



Title Name  
Position  
Organisation  
Address (email or postal)

Dear Title Family-Name,

**Subject: Update regarding campus protests relating to the Middle East conflict**

Dear xxx

I am writing to update you on TEQSA's work to understand and monitor universities' responses to ongoing protests about the conflict in the Middle East.

In our letter of 10 May 2024, we highlighted the student and staff safety and wellbeing obligations that universities and their governing bodies have under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021. 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.

Since that letter, we have spoken with senior staff in all universities that are managing ongoing protests and encampments. I thank Vice-Chancellors and other senior university staff for making time during this period to share details of local issues and responses. It has assisted our work to have real-time information and to be able to discuss directly, any concerns we have.

To date, TEQSA has observed a high level of senior leadership oversight and engagement in response to the protests. A focus on de-escalation of conflict is being reported, with TEQSA noting accounts of written communication and direct engagement with students to set expectations for peaceful protest and reinforce that behaviour vilifying or inciting hatred towards Jewish or Muslim people will not be tolerated and will be the subject of action.

As this issue continues to evolve, TEQSA has identified the following areas where a continued focus is required.

**Academic support and adjustment**

It is clear many students are significantly affected by the conflict in the Middle East, some quite directly and others by public commentary and statements and actions during protests. Some universities have put in place special arrangements for at-risk students to receive support. TEQSA encourages all universities to give special attention to making sure that processes for academic adjustment are fit for the current circumstances, and that thought be given to how impacted students are supported next semester. This should include making sure that processes for lodging requests for special consideration, as well as consideration of these requests are embedded with trauma-informed principles.

### **Safety of teaching and learning spaces**

While it has been longstanding custom for students to announce details of protests at the start of classes in many universities, this has been problematic given the charged and often personalised nature of these events. Feedback to TEQSA from student groups and some public reports indicate that people entering classrooms to put positions on protests and on the conflict are engaging in behaviour that is disruptive and intimidating to many, and that particular efforts are needed to ensure learning and teaching spaces are safe for all. Universities should take advantage of the semester break to carefully consider these matters, including university freedom of speech and academic freedom policies ahead of the resumption of classes next semester. This consideration should include the need for further advice and training for staff and communication with students.

### **Presence of outside parties on campuses**

One common theme TEQSA has identified is the complexity in legal provisions for dealing with occupation of university grounds and disbanding protests, and how these vary greatly. Constraints in identifying and responding to protesters who are not students or staff of the university has been a complicating issue for many institutions. While many universities in Australia have an 'open campus' policy, ongoing consideration needs to be given to managing building access, the use of student and staff ID cards, and making use of appropriate legal avenues to remove people that are not part of the university community who are engaging in behaviour that poses a risk to the safety and wellbeing of students and staff.

### **Ensuring complaint and support mechanisms are accessible**

While we note that more than 220 concerns or complaints related to this issue are being considered by universities, there needs to be a continued focus on ensuring students and staff are aware of complaint and support processes. We have heard from some student representatives that their members do not feel safe making specific complaints. Universities should ensure these processes are trauma informed and should continue to highlight the ways staff and students can make complaints and access support. Measures for maintaining confidentiality during complaints processes should be considered.

TEQSA will make another request for data about universities' responses to ongoing protest activity, after which we expect to conclude this aspect of our monitoring. This request will be due on 12 June 2024. Where there is an identified need to continue specific reporting from universities, we will assess this on a case-by-case basis or as broader circumstances continue to evolve.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact [REDACTED] Director, Sector Risk and Compliance, via [REDACTED] with any queries. If you would like to speak more generally about TEQSA's requests or response on these issues, please do not hesitate to contact Mary directly.

Kind regards,

**Ms Adrienne Nieuwenhuis**  
**Acting Chief Commissioner**  
**TEQSA**

**Dr Mary Russell**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**TEQSA**

5 June 2024