



Title Name  
Position  
Organisation  
Address (email or postal)

Dear Title Family-Name,

**Subject: 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.

Anecdotally, TEQSA is also aware of some incidents where there has been behaviour and acts of symbolism that risk falling outside the French Model Code's definition of academic freedom and freedom of speech, due to these being against the law or risking harm to students and staff. We are also aware of reports that students and staff are concerned about their safety due to people who are not part of the provider's community coming on to campus to engage in protest action. There have also been reports of actions within tutorials and other learning environments which have resulted in students feeling intimidated and unsafe.

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 that goes beyond what is acceptable in academic discussion in learning settings
- 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
- 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 free speech undertakings within higher education providers. This includes engaging directly with institutions where protest activities are taking place.

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 Katrina Quinn 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**

9 May 2024