NeverOK: University leaders united in zero-tolerance to sexual assault and harassment

The University of Tasmania today welcomed the results of the Australian Human Rights Commission’s survey on student experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment, *Change the Course*.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen said the institution adhered to a series of values including respect and self-respect, and would use the report to build on its commitment to the creation of a safe and just society.

“The welfare and safety of our students and staff are central to how we think and act,” Professor Rathjen said. “University is a time and place of learning and growth.

“We believe students should feel safe and our staff should operate knowing and abiding by these principles. We should all strive to be both exemplars and beneficiaries of a positive, equitable culture.”

The University of Tasmania survey results are available here: [www.utas.edu.au/neverok](http://www.utas.edu.au/neverok)

The report for the national sector is available here: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/)

The survey was conducted nationally at a time University of Tasmania students were between terms, contributing to a lower response rate. While the institutional results were broadly in line with those of the wider sector, the University of Tasmania accepted the challenge they present and would seek to use them to drive improvement.

The University offers reporting and support services for the victims and survivors of sexual assault, working closely with police, relevant government departments and across the community.

The University and its student body – through the Tasmania University Union (TUU) – is already united against sexual assault and harassment, partnering on the #NeverOK campaign.
The University has announced Professor Margaret Otlowski, the current University Dean of Law, would take up the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Culture and Wellbeing), a role which will include leadership of the University’s review and response to the survey.

The new role is designed to:

- strengthen leadership around the importance of culture and well-being,
- provide a focus around initiatives that build a safe, just, equitable and inclusive culture, which is true to our institution’s Statement of Values,
- support the University in fulfilling its wider community role,
- work closely with key University office holders including in the areas of student experience, campus services and security.

Professor Otlowski’s professional background focuses on the relationship between the law, ethics and health, and she was a member of the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal for 18 years.

“We exist as part of a broader community so the issues inherent in it are inherent here also,” Professor Otlowski said. “But we are of a view our university should have a leadership role.

“We work to ensure our environments and approaches honour our values, and do so with a strong commitment to a process of continuous improvement.”

The zero-tolerance approach to sexual assault and harassment on campus has been highly visible at the University of Tasmania through its support of the sector’s broader campaign, Respect. Now. Always, which was launched in February, 2016.

“We are strongly of the view that one assault, one incident of harassment is one too many,” Professor Otlowski said. “That principle will guide our efforts as we work as a community in the months ahead.”

**MEDIA NOTE:** Please make clear in your reporting that support is available for victims or survivors of sexual assault and harassment:

- 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)
- Interim National University Support Line on 1800 572 224.

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