



5 March 2013

# Higher Education Standards Panel

## Call for Comment (Number 1, March 2013)

### Draft Standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes

The Higher Education Standards Panel is inviting comment on proposed revisions to the current higher education Threshold Standards.

Closing date for comments is **Tuesday 16 April 2013**.

#### Panel's approach

This consultation is an important initial step in guiding the Panel's future work. As explained in previous communiques (see [www.HEstandards.gov.au](http://www.HEstandards.gov.au)) the Panel has decided to propose revisions to both the format of the standards and the framework in which they are organised.

Before releasing major revisions for comment, the Panel wishes to test its *approach* by inviting feedback on two specific examples of draft standards for:

- Course Design (Coursework)
- Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

Once the Panel has considered the views of stakeholders on its approach, it proposes to release a series of 'blocks' of revised standards in cognate areas (e.g. teaching, research, academic governance) and the details of the organising framework for the revised standards for comment.

In this consultation the Panel would appreciate comments in particular on:

- the proposed **format** of the standards, as exemplified by both sets of draft standards, and
- the **content** of each set of draft standards.

A short discussion paper explaining the Panel's approach and its application to the draft standards is attached.

#### Background

The Higher Education Standards Panel (the Panel) is required under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (Consequential Amendments & Transitional Provisions) Act 2011* to undertake a review of the current Threshold Standards. As outlined in its communiques (see [www.HEstandards.gov.au](http://www.HEstandards.gov.au)) the Panel has, with the assistance of stakeholders, identified opportunities for improvements to the current standards, all of which present complexities and challenges.

#### Consultation process

The Panel intends to release closely related draft standards together to better illustrate the Panel's approach to the proposed form and scope of the revised standards. The Panel is seeking comment on the draft standards from identified stakeholders and other interested parties. The Panel is also requesting that this invitation be passed on to any other interested parties.

As part of the consultation process, the Panel will collect personal information, including the name of the person or persons making comments, for the purposes of informing the Panel's approach to the development of the revised standards. Unless requested otherwise, the Panel intends to make all

comments available on the HE Standards website, including some of your personal information provided with the submission.

The Panel intends to disclose the content of submissions to assist the sector's consideration of the draft standards, unless a submission specifically states that it is made on a confidential basis. Automatically generated confidentiality statements in emails are not enough to note your intention that your submission should remain confidential. If you do not want your comments or some of your comments disclosed, please ensure the confidential material is clearly marked 'IN CONFIDENCE'. This can also apply where you are happy for the comments to be disclosed but not the author or organisation. The Panel may use a sector descriptor (e.g. student organisation, private provider) in such cases.

The comments received from stakeholders will be used to revise the draft standards. The Panel plans to post a report of its analysis of comments and revision of the drafts on the HE Standards website.

**Comments will be accepted until Tuesday 16 April 2013.**

#### **Format for submissions**

Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the Panel has an obligation to provide information in a manner accessible to everyone regardless of ability. Accordingly, the Panel needs to make sure that the documents published on its website are consistent with the relevant accessibility requirements.

Submissions will be uploaded to the Panel's website progressively as they become available in an accessible format. The Panel may elect not to publish submissions that are not provided in an accessible format.

For accessibility reasons, the Panel would prefer comments to be submitted electronically in Word format and limited to 20MB. An email acknowledgement will be sent within two working days of receipt of submissions. If your submission is greater than 20MB in size, please contact the Higher Education Standards Panel Executive to arrange another method for sending your submission. Comments in hardcopy will also be accepted.

#### **More information**

For further information regarding the draft standards or the consultation process please email [info@HEstandards.gov.au](mailto:info@HEstandards.gov.au) or telephone (+613) 8306 2509. The draft standards can be downloaded from the Higher Education Standards website at

[http://www.hestandards.gov.au/engagement#\\_Consultations](http://www.hestandards.gov.au/engagement#_Consultations)

#### **How do I submit my comments?**

Comments should be forwarded by Tuesday 16 April 2013 to:

[info@HEstandards.gov.au](mailto:info@HEstandards.gov.au)

OR

Higher Education Standards Panel Executive  
GPO Box 1672  
Melbourne VIC 3001

**All comments will be held in a register.**



## ***Draft Standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes – Discussion Paper***

### ***Purpose of this consultation***

The Panel has identified several opportunities for improvement of the current Threshold Standards as outlined in previous communiques (see [www.HEstandards.gov.au](http://www.HEstandards.gov.au)), particularly in relation to the inconsistent format of the standards, duplication of content and issues with the organising framework for the standards.

These issues are being addressed by:

- a revised format for the standards that is intended to be consistent throughout, and
- an improved organising framework (which was outlined in Communique Number 4 and is still under development).

The Panel is seeking some initial feedback on its proposed approach to revising the format and style of the standards and has decided to seek feedback from the sector using two specific examples of proposed revised standards on:

- Course Design (Coursework)
- Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

Feedback on these examples will guide the Panel's drafting of future standards for consultation.

### ***Next consultation***

When the Panel has considered the feedback on these specific examples, it proposes to:

- release the details of the proposed organising framework ('map') for all of the revised standards (of which the two examples from this consultation will be part), and
- progressively release blocks of draft standards from cognate areas (e.g. teaching, research) for consultation over the coming months.

As noted in Communique Number 4, the Panel is working on an organising framework along the following lines:

- **Entity** (e.g. the provider's incorporation, business model, partnership arrangements)
- **Representation** (e.g. agents, marketing and information for prospective students)
- **HE Functions** (e.g. course design, teaching, scholarship, research, research training, learning environment)
- **Educational Experience** (e.g. access, entry, progression, completion, learning outcomes, qualification)
- **Enablers** (e.g. detection of students at risk, academic support, personal support, safety nets)
- **Corporate Governance** (e.g. direction setting, risk oversight, performance monitoring)
- **Academic Governance** (e.g. academic leadership, HE policies, approval and quality assurance)
- **Management** (e.g. staffing, finance, risk management, information systems, analytics)
- **Performance** (e.g. HE outputs and outcomes, quality assurance, indicators, external comparators, reporting).

This is a working framework and subject to further refinement by the Panel.

### ***Format of the draft standards***

The format of the current Threshold Standards is inconsistent throughout the standards. The Panel is seeking an improved format in terms of style and consistency of standards statements that, ideally, will overcome some of the shortcomings identified by providers in the current standards.

In the model proposed by the Panel, each 'heading' for sections of the standards is simply taxonomic (as distinct from a standards statement). The headings are followed by a set of related but stand-alone standards statements, which together encompass the aspects of higher education provision that are the subject of that set of standards statements.

In the interests of reducing overlap and repetition, the Panel is hoping that those aspects of higher education provision that are encompassed by one set of standards statements will not need to be revisited in other standards statements (another problem identified in the current standards).

The Panel sees the proposed format for the standards as simple and effective. It will allow regulation against a set of standards statements as a coherent whole, or regulation against one or more of the statements within the set as needed. Ideally the standards will be clearer, more focussed and free of repetition.

A predominantly narrative style has been adopted rather than lists of points as favoured in parts of the current standards. Where 'lists' are employed for the sake of clarity, each point is labelled for ease of reference rather than using an unlabelled dot point.

The proposed format of the standards includes 'reference points' as outlined below.

### ***Concept of Reference Points***

The Panel notes that some stakeholders have commented that the current standards give little internal guidance on how they might be interpreted by providers or TEQSA, or the type of evidence that might be considered in achieving or demonstrating compliance.

The proposed standards include a component that the Panel has titled 'Reference Points'. The Reference Points are intended to be an integral part of the overall set of standards, although they are not themselves intended to be standards statements.

The Panel notes that the concept of reference points was broadly supported in feedback on an earlier discussion paper (see Panel Communique Number 3), although the Panel also sees a need to further refine the practical implications of the concept. Reference Points are currently defined as:

*..significant codes or frameworks that the Higher Education Standards Panel judges to be of relevance to providers in considering how they achieve and demonstrate compliance with required standards.*

*Reference Points are not themselves Higher Education Standards. Generally, the items listed as Reference Points are developed and maintained by peak national bodies and agencies. The Higher Education Standards Panel does not create or maintain the items listed as Reference Points.*

The use of Reference Points is seen as a mechanism that gives some guidance to providers and regulators while not being prescriptive or seeking to standardise a provider's approach to meeting the standards. The concept may require further work so the current examples should be seen as indicative rather than definitive.

#### **Call for Comments:**

Feedback on the **proposed format (e.g. style, clarity, pitch) for the revised standards (including the use of reference points)**, as represented by the two standards examples given, is invited by the Panel. It would be helpful if feedback could be framed around the following questions:

- Q1. Do you broadly support the proposed format for the standards? If not, why?
- Q2. Do you support the inclusion of Reference Points as proposed? If not, why?
- Q3. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the format of the standards?

### ***Course Design (Coursework)***

The proposed draft set of standards for Course Design largely encompass the scope of Section 1 of the current Provider Course Accreditation Standards and some minor components from elsewhere in the current standards. As the proposed draft is intended to focus on coursework, references to research training have not been included.

The Panel received consistent feedback in consultations that the current standards contain significant overlap in content. In response, the Panel has sought to streamline the content of the standards statements. In the knowledge that the matter of learning outcomes and their assessment is proposed to be addressed in detail under 'Learning Outcomes', learning outcomes are referred to but not addressed in detail under Course Design. This is an important step in reducing the repetition in the current standards.

**Call for Comments:**

Feedback on the proposed draft standards for **Course Design (Coursework)** is invited by the Panel. It would be helpful if feedback could be framed around the following questions:

Q4. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Course design? If not, why?

Q5. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

***Learning Outcomes (Coursework)***

The Panel sees the specification and assessment of learning outcomes as critical components of the provision of higher education that are worthy of a separate set of standards statements rather than as part of another set of standards statements (e.g. in course design). In the current standards, learning outcomes are addressed in a more dispersed and less focussed way.

The proposed set of standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework) is intended to encompass and extend sections 5 and 1.9 of the current Provider Course Accreditation Standards. Following consultation with research stakeholders, the Panel sees the outcomes of research training and their assessment as sufficiently different in character from those of coursework to warrant being handled separately. The Panel intends to draft separate learning outcomes for research training.

In view of the critical role of assessment of learning outcomes, the proposed set of standards encompasses both the specification and assessment of outcomes.

**Call for Comments:**

Feedback on the proposed draft standards for **Learning Outcomes (Coursework)** is invited by the Panel. It would be helpful if feedback could be framed around the following questions:

Q6. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes? If not, why?

Q7. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

***Future Consultations***

Because the Panel will be releasing blocks of standards in the future, there will be an opportunity to revisit these particular standards together with their proposed bedfellows.