



CENTRE FOR MUSLIM WELLBEING

Submission on Proposed Amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

Higher Education Standards Panel
Submitted By: Centre for Muslim Wellbeing
Date: 15 March 2026

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Acknowledgement

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem

In the name of Allah, The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful

We begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, work and gather, including the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, and all First Nations peoples across Victoria. We pay profound respect to Elders past and present, and honour their enduring connection to land, water, skies, and culture.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded—this has always been and always will be Aboriginal land. We stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, upholding shared values of justice, healing, dignity, and collective care.

Inspired by the divine attributes of Ar-Rahman (The Most Compassionate) and Ash-Shafee (The Healer), we affirm the strength, resilience and spiritual wellbeing of our Multicultural and Muslim communities. We honour the lived experiences of those we serve, whose voices guide our advocacy for systems that are compassionate, inclusive, and grounded in holistic wellbeing.

We are guided by Al-Adl (The Just) in our commitment to equity and fairness, Al-Wasi' (The All-Encompassing) in embracing the richness of diverse cultures and faiths, and Al-Hakeem (The All-Wise) in seeking thoughtful, evidence-informed solutions. We call upon An-Nur (The Light) to illuminate pathways of hope and healing, and As-Salaam (The Source of Peace) as we work towards environments that nurture peace, dignity and belonging for all.

Together, we strive to embody these divine values in service, policy, and community—fostering a Victoria where wellbeing is a shared right, and where all communities—especially those whose voices have been historically marginalised—are valued, included, and supported to flourish.



About Centre for Muslim Wellbeing

Who we are

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing (CMW) is a not-for-profit, community-led organisation established in 2018, dedicated to improving the mental health, spiritual wellbeing, and social inclusion of Muslim communities in Victoria. Established in response to a critical need for culturally and faith-informed care, CMW is grounded in lived experience, guided by evidence, and driven by community partnership.

We work at the intersection of mental health, community development, and faith-based healing, serving as a trusted bridge between government, services, and communities. Our work honours the diversity of Muslim identities and promotes dignity, resilience, and collective care across generations.

Through partnerships with primary health networks, schools, universities, faith leaders and community organisations, CMW has reached thousands of community members through mental health literacy programs, trauma recovery initiatives, youth wellbeing programs, cultural responsiveness training, and policy engagement.

This work provides CMW with direct insight into the systemic barriers affecting Muslim and multicultural communities, including those experienced by students within higher education settings.

What we do

CMW delivers a wide range of culturally responsive initiatives and advocacy efforts, including:

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and suicide postvention training** tailored for Muslim and multicultural communities
- **Healing circles and trauma recovery programs**, including faith-informed group work, grief workshops, and collective resilience initiatives
- **Youth and men's wellbeing programs** incorporating spiritual mentorship, mental fitness, and psycho-social education
- **Cultural intelligence (CQ) and anti-racism training** for schools, workplaces, and frontline services to strengthen service inclusivity
- **Community peer support initiatives** for carers, new migrants, and women, designed to reduce isolation and build community capacity
- **Policy advocacy and systems engagement** to ensure Muslim voices are embedded in mental health reform, anti-racism strategies, and multicultural policy

Through partnerships with primary health networks, faith leaders, education providers, and grassroots organisations, CMW has reached thousands of community members across Victoria, delivering practical impact while championing systemic change.

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1. Executive Summary

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework.

Higher education institutions play a central role in fostering environments that support academic success, belonging and equity. However, community engagement conducted by CMW and sector partners indicates that Muslim students and other culturally and linguistically diverse students continue to experience systemic barriers to safety, participation and support within higher education environments.

These barriers include experiences of racism and Islamophobia, lack of culturally responsive wellbeing services, limited faith literacy among staff, underreporting of discrimination due to low trust in complaints processes, and the mental health impacts of global conflict and social polarisation.

The current Standards Framework does not explicitly define cultural safety, anti-racism, or faith-informed support. This results in inconsistent and often inadequate implementation across institutions.

Wellbeing cannot be separated from culture, faith and identity. Students can be enrolled, attending and achieving academically, and still be psychologically and culturally unsafe. Access without safety does not constitute equity.

We need to strengthen these areas in the Framework so higher education providers meet contemporary expectations for safety, inclusion, and quality.

Summary of recommendations

- 1. Embed cultural safety and anti-racism as explicit requirements within the Standards Framework**
- 2. Require providers to demonstrate institution-wide strategies to prevent and respond to racism, Islamophobia and religious discrimination**
- 3. Mandate culturally responsive, trauma-informed and faith-aware student wellbeing services**
- 4. Introduce transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms for student safety and discrimination**
- 5. Require disaggregated data collection and reporting on student well-being and experiences of discrimination**
- 6. Require meaningful engagement with and representation of diverse communities in governance and service design**

2. Embedding Cultural Safety, Equity and Accountability in Higher Education

Muslim Students in Australian Higher Education

Australia's Muslim population is young and diverse. Muslim students contribute meaningfully to university communities, yet their experiences are not consistently reflected in institutional policy or practice.

CMW's engagement highlights several systemic challenges. Experiences of racism and Islamophobia remain a significant determinant of well-being. Students report discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion from campus spaces, and, in some cases, direct harassment. These experiences contribute to psychological distress, social withdrawal and reduced academic engagement.

Cultural barriers to help-seeking also persist. Many students delay or avoid accessing support services due to concerns that providers may not understand their cultural identity, religious practices, family context or experiences of discrimination. Global events and social discourse further shape student well-being. International conflict, media narratives and public sentiment can create heightened distress, grief and vulnerability within Muslim communities. Universities must be equipped to respond to these realities as part of their core responsibility to student wellbeing.

Strengthening Student Safety and Well-being

The proposed amendments present an important opportunity to strengthen expectations around student safety and wellbeing. Student wellbeing must be recognised as a core institutional responsibility that is embedded across governance, policy and service delivery.

Higher education providers should be required to demonstrate:

- Integrated and trauma-informed wellbeing frameworks
- Accessible and culturally responsive support services
- Systems for early identification and response to student distress
- Clear accountability for student safety outcomes

Safety must be understood to include psychological, cultural, and relational safety. It is not limited to acute incidents, but includes everyday experiences of exclusion, marginalisation and invalidation.

Embedding Cultural Safety, Equity and Accountability in Higher Education

Addressing Racism and Religious Discrimination

Racism and religious discrimination undermine both equity and educational outcomes. Providers should be required to implement clear and measurable strategies to prevent and respond to racism, Islamophobia and religious discrimination.

This should include:

- Explicit institutional policies addressing racism and religious discrimination
- Culturally safe and accessible reporting pathways
- Transparent complaints processes with defined timeframes and outcomes
- Mechanisms for institutional accountability and continuous improvement

Students must have confidence that reporting discrimination will lead to meaningful and timely action.

Cultural Safety in Student Support Services

Culturally responsive services are essential for equitable access to support. Providers should be required to demonstrate the capability to deliver services that are responsive to cultural and religious diversity.

This includes:

- Workforce capability in cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed care and faith literacy
- Availability of culturally relevant resources and supports
- Inclusion of bicultural or community-informed roles where appropriate
- Ongoing evaluation of service accessibility and effectiveness across diverse student groups

Capability must be demonstrated, not assumed.

Embedding Cultural Safety, Equity and Accountability in Higher Education

Partnerships and Governance

Community organisations hold critical expertise in culturally responsive engagement and service delivery.

Providers should be required to demonstrate how they engage with community organisations to inform service design, early intervention and student support.

In addition, institutions should demonstrate how students from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds are meaningfully represented in governance, advisory structures and decision-making processes.

Engagement must move beyond consultation toward shared influence and accountability.

Data, Monitoring and Accountability

Addressing systemic inequities requires robust and transparent data.

Providers should be required to collect, analyse and act on disaggregated data relating to:

- Student wellbeing outcomes
- Experiences of discrimination
- Engagement with support services

Data should be disaggregated where appropriate by cultural background, religion, gender and other relevant indicators.

This data should inform institutional improvement and be linked to accountability mechanisms that ensure progress over time.

3. Conclusion



Higher education institutions play a critical role in shaping not only academic outcomes but also the wellbeing, identity and future participation of young Australians.

Embedding cultural safety, addressing discrimination and strengthening student wellbeing are essential to ensuring that the Standards Framework reflects the realities of Australia's diverse student population.

These are not peripheral considerations. They are central to quality, safety and equity within higher education.

The Centre for Muslim Wellbeing welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and remains committed to working collaboratively with government, institutions and community partners to strengthen inclusive and supportive learning environments.



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