Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Policy

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Policy outlines Victoria University's (VU) commitment to promoting and protecting the wellbeing and safety of Children and Young People connected with the University community.

(2) People under 18 years of age (Young People) are part of the Victoria University community. VU's higher education, vocational education and training (VET), Non-School Senior and Foundation Secondary Programs and Wyndham Tech School which is hosted by VU all involve students under 18 years of age. Further, VU operates several community programs for Children and Young People.

(3) VU recognises and reinforces that it is a shared responsibility of all members of the University Community to create a child safe environment.

(4) VU is committed to the protection, welfare, engagement and support of Children and Young People under 18 years of age in accordance with:

a. the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) and the Child Safe Standards;
b. the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic);
c. the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (Cth) and the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth).

Section 2 - Scope

(5) This Policy applies to Adults and Young People involved in any Activity, and includes the children of staff and students visiting any campus or engaged in any VU activity.

(6) This Policy applies to all activities undertaken as part of study, research, work, living and socialising that are organised, or auspiced by, or reasonably associated with VU, whether that Activity occurs on a VU campus, at a different site, or online.

(7) This Policy also applies to all learning and teaching and other activities undertaken by VU Online.

(8) This Policy does not apply to children accessing services provided by the VU Children's Centres: Refer Children's Centre Child Protection and Child Safe Policy.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

Legislative Context

(9) VU is committed to the protection, welfare, engagement and support of Children and Young People in accordance with the:

a. Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
b. Child Safe Standards;
c. Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic);
d. Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
e. Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)
f. Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic)
g. Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme
h. Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)
i. Crimes Act 1914 (Cth)
j. Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (Cth)
k. National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth).
l. AHRC National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
m. DFAT Child Protection Policy 2017
n. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023, Chapter 4.2: Children and Young People

Child Safety and Wellbeing Commitments

(10) VU values children and young people and is committed to their safety and wellbeing. VU commits to creating an environment in which children and young people are safe, respected, engaged and happy within the University community.

(11) All Staff must abide by the Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy and the associated Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - Staff Code of Conduct when interacting with Young People.

(12) VU has zero tolerance of Child Abuse or Harm, and all allegations and safety concerns made to VU will be treated very seriously and consistently in line with VU's policies and procedures.

(13) In accordance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards, VU has the following priorities:

a. Fostering an environment of cultural safety for Aboriginal children.
b. Actively supporting Aboriginal children's connection to culture, kin, community, cultural practices and identity.
c. Embedding child safety in our leadership, governance and culture.
d. Empowering children and encouraging their participation, including:
    i. Encouraging children to have a voice and participate in decisions made about them; and,
    ii. Ensuring that children and families have information about how to raise concerns.
e. Where programs are designed for children or include an underage cohort, communicating with families or carers and encouraging their involvement.
f. Promoting a culture of inclusion and respect, which acknowledges VU is committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all Young People.
g. Adopting a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination against or abuse of any person.
h. Maintaing robust human resources and recruitment practices for all Staff, which explicitly consider child safety and wellbeing and embed screening requirements as appropriate.
i. Regularly training and educating Staff on the risks of Child Abuse or Harm, ensuring that all Staff understand their roles in supporting a Child-Safe Environment at VU.
    i. Staff will receive induction and ongoing training, education and support relating to this Policy, the Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - Staff Code of Conduct, and the Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Procedure.
j. Maintaining policies and procedures to guide and support its leadership team and Staff to achieve these

commitments to provide a Child-Safe Environment.

k. Ensuring children, their families and carers are supported to provide feedback, raise concerns and make complaints via our accessible complaints system.
l. Maintaining a preventative and proactive approach to Child Safety, including risk assessment, management and response. VU prioritises actions which have the greatest potential for preventing, or reducing the risk of, child harm.

(14) VU recognises that there are vulnerable groups requiring additional sensitivity and support. VU will take every measure possible to ensure the following groups of children have access to culturally appropriate support and are empowered to participate. These include:

a. Young People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal Young People;
b. Young People of all sexualities and gender identities, including intersex Young People;
c. All Young People with disabilities.

(15) VU aims to manage all allegations of child abuse, neglect and exploitation sensitively and expeditiously, and in accordance with principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

(16) VU meets all research ethics and compliance requirements, including the Child Safe Standards.

(17) VU is committed to maintaining appropriate confidentiality when dealing with and reporting on all allegations of child abuse / harm and exploitation.

Safety and Participation of Children

(18) VU encourages all Children and Young People who participate in its Activities to express their views about matters that directly affect them or are of importance to them.

(19) VU will ensure that Children and Young People are provided appropriate information as to their rights and the standards of care to which they are entitled, and are provided culturally appropriate guidance and support with regard to raising concerns, making complaints or letting someone know if they feel unsafe.

(20) VU has child-focused complaints and concerns processes, and will listen to and appropriately act on any concerns raised by a Young Person or any Adult concerning the safety and wellbeing of a Young Person.

Reporting Child Abuse and Child Safety Concerns

(21) VU has processes in place for responding to and reporting on suspected Child Abuse or Harm and concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a Young Person. These are specified in Appendix 1 - Child Safety Reporting Process.

(22) VU has legal obligations to report child abuse to relevant authorities including to the Social Services Regulator and/or Child Protection Services,

(23) VU will work to ensure that all Children, Young People and Adults involved in Activities know what to do or who to tell if they observe actual or potential Child Abuse or Harm.

Younger Students on International Visas

(24) VU will ensure that it fulfils its obligations under Standard 5 of the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth). The Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - International Student Welfare Procedure details the steps VU will take to ensure compliance with these obligations.

Review

(25) VU has a continuous improvement approach to reviewing policies and practices. Accordingly, VU:

a. Regularly reviews, evaluates and improves child-safe practices; and,
b. Analyses complaints, concerns and safety incidents to identify causes and systemic failures of practices; and,
c. Reports on relevant findings of reviews to management, and where relevant and appropriate, staff, families and young people.

Section 4 - Procedures

(26) Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Procedure

(27) Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - International Student Welfare Procedure

(28) Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - Staff Code of Conduct

Section 5 - HESF/ ASQA/ ESOS Alignment

(29) HESF: Standards 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety (2.3.3 & 2.3.4); 6.1.4 Corporate Governance

(30) Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2025: Standard 2.6 Wellbeing; 4.3 Risk Management. Compliance Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations and FPP Requirements 2025: 20 Compliance with Laws.

(31) National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth), Standard 5 (Younger Overseas Students).

(32) VRQA Minimum Standards for registration as a non-school senior secondary provider (VCE and VCAL programs) Standard 3 - Student Welfare.

Section 6 - Definitions

(33) Activity: Any VU activity including educational, research, recreational or other programs which take place on VU campuses, are organised or auspiced by VU at any site, or occur online.

(34) Adult: Any person aged 18 years and over (whether staff, students, researchers, visitors, parents, carers or guardians).

(35) Young Person/Young People: A person/people who is currently under 18 years of age, whether or not enrolled as a student.

(36) Child Abuse or Harm

(37) Child-Safe Environment

(38) Staff

(39) Student

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Student" - - a person enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award; or - a person whose study performance is being or is to be assessed by the University, notwithstanding that such a person is not enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award. (The above definition of student is from section 3 of the Victoria University Act 2010 and Council Resolution C2010 - 070).

"Staff" - Staff means: - all employees of the University, on all domestic and offshore locations, including student residences, and while engaged in all work-related activities such as conferences and work-sponsored social occasions; - all contractors and consultants performing work on University sites or on behalf of the University; - visiting academics, honorary, adjunct and exchange staff; - the Council and its committees; and - any volunteer in the workplace and study environment.

"Child Abuse or Harm" - Any act committed against a child involving: A sexual offence; or An offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 ; and The infliction, on a child, of: Physical violence; or Serious emotional or psychological harm; and The serious neglect of a child.

"Child-Safe Environment" - An environment that is created to reduce opportunities for harm or abuse to children. A child safe organisation is one that: Empowers and values children Engages with families and the broader community Adopts suitable strategies Takes appropriate action to promote child safety and wellbeing at all levels of the organisation.

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