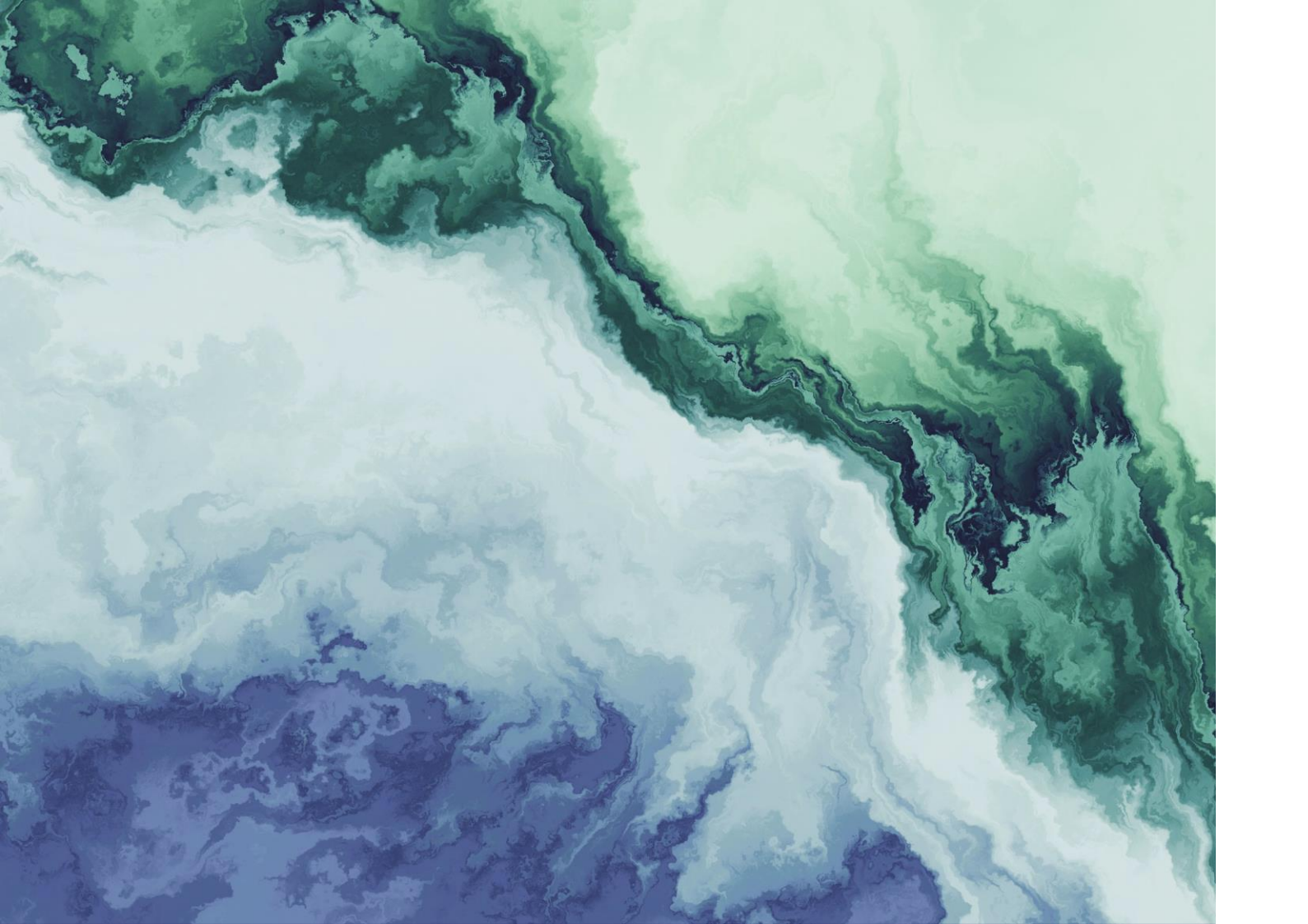




Guidelines for responding to gender-based violence at ACU

A guide for staff and affiliates

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ACU Core Principles for Responding to Gender-based Violence

Guided by our mission, identity, and values, ACU is committed to fostering a community built on respect, care for others and a strong focus on the dignity of the human person and the common good. In this culture of respect, gender-based violence is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

These principles guide ACU staff and affiliates (such as contractors, volunteers or visitors) in responding safely, appropriately and consistently to disclosures of gender-based violence.

SAFETY AND WELLBEING FIRST

The first responsibility is to check whether the person is safe. Safety may include physical, emotional, cultural, and environmental factors.

TRAUMA-INFORMED AND PERSON-CENTRED RESPONSE

Responses should acknowledge the impacts of trauma, prioritise dignity and respect and avoid judgement. A trauma-informed approach is built on safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

CHOICE, CONSENT AND CONTROL

Gender-based violence can take away a person's feelings of control. Support them to make their own informed decisions about what they share and what happens next.

INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY SAFE

People's backgrounds and circumstances, such as culture, faith, race, disability, sexuality, gender identity, age and visa status, shape how they experience violence and seek support. Responses should be inclusive, culturally safe and free of assumptions.

PROPORTIONATE, TIMELY AND PURPOSE-DRIVEN ACTION

Respond to what is in front of you rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Acting in a measured and timely way supports people without delay or additional harm. Fairness applies to everyone involved.

CONSISTENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ROLE CLARITY

Clear roles and pathways help staff respond with confidence. Consistent handover and notification keep responses safe and accountable and allow ACU to understand patterns of harm.

1. About the Guidelines

These guidelines set out ACU's first-response framework for all staff and affiliates who receive a disclosure or formal report of gender-based violence.

At ACU, any staff member may become a first responder. Disclosures often happen in classrooms, online, in offices and in informal conversations.

WHO THESE GUIDELINES APPLY TO: These guidelines apply to staff and affiliates who receive disclosures from any member of the ACU community.

WHAT THEY COVER: Responding to gender-based violence involving a member of the ACU community (students, staff, affiliates, contractors and visitors) wherever it occurs. This could be on campus, online, on placement, in ACU accommodation, or at ACU-related activities.

WHAT THESE GUIDELINES ARE AND ARE NOT: These guidelines cover first response only: receiving a disclosure, checking immediate safety, giving clear information about options and ensuring appropriate handover and notification to specialist teams. They do not replace ACU policies or procedures relating to investigation, discipline, or ongoing support, and do not require staff to assess risk, investigate, or provide counselling.

These guidelines should be read alongside relevant ACU policies and procedures, as listed in Appendix B. They support, but do not replace, ACU's required training and capability development in this space.

2. Key Terms

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE is any physical or non-physical violence, harassment, abuse or threat based on gender that causes, or is likely to cause, harm, fear or loss of control. It includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, family and domestic violence, stalking, and online harassment and image-based abuse.

A DISCLOSURE is when someone tells a person at ACU about their experience of gender-based violence. A disclosure gives them access to support and safety measures without starting a formal process.

A FORMAL REPORT is when someone asks ACU to start an official process, which may include an investigation.

Full definitions, including who counts as an ACU affiliate, are in Appendix E.

3. Responding to a disclosure

HOW DO I RECOGNISE A DISCLOSURE?

A disclosure can come at any time, and often when you're not expecting it. It might be in a private setting, like a one-on-one, or in a group setting, like a class or workshop.

People don't always use words like "violence", "harassment" or "abuse", so it may take a moment to recognise that what you're hearing is a disclosure. The harm may be ongoing, recent or in the past, and the person may be telling you about a colleague, friend or student who experienced it rather than themselves. The case study in Section 7 shows how this can sound in practice.

Sometimes these matters may also intersect with behaviours such as bullying or discrimination, which can make them harder to recognise as gender-based violence.

If you're not sure what you're hearing is a disclosure, please contact the specialist teams for advice at any point. Support is always available.

There is no script to follow, because every disclosure is different. But the most important first-response steps are the same every time.

3a. First Response Overview

What to do		What to say
	1. Receive disclosure Speak privately, listen calmly, believe the person, and let them share as much or as little as they choose.	<i>“Thank you for telling me. I believe you.”</i>
	2. Immediate safety check Check if the person is safe. Call 000 for immediate danger, or notify the National Security Centre or use the SafeZone app.	<i>“Do you feel safe at the moment?”</i>
	3. Explore needs Ask what the person would like to happen next, let them lead, and let them know support is available.	<i>“You don’t have to decide anything right now. What would feel most helpful?”</i>
	4. Discuss consent and information sharing Be honest about the limits of confidentiality, explain your reporting requirements, and seek consent for information sharing.	<i>“I have to pass this on to the specialist team. You choose what information goes with it.”</i>
	5. Notify and hand over Notify the relevant specialist team with consent, tell the person what happens next, and seek guidance if you need it.	<i>“If you want support, the team can reach out.”</i>

WHO TO NOTIFY

Student discloser: respectandsafety@acu.edu.au or +61 476 852 735

Staff or affiliate discloser: Staffrespectandsafety@acu.edu.au or +61 455 269 604

3b. First Response Steps

Each step is set out below in more detail. The steps reflect ACU's policy and procedure and align with sector best practice on responding to disclosures.

BEFORE YOU GO FURTHER: If a disclosure concerns suspected harm, abuse or exploitation of a child, young person or adult at risk, including where the discloser is under 18, ACU's [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Procedure](#) also applies. Follow the same steps below and notify your specialist team without delay.

1. RECEIVE DISCLOSURE

Do: speak privately where possible, listen calmly without interrupting, make clear you believe the person and they are not to blame ("Thank you for telling me. I believe you.") and let them share as much or as little as they choose.

Don't: ask probing questions, try to establish the facts or investigate, judge or criticise choices, share your own experiences, criticise the person who is alleged to have caused harm (keep the focus on the behaviour) or ask the person to provide a written or comprehensive account.

2. IMMEDIATE SAFETY CHECK

Do: check whether the person is safe right now ("Do you feel safe at the moment?"). If anyone is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical help, call 000, then if needed notify the National Security Centre on 1300 729 452 or use the SafeZone app.

Don't: try to assess or manage risk beyond immediate safety, or delay calling 000 or campus security when someone is in danger.

IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, CALLING 000 IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY: Do not wait for the specialist team; they cannot always respond to emergencies.

3. EXPLORE NEEDS

Do: ask what the person would like to happen next (for example, "What would you like to do? What kind of support would help?"), let them lead, and confirm they don't have to decide anything now. Let them know support is available from the Safety and Wellbeing Consultant or Safeguarding and Student Safety, now or later. Ask whether they have any immediate support needs (e.g. cultural, communication or accessibility) the team should know about.

Don't: decide for the person, take over, or pressure them to make a formal report or take any particular action.

4. DISCUSS CONSENT AND INFORMATION SHARING

Do: be honest about the limits of confidentiality, explain that ACU policy requires you to report the disclosure, and seek the person's consent about what information is shared, including any wish to remain anonymous. Let them know that remaining anonymous will limit the specialist team's ability to follow up, and that if anything changes about how their information is shared, they will be told first.

Don't: promise to keep the disclosure secret, try to provide ongoing support or counselling yourself, or share information more widely than needed.

YOU MUST NOTIFY. This is not optional. Notifying a specialist team is different from commencing a formal process. See Section 5 for when information may be shared without consent.

5. NOTIFY AND HAND OVER

Do: notify the relevant specialist team (contacts below), sharing only what the person has consented to, and explain to the person what you are doing and what the next steps are. Where the person has described what happened, pass on their account in their own words, as spoken. You can contact the specialist team at any point for guidance if you are unsure or need support while helping someone. Follow the specialist team's advice about next steps, if any

Don't: try to resolve, investigate, case manage or follow up the matter yourself, or keep the disclosure to yourself instead of notifying.

WHO ARE THE SPECIALIST TEAMS?

ACU has trained specialist teams who take over after your notification, offering the person support, assessing risk, considering safety measures and providing information about the person's options.

- **DISCLOSER IS A STAFF MEMBER OR AFFILIATE:**
SAFETY & WELLBEING Staffrespectandsafety@acu.edu.au or +61 455 269 604
- **DISCLOSER IS A STUDENT:**
SAFEGUARDING AND STUDENT SAFETY
respectandsafety@acu.edu.au or +61 476 852 735
- **OR USE THE ONLINE FORM:** [Safeguarding and Incident Reporting form.](#)

AFTER THE HANDOVER

The specialist team takes it from there. Your role as first responder is done. You are not expected to proactively follow up with the person about the disclosure or provide ongoing counselling support.

Supporting someone through a disclosure can be difficult. All ACU staff can seek confidential support for themselves through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) on 1300 364 273 or book an appointment via the [EAP Appointment Hub](#).

4. Disclosure vs. Formal Report

A person can choose to make a disclosure, a formal report, or both. There is no time limit on either option, although sharing sooner helps ACU respond effectively. The person can:

- make a disclosure only, to access support and safety measures
- make a formal report only, asking ACU to initiate a formal University response, which may include investigation, or
- make a disclosure first, and decide later, at their own pace, whether to make a formal report.

Support and safety planning is never conditional on making a formal report. Safety and wellbeing measures can be put in place either way. Notification by a first responder does not itself convert a disclosure into a formal report.

5. Notification, Consent and Information sharing

- All disclosures and formal reports must be notified to the relevant specialist ACU team as soon as practicable. This applies even where the person does not want any further action taken. Notification enables specialist support, advice and safety measures to be offered where appropriate and supports ACU to understand patterns of harm across the University. **Regardless of the person's preference, if there is immediate danger, always call 000.**
- **What is shared is led by the person's consent.** Explain your obligation to notify, then ask what they would like to be shared – for example, with their name or anonymously (subject to the exceptions below). Share only what is consented to. If the person asks for a de-identified report, you may still identify yourself as the person making the notification, so the specialist team can seek further information if required.
- After the notification, and where there is consent, the specialist team will contact the person to offer **tailored support, safety planning and information about reporting**. As the person who notified, you will be advised of what next steps, if any, are required of you.

WHEN ACTION MAY OCCUR WITHOUT CONSENT: Wherever possible, ACU will act only with the person's consent and in line with their wishes about what happens next, including if they choose to discontinue a disclosure or formal report. Choosing to discontinue will not result in negative consequences for the person, and the specialist team will work with them to address any concerns.

In limited circumstances, ACU may take action or share information without the person's consent, or continue action despite a request to discontinue. This may occur where (but is not limited to):

- there appears to be a significant risk to the health or safety of the discloser, or of any other person
- the specialist team determines that ACU has a legal or safeguarding obligation to report – for example, where the matter involves a child, young person or adult at risk, or the conduct involves a serious indictable offence (see Appendix E - Definitions)
- a particular individual becomes the subject of disclosures or formal reports from more than one person, and ACU is concerned this may present a risk to health or safety.

YOU DON'T DECIDE ON EXCEPTIONS: Other than calling 000 where there is immediate risk, you are not responsible for deciding whether one of these exceptions applies. These decisions are made by our specialist teams.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Outside required reporting pathways and authorised support channels, you must keep the matter confidential. Disclosing gender-based violence requires a lot of trust, and it is important this is respected. This means not disclosing the existence of the matter to colleagues or anyone else and only discussing it to get confidential advice or support from a health professional, a counsellor through the EAP, a priest, spiritual leader or Elder, a legal practitioner, the police, or your own support person. This applies whether the person is identified or not.

RECORDKEEPING:

Do not create or retain duplicate detailed records in email, Microsoft Teams, personal notes or local drives. Notify through an approved channel, share only the minimum information necessary, and keep the matter confidential. The specialist teams hold the official records of disclosures and formal reports.

6. Proportionate and safe responses

Every disclosure receives the same care and the same first-response steps. What changes is how quickly and how widely the specialist response escalates. This is called a proportionate response.

Circumstances that shape the specialist team's response might include:

- whether legal, safeguarding or reporting obligations apply
- the nature and seriousness of the behaviour described
- how many people have been impacted
- whether the people involved are still in contact
- whether there is a power imbalance or ongoing risk

If the discloser mentions any of these, include it in the information at handover with the specialist team. If they don't, that's fine. You are not asked to assess, weigh up or investigate. Simply share what the person has told you and consented to.

7. Case study: Responding in practice

THE SITUATION

Sarah is walking back from a staff meeting with her colleague Jan. Jan unexpectedly says, “Is it just me, or is John a bit much? He keeps coming by my desk and I feel like he’s trying to always put a sexual spin on our conversations – like yesterday he commented on how I looked in my work pants. Anyway, I’m probably overreacting.”

APPLYING THE FIRST-RESPONSE STEPS

1. Receive disclosure	Sarah suggests they speak somewhere quieter and listens to Jan without interrupting. Sarah tells Jan, “Thank you for telling me. I believe you, and you’re not overreacting.” Sarah doesn’t ask what else John has said, or whether Jan has told anyone else.
2. Immediate safety check	When Jan has finished speaking, Sarah asks, “Do you feel safe at the moment?” Jan says that while she’s started taking her breaks at different times, she’s feeling okay – more just uncomfortable. As there is no immediate danger, Sarah doesn’t call 000 or security.
3. Explore needs	Sarah asks Jan, “What would you like to happen next?” Jan says she doesn’t want to make a big thing of it and doesn’t want her supervisor to know. Sarah notes Jan doesn’t have to decide anything now and lets her know she can access confidential safety and wellbeing support from a Safety and Wellbeing Consultant at any time, without making a formal report or her manager knowing.
4. Discuss consent and information sharing	Sarah explains her obligation to notify and asks Jan what information she is comfortable sharing. Jan asks that her name not be included for now. Sarah explains that this means the team won’t be able to contact her directly, but that she can reach out whenever she’s ready. Sarah texts Jan the Safety and Wellbeing Consultant’s details to make sure she has them.
5. Notify and hand over	Sarah promptly contacts the Safety and Wellbeing Consultant and shares only what Jan consented to. She identifies herself as the person notifying, so she can receive next steps if needed. Once complete, she lets Jan know she has done this.

OUTCOME

The response helped ensure Jan was listened to, retained control over what information was shared, and understood the support options available to her. Sarah wasn’t sure at first whether a de-identified notification was enough, but she knew she’d done the right thing by telling the Safety and Wellbeing Consultant, and that she’d be guided on anything further.

8. Responding to Specific Situations

The same first-response steps (Section 3) apply in every case. Some situations need extra consideration. These situations include, but are not limited to:

Situation	What to do
You witnessed it, or a third party told you.	You still need to notify the specialist team with what you know, even if it is limited. If the information was provided by a third party, do not independently approach or question any person involved.
The person disclosing is a student.	Respond with the same care and follow the same first-response steps outlined in Section 3. Notify Safeguarding and Student Safety (Section 3), who provide support to students. For disclosures involving a child, young person or adult at risk, see the safeguarding requirements at the start of Section 3b.
It's about your manager, or someone in your reporting line.	Notify the specialist team directly. You never need to go through line management. If you are concerned about repercussions, please let the specialist team know. They can support you.
Someone shares an experience of gender-based violence in a group setting.	Acknowledge and validate the person, then ask to move the conversation to a private setting, e.g. "Thank you for sharing that. I'd like to check in with you at the break, if you're open to that."
The person who caused	When notifying the specialist team, flag that the respondent is

harm is a student, and you are a staff member.	a student so the specialist teams can coordinate under the relevant procedures.
A disclosure is made about you, as the respondent.	Being named in a disclosure does not mean any conclusion has been reached about wrongdoing. Any formal process will follow ACU policy and allow you procedural fairness. If you are notified that a report has been made about you, and/or you are affected by safety measures, you will also be offered specialist support. Do not attempt to resolve the matter, question the people involved or investigate independently. The specialist teams involved will provide you with guidance on next steps.

Appendix A – General Support Services

Full Stop	24/7 sexual, domestic and family violence response and recovery service	1800 385 578
Lifeline	24/7 crisis support	13 11 14
13YARN	Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members	13 92 76
InTouch	Support for migrant and refugee community members	1800 755 988
QLife	LGBTQIA+ peer support and counselling	1800 184 527
MensLine Australia	Counselling and support for men	1300 78 99 78

Appendix B – Related ACU policies and procedures

- [Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence Policy](#)
- [Staff Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence Procedure](#)
- [Student Prevention and Response to Sexual Harm or Gender-based Violence Procedure](#)
- [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Procedure](#)

Appendix C – Internal and external support services for staff members and affiliates who have experienced gender-based violence

[Internal and external support services for staff members and affiliates who have experienced gender-based violence](#)

Appendix D – Internal and external support services for students who have experienced gender-based violence

[Internal and external support services for students who have experienced gender-based violence](#)

Appendix E - Definitions

ACU affiliate	An ACU affiliate is anyone who is connected to ACU and does work with or for the University but is not necessarily an ACU employee or student. This includes people such as: • Religious members connected to ACU • Staff from partner organisations working on ACU activities • Volunteers • Contractors and consultants • Employees of companies contracted by ACU • Agency or temporary workers • Committee members who are not ACU employees • Honorary members • Visiting academics or visitors • Guests of ACU staff, students, or other University members
Gender-based Violence	Is any form of physical or non-physical violence, harassment, abuse or threats based on gender that results in, or is likely to result in, harm, coercion, control, fear, or deprivation of liberty or autonomy. It encompasses a range of behaviours, including (but not limited to): • Sexual harassment • Sexual assault • Family and domestic violence • Stalking • Online harassment and image-based abuse
Discloser	Means a person who has shared information about their experience of gender-based violence.

Respondent	A person about whom a disclosure or formal report of gender-based violence has been made.
Disclosure	A disclosure is when a person shares their experience of gender-based violence with someone at ACU without starting a formal process. A disclosure allows the person to receive support such as safety planning, academic or workplace adjustments, information, and connection to specialist teams without triggering an investigation or formal action.
Formal Report	A formal report is when a person chooses to initiate an official University process in response to gender-based violence. A formal report may lead to an investigation and potential disciplinary action under ACU policy and procedures. In most cases, a formal report cannot be made anonymously because identifying information is usually required for ACU to act.
Mandatory Reporting	A legal requirement that applies to certain professions and circumstances to report suspected child abuse or neglect to statutory authorities. This is separate from, and does not replace, ACU's internal notification requirements.
Serious indictable offence	A serious crime punishable by five or more years' imprisonment (for example sexual assault, kidnapping or grievous bodily harm). Exact offences differ between states and territories.

SAFETY & WELLBEING, PEOPLE AND CAPABILITY

October 2026