What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome behaviour or conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment is also any behaviour that offends, humiliates or intimidates you. Some forms of sexual harassment may also be defined as criminal acts and criminal charges may apply. Sexual harassment can include uninvited sexual advances, touching, suggestive comments or jokes, intrusive questioning or insinuations, displays of pornographic material, offensive communication such as phone calls, email or letters, staring, or unnecessary invasion of your personal space. Just because others may tolerate some behaviour does not mean that it is acceptable. In the vast majority of cases, a woman has been harassed by a man, though men and women have the same rights if they are victims of sexual harassment.

RMIT University has a legal obligation to provide safe study and work environments for all students and staff that are free of all forms of harassment and discrimination. Sexual harassment only needs to happen once for you to have grounds for a complaint.

Is Sexual harassment a private matter between those involved?

No it is not. Sexual harassment is often about power and control as the perpetrator feels that they have a right to make an unwanted sexual advance. If treated as a private matter, often the victim would be significantly disadvantaged and unlikely to obtain a fair hearing or outcome. Sexual harassment is a serious matter, and RMIT has both a moral and legal responsibility to investigate instances of harassment or discrimination that occur on campus. Sexual harassment is UNLAWFUL under the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995. Everyone has the right to work or study in peace without fear of harassment or intimidation.

What are the effects & consequences of Sexual Harassment?

The experience of sexual harassment can have a very serious effect on a person's life, as well as adverse consequences in the general workplace or learning environment. Reactions can range from annoyance to embarrassment, intimidation, humiliation, distress, anxiety, fear and ill-health. Sexual harassment often means that the victim will feel uncomfortable dealing with the perpetrator and may use strategies to avoid that person. This may have a negative effect on the victim's ability to work or study, affecting both the individual and those around them. Harassment can take many forms, such as verbal, written or physical, and may arise from the behaviour of an individual or a group. The distress caused can be the same whether the conduct is deliberate or unintentional.

How do I, as a supervisor, take reasonable steps to prevent Sexual Harassment in my area?

- Tell the staff that work for you what sexual harassment is;
- Tell staff that work for you that sexual harassment is unlawful; that it is not be tolerated at RMIT and that it can result in disciplinary procedures being instigated;
- Tell staff that work for you about the steps they can take if they have a complaint or concern about sexual harassment;
- Ask that posters or other display materials that may be offensive to either sex be taken down and not displayed where other staff or students may see them;
- Display information about sexual harassment and complaint procedures in your area.

Staff who have any questions should contact their supervisor / People Services for further information.
How do I raise awareness of sexual harassment in my workplace or study environment?

Sexual harassment is often a difficult issue to raise in a workplace or study environment in an informal way. For staff, training courses that explore issues of sexual harassment and discrimination are available, and you can ask management about arranging a group training session for your area.

Students can contact their Student Union and talk to elected representatives; or contact the RMIT Student Complaints Manager. Both these areas can organise activities including a short talk in a lecture, to an awareness campaign run in conjunction with various collectives on campus. Posters, leaflets and brochures are also available for distribution. See list of names of contact officers who can assist you with material.

How do I make a Sexual Harassment complaint?

There are procedures in place for both staff and students to make complaints about sexual harassment at RMIT.

Staff contacts:

People Services (City Campus) – Case Management Team
Ph: 9925 4600

Student Contacts:

Student Complaints Manager – Office of the Academic Registrar:
Email: Anne Holland
Ph: 9925 5228