



Support for Students Policy

Policy Intent

1. Context

The Support for Students Policy is established under section 19-43 of the [Higher Education Support Act 2003](#) (HESA), requiring eligible higher education providers to ensure the provision of appropriate, sufficient and effective services and supports to students at risk of not completing one or more units of study (**referred to as ‘students at risk’**).

With the context of the Government’s commitment to lift the tertiary attainment rate of the working age population from 60 per cent to 80 per cent by 2050, the objectives of the Support for Students Policy requirements are a critical enabler to ensuring students are supported – both academically and non-academically – to succeed in their studies. It also contributes to new and existing Government measures to enhance student safety, prevention of gender-based violence and support social cohesion through the delivery of quality student support services, including those with a focus on wellbeing. It also contributes to work across the higher education sector to share best practice and foster continuous improvement in teaching and learning and student equity interventions.

The Support for Students Policy requirements complement other student success and wellbeing requirements under HESA, [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) (Threshold Standards), the [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018](#) and the proposed [National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence](#).

2. Introduction of the Support for Students Policy and Guidelines

In response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report Priority Action 2, the Australia Government committed to removing the 50 per cent pass rate requirement for students receiving Commonwealth assistance.

Under this requirement, students who had a low completion rate (failed more than 50 per cent of the units of study they undertook as part of attempting eight or more units of study in a bachelor level or higher course) were no longer eligible to receive Commonwealth assistance such as studying in a CSP or accessing HELP loans. The Accord Interim Report noted this requirement disproportionately disadvantaged students from equity backgrounds and reduced opportunities for higher education participation.

In removing this requirement, the Government committed to introducing an alternative approach to ensure student completion and success, and transparent reporting on student progress for providers approved under HESA and whose students are receiving Commonwealth assistance.

In November 2023, the [*Higher Education Support Amendment \(Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report\) Act 2023*](#) amended HESA to remove the 50 per cent pass rate requirement for students receiving Commonwealth assistance. It also introduced strengthened requirements under HESA (section 19-43) for supporting students by requiring higher education providers to have, comply with and report annually on the implementation of their Support for Students Policy as per amendments to the [*Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023*](#).

The essential requirements of a Support for Students Policy are described in paragraphs 1 to 3 of section 19-43 of HESA, and the detailed requirements for a Support for Students Policy are given in section 49A of the *Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023*.

The requirements for reporting to the Minister for Education including the frequency of reports are given in section 49B of the *Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023* in demonstrating compliance with the requirements in section 49A.

3. Policy implementation intent and principles

3.1 Policy intent

The underpinning intent of the Support for Students Policy is to ensure students are supported to succeed and complete their higher education studies. This is achieved through early identification, communication and provision of an integrated network of academic and non-academic supports, interventions and processes specific to their needs.

While the introduction of the Support for Students Policy was aimed at supporting students receiving Commonwealth assistance, its intent is also relevant to all students enrolled at a higher education provider.

The amendments to the *Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023* operationalise this underpinning intent, setting out the minimum expectations of higher education providers around their processes to identify, communicate and provide supports to students at risk.

The intent of a higher education provider's annual report against their Support for Students Policy is to enhance transparency around the higher education provider's practices and approaches and demonstrate accountability to the Minister for Education as assessed by the Department of Education (the department).

As a secondary outcome, the intent of the report (provided to the department) contributes to enhancing sector performance insights and driving improvements to future policy and program delivery approaches.

3.2 Implementation principles

The implementation of the Support for Students Policy is shared by the department and higher education providers.

Through implementation, the department will be guided by the following principles:

- Collaborative working arrangements with the higher education sector which demonstrate a shared commitment to strengthening a culture of student support and success, both academically and non-academically
- An education approach to compliance assessment and activities which recognise individual provider contexts and student needs.
- Proportionate reporting and compliance assessment arrangements focussed on building an informative evidence-base to demonstrate assurances of provider practices.
- To minimise and reduce duplication across higher education provider reporting requirements.
- To share approved information, as required, to improve sector-wide regulation activities and enhance insights on provider practices and performance.

Through implementation of their own Support for Students Policy, higher education providers will be guided by the following principles:

- An integrated institutional approach to implementing, monitoring and improving support for students.
- An evidence-based approach to student supports, improvements to those supports and commitment to continual improvements.
- Recognition of student agency – that students have primary responsibility for accepting support for their own success and play an important role in the design, delivery and improvement of supports.
- Open and transparent reporting of processes and outcomes to the Government, department and relevant stakeholders, such as students and staff with responsibility for supports.
- Collaboration across the sector and the opportunity to share learnings as well as challenges and strategies in designing best practice student support processes.

3.3 Implementation timeframes

The implementation of the Support for Students Policy requirements was a staged process:

- From 1 January 2024, higher education providers approved under HESA were required to have and comply with their Support for Students Policy.
- From 1 April 2024, full and comprehensive policy requirements took effect, providing clarity to providers and students on the kind of supports available, how they are communicated and how those supports are provided.
- By 1 March 2025, higher education providers were required to submit their first report. This was an interim report, covering the period 1 April to 31 December 2024 and was qualitative.
- From 2026, providers will be required to submit annual reports to the department on or before 1 March.

3.4 Support for Students Policy monitoring and compliance

The department's assessment and compliance arrangements

The department proposes to take a risk-based, proportionate and continuous improvement approach to assessing higher education providers' compliance with the Support for Students Policy. This recognises that there is no 'one size fits all' or universal approach to supporting students at risk. A higher education provider's mission, institutional structure, resourcing and the characteristics of the student population are critical to understanding the content, implementation and success of their Support for Students Policy.

Assessment of reporting will focus on ensuring providers are delivering supports in line with the detailed Guidelines requirements, and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement and addressing potential gaps. The department will proactively engage with higher education providers to address potential compliance concerns and to swiftly address these.

Providers who do not comply with the Support for Students Policy requirements may be considered in breach and subject to a civil penalty (subsection 19-43(7) of HESA). However, it will always be the department's intent to work with the higher education provider to address concerns ahead a decision to take such action.

Information provided in a higher education provider's annual report will also be used by the department to identify sector-wide trends and contribute to provider performance insights.

The department proposes to produce an annual summary on the overall implementation of the Support for Students Policy by the sector and identification of key themes and approaches that can contribute to knowledge sharing and promote best practice.

Information provided by a higher education provider as part of their annual report will not be reproduced by the department for reasons beyond determining compliance, unless approved by the provider.

It is the department's intent that providers will share their own annual reports with the communities and other stakeholders to contribute to innovation and best practice sharing. However, a provider is not obligated to publish their annual report.

Monitoring and key data points

The department will monitor the following two key performance indicators as part of the ongoing review of the effectiveness of the Support for Students Policy:

- The rate of attrition for students as collected through the Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) system.
- The rate of completion for students as collected through TCSI.

These two key performance indicators will be used to monitor and review the effectiveness the Support for Students Policy at a sector level. The department may also consider other relevant data reported through TCSI when monitoring the Support for Students Policy.

The department recognises higher education providers will also collect, monitor and review indicators relating to the scale and effectiveness of their student supports, and that providers will determine and implement indicators relevant to their Support for Students Policy and institution.

Reporting strategy

The department intends to establish the following reporting cycle:

- Comprehensive qualitative baseline annual reports for 2024, 2025 and 2026 (provided in each following year of the reporting year).
- Targeted, thematic reporting for annual reports due in 2027 to 2029.
- A comprehensive review/evaluation oriented annual report due in 2030.

While adhering to the reporting requirements under HESA and the *Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023*, the department is committed to ensuring proportionate reporting requirements for higher education providers by minimising duplication across reporting for related programs. Reporting requirements for the Support for Students Policy will be reviewed to identify opportunities to streamline and minimise reporting by higher education providers alongside other departmental processes.

The department will provide a reporting template to enable structured and standardised reporting by higher education providers. The reporting template will be aligned with the reporting requirements in the *Higher Education Provider Guidelines 2023*. The intent of the reporting template is to allow higher education providers to demonstrate compliance with the Support for Students Policy requirements by providing examples of supports offered to students at risk, as well as describing how these supports are communicated to students at risk and reviewed for continuous improvement.

Information sharing

Reporting provided to the department for the Support for Students Policy may be relevant to a higher education provider's compliance with the Threshold Standards. As a result, the department may share its compliance assessment and reports with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Sharing of reports relating to the Support for Students Policy with TEQSA would be in accordance with section 180-15 of HESA. Reporting requirements concerning the Support for Students Policy may inform TEQSA's re-registration processes. This is intended to manage the regulatory burden, as providers may not be required to submit to TEQSA information already captured by the reporting requirements of the Support for Students Policy.

The department will seek a provider's approval before sharing any reports or information.