# Governance in a Time of Change: A Practical Toolkit

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HEPP-QN National Conference / Chairs of Academic Board Forum 26 November 2026

## How to use this toolkit

These five tools help governing bodies and Academic Boards show that their governance works, not only that it exists. The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (as amended, 2026) apply the racism standard (6.4) to all providers from 1 January 2027 and the new governance standards to non-university providers from 1 July 2027.

| Tool | Use it to | Who uses it | Time needed |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Readiness heatmap | Rate your readiness against each Domain 6 standard and name your evidence | Governing body, Academic Board, quality team | 60 minutes as a group |
| 2. The assurance test | Test whether any paper gives real assurance | Every member, at every meeting | 2 minutes a paper |
| 3. Skills matrix and induction checklist | Find capability gaps before appointing, and induct new members properly | Chair, nominations committee, secretariat | Annual review |
| 4. Culture signals | Notice how the body really works, and act early | Chair, members, independent reviewers | At each annual evaluation |
| 5. Governance calendar | Schedule every obligation across the year | Secretariat, chairs | Once a year, reviewed each quarter |

Start with Tool 1. Its gaps tell you which of the other tools to use first.

## Tool 1: Readiness heatmap

Rate each standard honestly, then write down the evidence you would send TEQSA tomorrow. A rating with no evidence beside it is "Not yet".

**Scenario:** On 2 July 2027, TEQSA writes asking for evidence on Standards 6.6 and 6.11. What do you send? Minutes showing a topic was discussed are not enough; TEQSA will look for outcomes.

| Standard | What it asks | Readiness | Evidence you would show | Owner |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6.1 to 6.3 (amended) | Clear governing body responsibilities; defined risk appetite; minutes true and complete; transparent, independent academic governance | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Charter, delegations register, Academic Board terms of reference | |
| 6.4 Racism | A safe, inclusive environment that prevents and responds to racism, with adopted definitions | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Adopted definitions, consultation record, governing body approval, complaints data | |
| 6.5 Accountability | Structures and accountabilities clearly delineated, understood and respected | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Delegations register, reviewed terms of reference | |
| 6.6 Composition | Independence, diversity, induction, development, constructive culture | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Skills matrix, induction records, annual evaluation, staff surveys | |
| 6.7 Independence | Academic freedom; no undue commercial or political influence | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Academic freedom policy, conflict of interest register | |
| 6.8 Transparency | Clear purpose and objectives; transparent performance reporting | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Strategic plan, performance reports to the governing body | |
| 6.9 Trustworthy | Lawful, ethical, responsible operation; culture aligned with values | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Code of Conduct, culture survey results, whistleblower reports | |
| 6.10 Inclusive and responsive | Effective consultation with students, staff and stakeholders | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Stakeholder engagement plan, consultation outcomes and responses | |
| 6.11 Sustainable | Proactive risk oversight; evaluation of risk management | In Place<br>Partly<br>Not yet | Risk appetite statement, risk policy, risk reviews, internal audit reports | |

**Next step:** every "Not yet" becomes an action with an owner and a date in Tool 5. The evidence shown above is indicative, rather than comprehensive.

## Tool 2: The assurance test

Ask these five questions of every paper that comes to the governing body or Academic Board. If a paper cannot answer all five, the body has been reassured, not assured.

| Question | What good looks like |
|---|---|
| 1. So what? | The paper says what the issue means for students, quality or risk, not only what happened |
| 2. How do we know? | The evidence is data, trends or independent testing, not management's word |
| 3. What are we doing? | Actions have owners, dates and resources |
| 4. How will we know it worked? | A measure of success and a date when the body will see it |
| 5. What is next? | The next step for the body: a decision, an escalation, an update, or the date the matter returns to the agenda |

**Worked example:** An Academic Board receives a report showing that progression in a large course fell from 84% to 76% over two years. It notes the report and asks for an update in six months.

- **So what?** Which student groups are affected, and is the course at risk against the Threshold Standards?
- **How do we know?** Is the fall consistent across campuses, delivery modes and student cohorts?
- **What are we doing?** What are the root causes, and who owns each action?
- **How will we know it worked?** What progression rate is expected, by when, and when will the Board see it?
- **What is next?** Does the Board escalate the matter to the governing body, and at which meeting does it return?

Noting the report and asking for an update answers none of the five questions. The Board should ask management for root causes, actions and a measure of success, without taking over the corrective work itself.

**Reassurance or assurance?**

| Reassurance | Assurance |
|---|---|
| Management says it is under control | Independent testing of controls and outcomes |
| No complaints were received | Complaints data, trends and actions closed |
| The policy was approved in 2022 | The policy has been reviewed, implemented and monitored |
| We have always done it this way | Evidence mapped to the Threshold Standards |

# Tool 3: Skills matrix and induction checklist

Test every nomination against the body's gaps before appointing. Standard 6.6 expects independence of mind, diverse perspectives, induction and development, and a culture of constructive discussion.

**Scenario:** A new member is nominated because the chair knows them well. Before appointing, check the nomination against the skills matrix: which gap does this person fill? Who are you missing by accepting this person?

**Skills matrix template.** Rate each member 0 (none), 1 (working knowledge) or 2 (expert). Any row with no expert in it is a gap.

| Capability | Member A | Member B | Member C | Member D | Gap? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Higher education and academic quality | | | | | |
| Academic governance and integrity | | | | | |
| Risk, and audit | | | | | |
| Finance | | | | | |
| Legal and regulatory | | | | | |
| First Nations knowledge and perspectives | | | | | |
| Student experience and voice | | | | | |
| Digital, cyber and AI | | | | | |
| Strategy and commercial acumen | | | | | |

**Induction checklist for a new member**

- ☐ Letter of appointment, term and duties
- ☐ Governance charter, delegations and terms of reference
- ☐ Strategic plan and latest performance report
- ☐ Risk appetite statement and risk register
- ☐ Code of Conduct and conflict of interest declaration
- ☐ Briefing on the Threshold Standards, including Domain 6
- ☐ Meeting with the chair and the secretary
- ☐ Assigned mentor for the first year
- ☐ Professional development plan, reviewed at the annual evaluation

**Review cycle:** internal evaluation every year; independent review every 5 years for universities and every 7 years for other providers.

More/different capabilities may be required depending on provider scope e.g. international education.

## Tool 4: Culture signals

Culture cannot be read in a policy, but it can be observed. Standard 6.9 expects an institutional culture aligned with values and purpose, and the governing body to monitor it. Standard 6.10 requires meaningful engagement with students and staff on planning, review and decision making on matters that directly affect them.

**Scenario:** The chair dominates every meeting, and dissent is never recorded in the minutes. The most effective first response is usually to raise it through the annual evaluation, with an independent facilitator, rather than in an open meeting.

| Healthy signals | Red flags |
|---|---|
| Members ask questions before papers are noted | Papers are noted without discussion, meeting after meeting |
| Minutes record dissent and how it was resolved | Minutes read as though every decision was unanimous |
| Management brings bad news early | Problems first appear in the media or as a complaint |
| Members declare conflicts without being asked | The conflict register has not changed in years |
| Staff and students are heard directly | The body hears only from senior management |
| Evaluations lead to visible change | Evaluation results are filed and not discussed |

**Where to observe culture**

- **Surveys:** staff and student surveys, and members' own evaluation of the body
- **Complaints:** themes, trends, underlying causes, & time to resolve, not only the number received
- **Consultation:** who is consulted, what is their (lived) experience, and whether their input changes decisions
- **Meetings:** the balance of discussion, who speaks, and what reaches the agenda

**Discussion prompt:** tone from the top matters most when the person at the top is the obstacle. Who on your body can raise that, and how?

## Tool 5: Governance calendar

Put every obligation on a date, so nothing depends on someone remembering it. This template assumes a calendar year; shift the quarters if your governance year differs.

**Scenario:** It is December 2026, and Standard 6.4 applies in four weeks. Approving your definitions of racism and the related policy belongs on the first governing body agenda of 2027.

| Quarter | Governing body | Academic Board |
|---|---|---|
| Q1 (Jan to Mar) | Approve 6.4 definitions and policy; review the risk appetite statement | Review the academic risk register; confirm the annual work plan |
| Q2 (Apr to Jun) | Delegations and Terms of reference review; Skills matrix review and annual evaluation; readiness check before 1 July 2027 | Student outcomes, cohort and progression reports, using the assurance test |
| Q3 (Jul to Sep) | Strategy and performance review; stakeholder engagement plan (6.10) | Review academic delegations and Terms of reference; Complaints, academic integrity and academic freedom report |
| Q4 (Oct to Dec) | Annual assurance against the Threshold Standards; plan the next independent review | Annual self-review and report to the governing body |

**Every quarter:** the readiness heatmap (Tool 1) is updated, and open actions are reported until closed.

## Your first 90 days using the tools

1. **Days 1 to 30:** complete the readiness heatmap with your chair and secretary. Apply the assurance test to the papers for your next meeting.
2. **Days 31 to 60:** update the skills matrix and induction checklist. Review Terms of reference and membership to ensure effective, diverse viewpoints are enabled. Add culture signals to the next annual evaluation.
3. **Days 61 to 90:** adopt the governance calendar. Put 6.4 on the next governing body agenda and schedule your next independent review.

## Appendix: the standards at a glance

| Standard | Theme | Degree of change | Priority actions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6.4 | Preventing and responding to racism | High: new standard, all providers from 1 January 2027 | Consult, adopt and communicate definitions, governing body approval, link to complaints |
| 6.5 | Accountability | Low | Oversight of academic governance; review delegations and terms of reference |
| 6.6 | Diversity of perspectives | Moderate | Skills matrix, diversity review, conflict of interest policy, induction, staff and student involvement, independent review |
| 6.7 | Independence | Low | No undue commercial or political influence; check conflicts and the Code of Conduct |
| 6.8 | Transparency | Moderate (higher for universities) | Visible purpose and priorities, performance monitoring, annual report |
| 6.9 | Trustworthy | Moderate | Code of Conduct, complaints, whistleblower and fraud policies, monitoring of culture |
| 6.10 | Inclusive and responsive | Moderate | Stakeholder mapping and engagement plan; co-creation with students |
| 6.11 | Sustainable | Low (risk appetite is new) | Explicit risk appetite, risks to social licence, regular evaluation of risk processes and framework, risk management plans |
| 6.12 | Responsible | High for universities; Low for others | Universities: public VC pay and remuneration strategy. Others: workplace compliance through 6.2 and 6.9 |

The racism standard (Schedule 1) applies to all providers from 1 January 2027. The governance standards (Schedule 2) apply to Table A universities from 1 January 2027 and to all other providers from 1 July 2027.

# Standard 6.4: Inclusive

Preventing and responding to racism

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principle 4: First Peoples**

- First Peoples engagement in governance

Expert Council

**Principle 6: Inclusive and responsive**

- Students, staff and stakeholders

**6.4**

- Safe, inclusive environment that prevents and responds to racism
- Defined forms of racism, including towards First Nations peoples
- All providers from 1 Jan 2027

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

High: new standard

**TEQSA GUIDANCE (SRES)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Antisemitism** | Final, Oct 2026 |
| **Islamophobia** | Final, Nov 2026 |
| **First Nations racism** | In development |

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Consult, with lived experience
2. Adopt and share definitions
3. Governing body approval
4. Policy, training and induction
5. Monitor and evidence progress
6. Link to complaints processes

# Standard 6.5: Accountability

Governance structures and accountabilities

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principles 6 and 15**

- Clear line between governing body and management
- Effective academic governance, including delegations
- Council retains ultimate oversight of academic governance

Expert Council

**Principle 3: Independence**

- Academic Board Chair a member of Council
- Charter clarifying how bodies work together

**6.5**

- Governing body accountable for strategy, performance, risk, culture and compliance, consistent with purpose
- Governance clearly delineated, understood and respected

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Low

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Governing body oversight of academic governance
2. Clear accountabilities through delegations
3. Review terms of reference and delegations

Not much change here: most providers already meet this.

# Standard 6.6: Diversity of perspectives

Governing body composition

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principle 3: Composition**

- Diversity
- Higher education, First Nations, staff and student members

Expert Council

**Principle 2: Diversity of perspectives**

- Effective skills matrix
- Independent members with higher education expertise
- Succession, induction, development
- Conflict of interest policy; annual review

**6.6**

- Independence of mind
- Diversity of perspectives
- Inclusive
- Induction and professional development
- Culture of respect and constructive discussion

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Moderate

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Review or create a skills matrix
2. Realistic review of diversity
3. Implement conflict of interest policy
4. Staff and student members (or consultation)
5. Induction and professional development
6. Internal survey and external review

Independent review: 5-yearly for universities, 7-yearly for others.

# Standard 6.7: Independence

Academic standards and freedom

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

Expert Council

**Principle 3: Independence**

- Academic standards and freedom respected and protected
- Academic governance independent of senior management

Existing Threshold Standards

**6.1.4 and B1.1.1**

- Academic freedom and freedom of speech already required

**6.7**

- Freedom of speech and academic freedom
- No undue commercial or political influence

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Low

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Policy, monitoring and review
2. Complaints
3. Check conflict of interest and Code of Conduct

The only real change: no undue commercial or political influence.

# Standard 6.8: Transparency

Purpose, strategy and performance

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principles 8 and 5**

- Performance reviews: 3-year and 7-year
- Performance of senior executives
- Transparent appointment processes

Expert Council

**Principle 4: Transparency**

- Purpose, strategy and performance clear and openly communicated
- Purpose used in decision-making
- Strategy and priorities set

**6.8**

- Purpose and values
- Performance against purpose

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Moderate (higher for universities)

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Visible purpose, values and priorities
2. Strategic plan
3. Monitor performance
4. Transparent decision-making
5. Annual report

**UNIVERSITIES ALSO PUBLISH**

- Council outcomes and consultancy spend
- VC external roles and conflicts
- Remuneration reports

# Standard 6.9: Trustworthy

Lawful, ethical and responsible

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principle 7: Awareness**

- Induction and development
- Culture of legal compliance, incl. WHS
- Code of Conduct; whistleblower policy

Expert Council

**Principle 5: Trustworthy**

- Lawful, ethical, consistent with public purpose
- Culture and tone from the top
- Governing body meets staff

**6.9**

- Institutional culture aligned to values and purpose
- Monitoring of culture

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Moderate

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Code of Conduct
2. Complaints
3. Whistleblower, fraud, corruption and conflict policies

**CULTURE IS OBSERVED THROUGH**

- Surveys
- Complaints
- Consultation

Tone from the top: what happens when the chair is the obstacle?

# Standard 6.10: Inclusive and responsive

Consultation and engagement

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principle 4: Engagement**

- First Peoples, staff, student and community engagement in governance
- Transparent

Expert Council

**Principle 6: Inclusive and responsive**

- Students
- Staff
- Stakeholders

**6.10**

- Students, staff and stakeholders
- Effective consultation

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Moderate

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Stakeholder mapping
2. Stakeholder engagement plan
3. Accountable: confidential, transparent, responsive
4. Not just student feedback: co-creation
5. Consultation on strategy and planning

# Standard 6.11: Sustainable

Risk management

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

UCC Statement

**Principle 14: Risk management**

- Risk management framework
- Audit and Risk Committee; internal audit
- Annual review; oversight of high-risk areas

Expert Council

**Principle 7: Sustainable**

- Risks understood and managed effectively
- Monitoring, management and mitigation
- Internal audit

**6.11**

- Effective management of risks
- Risk to social licence
- Evaluate risk management and control processes

**DEGREE OF CHANGE**

Low (risk appetite is new)

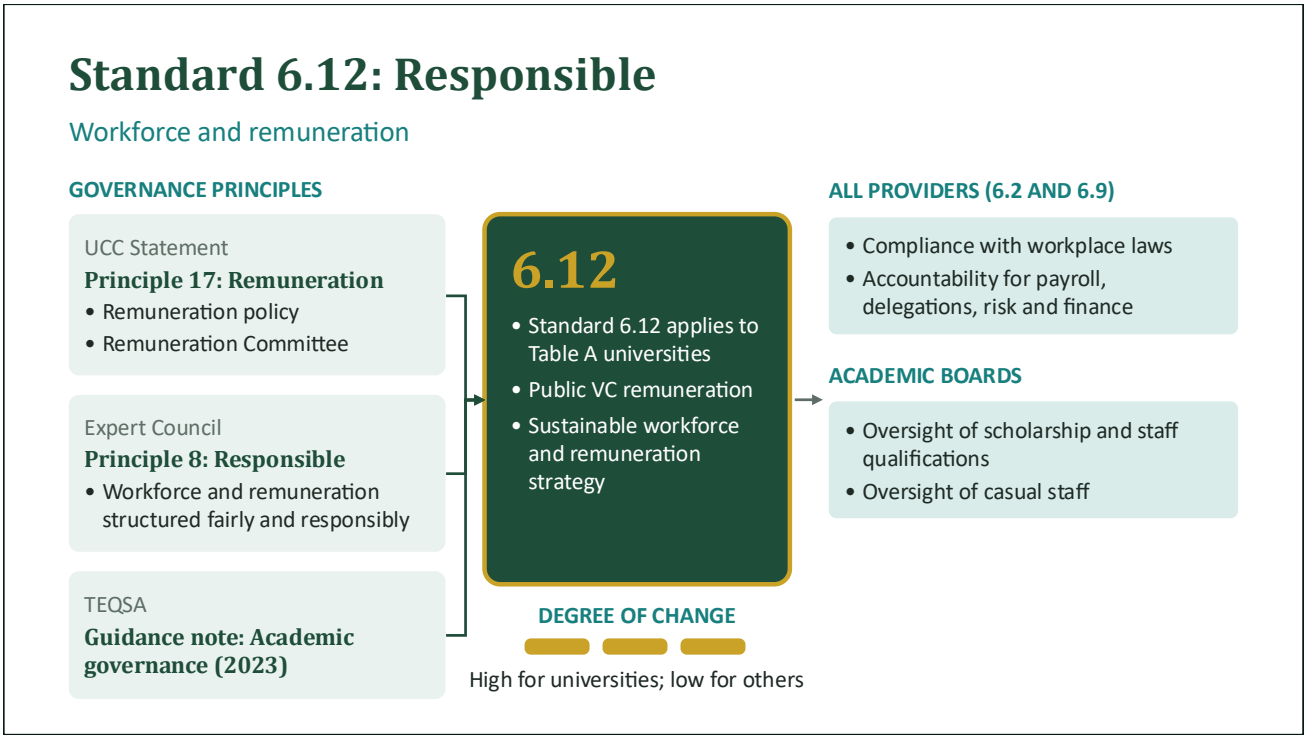
**WHAT TO DO**

1. Proactive risk management
2. Explicit risk appetite (new)
3. Risks to social licence (sector risks)
4. Evaluate processes regularly
5. Embed risk in other processes

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

- Academic risk
- Joined up with overall risk

Most providers already do this.

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- TEQSA: Statement of Regulatory Expectations, Student grievance and complaint mechanisms
- https://ucc.edu.au/code-governance-principles