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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Beyond permission: Mapping generative AI policy approaches across Australian universities

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Australian universities are revising generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) guidance under strong pressure to assure learning, academic integrity and assessment quality. This concise paper reports a public-source mapping of GenAI policy, assessment guidance and student AI-literacy preparation across the 38 Universities Australia member universities. Using six TEQSA sources as contextual material, 100 university sources were coded by authority level, dominant public guidance approach, assessment model and student-facing literacy support. The public evidence shows diverse policy configurations: 18 universities used a structured framework, scale, tier or lane model, while eight relied mainly on assessment-specific rules. Student preparation was also prominent: 19 universities provided formal AI-specific learning opportunities, and 12 provided structured student hubs or toolkits. The findings suggest that GenAI policy can function as curriculum infrastructure rather than only academic-integrity compliance. The paper contributes to Human-Centred Learning Design by treating GenAI policy as learning design infrastructure that connects assessment authority, student trust, feedback expectations and AI literacy.

Keywords: generative AI, assessment, AI literacy, academic integrity, policy mapping, Australian universities

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence has shifted from an exceptional academic-integrity concern to a routine condition of university learning, assessment and work. For Australian higher education, the practical question is no longer whether students and staff will encounter GenAI, but how universities make expectations visible, fair and educationally productive. The policy challenge is therefore also a learning-design challenge: institutions must assure student achievement while preparing students to use AI tools critically, ethically and transparently. This is also an equity issue, because fragmented expectations can disadvantage students with less prior access to AI tools, institutional language or informal advice.

This public-source mapping examines how 38 Universities Australia member institutions connect policy authority, assessment guidance and student AI-literacy preparation. Rather than a legal audit, it treats GenAI policy as curriculum infrastructure: the connected policies, assessment instructions and learning resources that organise learning and demonstrations of achievement. This framing extends regulation into teachable practice.

Three research questions guided the analysis: What public-facing GenAI policy, assessment guidance and student support sources are Australian universities making available? How do universities differ in their dominant public guidance approach and their use of assessment frameworks such as lanes, scales, tiers or categories? How are institutions connecting compliance expectations with student AI literacy?

Background

Australian universities are responding to GenAI within a regulatory environment that requires credible assessment and award assurance but does not prescribe a single AI policy model. TEQSA's HESF Domain 1 foregrounds learning outcomes, student achievement and assessment quality, while TEQSA's GenAI knowledge hub curates sector approaches to academic integrity and assessment reform rather than prescribing a single institutional model (Lodge et al., 2023; TEQSA, 2022, 2026). This distinction matters: a two-

lane model, traffic-light scheme or AI assessment scale is an institutional design choice, not a TEQSA mandate. Alignment with this regulatory context does not establish that institutional approaches developed in response to TEQSA.

Recent ASCILITE work also frames GenAI as a problem of assessment design and transparent communication. White and Huber (2024) examine GenAI through a quality online assessment framework, including integrity, authenticity, equity and student experience. Tregloan and Song (2024) argue that educators need shared language for authorising and evaluating student AI use, while Campbell et al. (2024) foreground transparent communication in a course-level response to GenAI. These studies suggest that policy matters when it becomes usable language for assessment decisions, student expectations and learning support.

AI literacy is the missing link between compliance and capability. A student who is told to acknowledge GenAI use still needs to know what counts as acceptable assistance, how to check outputs, when privacy risks arise and how AI use relates to learning outcomes. Large-scale ASCILITE work on student GenAI use has similarly examined student knowledge, access, skills and trust as policy-relevant issues (Chung et al., 2024). This paper therefore treats student AI-literacy preparation as part of the policy landscape, not as a separate support service.

Method

The sample comprised the 38 member universities represented by Universities Australia (n.d.). For each institution, public official or university-linked sources were collected into a source register. Preferred evidence included policy libraries, academic-integrity pages, assessment guidance, teaching and learning resources, library guides, student support pages, staff guidance and official institutional news. Our dataset contains 106 source records: 100 university sources and six TEQSA contextual sources. University counts use 38 institutions while TEQSA records provide context only. Initial collection was completed in May 2026, with source checking and coding extending to the revision process in September 2026.

Sources were coded into an institution-level comparison matrix. Each university received normalised codes for dominant public guidance approach, authority level, assessment model, and student AI-literacy preparation. Dominant public guidance approach was coded hierarchically: where an institution used a common institutional framework, scale, lane or category model, that model was coded as the dominant approach even if local assessment-level permission language was also present. Five profiles were used: structured assessment model (common institutional lanes, scales or categories), assessment-specific rules (unit or task instructions govern use), encouraged with safeguards (responsible adoption is foregrounded with controls), authorisation required (explicit permission is foregrounded), and unclear public position (insufficient evidence of an overall permission position). Without such a model, the documented dominant emphasis determined the profile. These profiles are not an openness ranking. Acknowledgement alone does not establish permission. Authority coding identified the highest relevant retained source: binding policy or procedure, official framework, guidance, or support resource.

Assessment models were coded separately from the dominant public guidance approach. A university could be coded as using an explicit two-lane model, a similar secure/open model, another structured model such as a scale or traffic-light scheme, local assessment discretion, or no named public model. Local discretion denotes task-level rules without a coded framework. No named model records insufficient evidence of either a framework or a clear local mechanism. Each institution received one literacy code representing the highest level of provision evidenced in the retained sources. The categories were formal AI-specific learning, broader academic-integrity training explicitly including AI, student toolkits or hubs, library guides only, developing or planned provision, or no public evidence. Formal AI-specific learning included structured interactive tutorials with learning objectives and activities. Student toolkits or hubs included standalone presentations without an evidenced structured learning sequence. Formal learning did not require compulsory participation or certification, and resources were classified by their instructional structure rather than their hosting location. Public guidance is not treated as binding policy, and the mapping describes public evidence rather than internal practice.

Ethics and data: This study analysed publicly available institutional documents, without recruiting participants, collecting individual-level personal data or accessing private student records.

Findings

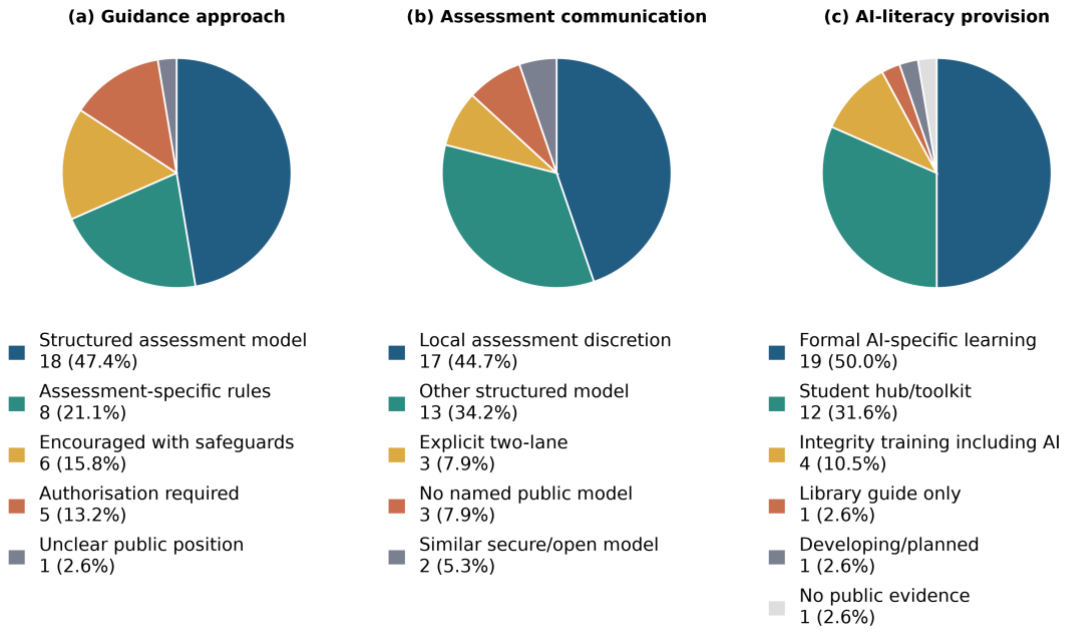


Figure 1. Public GenAI governance architecture across the 38 Universities Australia member universities. Each panel classifies the same 38 institutions into mutually exclusive categories. Labels show counts and percentages

Figure 1(a)–(b) shows varied guidance approaches and assessment communication models. Eighteen institutions used structured assessment models, comprising 13 other structured models, three explicit two-lane models and two similar secure/open models. Local assessment discretion was identified at 17 institutions in Figure 1(b). These comprised all eight institutions with assessment-specific guidance, five of the six with encouraged-with-safeguards guidance, and four of the five requiring authorisation in Figure 1(a).

Student capability-building was a common companion strategy. Figure 1(c) shows formal AI-specific learning support at 19 universities and student hubs or toolkits at 12. Four embedded AI in broader integrity training, and library-only, planned and no-public-evidence categories each contained one institution. Additional coding identified disclosure or acknowledgement as required at 32 institutions, task-dependent at five and unclear at one. Citation or referencing was coded as required at 11 institutions, task-dependent at 23, not required at three and unclear at one. These overlapping signals do not imply permission to use AI. Combining AI-specific provision with broader integrity training containing AI, formal learning support was identified at nine of 18 structured-model institutions and 14 of 20 institutions with other guidance profiles.

Authority and accessibility are distinct. Thirteen universities had binding institutional policy as their highest relevant source and four a procedure. Nineteen were represented by official guidance, one by an institutional framework and one by a support resource. Public guidance may communicate expectations more clearly than formal policy, but comparisons must distinguish accessibility from institutional authority. Co-presence of assessment categories, disclosure expectations and student AI literacy does not establish their alignment in practice.

Discussion

The findings suggest that Australian university GenAI governance can be understood as curriculum infrastructure rather than rule publication alone. Beyond permission rules, the public evidence shows

assessment taxonomies, secure/open approaches and student AI-literacy support. This pattern aligns with TEQSA's assessment-reform context while preserving institutional variation.

For educators and learning designers, GenAI policy must be translated into assessment language. Permission and acknowledgement statements are necessary but insufficient. Students need to understand why an assessment restricts or invites AI assistance, which learning outcomes are protected and what human judgement is expected. Structured frameworks can help when paired with examples, rubrics, student explanations and staff development.

Acknowledgement rules and AI-literacy training can provide a teachable language for acceptable assistance, verification, privacy, human authorship and disciplinary judgement. The policy question is not only whether students disclose AI use, but whether acknowledgement practices connect to assessment criteria, feedback conversations and student learning support.

For institutional leaders, the analysis raises a coherence problem. Formal policies clarify authority and risk ownership, while student hubs and library guides make expectations usable. The priority is not simply a dedicated AI policy, but alignment between policy authority, assessment design and AI-literacy support. This reflects ASCILITE's 2026 theme of connection through learning relationships, feedback, trust, capability and care.

Privacy, security, data governance, equity and accessibility risk being overshadowed when GenAI guidance centres on misconduct and disclosure. Student AI-literacy modules and hubs can broaden the conversation by teaching verification, data caution, tool limits and disciplinary judgement before students encounter a misconduct process. AI literacy is therefore not a soft add-on to policy, but a condition for fair implementation.

This cross-sectional mapping describes public-facing guidance, not internal governance, classroom implementation or student understanding. Sources were checked during revision and do not establish a uniform May 2026 snapshot or historical policy progression.

Design implications

First, assessment briefs should translate policy into clear expectations, explaining permitted or restricted GenAI use in relation to learning outcomes and human judgement. Where acknowledgement is required, provide examples of acceptable statements rather than relying on generic disclosure instructions.

Second, AI literacy should form part of assessment quality assurance. Learning resources should teach output verification, privacy awareness, recognition of fabricated sources and disciplinary expectations for AI assistance and authorship. Accessible provision matters particularly for students with unequal prior access to AI tools or advice. Future research should examine inclusive and culturally responsive implementation.

Third, institutions should align formal policy, assessment instructions and student support. Students should encounter consistent expectations across course sites, teaching staff explanations and literacy resources. This coherence can support trust and make institutional requirements easier to understand and apply.

Conclusion

The public evidence suggests varied combinations of assessment guidance, institutional authority and student AI-literacy support, rather than a demonstrated historical shift. Three connected features are visible: structured assessment models at 18 institutions, local discretion at 17, and formal learning including AI at 23. For higher education, the next challenge is not only to publish clearer rules; it is to build connected curriculum infrastructure that makes AI expectations transparent, teachable and fair.

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