

## Amendments to Threshold Standards

### ENQUIRIES

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Office of the Vice Chancellor

[Redacted]

## INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Trobe University welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

Universities are already undertaking substantial work to ensure they are inclusive, safe and well-governed institutions for the benefit of their students, staff and the communities they serve. We recognise and support the intent of the targeted amendments “to improve student safety, strengthen governance, enhance inclusion and ensure the Threshold Standards keep pace with technological and sector change”.

La Trobe broadly supports the proposed amendments though further consultation will be required on the formulation should the existing standards be amended or new standards be introduced. It is essential that any proposed changes do not duplicate actions stemming from other ongoing reviews and that universities continue to retain the flexibility to respond to policy changes and to external factors.

## LA TROBE’S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### Demonstrating a commitment to addressing racism

La Trobe’s response to this question is informed by the extensive internal work and consultation that led to the University’s [Anti-Racism Action Plan 2025-2030](#) which was released in 2025.

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

- It is our view that higher education providers should demonstrate an explicit, institution-wide commitment to addressing racism through clear definition, accountability, and alignment with legal and social obligations. Specifically, we recommend that providers should formally define racism within their Anti-Racism or Anti-Prejudice Action Plans, including a historically grounded definition that acknowledges colonisation and the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, expressed in their own voices.
- Higher education providers should also reflect and embed their commitment to addressing racism within their policies, explicitly referencing relevant anti-discrimination legislation and acknowledging the broader societal context. This ensures that anti-racism commitments are not positioned as aspirational guidance, but as enforceable institutional responsibilities. Institutions should demonstrate leadership by addressing antisemitism and Islamophobia alongside other forms of racism. This signals that anti-racism is not episodic or reactive, but embedded in governance, policy, culture and accountability mechanisms across the organisation.

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

- The most effective targeted guidance would position racism explicitly as a psychosocial hazard within institutional risk and governance frameworks. Given there is a known likelihood of racism occurring in university environments, which has now been corroborated through the recent AHRC's Racism@Uni survey, providers should be supported to take a proactive, prevention-based approach rather than a reactive or complaint-driven one. By framing racism as a foreseeable and preventable risk, and by providing structured guidance around directing behaviour, preventing harm, detecting issues early, and responding effectively, regulators would move anti-racism expectations from aspirational commitments to enforceable, system-wide risk controls.

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

- La Trobe is supportive of explicit anti-racism standards in line with existing legislation. Explicit anti-racism standards would provide clarity, accountability, and a whole-of-institution mandate to address systemic racism in a way that general wellbeing, equity, and governance provisions often do not. They enable institutions to directly name racism, embed truth-telling and intersectional practice, centre lived experience, and align with sector expectations set by bodies such as Universities Australia and Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. However, if not well integrated, they risk duplication, compliance-driven implementation, and policy layering. Their effectiveness ultimately depends on sustainable resourcing and embedding anti-racism within existing governance and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) frameworks rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

### **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'?**

- The advantage would be to provide public institutions with clear expectations which are appropriate to public (non-profit) sector organisations and tailored to universities, and which are transparent to all stakeholders. This would also help to strengthen public confidence and universities' social licence. A drawback would be that for-profit universities would operate under a different set of expectations, but it could be argued that this is already the case and, unlike public universities, they are not in receipt of public resources.
- La Trobe University supports the 'Final Report and Principles of the Expert Council on University Governance'. We support the inclusion of the high-level Principles 1-8 into the Threshold Standards but not the inclusion of every sub-principle included in the

Final Report. The full inclusion would not allow any room for flexibility and would go against the recommendations of the Expert Panel that universities should be able to report on their adherence to the Principle on a 'if not, why not' basis. More importantly, if the Governance Principles were to be included in the Threshold Standards, there should not be duplication at state-level leading to legislation of additional requirements.

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

- Strengthened standards could be clearer about academic oversight (i.e. academic governance) requirements. While this differs across different universities, it is not uncommon for there to be confusion between academic and corporate governance in universities. These amendments to the Threshold Standards might be an opportunity to address this.
- There has also been a concern linked to change processes at universities and how they have been managed and communicated. Clearer standards could provide a framework for universities to design, communicate, implement and monitor major change processes as well as make operational adjustments in response to changing student and stakeholder demand while ensuring academic standards and student experience are protected. Any changes however should be careful not to duplicate any actions that result from government reviews and must allow universities flexibility to respond to policy change and external factors that impact sustainability.

#### **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?**

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

- La Trobe agrees with the proposed themes of inclusion, universal design and inherent requirements which would move the sector from simply complying with legislative requirements to a more contemporary model of accountability. Providers should already be meeting their obligations as it relates to compliance with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE) and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA).
- In terms of the point raised in the Discussion Paper on the need to revisit the recommendations from HESP's 2016 report on *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education*, La Trobe would caution against revisiting a report which is already ten years old. While this report has been important, and universities have relied on it in their practice and research, there have been significant developments

since 2016 including new technology, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Any changes need to be grounded in, and responsive to, contemporary circumstances to ensure the best possible outcomes for people with a 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.**

- Yes, the term "emerging technologies" adequately captures the range of innovations and digital technologies. While it is acknowledged that it may be considered vague and may not fully capture the new and changed practices that accompany new technology, it has the advantage of being widely understood. It helpfully reflects a point in time when there is the greatest risk – when a technology is new, rapidly evolving, significantly uncertain and disruptive to existing understanding and practices. Rather than attempting to develop a new term, there is an opportunity to elaborate this existing term to draw attention to the key considerations. This does not discount the ongoing need to monitor and attend to mature technologies in relation to the standards but recognises that universities are (and should be) better equipped to respond to evolutions rather than disruptions.
- Our strong recommendation is not to get sidetracked by a discussion on terminology and use a term which is widely understood and utilised. Should it be needed, Guidance Notes can reference additional technologies as they occur with 'emerging technologies' suitably relevant as a capture-all definition for the purpose of the Standards.

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

- In their current form, the standards do not explicitly draw attention to the types of risks posed by emerging technologies across the full range of university activities (i.e. Learning and teaching, research and operations). While this could be considered as being part of the responsibilities to manage institutional risk as part of corporate and academic governance, explicit standards would draw attention to, and shape, responses to this class of risk.

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

- As is the case with other standards, providers must have flexibility. The standards must reflect the key principles and considerations, and providers should be responsible for designing, implementing, monitoring and improving their approach. Consideration should be given to how good practice can be shared to address

system-wide risk, promote high quality and enable responsive and responsible innovation.

### **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?**

- The introduction of 5-year cyclical review of the Threshold Standards implies a shift from the current 5–7-year registration processes peaks to continuous alignment. This means that universities will require sustained internal capacity and capability to manage their alignment with the Threshold Standards rather than a project-based approach to registration (every 7 years).
- Any review should be based on a clear purpose, scope and parameters before a methodology is designed. It should identify specific regulatory gaps or quality risks under consideration without assuming that amendments are necessary. Once that is determined, there are many contemporary methodologies that combine evidence and diverse stakeholder input (e.g., citizen jury and social lab approaches), without being overly burdensome.
- Any review should also consider the diversity of the higher education sector – noting that universities vary in scale, mission and location and that the proposed changes under the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and Mission-Based-Compacts is intended to encourage further diversity in the sector.
- It is essential that outcomes are credible to all stakeholders and mindful of regulatory cycles. A cyclical review of the Threshold Standards will be most effective if it balances regulatory assurance with trust in institutional capability, keeps students firmly at the centre, and treats engagement as a partnership rather than a procedural requirement.