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Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Reframing academic integrity in Australian universities for the Generative AI era

Sangeetha Kutty, Meena Jha, Elaheh Yadegaridehkordi, Ritesh Chugh, Jahan Hassan
Central Queensland University

Eric Duku
University of Technology Sydney

Michael Cowling
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

This paper reports initial findings on how the top 10 Australian universities have responded to Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) through their academic integrity policies, guidelines, and AI-related governance documents. Using qualitative policy analysis and thematic analysis of institutional policies and guidelines, this study examines how GenAI use is framed and governed, including how institutional expectations are communicated to students, academics, and administrators. The study also explores how universities frame the opportunities and risks associated with GenAI. The initial findings show a clear shift away from prohibition and surveillance-oriented approaches once common in higher education. Rather than relying on AI detection tools, universities are increasingly emphasising responsible use, transparency, assessment redesign, and shared accountability among students and educators. Academic integrity is being reframed as a matter of learning design and ethical participation rather than solely as compliance and enforcement, moving from a detective to an educative approach. These findings suggest that Australian universities are seeking to balance technological innovation with educational values, offering insights for institutions navigating the evolving relationship between GenAI, assessment, and learning. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions on how higher education can effectively integrate AI while fostering trust, safeguarding academic integrity, and enhancing meaningful learning.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, academic Integrity, higher education policy, assessment redesign, responsible AI governance.

Introduction

The rapid adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in higher education has challenged long-standing assumptions about academic integrity, assessment validity, and technology's role in learning (Shaheen & Sadheer, 2026). Early responses often focused on the possibility of detecting AI-generated work and preventing misuse (Kofinas et al., 2025). However, growing recognition of the limitations of AI detection technologies has prompted a broader reconsideration of how integrity can be maintained in an environment where AI tools are readily accessible and increasingly embedded in everyday academic practice (Kofinas et al., 2025). In Australia, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has encouraged institutions to rethink assessment approaches (TEQSA, 2025).

Policy discussions are increasingly centred on assessment redesign (Farah et al., 2025), transparency, AI literacy (Ayo et al., 2025), and responsible use rather than prohibition alone (Sabourin, 2026). Universities are being encouraged to develop clear expectations for students and staff while creating learning environments that acknowledge the reality of AI-assisted work (Chugh et al., 2025; Jha & Atif, 2025; Kutty et al., 2024). Studies have highlighted continuing uncertainty around acceptable AI use (Fu et al., 2026), inconsistencies in institutional guidance (Atif et al., 2025; Kaşarcı et al., 2025; Kutty et al., 2025), and the need for governance approaches (O'Sullivan & Lowry, 2026) that align educational values with technological change (Atif et al., 2026; Bayraktar et al., 2026). A growing gap exists between student AI practices and institutional

preparedness, with policy development and assessment reform becoming central components of responsible AI adoption in higher education (Atif et al., 2026). Rather than viewing integrity solely as a matter of compliance and misconduct, institutions are increasingly linking it to assessment design, ethical participation, transparency, and the development of student judgement (Atif et al., 2025). Such changes reflect broader efforts to balance the opportunities presented by GenAI with concerns about learning quality, fairness, and trust.

This study complements recent national analyses of institutional GenAI responses, including Atif et al. (2026), by focusing on how university policy and governance are reframing academic integrity. Rather than evaluating institutional alignment with governance principles across discipline-specific discussions, this analysis examines governance mechanisms, stakeholder responsibilities, responsible AI use and assessment-related responses across the top 10 Australian universities. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do the top 10 Australian universities frame academic integrity and responsible GenAI use in their institutional policies, guidelines and governance documents?

RQ2. How do universities differ in their approaches to GenAI governance, including governance structures, stakeholder responsibilities, institutional guidance and academic integrity provisions?

RQ3. How do universities differ in their assessment-related responses to GenAI, particularly in relation to acceptable use, transparency and acknowledgement, assessment redesign, assessment security, and AI detection?

This paper reports initial findings on how the top 10 Australian universities are responding to these challenges through their academic integrity and AI-related governance documents. Preliminary findings show a shift away from detection-centred responses toward approaches that emphasise responsible use, assessment redesign, and shared responsibility across university communities.

Method

This study employed a qualitative policy analysis approach to examine how Australian universities are responding to the emergence of GenAI through institutional policy and governance mechanisms, providing a useful lens for exploring how institutions define issues, communicate expectations, and shape practice within evolving educational contexts. A total of 41 institutional documents from the top 10 Australian universities were analysed. The universities were selected from the highest-ranked Australian institutions in the 2026 QS World University Rankings (OCallaghan, 2026): The University of Melbourne, The University of Sydney, The University of New South Wales (UNSW), The Australian National University, Monash University, The University of Queensland, The University of Western Australia, The University of Adelaide, the University of Technology Sydney, and RMIT University. The document search and data collection were conducted between January and March 2026 through university policy repositories and targeted web searches. The search focused on academic integrity policies, assessment policies, AI policies, procedures, guidelines, principles, and related governance documents that referenced AI or GenAI. Where standalone AI policies were unavailable, relevant sections of academic integrity and assessment documents were included in the analysis.

Documents were included when they were publicly accessible, issued or maintained at the institutional level, and contained substantive material on GenAI, academic integrity, assessment, teaching and learning, or AI governance. Duplicate items, superseded versions, pages containing only incidental references to AI, and materials without substantive policy or guidance content were excluded. Where relevant institutional guidance was published as web content rather than as a formal document, the content was retained as part of the document corpus. These criteria were applied consistently across the selected universities to support a transparent and systematic document-selection process.

Figure 1 shows the methodological flowchart for the policy analysis. All documents were reviewed and organised into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to support comparison across institutions. The dataset was then

imported into NVivo for qualitative analysis. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, documents were coded to identify recurring patterns in how universities framed the opportunities, risks, responsibilities, and governance requirements associated with GenAI. Stakeholders such as general, administrators, staff and students were defined as cases, and codes were assigned to each of the stakeholders. The general case captured provisions applicable across the university community. Codes were independently assigned by two researchers: an academic with more than 15 years' experience in learning and teaching and a researcher with more than three years' experience in policy analysis and development. The researchers then compared and refined the coding framework through iterative discussion and repeated review of the documents. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa, yielding a coefficient of 0.77, indicating a high level of agreement between the coders (Cohen, 1960).

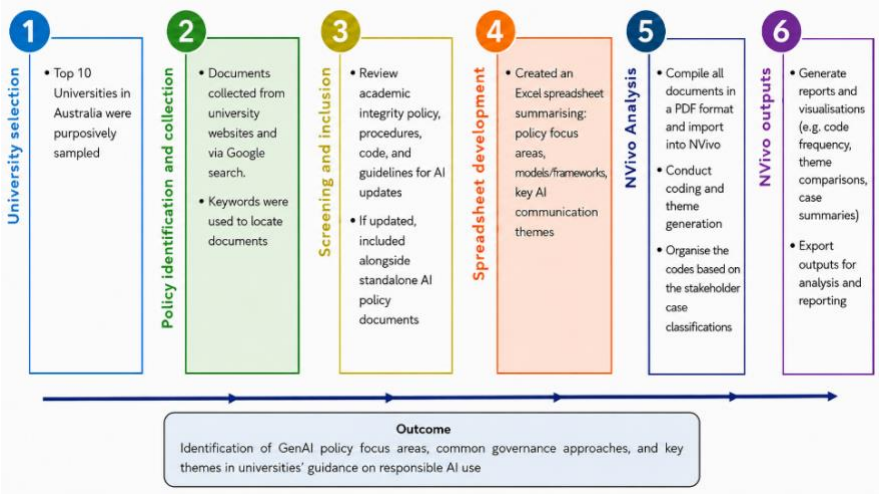


Figure 1. Methodological flowchart for policy analysis

Findings

The analysis revealed a consistent pattern across the top 10 universities despite differences in the scope and maturity of their AI governance arrangements. While institutions varied in the number and type of documents developed to address GenAI, their responses shared a common strategic direction. At the same time, variation in institutional approaches demonstrates that universities often interpret and operationalise TEQSA's regulatory guidance differently, despite operating within the same national quality assurance framework. Rather than treating GenAI primarily as a threat to academic integrity, universities are increasingly positioning it as a technology that requires guidance, transparency, and responsible use. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: a move away from prohibition, a reframing of academic integrity through responsible AI use, and a growing emphasis on assessment redesign over AI detection.

Across the 10 universities, common principles were more consistent than implementation mechanisms. All institutions provided some form of AI or GenAI guidance and access to institutional tools or resources, while dedicated AI governance bodies, standalone AI policies, and AI-specific operations procedures were evident in only three institutions each. Eight institutions had explicit AI principles, and eight had academic-integrity mechanisms that addressed AI. These patterns indicate convergence in principle but variation in implementation across institutions.

Theme 1: Universities are moving beyond prohibition

Contrary to concerns that universities might respond to GenAI by banning its use (Xiao et al., 2023), none of the institutions included in this study had adopted a prohibition-based approach. Instead, all universities acknowledged both the opportunities and risks associated with GenAI and sought to provide guidance on its use in teaching, learning, research, and administrative activities; however, the ways they communicated this information differed. These ranged from integrating AI into existing academic integrity policies to developing

standalone AI governance frameworks and institution-wide guidance. This variation suggests that universities shared a common direction while differing in the mechanisms used to communicate expectations and support responsible AI use.

Eight of the 10 universities included in this study have updated their academic integrity policies and code of conduct to include AI-related information and AI-specific rules. The amended academic integrity policy of the University of Sydney, for instance, added a definition of GenAI and states that using GenAI tools to complete or contribute to a secure assessment without approval, or to complete or contribute to an assessment or thesis without appropriate acknowledgement, constitutes an academic integrity breach. These documents primarily focused on clarifying acceptable AI use, outlining the responsibilities of students and staff, and identifying circumstances in which disclosure or acknowledgement of AI use was required. The emphasis has shifted from restricting access to establishing conditions for ethical, transparent, and responsible AI use.

The university-level comparison shows several distinct governance configurations. Monash University and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) displayed the most comprehensive publicly visible arrangements in the analysed corpus, with dedicated AI governance bodies, AI principles, guidance, standalone AI policies, operating procedures, institutional GenAI tools, and AI-related academic-integrity provisions all evident. The University of Melbourne also had a dedicated governance body, principles, guidance, institutional tools and AI-related academic-integrity provisions, but no standalone AI policy or operating procedure was identified in the sampled documents. UNSW showed a different configuration: principles, guidance and a standalone AI policy were present, but no dedicated governance body or AI-specific operating procedure was evident, and AI-related provisions were not identified in its sampled academic-integrity mechanisms. RMIT showed a more operational configuration, with principles, guidance, an operating procedure and institutional tools, but without a dedicated governance body, standalone AI policy or explicit AI-related academic-integrity provision in the sampled material. The University of Sydney, Australian National University (ANU) and University of Adelaide relied primarily on principles, guidance, institutional tools and academic-integrity provisions rather than standalone AI policy or operations structures, while the University of Western Australia (UWA) and University of Queensland (UQ) showed guidance, institutional tools and AI-related academic-integrity mechanisms without a dedicated governance body, standalone AI policy or operating procedure. These differences demonstrate that the common move away from prohibition is being implemented through markedly different institutional governance architectures.

Theme 2: Academic integrity is being reframed through responsible AI use

A second theme concerned the way academic integrity was conceptualised within policy and guidance documents. Across institutions, integrity was no longer framed solely as the prevention of misconduct. Instead, policy language increasingly emphasised responsible use, transparency, ethical decision-making, and accountability. Students were encouraged to understand the limitations of AI-generated outputs and to take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of work submitted for assessment. Academic staff were positioned as key contributors to guiding students' use of AI within disciplinary and assessment contexts.

Figure 2 further illustrates how this reframing of academic integrity is reflected across stakeholder groups represented as cases in NVivo. It presents the distribution of coded references within each theme across the stakeholder cases. The percentages indicate the proportion of coded text segments associated with each case rather than the number of policy documents. The General case captures policy provisions applicable to all stakeholders, while the Staff, Administrators, and Students cases represent guidance directed specifically to those groups.

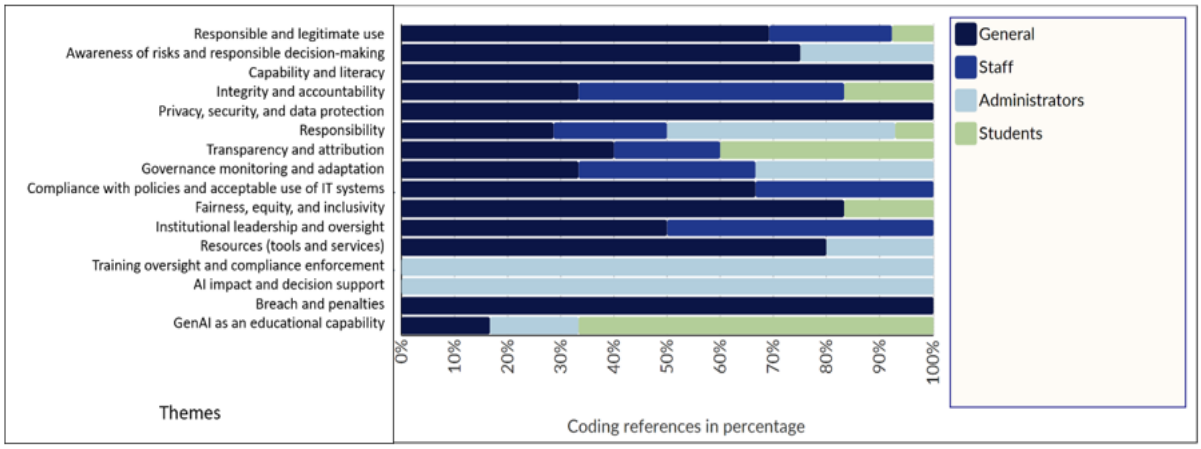


Figure 2. Institutional framing of Generative AI across university stakeholders

Across most themes, the largest proportion of coded references was associated with the General case, suggesting that universities predominantly frame responsible AI use and academic integrity as institution-wide responsibilities rather than obligations assigned to individual stakeholder groups. Although some provisions explicitly define administrators' roles in training, oversight, compliance enforcement, and decision support, the dominant emphasis is on establishing shared expectations across the university community. This pattern reinforces a broader shift from viewing academic integrity primarily as a matter of student misconduct towards understanding it as a collective responsibility centred on the responsible, ethical, and accountable use of AI.

Also, Figure 2 shows that governance attention is concentrated on responsible AI use, capability development, privacy and institutional accountability, whereas comparatively less attention is devoted to operational implementation themes such as AI-assisted decision support, oversight training and educational capability. This distribution suggests that universities are prioritising normative governance principles over operational implementation.

The university-level evidence also shows that academic integrity is being operationalised through different institutional pathways. The University of Sydney formalised GenAI directly within academic integrity rules, including explicit conditions under which unauthorised use in secure assessment or unacknowledged use in assessment or thesis work constitutes an integrity breach. UQ embedded AI expectations within its assessment and integrity mechanisms: its assessment procedure requires course profiles to state how GenAI may be used in each assessment, positions course coordinators as responsible for communicating those requirements, and retains student responsibility for complying with the stated assessment conditions. Melbourne, ANU, Monash, UWA, Adelaide and UTS also had AI-related provisions evident within academic-integrity mechanisms, whereas comparable AI-specific integrity provisions were not evident in the sampled UNSW and RMIT material despite both universities having other AI governance instruments. This contrast indicates that responsible AI is not being incorporated through a single policy model. Some universities embed GenAI within existing academic-integrity and assessment systems, while others place greater emphasis on dedicated AI policy, governance or operational instruments.

Theme 3: Assessment redesign is replacing reliance on AI detection

The third theme reflected a growing recognition that AI detection technologies provide limited reliability for determining whether work has been AI-generated. Across the reviewed documents, universities rarely presented detection tools as a primary solution to academic integrity concerns. Instead, attention was directed towards assessment practices capable of providing stronger evidence of student learning.
Policy guidance encouraged assessment approaches that emphasise process, reflection, authentic tasks, and demonstrations of learning. In several cases, universities had revised assessment procedures or provided

resources to support academics in designing tasks that remain meaningful in AI-enabled learning environments. The focus on assessment redesign signals a broader institutional response that seeks to strengthen learning rather than increase surveillance. By placing greater emphasis on assessment redesign,

universities are attempting to preserve academic standards while recognising the realities of widespread AI use.

Assessment-related responses also differed in where and how expectations were operationalised. Some institutions focused primarily on defining authorised GenAI use, acknowledgement requirements and the academic-integrity consequences of misuse. Others adopted a more assessment-specific communication approach, requiring permitted GenAI use to be stated clearly for individual assessments and linking assessment security reviews to technological developments, including AI. In institutions with broader governance architectures, assessment expectations were embedded within institution-wide arrangements addressing governance, operations and responsible AI use, while others relied more heavily on assessment and academic-integrity guidance rather than standalone AI operational frameworks. Overall, assessment responses varied across institutions in how they specified acceptable GenAI use, required acknowledgement or disclosure, promoted assessment redesign, approached assessment security and AI detection, and operationalised these responses through assessment rules, course-level communication, academic-integrity frameworks, or broader institution-wide AI governance.

Discussion and implications

The findings demonstrate that Australian universities are converging on a governance approach that recognises GenAI as an enduring feature of higher education rather than a technology that can be excluded from educational practice. This aligns with sector-wide guidance encouraging institutions to develop frameworks for responsible and ethical AI use rather than relying on restrictive responses (e.g., TEQSA, 2023; TEQSA, 2025).

These findings complement Atif et al. (2026) which examined institutional alignment with TEQSA principles across a broader Australian university sample. The present study adds a governance-focused perspective by examining how institutional mechanisms, stakeholder responsibilities and academic-integrity framings are operationalised, highlighting both sector-wide convergence and differences in policy maturity and implementation.

Viewed against the research questions, the comparative evidence provides three related findings. For RQ1, universities broadly converge on framing GenAI through responsible and ethical use, transparency, accountability and guidance rather than prohibition, but they differ in the policy instruments used to communicate these expectations. For RQ2, the strongest differences concern governance architecture: Monash and UTS show the most integrated combination of governance, policy and operational mechanisms, while other universities rely on selected combinations of principles, guidance, integrity provisions or operational procedures. For RQ3, assessment responses vary from explicit integrity rules governing authorised and acknowledged use, as illustrated by the University of Sydney, to course-level specification of permitted GenAI use and assessment-security requirements, with other institutions positioning assessment within broader AI governance or integrity frameworks. The findings therefore point to convergence in policy direction but divergence in institutional operationalisation.

The first theme, moving beyond prohibition, suggests that universities increasingly recognise the practical limitations of banning GenAI technologies. The widespread availability of AI tools and their growing integration into professional and academic contexts make prohibition difficult to enforce and potentially counterproductive. This finding is consistent with recent analyses of university AI policies, which report a transition from restrictive approaches toward institution-wide frameworks that emphasise guidance, accountability, and responsible participation (Luo, 2024). It also reflects broader international trends favouring ethical and responsible AI governance, with universities increasingly facilitating rather than prohibiting AI use (Chan, 2023).

The second theme, reframing academic integrity through responsible AI use, highlights a notable shift in how integrity is conceptualised. Universities are increasingly emphasising responsible use, transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making rather than focusing solely on misconduct prevention. Similar developments can be observed internationally. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Russell Group has established principles for the ethical use of AI that promote AI literacy and the integration of AI into teaching

and learning while maintaining academic integrity (Ngila, 2023). The prominence of themes such as responsible use, capability development, and institutional accountability suggests that universities are seeking to develop students' AI literacy alongside traditional understandings of academic integrity. Rapanta et al. (2025) argue that critical GenAI literacy extends beyond technical proficiency and requires learners to engage with the epistemological, ethical, and relational dimensions of AI, enabling them to critically examine its role in knowledge creation. According to Yan et al. (2025), effective GenAI literacy emerges from continuous engagement and reflective use of diverse AI tools, supporting creative application while preserving human agency and critical thinking.

The third theme, assessment redesign that replaces reliance on AI detection, reflects growing scepticism about the effectiveness of AI detection technologies. Universities in this study rarely presented detection tools as a primary solution to academic integrity concerns. Instead, they increasingly emphasised authentic, process-oriented, and competency-based assessment approaches that provide stronger evidence of student learning. This finding is consistent with recent literature suggesting that technological surveillance alone is insufficient to address the challenges posed by GenAI. Gondaliya and Acharya (2026) identified a growing shift towards authentic and competency-oriented assessment redesign, while Ardito (2025) argues that reliance on detection mechanisms is increasingly misaligned with an educational landscape in which AI plays a significant role.

The findings indicate that Australian universities are responding to GenAI by repositioning academic integrity as a question of educational design rather than technological control. Although AI detection tools continue to be referenced in some institutional documents, they are no longer presented as the primary mechanism for maintaining academic standards. Instead, policy attention is increasingly directed towards assessment redesign, responsible AI use, transparency, and the development of student judgement (Atif et al., 2026). This represents a shift from viewing integrity as a problem of identifying misconduct towards creating learning environments in which appropriate AI use is explicitly supported and governed. Such an approach reflects growing recognition that academic integrity is sustained through the design of meaningful learning experiences rather than through surveillance alone (Jha & Atif, 2025).

Viewed through the lens of human-centred learning design, these policy developments suggest that universities are beginning to place learners, rather than technologies, at the centre of institutional responses to GenAI (Atif et al., 2025). Across the reviewed institutions, policies increasingly acknowledge that students will encounter AI throughout their studies and future professional practice. Consequently, institutional guidance is evolving beyond lists of prohibited behaviours to emphasise ethical participation, critical judgement, transparency, and shared responsibility between students and educators. Assessment is similarly being reframed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate authentic understanding, disciplinary reasoning, and reflective engagement in AI-rich environments, rather than merely producing AI-free artefacts. This represents a notable shift from technology-centred governance towards educational approaches that support learning, agency, and capability development (Castlereagh Summit, 2026).

Despite differences in institutional guidance, the consistency of these themes suggests an emerging sector-wide shift in how academic integrity is conceptualised. Rather than preserving assessment models developed for pre-GenAI contexts, universities are increasingly adapting institutional policies to recognise AI as an enduring feature of higher education. The emphasis on assessment redesign, responsible participation, and institutional guidance indicates that academic integrity is becoming embedded within broader teaching and learning strategies rather than being addressed solely through compliance and enforcement mechanisms. This transition aligns with recent national policy directions, including TEQSA's assessment reform agenda (TEQSA, 2024, 2025) and the Castlereagh Statement (Castlereagh Summit, 2026), both of which advocate coordinated educational responses to AI that strengthen learning while maintaining trust in assessment.

Collectively, these findings suggest that Australian universities are not simply revising policy in response to GenAI; they are reframing academic integrity itself. Rather than viewing integrity primarily as compliance with institutional rules and the detection of misconduct, universities are increasingly conceptualising it as a human-centred educational endeavour supported through responsible AI use, assessment redesign, transparency, and shared responsibility. For learning and teaching practitioners, these findings suggest that successful GenAI

governance depends less on technological controls than on curriculum design, assessment practices, and the development of students' ethical judgement. For institutional practice, this means that policy coherence should be accompanied by operational support: clear stakeholder responsibilities, staff capability development, transparent guidance on acceptable AI use, and assessment designs that generate credible evidence of student learning.

Conclusion, recommendations and future work

This study examined how the 10 sampled Australian universities are responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by GenAI through their policies, guidelines, and governance frameworks. Beyond documenting these policy responses, the findings suggest that Australian universities are collectively reframing academic integrity from a compliance-focused model towards a more educational approach that emphasises responsible AI use, assessment redesign, transparency, and shared responsibility. This sector-wide shift reflects a broader reconceptualisation of academic integrity for the GenAI era. Based on the findings, universities should continue to support academics in redesigning assessments for AI-enabled learning contexts. This includes providing clear, consistent, and stakeholder-specific guidance on acceptable AI use, embedding AI literacy and ethical decision-making across curricula, and investing in professional development that strengthens educators' capacity to design robust, authentic, and future-focused assessments. Universities should also make more of their AI-related policies and guidance publicly accessible, as greater transparency would facilitate knowledge sharing, benchmarking, and the exchange of effective practices across institutions. Clearer guidance tailored to students, staff, and administrators would further support each stakeholder group in understanding its specific responsibilities for responsible, ethical, and accountable AI use. Institutional policies should also remain adaptive and responsive to the rapidly evolving capabilities of AI technologies and their implications for higher education.

This study focused on publicly accessible policy and governance documents from Australia's top 10 universities and may therefore not capture internal or unpublished institutional guidance, or how these policies are interpreted, experienced, or enacted in practice. Furthermore, given the rapid evolution of GenAI technologies and institutional responses, the findings represent a snapshot of university policies and governance arrangements during the data collection period. Policies and institutional approaches may continue to evolve as GenAI capabilities, regulatory expectations, and educational practices develop. Future research should therefore investigate how students and academics understand and apply institutional AI guidance in their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. Longitudinal studies would also provide valuable insights into how university policies, governance frameworks, and assessment practices continue to evolve as GenAI becomes increasingly embedded within higher education and professional practice.

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