information gathering, interviewing witnesses or persons affected by an incident.
Primary Prevention Frameworks	The primary prevention frameworks were presented and agreed through the VC Advisory Committee (VCAC). The implementation of these primary prevention frameworks are included in the VCAC Action Plan.
VCRCC	Vice Chancellor's Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee
USET	University Senior Executive Team
Senior Leaders	Managers in Leadership levels 1 to 4 as per the Human Resources delegations schedule .
Senior Leaders Forum	Regular forums that consist of Senior Leaders.
Strategic EDI Committees	Centralised strategic committee. (This is distinct from local EDIA committees in many work groups across UQ)
WGEA	The Workplace Gender Equality Agency is a federal government agency created by legislation to promote and improve gender equality in Australian workplaces. All public sector employers that employ 100 or more people must submit an annual report to WGEA enabling benchmarking, comparisons and highlighting key areas for action on gender equality.