



Title Name
Position
Organisation
Address (email or postal)

Dear Title Family-Name,

Continuing to assure wellbeing and safety, freedom of speech and academic freedom

We are writing to update you on TEQSA's continuing monitoring of how Australian universities are assuring wellbeing and safety, freedom of speech and academic freedom following the increase in protest activity related to the Middle East conflict observed between April – June 2024.

We again thank you for cooperating with our request for information relating to complaints and concerns within your university stemming from the conflict. Our early analysis of the information has given TEQSA some confidence that most institutions are focused on ensuring these concerns are dealt with appropriately and in accordance with institutional policies.

While the mid-year break has seen fewer people active within universities, and therefore a major reduction in protest activities and tensions within online and campus environments, TEQSA continues to have concerns about risks to students and staff as teaching resumes and activity within universities increases. We understand this is a concern shared by a number of institutions.

In the coming days, TEQSA will publish a sector update on our website that summarises our expectations previously communicated with you on 10 May and 5 June 2024 in relation to the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*. Our aim is to make it easier for providers to understand their obligations in accordance with the standards by consolidating information that has previously been shared with you.

However, given the need for continued vigilance, we also wanted to share the below points with you to assist your institution with managing these risks as students return.

Post-action reviews

TEQSA expects institutions will have used the opportunity offered by the break to undertake a review of actions taken in response to increased community and campus tensions relating to the conflict.

Such reviews should include, but not be limited to:

- the effectiveness of institutional policies and procedures, such as misconduct procedures, freedom of speech and academic freedom policies, academic support
- the opportunity to review and update documents such as student charters to communicate expectations of respectful engagement and exercising freedom of speech
- addressing any identified gaps in policies and procedures or legal frameworks. For example, one area of focus identified by several institutions has been whether statutes/by-laws regarding the use of university land meet contemporary expectations
- effectiveness of critical incident management structures and relationships with outside agencies, such as police, and effectiveness of institutional security
- effectiveness of governance decision-making and oversight
- training and support for staff to respond to disruption to learning environments both on-campus and online
- effectiveness and oversight of concerns regarding student and staff safety.

Protecting wellbeing and safety

In addition to ensuring your student and staff conduct charters/policies are up-to-date and reflective of your university community's expectations, and misconduct policies are consistently and fairly applied, TEQSA expects institutions will maintain a focus on wellbeing and safety. These themes were noted in the CEO Update during the TEQSA Talks webinar last month – [a recording is available on our website](#).

Actions by universities should include, but not be limited to:

- educating students and training staff about expectations for acceptable engagement and expression of views, including in learning and teaching spaces
- ensuring academic support is available for students whose wellbeing has been impacted by the conflict or associated protest activity
- engaging with student groups on campus to ensure any protest activities are respectful and in keeping with university policies
- sharing information about student conduct policies, expectations and how to access support through student communications and other communication channels
- ensuring hate speech and symbols are promptly removed from university property, including online spaces
- being aware of who is accessing the campus and ensuring security arrangements are appropriate to mitigate any identified risks.

Upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom

Last semester's protest activity presented a major test of changes to university freedom of speech and academic freedom policies following the development of the French Model code in 2019.

TEQSA expects that universities will evaluate the effectiveness and operation of their policies relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom and make any required adjustments. Additionally, TEQSA expects universities to actively consider how they work to assure their governing bodies that students and staff understand the content of the relevant policies and how they intersect with the law in relation to anti-discrimination and hate speech that may be applicable on campuses (and online).

TEQSA's approach going forward

As part of our ongoing engagement with students and providers, we will also be seeking examples of good practice that can be shared to support institutions in responding to these ongoing risks. If you believe there are examples of good practice or learnings from your institution that you wish to share with TEQSA, please email policyandresearch@teqsa.gov.au.

Longer term, TEQSA is planning engage with providers, students and government as part of a project to explore how social cohesion principles can be embedded within university environments and learning experiences. TEQSA is in the early stages of planning this work, and we look forward to further engaging with the sector about this in the coming weeks and months.

If you have any questions, or wish to speak with TEQSA regarding any issues relating to social cohesion or protest activity within your institution, please contact [Katrina Quinn](#), Acting Executive Director, Regulatory Operations.

Our monitoring of this situation is ongoing, and we will continue to engage with higher education providers where we have questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Adrienne Nieuwenhuis
Acting Chief Commissioner
7 August 2024

Dr Mary Russell
Chief Executive Officer