



Transcript

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

Standard 7 - Safe Student Accommodation

November 2025

The transcript of this (and all further webinars) webinars should be read with the *Universities Accord (National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence) Act 2025* (the Act) and the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence 2025* (the National Code), which are the primary sources of requirements with which providers must comply. To the extent there is any inconsistency between the transcript of the webinar and the Act and the National Code, the Act and the National Code will prevail. The transcript of the webinar is intended to provide general guidance only and is not intended as, and should not be relied on, as legal advice. Providers should seek their own legal advice to understand their obligations under the Act and the National Code.

Presented by:

- Larissa Hinds – Interim Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Gender-based Violence Regulator, Department of Education
- Joanna Brislane – Director, Education and Engagement, Higher Education Gender-based Violence Regulator, Department of Education

Larissa Hinds:

Welcome to today's webinar on Standard 7 of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. Today we are focusing on safe student accommodation.

My name is Larissa Hinds and I'm currently in the Assistant Secretary role for the Gender-based Violence Reform Branch in the Department of Education, and I'm joined today by my colleague Jo Brislane, our Director of Education and Engagement.

I would like to thank those of you who have joined us for our previous webinars on the introduction to the National Code, which looked generally at provider requirements, and we've had a webinar on Standard 1, Accountable leadership and governance. The recordings of these webinars are now available on our [website](#) for you to access and to share with colleagues in the sector, and if the technology is with us today, a link of those will be now posted.

Slide 2 - Acknowledgment of Country

I am joining you today from the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia. I pay my respects to them and their cultures and elders past and present - and I extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who join us today.

Slide 3 – Victim-survivor acknowledgement

I would also like to acknowledge the 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 was created in response to the prevalence of gender-based violence in Australia, including in higher education settings, and one area of particular concern within the education sector is student accommodation, as this can be a high-risk environment for gender-based violence.

The National Student Safety Survey in 2021 found that of those who experienced sexual assault in a university context, one in four reported that the most impactful incident occurred in student accommodation or residences.

The proximity of students in shared living spaces, the presence of alcohol and gaps in supervision and oversight can exacerbate risk.

Student accommodation is also one of the most common sites where students seek support following incidents of sexual assault or harassment, regardless of whether the incident took place in the student accommodation setting or not.

And this is why the National Code has a specific focus on student accommodation. It can be a site of risk, but also a setting that presents an opportunity to promote the prevention of gender-based violence and ensure safety and support for those who experience it.

Slide 4 – Agenda

Under the National Code, higher education providers are responsible for compliance relating to the Standards and requirements for student accommodation.

Higher education providers who own, operate or manage student accommodation need to include those student accommodation aspects in their whole-of-organisation scope and Plan - and higher education providers who otherwise control, or are affiliated with student accommodation providers need to work with these separate accommodation providers to ensure that they comply with the relevant requirements under Standard 7.

Today's webinar will provide clarity on the distinct types of student accommodation providers and the relevant requirements with respect to the National Code. For reference to any Standard or requirement, please refer to the National Code, which is clear and specific about provider requirements.

Today we will share about 25 minutes of content between Jo and I, and we'll cover an overview of Standard 7, highlighting the importance of safe student accommodation, look at staff screening and staff declaration requirements, and the requirements for student accommodation that is directly owned, operated or managed, and that which is controlled or affiliated with a higher education provider.

In the latter category, we will cover five key areas of focus – a whole-of-organisation approach, safe environments and systems, knowledge and capability, safety and support, and data, evidence and impact. We'll then have a look at what the next steps are and allow for about 10 minutes for questions.

In terms of some brief housekeeping and with my fingers crossed from a technical point of view, as we have done in our previous webinars, today's session will be recorded and made available on the department's website. The Department will continue to produce guidance on the National Codes requirements and if you haven't already done so, we invite you to join our [mailing list](#) so that you can receive updates from the department. Again, a link will be posted shortly.

If things are going to plan, the chat function has been disabled today and we would invite you to submit questions at any time throughout the session using the Q&A function, which

we will seek to address as many as possible. Questions we do not get to today will be grouped by themes and addressed through iterative updates to the [Frequently Asked Questions section on the National Code pages of the Department's website](#). For the purposes of a clean recording and to adhere to data privacy laws, the questions that you each submit will not be made visible to all participants.

I'll hand across to you now, Jo.

Slide 5 – Standard 7 overview

Joanna Brislane:

Thanks, Larissa. Standard 7 requires providers to ensure student accommodation is safe for all students and staff. Safety in accommodation is about protecting students' right to feel secure where they live and to pursue their education without fear or disruption.

Engaging with residents in student accommodation is also a key opportunity to shape attitudes and norms to prevent gender-based violence from occurring in the first place. The National Code applies to three distinct categories of student accommodation.

One, student accommodation that is directly owned, managed or operated by a higher education provider; two, to student accommodation that is otherwise under the control of the higher education provider with the meaning of 50AA of the Corporations Act of 2001, and three, student accommodation that is affiliated with a higher education provider.

Affiliated student accommodation is defined in the National Code and includes student accommodation providers who have a service agreement or other agreement with the provider, are operating on the provider's lands, or are authorised by the provider to use their intellectual property, for example their logo in their recruitment or marketing materials or on their website.

Regardless of student accommodation type, accountability for meeting National Code requirements around safety in student accommodation lies with the higher education provider.

For student accommodation under the control of the higher education provider or affiliated with it, the higher education provider is required to do everything reasonably possible to meet the National Code's Standards by seeking to establish or - where relevant - to amend existing legal arrangements with the student accommodation provider.

Slide 6 - Staff screening and declarations

We'll start today by going through the requirements related to student accommodation staff. These apply to all three student accommodation provider types covered by the National Code.

In recognition of the high-risk environment where staff and students work and live in proximity, Standard 7 has specific requirements related to staff working in student accommodation. These requirements relate to screening and declarations.

Requirements are for the provider to request staff working in student accommodation to declare if they've ever been investigated for or found to have engaged in gender-based violence, whether in previous roles or through legal processes, and consider any risks arising from substantiated allegations of gender-based violence when deciding if someone is suitable for a role or when considering staff for promotion or recognition.

Actions to meet these requirements may include reviewing existing HR policies and procedures to incorporate employee declarations in a way that aligns with or is modelled on similar existing processes.

For example, with misconduct declarations, incorporating clear messaging about the purpose of required declarations into policies and procedures and communicating this with prospective staff, and establishing policies and procedures to assess risk, safety and suitability based on declarations, taking the duty of care to staff and students into account. Risk and safety assessment processes should consider the nature of the disclosure, alongside information gathered from other mechanisms like criminal history checks and robust reference checks.

These requirements help providers make informed staffing decisions. Declarations do not preclude providers from employing a candidate but allow for greater transparency and strengthened provider safety procedures requiring gender-based violence declarations signals to prospective staff that gender-based violence is unacceptable.

These requirements reflect evidence that employees who become subject to an allegation of gender-based violence may cease employment or move to another organisation before an investigation is concluded.

Gender-based violence is deeply connected to imbalances of power and this can show up in intimate relationships, particularly in a setting where many staff are students or residents.

Under the National Code, student accommodation providers are also required to ask staff to declare any current or past intimate personal relationship with residents. And, if such a relationship exists, to put a conflict of interest or risk management plan in place. Intimate relationship declaration supports student accommodation providers to make informed assessment of risks and take actions to mitigate these risks.

The National Code does not define the term *intimate personal relationships*. Like other pre-employment declarations, the requirement relies on an individual staff member to make a disclosure. Higher education providers are required to manage these disclosures sensitively and appropriately, in line with privacy laws. This is likely to require the development of new policies and procedures.

I'll now pass over to Larissa who'll outline requirements specific to student accommodation that is directly owned, operated or managed by a higher education provider.

Slide 7 - Directly owned, managed and/or operated student accommodation

Larissa Hinds:

Thanks, Jo. The National Code includes several specific requirements for student accommodation that is owned, operated or managed by a higher education provider. As part of a whole-of-organisation approach, any student accommodation that falls under these categories should be included in the higher education providers' whole-of-organisation gender-based violence prevention and response Plan. It also means that providers must include accommodation in the development of actions to comply with Standards 1 to 6.

In meeting these requirements, providers need to ensure their policies, procedures and activities are tailored to student accommodation settings and address the specific context and risks associated with student accommodation, given it is a setting where people live as well as learn, study and socialise.

For example, in developing a gender-based violence policy as required by Standard 3.1, a provider should make clear how the policy applies to student accommodation, and the policy may include clauses specific to residential settings. Higher education providers may establish working groups or engage student accommodation providers to support their whole-of-organisation planning, and to shape actions that will meet the requirements across Standards 1 to 6.

The National Code also recognises the important role student accommodation staff and leaders can play in responding to disclosures when disclosures or formal reports of gender-based violence are made involving a resident, student accommodation staff, or any staff whose substantive role is in connection with student accommodation.

The higher education provider needs to take all necessary and immediate action proportionate to the risk arising from the disclosure to ensure the safety of the discloser, residents and student accommodation staff, undertake a risk assessment within 48 hours and determine safety measures to be implemented to protect the safety of the discloser and other residents, and implement support plans developed collaboratively with the discloser and respondent if required within 48 hours.

This Standard goes as far as allowing for the permanent removal of a person who has had an allegation of gender-based violence against them substantiated, where it is determined necessary to protect the safety of residents and after seeking and considering the views of the discloser.

To inform evaluation and reporting under Standard 6, providers must also ensure the necessary systems and agreements are in place for student accommodation providers to safely collect and share gender-based violence data.

Finally, the National Code's focus on education and training extends to student accommodation that is owned, operated or managed by the provider. Standard 7.1 requires that residents, student accommodation staff and any staff whose substantive role relates to student accommodation, undertake education and training focused on prevention and responding to disclosures. This is referenced in Standard 3 of the National Code but will need to be tailored to the student accommodation environment.

This may look like requiring residents to complete prevention and responding to disclosures training as part of orientation, or including it in mandatory training requirements for staff, tailoring training to the student accommodation context – by including scenarios based on common situations in residences and social events – and content about how power dynamics can play out in student accommodation, including providing information about support pathways.

We will now turn to the requirements for student accommodation providers, which are not directly owned, operated or managed by the higher education provider.

Slide 8 - Controlled or affiliated student accommodation

Joanna Brislane:

The National Code outlines requirements for controlled or affiliated student accommodation providers and will address these together across these five themes: whole-of-organisation approach, safe environments and systems, knowledge and capability, safety and support - including trauma-informed and person-centred responses, and data, evidence and impact.

For successful implementation of the National Code's requirements, a collaborative relationship between higher education providers and student accommodation providers they control or are affiliated with is essential. As noted earlier, higher education providers are required to do everything reasonably possible to meet the National Code's Standards, and ensuring these requirements are met by controlled or affiliated student accommodation providers may require them to establish or amend legal arrangements.

We understand higher education providers are at different stages of maturity regarding these processes, and many are already progressing with this. If a provider does not yet have a legally binding agreement with an existing affiliated student accommodation provider, or is planning to work with a new one, they must do everything reasonably within their power to enter into a legally binding written agreement that meets the requirements set out in Standards 7.2 to 7.8, which we'll dive into for the rest of this session.

Student accommodation providers that do not agree to implement an agreement may lose the benefits of affiliation with the higher education provider.

I'll now share more on the requirements for controlled or affiliated student accommodation providers to take a whole-of-organisation approach at the accommodation level.

Slide 9 - Whole-of-organisation approach

Higher education providers must ensure that controlled or affiliated student accommodation providers develop, implement and publish a Whole-of-Organisation Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan on their website. The Plan must include the student accommodation provider's approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence in a way that prioritises safety and support of both residents and staff and addresses factors that drive gender-based violence (including those specific to their context), record how they'll implement the requirements set out in Standard 7.2 to 7.8 of the National Code, include an organisation-wide assessment identifying systemic risks, enablers and barriers to preventing gender-based violence. For example, there could be a lack of staff expertise, unsafe reporting mechanisms or outdated systems. And then set out

actions that will be taken in response to findings of that assessment, such as uplifting capability or implementing more responsive systems.

And finally, the Plan must reflect the needs, experiences and voices of all members of the accommodation community, especially those disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

The Plan must be developed in collaboration with residents and student accommodation, including people with lived experience of gender-based violence, and must be monitored on an ongoing basis to measure its impact, and it needs to be updated at least every four years. In our recent webinar on Standard 1, we introduced a guide and optional templates for higher education providers to prepare a whole-of-organisation Plan. These resources are available on our [website](#) and could be useful for student accommodation providers also.

I'll now pass back to Larissa who'll walk through the requirements of Standard 7.4 - which relate to safe environments and systems.

Slide 10 - Safe environments and systems

Larissa Hinds:

In line with Standard 7.4, higher education providers must have arrangements in place with controlled or affiliated student accommodation providers to ensure their environments are safe and continuously improving.

In addition to the staff screening requirements we have already discussed, higher education providers must have arrangements in place with student accommodation providers that ensure their policies and procedures relating to the prevention and response of gender-based violence are appropriate - either through adopting those of the higher education provider or through development of their own.

If the student accommodation provider already has policies and plans or decides to develop their own, they must ensure that they provide information on the factors that drive and contribute to gender-based violence, including those relevant to their context, are person-centred and trauma-informed, adopt the definition of gender-based violence from the National Code, clearly state that gender-based violence is unacceptable, include information about available support services in relation to gender-based violence, have appropriate gender-based violence policies and procedures compliant with Standard 5 - which is about safe processes, include information on procedures in relating to a disclosure or formal report of gender-based violence, and ensure that all of these are publicly available, written

in plain English and, where relevant, able to be translated into the language of members of the student accommodation community.

These policies and procedures are to be reviewed at least every three years, following meaningful engagement with residents, student accommodation staff, and groups who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

The higher education provider must also be able to review the student accommodation provider's policies and procedures relating to gender-based violence on request and be able to provide feedback to ensure compliance with Standard 7.

Higher education providers are also required to put arrangements in place with student accommodation providers to ensure non-disclosure agreements are prohibited unless requested by the person disclosing the experience. And that any settlement terms do not include a non-disparagement clause.

We will now turn to Standards 7.5 and 7.6, which centre on knowledge and capability.

Slide 11 - Knowledge and capability

Under Standard 7.5, higher education providers are required to have formal agreements with student accommodation providers to support education and prevention efforts. These agreements must ensure that all residents and accommodation staff complete education and training on prevention and responding to disclosures tailored to student accommodation settings. This training must be delivered or approved by the higher education provider and meet the requirements of Standard 3 of the National Code.

Accommodation providers must also actively promote and share prevention messages that are evidence-informed and relevant to the student living environment. These messages should be visible and accessible throughout the accommodation space.

Evaluation of prevention programs and campaigns run by student accommodation providers is also required to support and inform revisions and ensure that prevention efforts are relevant and continually refined.

With regards to capability requirements, Standard 7.6 requires that risk assessments in student accommodation are only carried out by individuals with expertise and experience. That includes expertise in gender-based violence risk assessment and knowledge of evidence-based risk and protective factors for experiencing gender-based violence, the

types, patterns and effects of gender-based violence, and how gender-based violence is experienced by different groups of people.

I'll now pass back to Jo to cover our Standards 7.7 and 7.8, centred on safety and support.

Side 12 - Safety and support

Joanna Brislane:

To ensure safety and support for those who experience gender-based violence, Standard 7.7 requires higher education providers to have arrangements in place with student accommodation providers to ensure their responses, practices and support services are safe, person-centred and trauma-informed.

Trauma-informed and person-centred approaches foster an understanding of how trauma presents, promote safety, support recovery, and ensure disclosers have a voice and a choice. These approaches support residents and staff feeling safe to make reports, knowing that they'll be respected and heard, and their disclosures will be handled with care and professionalism.

Standard 7.7 requires student accommodation providers to provide or facilitate access to support services, which includes explaining the available support services and academic supports, actively promote and make accessible information about policies, procedures and services, both internal and external.

In response to any disclosures or formal reports, student accommodation providers need to conduct a risk assessment and manage any identified risks on an ongoing basis if the disclosure relates to conduct that occurred in student accommodation or at an accommodation organised event. The student accommodation provider must take immediate action proportionate to the risk. This may include relocating the respondent or arranging urgent support services.

Disclosers must be given the choice to have the higher education provider lead the response. If they choose this option, the student accommodation provider must fully cooperate, sharing relevant information and implementing any outcomes decided by the higher education provider.

If the discloser elects for the student accommodation provider to lead the response, the student accommodation provider must conduct a risk assessment within 48 hours, or immediately if needed, taking the discloser's view seriously. Safety measures are to be implemented right away, risks are to be monitored, and information will need to be shared

with the higher education provider under specific conditions, including with the discloser's consent and when necessary to protect well-being.

Within 48 hours of a disclosure or formal report, the student accommodation provider is also required to develop and implement support plans for both the discloser and respondent. This is in line with Standard 4 and speaks to the procedural fairness aspects of the National Code.

In the next slide, we'll talk a little more about data collection.

Slide 13 - Data, evidence and impact

The National Code recognises that strengthened data collection is an essential component of a comprehensive response to addressing gender-based violence. Affiliated or controlled student accommodation providers are required to collect and share gender-based violence data with higher education providers to support accurate and robust reporting under Standard 6 of the National Code. These will need to be reflected in agreements between higher education providers and student accommodation providers and may require some adjustment to current data collection processes or systems.

Requirements related to student accommodation data collection include, but are not limited to, ensuring data is collected in a safe, trauma-informed and person-centred manner and is handled securely. Making sure data informs the evaluation and review of the Whole-of-Organisation Prevention and Response Plan, and ensuring data collection informs evaluation, impact and planning for prevention and response approaches.

Larissa will now cover off on what's next.

Slide 14 - What's Next

Larissa Hinds:

The National Code comes into force from 1 January 2026 and with this, Table A and Table B higher education providers and relevant student accommodation providers are required to commence the data collection around gender-based violence.

We know that many universities are already working collaboratively with their accommodation providers, and accommodation providers are considering how to comply with the National Code.

Higher education providers' Whole-of-Organisation Prevention and Response Plans are due in January 2026. So those providers who directly own, operate or manage student

accommodation will be needing to take student accommodation requirements into account for these Plans.

Higher education providers should also be in discussion with student accommodation that is otherwise controlled by or affiliated with the provider about their requirement to produce their whole their own Whole-of-Organisation Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan.

Regarding distinct reporting requirements in relation to student accommodation, higher education providers need to, by 30 June each year, provide to the Secretary of the Department of Education, the names of the student accommodation that they directly own, operate or manage, the student accommodation that they otherwise control, and the student accommodation to which they are affiliated.

This session has been recorded, and it too will be uploaded along with the slides, and a transcript to what Jo and I have gone through today.

Higher education and student accommodation providers are a critical partner in this national effort, and we look forward to working alongside you to building environments where safety is the norm, where disclosures lead to support and where every member of our higher education community can flourish. Thank you.

Joanna Brislane:

Thanks, everyone.

[END]