



ANU Feedback on Amendments to HESF 2021 – March 2026

ANU supports changes to the HESF that are not onerous or require extensive additional reporting requirements. The key themes identified for additional attention are all relevant to current industry challenges, and additional guidance for institutions may assist institutions being proactive in managing these challenges.

Demonstrating a commitment to addressing racism

1. What specific actions should higher education providers be required to take to demonstrate a clear, institution-wide commitment to addressing racism?

ANU would support evidence requirements for how racism is prevented and responded to within providers, which may include an institution statement against racism, policies, procedures or legislation, and the mechanisms for reporting racism and other harmful behaviours. This evidence should be publicly accessible.

2. What targeted guidance would most effectively support providers to meet strengthened anti-racism expectations?

ANU would support additional guidance that is whole of sector, holistic and aligned with recommendations in the AHRC Racism@Uni Study. Guidance notes on balancing academic freedom, academic discourse, and prevention of speech that may cause harm or distress to the community will also be useful from a whole-of-sector perspective.

Guidance notes on broadening universal design for learning to other inclusive practices in teaching and learning and student experience would also be useful for providers.

3. What are the principal benefits and potential limitations of explicit anti-racism standards compared with reliance on existing wellbeing, equity and governance provisions?

Explicit anti-racism standards may increase trust in providers ability to address harmful behaviours. However, having a separate and explicit standard on anti-racism could inadvertently ignore the intersectionality of staff and student experience. Having expectations around the reduction and response to a range of harmful behaviours, such as racism, gender-based violence, ableism, etc. embedded within the existing wellbeing provisions allows universities for a coordinated and consistent approach to supporting student wellbeing and experience

Incorporating the University Governance Principles and transparency requirements

4. If a new Part C is created to incorporate the University Governance Principles, what are the advantages and risks of having some standards apply only to 'public universities'?

Nil response.

5. How might strengthened standards on academic oversight, staffing profiles, and teaching quality affect student outcomes and experience?

Where standards are clarified, incisive, and focused on key areas of accountability and practice they offer important avenues to demonstrate quality whilst also facilitating ongoing improvement. These are to be welcomed. Where standards are overly complex, hard to discern, require repeated and overlapping reporting, or are changed,

augmented, or removed, over relatively short periods of time these standards pose challenges. In particular, the balance between appropriate and beneficial reporting and any institution's capacity through regular practice to focus on quality and experience should be considered. Strengthened standards should support appropriately considered innovation and flexibility when that is in the interests of quality and experience.

Strengthening of oversight is not synonymous with simply more oversight – it is best thought of as improving oversight in a holistic way in the context of the broad functioning of a university within its regulatory context. This offers the best approach to demonstrating and improving quality and experience. Any standards should remain principles-based and continue to allow flexibility for institutions to demonstrate their compliance.

Supporting people with disability in higher education

6. To what extent would the proposed themes in the consultation paper (inclusion, universal design and inherent requirements) drive a more inclusive and equitable higher education system and improved student outcomes?

ANU encourages the consideration of how these amendments can deliver better alignment between the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), the Disability Standards for Education (DSF), and the HESF. Greater clarity is needed regarding provider obligations in relation to reasonable adjustments. There are continuing concerns regarding the reliance on medical documentation to meet HESA legislation.

Better alignment between provider obligations and those of professional accrediting bodies would also assist in clarifying expectations in relation to reasonable adjustments for professional accredited programs.

The current DSF does not adequately recognise the support needs of international students, many of whom may be receiving a diagnosis for the first time in Australia.

Embedding UDL and ICD as minimum expectations in teaching and learning standards would significantly improve the student experience for a broad range of diverse student cohorts.

Greater clarity is needed on the purpose of inherent requirements, ensuring they are used as a tool to support decision making and reasonable adjustments rather than as a tool to screen suitability to enter a program. The adoption of a whole-of-sector approach to inherent requirements would be beneficial to both students and institutions by promoting greater consistency across the higher education sector.

7. To what extent would the proposed themes promote accountability, better governance and improved provider practice to support people with disability in higher education?

Promoting accountability and improved provider practice as a focus in any proposed standard changes will encourage institutions to design accessible curricula, digital platforms and learning environments, reducing reliance on reasonable adjustments put in place for individual students.

Such standards may also support greater consistency in practice both within institutions and across the sector, helping to clarify expectations for providers and improve the overall experience for students with disability.

Emerging technologies and the Higher Education Regulatory Framework

8. Does the term 'emerging technologies' adequately capture the range of innovations and digital technologies that are transforming higher education? If not, please suggest alternative terminology.

'Emerging technologies' sufficiently captures open-ended ways technology challenges the provision of education. It is an acceptable neutral term. Where guidance is provided for a more narrow technological innovation, ANU suggests that the current approach of naming that innovation continues – this has been demonstrated in the Generative AI guidance provided by TEQSA <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/corporate-publications/gen-ai-strategies-australian-higher-education-emerging-practice>

ANU has a strong preference for the regulatory environment to remain technology-neutral and principles based (academic integrity, wellbeing, equity etc) to allow for continued innovation and adaptation to new technologies.

The impacts of technology on student and staff experience and service requires diverse ethical and policy/regulatory considerations for governance and academic integrity. The impacts of technology on outcomes such as student, research and equity should be considered.

9. Do the standards currently provide adequate guidance to manage risks related to emerging technologies?

ANU would welcome further guidance on risk management relating to emerging technologies, while acknowledging the guidance that does already exist. Guidance notes could be expanded to include more information on higher impact or higher risk technologies and include best practice case studies, rather than adding new requirements for policies or practice that would increase the regulatory burden.

10. How should amended standards appropriately balance the management of risks with the need to preserve provider flexibility, so as to support ongoing innovation?

ANU would support a reasonable minimum level of service and risk management being outlined in the standards, without an overly prescriptive approach to allow for the different sizes, focus and demographics of each provider. For example, there may be a minimum of access to online material in a safe environment, without specifying how AI-supported learning resources or AI-based assessments are included.

Any amended standards need to be sensible to the rapidly changing technological context. Flexibility for providers is the only way to future proof any regulatory environment. Clarification of goals and expectations for providers is welcome – prescribing how those goals are achieved should not be included.

Approach to a cyclical review of the Threshold Standards

11. What methodological approaches should underpin a cyclical review of the Threshold Standards to ensure it is robust, proportionate and evidence-informed?

12. How can a review process be designed to meaningfully engage a diverse range of stakeholders?

Review of the Standards should be regular with focus on emerging concerns to assess 'fit-for-purpose'. Review by independent experts would build additional trust in the Framework. Evidence-informed reviews must include seeking direct feedback from providers, regulatory practitioners, students and provider staff.

An established regular cycle would ensure that stakeholders are more aware of reviews, can be prepared to provide input, and would reduce the need to react as an industry to emerging challenges. Reviews should invite engagement from staff, students, providers, industry partners, and regulatory practitioners specifically. Regular review would also be able to respond to an increasingly regulatory environment, with additional legislative instruments that are at times in conflict.

As providers move into a more open-ended review/reporting cycles it makes sense that the regulatory reviews also shift to a more open-ended cycle. Discrete, staccato

reviews could be replaced by facilitated ongoing engagement with partners and stakeholders throughout.