



28 May 2013

Higher Education Standards Panel

Call for Comment (Number 2, 28 May 2013)

Draft Standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes (Research Training)

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

Closing date for comments is 10 July 2013.

Panel's approach

This consultation is an important step in addressing the representation of research and research training in the Higher Education Standards Framework. Development of the attached proposed draft standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes (Research Training) has been informed by feedback from the previous call for comment on draft standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes (Coursework) in relation to format, style and the use of 'Reference Points' (see http://www.hestandards.gov.au/engagement#_Consultations).

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 Higher Education Threshold Standards. As outlined in its communiques (see http://www.hestandards.gov.au/engagement#_Communiqués) 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 these 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.

Future Calls for Comment

- The Panel is grateful for the feedback it received on its initial Call for Comment.
- There was overwhelming support for the Panel's overall approach to revising the standards, albeit with many helpful suggestions for detailed improvements.
- In the light of the feedback about the overall format of the standards, the Panel is confident in building on that foundation for drafting future standards.
- The Panel appreciates the effort undertaken to provide feedback and is reviewing its proposed standards to take into account the comments received.
- The Panel believes it will be helpful to seek specific comment on research standards now because research is represented in only a limited way in the current threshold standards and was mooted as part of the 'non-threshold' standards. In addition, research standards will only be applicable to some providers.
- Subject to analyses of feedback it has received or will receive, the Panel hopes that it will not need to go to another Call for Comment until it has completed drafting most, if not all, of the proposed revised standards. This will provide stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on the possible operation of the standards as a whole as well as the content of the standards overall.
- Developments in the Panel's thinking will continue to be the subject of communiques.

Use of feedback

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 10 July 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 MS 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 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

How do I submit my comments?

Comments should be forwarded by 10 July 2013 to:

info@HEstandards.gov.au

OR

Higher Education Standards Panel Executive
GPO Box 1672
Melbourne VIC 3001

All comments will be held in a register.



Discussion Paper: Draft Standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes (Research Training)

Background to this Consultation

The Higher Education Standards Panel (the Panel) has previously noted that research and research training receive little coverage in the current Threshold Standards. The Higher Education Standards Framework also lists 'Research' as one of the mooted, but otherwise unspecified, 'Non-Threshold' Standards. Research, or more particularly the extent of research carried out, is also one of the significant differentiating characteristics for higher education providers in the current Provider Category Standards.

The Panel has agreed to proceed with the development of draft standards for research and research training as part of its review of the Threshold Standards. In so doing, the Panel has taken particular account of:

- feedback on the form and style of the draft standards obtained from responses to the Panel's inaugural Call for Comment Number 1
- consultations with the sector, particularly with those involved in research
- a recent investigation of research training undertaken by the Commonwealth (*Defining Quality for Research Training in Australia: A Consultation Paper, October 2011*¹)
- the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, Australian Government, 2007*², and
- work on codification of good practice being undertaken by the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research.

Research and 'Non-Threshold' Standards

As outlined in earlier communiques, the Panel believes that an arrangement of (regulated) 'threshold' and (unregulated) 'non-threshold' standards is not helpful. Further, the topics mooted for non-threshold standards are already represented in the current Threshold Standards, although to varying degrees and not always explicitly. For example, research and/or research training are referred to in the Provider Registration Standards (4.3, 4.4, 5.6, 7.1), Course Accreditation Standards (1.8) and throughout the Provider Category Standards.

The Panel proposes that research and research training standards are warranted in the revised Higher Education Standards Framework, while acknowledging that such standards will not apply to all providers. The same standards would, however, apply to all providers who conduct research, or research and research training, irrespective of the category of provider. Like the current Threshold Standards, the proposed research standards are intended to be the subject of regulation, i.e. they will not be 'non-threshold' standards.

Guiding Principles

Following its consultations with the sector and other stakeholders, the Panel has adopted some principles to guide its work on this topic:

- if a HE provider is conducting research, or research and research training, the same standards should apply for those activities irrespective of the category of provider or type of research being conducted
- research training is sufficiently different in character that it should be separated from coursework in the HE standards framework (while not precluding a mix of coursework and research training in practice)

¹ <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Research/ResearchWorkforceIssues/Documents/DefiningQualityforResearchTraininginAustralia.pdf>

² <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/r39>

- research training is critically dependent on a culture and context of research activity, without which research training should not be contemplated
- research training should be supervised only by 'research-active' supervisors and only in fields where the provider has sufficient capability, resources and infrastructure for the field of research and proposed candidatures
- standards for research training must contemplate a diverse set of educational circumstances and, accordingly, should not be overly prescriptive
- orientation and further development of generic skills are essential components of research training, as are effective policies and procedures, high-level academic oversight of research training and mechanisms for monitoring and developing supervisors
- the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, Australian Government, 2007*³ is an important and helpful reference point for all providers
- examination of research theses or other major assessable components of research training should include independent external assessment by examiners of international standing
- the proposed standards should stand independently of any system that may be used to categorise providers
- Excellence in Research for Australia performance reports are not an appropriate requirement of minimum standards for research, but their use should not be precluded in a provider's methods for demonstrating its achievements
- standards developed for research and research training should not inhibit innovations in methods of research training, and
- the onus of measuring or demonstrating achievements should remain with the provider.

Format of the Draft Standards

The format of the draft standards is the same as advocated previously (and strongly supported by stakeholders) for course design and learning outcomes i.e. a taxonomic heading followed by a set of interrelated but stand-alone standards statements, with the addition of Reference Points⁴ where relevant.

Scope of the Draft Standards

In developing the proposed standards the Panel has sought to address items that it believes:

- are critical aspects of the conduct of research and research training
- specify the minimum acceptable levels of performance from providers that conduct research
- warrant codification in the (regulated) component of the Higher Education Standards Framework, and
- will not impose unreasonable regulatory burden on competent responsible providers who carry out research without offering research training, or carry out research and offer research training.

³ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/r39>

⁴ The Panel notes that the majority of stakeholders broadly support the concept of 'Reference Points' but see its application as requiring further exploration and clarification. Accordingly, the Panel sees the Reference Points proposed in the attached draft standards as only indicative at this point. Reference Points are the subject of a separate communique from the Panel (HES Communique Number 8).

Draft Standards for Research

The proposed draft set of standards for research encompass responsibilities for the conduct of research, the skills of the staff involved, an academic governance framework, maintenance of a repository of research outputs, reporting and analysis of research outputs by the provider and a reference to the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*⁵.

The concept of being 'research active' is applicable to various aspects of research, research training and research governance and the Panel believes it is in the interests of the provider to define what it means by 'research active' and to apply the concept consistently and equitably throughout the provider's research-related activities.

Call for Comments:

Feedback on the proposed draft Standards for **Research** 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 standards for Research? If not, why?
- Q2. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

Draft Standards for Research Training

The Panel sees research training as being part of an active research context. Consequently, the draft Standards for Research Training presuppose that the provider conducts research in the field in which research training is offered and meets the Standards for Research as a *pre-requisite* for offering research training. The Standards for Research Training then build on the underpinning foundation of requirements of the Research Standards to address the specific requirements for research training in a research environment.

The proposed draft Standards extend the academic governance requirements of the current research standards to address research training, to codify requirements for supervision and induction and to encourage the development of independent capabilities. The draft Standards also address the quality and standing of research arising from research training and monitoring and improvement of research training.

The draft Research Training Standards require that *formal* coursework associated with research training complies with the same requirements as any other coursework offered by the provider, thus avoiding duplication of standards statements for coursework here. Similarly, the overall course of study undertaken by research students will be addressed by standards for Course Design and need not be duplicated here. It is proposed to incorporate courses of study involving research into a future revision of the Standards for Course Design so that they encompass both coursework and research training.

There is again a reference to the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*⁶, in this case proposing guidance on research training in particular. The Panel has had discussions with the Deans and Directors of Graduate Research in relation to work being undertaken to exemplify good practice in research training and the Panel expects that this work will be a reference point as well.

Call for Comments:

Feedback on the proposed draft Standards for **Research Training** is invited by the Panel. It would be helpful if feedback could be framed around the following questions:

- Q3. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Research Training? If not, why?
- Q4. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

⁵ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/r39>

⁶ Ibid.

Draft standards for Learning Outcomes (Research Training)

These draft standards statements focus specifically on the learning outcomes for research training. Readers are asked to note that where a research-based course of study also includes a formal coursework requirement, the standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework)⁷ would also be applicable to the course of study. Like the draft Standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework), the draft Standards incorporate assessment of the learning outcomes as well as the outcomes themselves.

The Panel is exploring the possibility of combining the standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework) and Learning Outcomes (Research Training) into a single set of standards statements for Learning Outcomes, while still retaining the distinctive outcomes and different methods of assessment within the combined set. This would avoid duplication of the first two standards statements in the current drafts.

Call for Comments:

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

Q5. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes (Research Training)? If not, why?

Q6. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

Call for Comments:

Q7. Do you wish to make any **Overall or General Comments** about the form, style, scope or any other aspects of the proposed set of research-related standards?

⁷ Released with Call for Comment Number 1.