

Department of Education

National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence

Standard 1 – Accountable Leadership and Governance

Friday, 31 October 2025

PRESENTED BY:

MC:

Larissa Hinds

ATTENDEE:

Joanna Brislane

[Opening visual of slide with text saying 'Australian Government with Crest (logo)', 'Department of Education', 'Welcome', 'National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence', 'WEBINAR: Standard 1 – Accountable Leadership and Governance']

[The visuals during this webinar are of each speaker presenting in turn via video, with reference to the content of a PowerPoint presentation being played on screen]

Larissa Hinds:

Hello everyone and welcome to today's webinar on Standard 1 – Accountable Leadership and Governance within the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence. My name is Larissa Hinds and I am the Assistant Secretary for the Gender-Based Violence Reform Branch in the Department of Education and I am joined today by my colleague Jo Brislane, our Director of Education and Engagement.

I would like to thank those who have joined our previous webinars which introduced the National Code and outlined provider requirements. A recording, the transcript and the presentation of

those introductory webinars have now been made available on our website and my team will post a link in the Q&A function shortly.

I am joining you today from the beautiful lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. I pay my respects to them and their cultures and Elders past and present. I also extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today.

I also want to acknowledge the strength, courage and resilience of those who have experienced gender-based violence and the commitment of advocates and practitioners who together have been instrumental in shaping the National Code. The National Code exists because of the prevalence of gender-based violence in Australian society and in higher education. And this national priority requires a coordinated, sector wide response and leadership within institutions as well as across the sector. Standard 1 of the National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence centres on accountable leadership and governance and will be our focus today.

Today we aim to share about 25 minutes of content between Jo and myself to cover off Standard 1 highlighting the importance of leadership and governance, discuss the whole of organisation prevention and response plan, look at the guidance on preparation of the plan and the outcomes framework and consider what the next steps are for providers. Our aim is to allow for about ten minutes at the end of the session to answer questions that will be posted today.

In terms of some brief housekeeping as I noted earlier many foundation topics related to the National Code have already been covered in our recent webinar, the Introduction to the National Higher Education Code and Provider Requirements. Today's webinar will also be recorded and made available on our website. We will continue to produce guidance on the National Code's requirements including webinars to enable sector readiness and we invite you to join our mailing list so you can receive updates from the Department including on up and coming webinars. Again a link for this will be posted shortly by the team.

The chat function today has been disabled for this webinar and so we invite you to submit questions via the question and answer function you should see at the top of your screens. We will seek to answer as many questions as possible noting that questions that do not get answered today will be grouped into themes and addressed in the frequently asked questions section on the Department of Education's website. For the purposes of a clean recording and to

adhere to data privacy laws the Q&A function will not be visible to participants during the recording process. I'll now hand over to Jo.

Joanne Brislane:

Standard 1 focuses on two foundational concepts, accountable leadership and governance and a whole of organisation approach. This Standard recognises that the cultural change required to address gender-based violence must be led from the top, have strong governance oversight and require implementation across every level of a higher education institution. Standard 1 includes specific requirements that underscore the pivotal role of leaders in driving change, in particular the Higher Education Principal Executive Officer and the governing body. The Principal Executive Officer plays a critical leadership role in setting strategic direction and operationalising policies and plans to foster safe, respectful and inclusive higher education environments.

Standard 1.1 requires that the Principal Executive Officer such as a Vice Chancellor, CEO or equivalent be ultimately accountable for compliance with the National Code. This requirement embeds gender-based violence prevention and response into leadership structures and prioritises it at the highest level setting the tone for the entire organisation. Standard 1 also requires the leadership of the Principal Executive Officer in the preparation, implementation and publication of the whole of organisation Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Plan and Outcomes Framework. Leadership extends beyond endorsement. It involves championing the Plan and Outcomes Framework, embedding their principles across the organisation and ensuring prevention and response efforts remain dynamic and responsive through regular evaluation and renewal.

Under Standard 1 governing bodies also play a key role in maintaining oversight and ensuring a strategic approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Standard 1.2 requires providers to include a member with expertise in student and staff safety and wellbeing within the membership of their governing body or to have a sub-committee that reports directly to their governing body that has delegated responsibility for student and staff safety and wellbeing. With regards to expertise a broad range of skills, competencies and experiences that can be relevant including across fields such as public health and health promotion, student and staff safety, gender-based violence, sexual violence and family violence and mental health. Integrating this expertise at the highest levels of decision making supports providers to ensure that safety and wellbeing are being prioritised and strategically guided, resourced and continuously improved.

Under Standards 1.8 and 1.9 governing bodies also play a key role in endorsing plans for and monitoring progress against institution wide action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

Additionally to uphold ethical and lawful information practices providers are required to provide deidentified information and otherwise undertake their obligations under the National Code in accordance with applicable Commonwealth, state and territory privacy laws. By embedding privacy compliance into provider operational frameworks providers can ensure that the collection, use and disclosure of information related to gender-based violence is conducted responsibly, transparently and with respect for individual rights. We'll explore this further in the upcoming webinar on Standard 6 Data Evidence and Impact which will focus on building an evidence base at the provider and sector level on the incidence and prevalence of gender-based violence, one of the key objectives of the National Code.

Now we'll turn to the next foundational concept of Standard 1, the whole of organisation approach. So I'll pass back to Larissa.

Larissa Hinds:

In the context of the National Code a whole of organisation approach refers to a coordinated and evidence informed strategy that is implemented across all areas of a provider's operations including in student accommodation. The student accommodation covered by the National Code is that which is directly owned, operated or managed by a higher education provider, student accommodation that is otherwise under the control of a provider and student accommodation that is affiliated with the provider. This means implementing action across every level of the provider organisation and community. Action to prevent and ensure safe responses to gender-based violence cannot be effective if it is the sole responsibility of a single Department, faculty or team, or if it is adopted in an inconsistent way across a provider's community.

A whole of organisation approach extends across the diverse working, learning and research contexts including considerations such as placements, field work and laboratory work, offsite university activities such as representative sporting events, online spaces including social media forums, libraries and as mentioned in residential settings.

In line with the definition in the National Code the whole of organisation approach must be embedded in the ten operational areas on this slide. They are leadership, culture and environment, consideration of structures, norms and practices, systems and infrastructure,

across service delivery domains such as curriculum, teaching and learning, taking account of policy and procedures, management and governance and reaching as far as community engagement, business, research and partnerships.

By integrating a whole of organisation approach providers can foster safer, more inclusive campuses, uphold student and staff wellbeing and meet their obligations under the National Code. I'll hand back to you Jo.

Joanne Brislane:

Standard 1.4 of the National Code requires that providers led by their Principal Executive Officer prepare, implement and publish on their website a whole of organisation Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Plan. Providers are also required to develop an Outcomes Framework to track and assess effectiveness and progress against this Plan. For ease we'll refer to a Plan and Outcomes Framework for the rest of the webinar.

With respect to student accommodation any provider that directly owns, operates and/or manages student accommodation must ensure that its plan addresses how it will comply with its obligations under the National Code. Driving whole of organisation transformation is a long term commitment. We anticipate that providers will advance at different stages of maturity in strengthening processes and building capability. Providers' risk profiles will also vary shaped by strategic factors such as geographic location, campus characteristics, student and staff demographics and the breadth of academic offerings. A provider's Plan and Outcomes Framework will be key transformative instruments. They are central to guiding how institutions embed, activate and evolve their approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Both the Plan and the ongoing evaluation of outcomes reflect a strategic commitment to cultural change and continuous improvement.

The requirement to submit the Plan and Outcomes Framework to the Department as well as publicly release it is focused on strengthening transparency and accountability. The Department has developed a guide and resources to assist providers to develop their Plan and Outcomes Framework in line with the requirements of the National Code and we'll walk through these now.

The Department has developed four resources to support providers that are now available on our website. Guidance to develop the Plan and Outcomes Framework, an endorsement template, an optional plan template and operational preparation worksheets. While the use of the Plan template and preparation worksheets is optional all providers are required to attach a completed

endorsement template alongside the submission of their Plan. Providers may choose to develop a Plan and Outcomes Framework in their own format noting that they need to meet the requirements set out in the National Code. If at any point there are doubts regarding a specific standard or requirement always refer to the National Code itself which is clear and specific about provider requirements.

I'll now pass back to Larissa to talk through the steps involved in the guidance.

Larissa Hinds:

I'll now step you through the first product which is the guidance to develop the Plan and Outcomes Framework. The guidance outlines six recommended steps to support providers in demonstrating how they're preparing, finalising and activating their Plan and Outcomes Framework to meet the requirements of the National Code.

Step one is prepare and it is about identifying who needs to be involved in the development of the Plan. This is the opportunity for providers to consider what they already have, what can be built on, what needs to be improved, the opportunity to highlight where there might be key gaps around the prevention and response to gender-based violence and formulate how to champion the work to prevent and respond to gender-based violence across the organisation. This is also the opportunity to consider the level of commitment that will be required to embed and bring to life the Plan to drive the culture, capability, systems, processes and to collect and use evidence and data. The development of the Plan is required to be led by the organisation's Principal Executive Officer.

In considering these preparation steps elements of Standard 1.4 require providers to demonstrate the work undertaken to inform the development of their Plan and to identify actions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence arising from this work. To support the preparation of the Plan and the development of the Outcomes Framework providers might wish to group the requirements in the following way. Engagement. Plans are required to reflect the diverse needs and experiences of the provider community especially those disproportionately affected by gender-based violence. Engagement will need to be collaborative involving staff and students including victim survivors, noting the importance of a trauma informed approach.

Secondly data analysis and evidence review. Plans are to be informed by pulling together and reflecting on data about gender-based violence that's specific to the provider and the provider community and an undertaking of the analysis of provider responses to date. Plans need to also

draw on relevant domestic and international evidence and providers should clearly document the process they have undertaken to examine their data and evidence.

Thirdly systemic risks, enablers and barriers. Plans are to include a whole of organisation assessment across the ten operational areas we have outlined earlier. This should identify systemic risks, enablers and barriers including those present in a provider's student accommodation, and actions are to be incorporated into the Plan that address these risks, consider the enablers and address the barriers. Understanding the specific risks within your own provider environment is critical and tailoring your Plan to these risks will be important. For example the challenges faced by predominantly online cohorts can be very different to those experienced by younger students living and studying in person on campus. This is the opportunity to recognise and respond to different provider characteristics.

As another example evidence shows that there is a significant percentage of international students identifying as women who experience some form of sexual violence in their first year of study in Australia. Understanding if this is relevant to your context and how you will address it is important. A trauma informed understanding of risks, enablers and barriers is key to creating meaningful and effective actions in the Plan.

And lastly implementation of requirements. Plans are required to detail how each National Code requirement will be implemented including in student accommodation.

There may be some overlap amongst the actions that emerge in the prepare steps with providers' existing approaches and Plans to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and through their existing approaches to promote gender equality. Providers can include, cross-reference and record their existing actions and approaches within their Plan. And I'll hand to you now Jo.

Joanne Brislane:

Step two is about planning and providers will need to produce a single meaningful plan including a Gender Equality Action Plan which should reflect work undertaken in the prepare step and an Outcomes Framework which is clearly linked to the Plan and tracks and measure the effectiveness of actions under the Plan. In developing their Plan providers are required to consider student accommodation specific to their context. As mentioned earlier student accommodation that is directly owned, operated or managed by the provider should be included in the provider's whole of organisation Plan and providers must ensure that their Plan

comprehensively addresses how it will comply with National Code requirements specific to student accommodation.

As detailed in Standard 1.4 the Plan must detail providers' approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, address the factors that drive and contribute to gender-based violence, reflect the needs, experience and diversity of members of a particular provider community and document how providers will meet the requirements of the National Code.

Under Standard 1.7 of the National Code providers are required to develop an Outcomes Framework to track and measure how effective their actions are under the Plan. Providers may have their own templates that align to organisational reporting and evaluation processes and these can be used noting that providers are responsible for ensuring Plan and Outcomes Framework alignment.

Whole of organisation transformation is a strategic and long term journey. Different providers will be at different stages of maturity as they work to strengthen their internal systems and build capability.

Standard 1.4G requires providers to include a Gender Equality Action Plan in their broader plan. We acknowledge that many providers have existing Gender Equality Action Plans such as those developed for the Commission for gender equality in the public sector in Victoria, Science in Australia Gender Equity, SAGE, and other gender equality initiatives. These plans may align in part or whole with the whole of organisation approach required under the National Code.

Providers can use their existing Gender Equality Action Plans and either expand them to include actions for students and the broader provider community or incorporate actions to promote gender equality for the broader community into their broader whole of organisation plan. For those providers who wish to use their existing Gender Equality Action Plan this can be submitted as an annex to the whole of organisation Plan.

Step three is an opportunity for review. Before a Plan is endorsed providers should reflect on whether the Plan clearly outlines how change will be achieved and whether it meets the requirements under the National Code. This step is the opportunity to test the plan to ensure it captures a wide range of perspectives and needs. Meaningful engagement helps identify gaps, builds legitimacy and fosters shared ownership, a key element for successful implementation and lasting cultural change. Providers should also assess readiness to implement the Plan effectively.

This means confirming that resources, systems and stakeholder supports are in place or are in the process of being put in place and attention is being paid to addressing any barriers.

I'll pass back to Larissa to cover off on step four.

Larissa Hinds:

Step four encompasses endorsement and enablement of the Plan.

As we've covered lasting cultural and structural change requires coordinated leadership, clear accountability and active engagement across all levels of an organisation. With the requirement that the Principal Executive Officer lead and the governing body endorse the Plan this step is crucial. Regardless of how a provider chooses to format their Plan the Department requires providers to submit the completed endorsement template alongside the Plan. Providers may choose to include a statement of leadership or commitment addressing gender-based violence from their Principal Executive Officer. This would represent the leadership approach and signal strong commitment to preventing and responding to gender-based violence which sits at the heart of the National Code.

Step five is activate and embed. As we've covered Standard 1.4 to 1.7 of the National Code requires providers to implement their Plan and to monitor progress via an Outcomes Framework. For Plans to be effective providers need to move beyond endorsement of the Plan to embedding their actions in the Plan into everyday practice. This may include activities such as communicating the Plan's purpose and requirements, monitoring and mitigating gender-based violence risks and integrating actions into systems, policies and procedures.

It could also include provision of ongoing training, reinforcement and support. Providers should note that under Standard 6.9 they may be required to provide data on student and staff awareness of the Plan, the policies and procedures for making disclosures and formal reports, and of student and staff awareness of the availability and accessibility of providers' support services.

Joanne Brislane:

Finally we arrive at step six which is refresh. A continuous improvement approach is essential to ensure the Plan and Outcomes Framework remain current, effective and responsive to the evolving risks and needs of a provider's communities. Systemic change takes time and progress must be actively monitored, evaluated and refined. As providers deepen their understanding and

implementation approaches their strategies are likely to evolve, becoming more targeted, impactful and reflective of growing maturity in addressing gender-based violence across the organisation.

Provider requirements relevant to continuous improvement include reporting on the Plan and Outcomes Framework to the governing body every six months to support the identification of trends and changes over time, using data collected under Standard 6 to strengthen the prevention and response approach and reviewing and amending the Plan with regard to duty of care of students and staff with amendments being endorsed by the governing body. For example if it comes to light that something in the Prevention and Response Plan has unintended consequences the Plan may need to be revised along the way.

These above requirements all support an iterative and reflective approach to implementation. They support evidence informed decision making and will contribute to the Plan's evolution to meet emerging needs. Providers also need to report on the Plan and Outcomes Framework to the Department every two years and submit a new Plan and associated Outcomes Framework every four years.

The six steps we've just outlined represent a cycle of continuous improvement that supports meaningful and measurable change to address gender-based violence in higher education.

I'll now pass back to Larissa to outline the next steps.

Larissa Hinds:

So what happens next? As required by Standards 1.4 and 1.8 providers are required to submit a consolidated Plan and Outcomes Framework developed and attested to by their Principal Executive Officer and endorsed by their governing body to the Department according to the following timeframes. For Table A and B providers by 1 January 2026 and for all other providers registered with TEQSA by 1 January 2027.

To give practical effect to the 1 January 2026 submission date for Table A and B providers the Department will accept submissions of the Plan and Outcomes Framework up to midday Australian Eastern Daylight Time on Friday the 16th of January 2026. This takes into account key public holidays and leave periods in December and January. From a documentation point of view a small number of attachments may also be submitted to support the Plan and demonstrate compliance.

To support effective communication and accountability each provider is being asked to nominate a single key contact as the primary liaison with the Department regarding the Plan and Outcomes Framework. This contact will be responsible for coordinating the submissions and being the point of contact for responding to feedback. The Department will work with each provider's key contacts to advise on any specific submission requirements including timeframes and document formats and any size limitations.

In line with Standard 1.12 providers may need to respond to feedback provided by the Department and may be required to revise their Plan and Outcomes Framework if requested. Table A and B providers should be prepared to action any feedback in early to mid-2026.

As we mentioned at the start Standard 1 focuses on accountable leadership and governance as the foundation for preventing and responding to gender-based violence in higher education. The content outlined today acknowledges that implementation of organisation wide change requires considerable effort.

Gender-based violence is a complex, multifaceted challenge and providers will vary in their current levels of maturity in terms of processes and capability as well as in their risk profiles. In complying with the National Code providers will need to develop nuanced and dynamic prevention and response processes and practices that are tailored to their organisation context.

If I can leave you with some key takeaways today they would be that ending gender-based violence in higher education requires strong, visible, sustained and committed leadership, a whole of organisation approach which will be fundamental to driving systemic change.

Governing bodies who have a key role, a vital role to play in endorsing the approach to the Plan and the approach to minimising gender-based violence and their ongoing role in monitoring the effectiveness of the organisation's plan over time. And finally that sector wide leadership and governance is essential to effectively embed prevention and response measures and foster the cultural transformation necessary to prevent gender-based violence.

This brings us to the end of the content related to our presentation today and as mentioned you have had the opportunity throughout to post questions in the Q&A function. We will just go on pause for two minutes and we will come back and seek to answer as many questions as possible. Thank you.

[Visual of slide with text saying 'Q&A']

All right. We might bring myself and Jo back on and we will see how many questions we can get through in the remaining sort of nine minutes. I will tackle a couple of the questions that I can see at the top. One question is:

Q: Why is there a 12 month difference, timing difference between Table A and Table B providers and non-university higher education providers?

And that is in recognition of the fact that many Table A and Table B providers have efforts underway and activities underway and processes and procedures that may need to be matured. And I think the differential in timing acknowledges that there is probably a different level of maturity in our non-university sector noting that these are broad statements that I am making. And so that is the rationale between the difference between 1 January 2026 for our Table A and Table B providers and 1 January 2027 for our non-university sector.

Joanne Brislane:

I'll just jump in Larissa. Someone's just said:

Q: Did you say the deadline for Plan submission is now the 16th of January not the 1st?

So just to clarify per the Code the 1st of January is when the submission for the Plan and Outcomes Framework is due but knowing that practically we need to make this applicable for people around public holidays and summer leave we are accepting Plans to be submitted to the Department up until noon on the 16th of January Australian Eastern Daylight Saving Time. So yes in answer to that question. That is clarifying that noon on the 16th of January is now when they can be submitted up to.

There's also a question here about whether there's guidance around the publishing timeline. So just to share that in terms of us providing feedback there'd be a submission date on the 16th of January and then the Department will provide feedback. And so we just wanted to clarify the requirements around that because there's a question. So we expect providers will publish their plan within a reasonable timeframe following submission to the Department, obviously noting that there's going to be feedback. We understand that people may not want to publish and then have to publish an updated version. So we'll allow for a reasonable timeframe. That may be different across different providers because the timeline for giving that feedback may be distinct. So it doesn't have to be at the exact same time. We can allow for feedback and then within a reasonable time we would expect people to publish their Plan.

Larissa Hinds:

Jo I'm going to group up a couple of different questions that all seem to go to the same theme which is questions about:

Q: What if we need to do more consultation like the runway through to 1 January?

There's a comment around the stress and pressure that this has inflicted, I think the word is. And so there are similar themed questions.

So we did clarify that the submission date and timeframes is for Table A and Table B providers and I will note that in anticipation of quite a hectic year with an election the Minister for Education tabled the draft National Code when the legislation was first introduced into Parliament in February. And that was to ensure that there was a clear runway for preparation.

The Department has actively reinforced the expectation that the preparation for the National Code will be well in train throughout this year.

Noting that we understand that there will be a variety of providers both in terms of their starting positions around how they deal with gender-based violence and in their extent of preparation.

To be compliant with the National Code providers do need to submit their plans by the required date in January 2026. If a provider finds that they have not completed the consultation that they would wish to undertake they may choose to outline that in their Plan and outline how they would seek to complete that. So I think that that goes to some of the key questions and the theme that we're seeing.

Joanne Brislane:

And Larissa there's a question here and I'm happy for you to answer it or me around what we're looking for in terms of evaluating Plans and Outcomes Framework. Do you want to take that one?

Larissa Hinds:

So I think that the reality is that the Department expects to receive a whole lot of different levels and formats and levels of detail in the Plan and as a regulator we will also be seeking to reflect back to the higher education sector. But if I could draw your attention in particular to the fact that the Department will be taking a risk based approach in undertaking its regulatory function and if I

can repeat the word risk I would say that the Department will be looking for the evidence that providers have understood their context and have understood their risks and are shaping Plans that seek to target and address those risks so that that objective of minimising gender-based violence is being achieved. And I think that will be the evidence around the preparation work and identifying and addressing the risks will be one of our key areas of focus.

Joanne Brislane:

And maybe I think we've got time for one last question and there's just a more technical question around elaborating on the types of attachments that can be submitted with the Plan. That's something that we'll – part of the reason we're seeking to establish a key contact with each university is so that we can directly communicate one to one with people about the way that Plans will be submitted including details like the types of document format that we can accept and the number of documents or size of documents that we can accept. So if people can support us as soon as possible once we reach out identifying a key contact. That's something that we'll be in direct contact about as soon as possible.

Larissa Hinds:

Jo if I could just add to that. I think there's just a security consideration around the receipt of a zip file but largely I think standard formats of Word and PowerPoint and all the usual suites of documents should be fine. We would reiterate that we are seeking a consolidated Plan with maybe one or two attachments.

Joanne Brislane:

And just one cheeky last one only because I can answer it.

Q: *Will there be more sessions run and will there be a specific session around Standard 7 on student accommodation?*

Standard 7 is the next topic that we'll be doing. We're preparing for that as we speak and we're hoping to be able to send out communication shortly about when that webinar will be run. But it will be the next one and then after that we will be running further webinars to cover off on each of the remaining Standards of the Code much like today. Thanks Larissa.

Larissa Hinds:

I think they're the key themes. We'll work with the team if there were any other specific questions and get those published onto our frequently asked questions page. And you can see that the Department will be publishing frequently asked questions and then adding to those questions as we undertake future webinars.

Thank you all for your participation today. I think we've held at about 210 for a lot of today and we hope that you find this material and the links to the website that have been shared useful. Thank you for your time.

Joanne Brislane:

Thank you everyone.

*[Closing visual of slide with text saying 'Thank you',
'<https://www.education.gov.au/highereducationGBVcode>']*

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