



Title Name
Position
Organisation
Address (email)

Dear Title Family-Name,

Subject: Continuing to assure social cohesion in higher education

As we all know, the Middle East conflict and ensuing protests in Australia have had a tremendous impact on students and staff across Australia's higher education sector.

TEQSA is aware that many of these issues have been centred in our universities, and this is where the bulk of our regulatory response has been directed to date.

However, it is important that all higher education providers give attention to mitigating the risks posed to student and staff wellbeing and safety, freedom of speech and academic freedom.

Regardless of whether you are a large university or a small provider, chances are you will have students and staff who are at risk of being subject to hate speech or experiencing distress due to the impact of this conflict on their family and friends.

We have heard very clear evidence provided to the Parliament by students and the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, about incidents of hate speech and vilification increasing dramatically over the past year and causing harm to students and staff within higher education in this country.

This is unacceptable. Unfortunately, the risk of such behaviours remains high as the conflict continues.

It is therefore critical for governing bodies and the executives of higher education providers to ensure they have in place appropriate processes for identifying, responding to and mitigating these risks, as outlined in our [recent interim sector update](#).

We take this opportunity to remind you that many of the underlying tensions and impacts of the conflict continue, even though the situation with protests and encampments has changed. We expect all higher education providers to continue actively reviewing and responding to issues that may be adversely impacting students and staff. This expectation is consistent with your obligations under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

Future work by TEQSA

In our letter to universities on 7 August 2024 we emphasised the need for institutions to review and learn from the experiences of protests and the impacts on students this year. We expect this will highlight the need to improve incident responses, but also respond to the need for systemic improvements. Amongst the key issues that have emerged during our regulatory work on these issues is dissatisfaction with current processes for students and staff to make complaints to their university.

Students have also told us that processes for seeking academic support and adjustments are not accessible, timely and trauma informed. These are key areas where systemic improvements in processes are needed to respond to the recent experiences of students and staff.

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TEQSA has already begun work on organising roundtable discussions with students and universities to address this and other issues, with a view to quickly developing updated best practice guidance and regulatory expectations for the sector.

These roundtables will be independently facilitated and invitations will be going out shortly. We will of course, share the outcomes as this work progresses.

Kind regards,

Adrienne Nieuwenhuis
Acting Chief Commissioner
4 October 2024

Dr Mary Russell
CEO

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