



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

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<< Test Title >> << Test First Name >> << Test Last Name >>
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Dear << Test Title >> << Test Last Name >>,

Protecting student and staff safety and wellbeing within higher education institutions

As you know, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is continuing to impact many Australians, including students and staff within our higher education institutions. Throughout this conflict, Australians have engaged in a variety of protest actions, most of these peaceful.

In recent weeks we have seen protest activities escalate on some campuses. The management of these activities by providers so far has been characterised by responding to the presence of protests, with clear communication around institutional policies, procedures and support services. This communication has emphasised efforts to minimise operational disruptions, ensuring student safety and messages highlighting that behaviour that vilifies or incites hatred towards Jewish or Muslim people will not be tolerated and will be the subject of action.

TEQSA is also aware of protest behaviour and activities that risk falling outside the French Model Code's protections due to their being unlawful or risking the wellbeing of students and staff or effecting the ability of higher education institutions to discharge their teaching and research activities.

We take this opportunity to stress the obligations institutions and their governing bodies have under the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, for student and staff safety and wellbeing. Standard 2.3 encompasses organisational responsibilities for safeguarding and supporting the wellbeing and safety of students and staff, while Standard 6.1.4 applies to the governing body taking steps to maintain an institutional environment where the wellbeing of students and staff is fostered.

It is therefore critical that provider ensure they have the appropriate measures in place to:

- remove materials that breach Australian law or conflict with institutional policies from their property. This includes removal from physical property and digital platforms
- take appropriate action against students and staff whose conduct breaches institutional policies - this includes behaviour as part of organised protest activity and language in learning settings that goes beyond what is acceptable in academic discussion
- support students and staff who have concerns for their safety and security on campus, and that information on how to access this support is routinely shared, and the effectiveness of these supports is regularly reviewed
- identify and support at-risk students, through measures such as special consideration or other academic supports to ensure students can continue their studies
- address the specific needs and institutional obligations in relation to any students aged under 18

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- have effective relationships with law enforcement and proactive approaches to ensure that any risks to student and staff safety are identified, shared and acted upon
- ensure institutional policies and procedures are fairly and consistently applied and any cases where action is taken are transparently reported, and
- take appropriate action against people from outside the provider's community who may engage in behaviour in breach of institutional standards while on the provider's property or when using provider-managed digital platforms.

TEQSA is continuing to monitor this whole issue, including compliance with Standards 2.3 and 6.1.3 and academic freedom and freedom of speech undertakings within higher education providers.

We encourage and welcome any reporting that institutions wish to make through the Material Change notification process. You can also contact TEQSA's CEO, Dr Mary Russell, or Acting Executive Director of Regulatory Operations, [REDACTED], if wish to discuss this matter with TEQSA.

We seek your cooperation as we monitor sector responses to these very difficult matters. We appreciate that events are evolving very quickly and responses need to be constantly reviewed and adjusted. We will also keep you updated about any key developments or insights that we become aware of that may be helpful to your own work.

Professor Peter Coaldrake, AO
Chief Commissioner, TEQSA

Dr Mary Russell
Chief Executive Officer, TEQSA

10 May 2024

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