

Commonwealth of Australia

*Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*

**Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015**

I, SIMON BIRMINGHAM, Minister for Education and Training, make the following standards under subsection 58(1) of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*:

1. the Provider Registration Standards
2. the Provider Category Standards
3. the Provider Course Accreditation Standards, and
4. the Qualification Standards.

Dated: 7 October 2015

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SIMON BIRMINGHAM  
Minister for Education and Training

## 1. Name of Instrument

This Legislative Instrument is the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* and revokes the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011* (F2013C00169) and all subsequent amendments.

## 2. Authority

This legislative instrument is made under subsection 58(1) of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act 2011).

## 3. Threshold Standards

For the purposes of defining the Threshold Standards under paragraphs 58(1) (a) to (d) inclusive of the TEQSA Act 2011, the applicable standards in the *Higher Education Standards Framework* are specified in the relevant column of Table 1 below:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| (a) the Provider Registration Standards:         | column 2 |
| (b) the Provider Category Standards:             | column 3 |
| (c) the Provider Course Accreditation Standards: | column 4 |
| (d) the Qualification Standards:                 | column 5 |

**Table 1 – Threshold Standards**

Higher Education Standards Framework standard	Column 2 Provider Registration	Column 3 Provider Category	Column 4 Course Accreditation	Column 5 Qualification
<b>Part A: Standards for Higher Education</b>				
<b>1. Student Participation and Attainment</b>				
1.1 Admission	✓		✓	
1.2 Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning	✓		✓	
1.3 Orientation and Progression	✓		✓	
1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment			✓	
1.5 Qualifications and Certification			✓	✓
<b>2. Learning Environment</b>				
2.1 Facilities and Infrastructure	✓		✓	
2.2 Diversity and Equity	✓		✓	
2.3 Wellbeing and Safety	✓		✓ (only if regulation under the <i>Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000</i> is required)	
2.4 Student Grievances and Complaints	✓			

Higher Education Standards Framework standard	Column 2 Provider Registration	Column 3 Provider Category	Column 4 Course Accreditation	Column 5 Qualification
<b>3. Teaching</b>				
3.1 Course Design			✓	
3.2 Staffing	✓		✓	
3.3 Learning Resources and Educational Support	✓		✓	
<b>4. Research and Research Training</b>				
4.1 Research	✓ (according to provider's circumstances)		✓	
4.2 Research Training			✓ (if applicable to the provider)	
<b>5. Institutional Quality Assurance</b>				
5.1 Course Approval and Accreditation	✓		✓	
5.2 Academic and Research Integrity	✓			
5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement	✓		✓	
5.4 Delivery with Other Parties	✓ (if applicable to the provider)		✓ (if applicable to the provider)	
<b>6. Governance and Accountability</b>				
6.1 Corporate Governance	✓			
6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	✓		✓ (6.2.1i only)	
6.3 Academic Governance	✓			
<b>7. Representation, Information and Information Management</b>				
7.1 Representation	✓		✓	
7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students	✓		✓	
7.3 Information Management	✓		✓	
<b>Part B: Criteria for Higher Education Providers</b>				
B1 Classification of Higher Education Providers	✓	✓		
B2 Authority for Self-Accreditation of Courses of Study			✓ (if applicable to the provider)	

#### 4. Commencement

This legislative instrument commences on 1 January 2017 (**commencement date**).

**5. Application and savings provision for applications made before this instrument commences**

1. This item applies in relation to an entity if, before the commencement date:
  - (a) the entity makes an application to TEQSA under Part 3 (registration) or Part 4 (accreditation) of the TEQSA Act, and
  - (b) TEQSA has not made a decision in respect of the application.
2. TEQSA must make a decision in respect of an application to which sub-item 5(1) refers in accordance with the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011* as in force immediately before the commencement date.



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Education and Training**

# **HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS FRAMEWORK**

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# The *Higher Education Standards Framework*

The *Higher Education Standards Framework* (the Framework) is established by section 58 of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act 2011).

The Framework comprises:

## **Part A: Standards for Higher Education**

These Standards represent the minimum acceptable requirements for the provision of higher education in or from Australia by higher education providers registered under the TEQSA Act 2011.

## **Part B: Criteria for Higher Education Providers**

These criteria enable categorisation of different types of higher education providers according to certain characteristics; and whether a provider is responsible for self-accreditation of a course(s) of study it delivers.

## **Definitions**

Unless the contrary intention appears, the terms and phrases used in the Framework have the same meaning as in the TEQSA Act 2011.

## **Higher Education Qualification**

Higher Education Qualification has the same meaning as *Higher education award* in section 5 of the TEQSA Act 2011 and includes the qualifications listed in Table 2 below, other than an award at an equivalent level in the *Australian Qualifications Framework* (AQF) that is offered or conferred for completion of a vocational education and training course:

**Table 2 – Australian Higher Education Qualifications**

<b>AQF level</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
10	Higher Doctoral Degree *†
10	Doctoral Degree *†
9	Masters Degree (Research) *†
9	Masters Degree (Coursework) *
9	Masters Degree (Extended) *
8	Graduate Diploma *
8	Graduate Certificate *
8	Bachelor Honours Degree
7	Bachelor Degree
6	Associate Degree
6	Advanced Diploma
5	Diploma

\* = 'Higher Degrees', also known as 'postgraduate degrees/qualifications'

† = 'Higher Degrees by Research'

## **Australian Higher Education Qualification**

Australian Higher Education Qualification has the same meaning as *Australian higher education award* in section 5 of the TEQSA Act 2011.

## **Overseas Higher Education Qualification**

Overseas Higher Education Qualification has the same meaning as *overseas higher education award* in section 5 of the TEQSA Act 2011.

# **PART A: Standards for Higher Education**

## **1 Student Participation and Attainment**

### **1.1 Admission**

1. Admissions policies, requirements and procedures are documented, are applied fairly and consistently, and are designed to ensure that admitted students have the academic preparation and proficiency in English needed to participate in their intended study, and no known limitations that would be expected to impede their progression and completion.
2. The admissions process ensures that, prior to enrolment and before fees are accepted, students are informed of their rights and obligations, including:
  - a. all charges associated with their proposed studies as known at the time and advice on the potential for changes in charges during their studies
  - b. policies, arrangements and potential eligibility for credit for prior learning, and
  - c. policies on changes to or withdrawal from offers, acceptance and enrolment, tuition protection and refunds of charges.
3. Admission and other contractual arrangements with students, or where legally required, with their parent or guardian, are in writing and include any particular conditions of enrolment and participation for undertaking particular courses of study that may not apply to other courses more generally, such as health requirements for students undertaking clinical work, requirements for security checks, particular language requirements and particular requirements of work placements.

### **1.2 Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning**

1. Assessment of prior learning is undertaken for the purpose of granting credit for units of study within a course of study or toward the completion of a qualification, such assessment is conducted according to institutional policies, the result is recorded and students receive timely written advice of the outcome.
2. Credit through recognition of prior learning is granted only if:
  - a. students granted such credit are not disadvantaged in achieving the expected learning outcomes for the course of study or qualification, and
  - b. the integrity of the course of study and the qualification are maintained.

### **1.3 Orientation and Progression**

1. Successful transition into courses of study is achieved through orientation programs that are tailored to the needs of student cohorts and include specific consideration for international students adjusting to living and studying in Australia.
2. Specific strategies support transition, including:
  - a. assessing the needs and preparedness of individual students and cohorts
  - b. undertaking early assessment or review that provides formative feedback on academic progress and is able to identify needs for additional support, and
  - c. providing access to informed advice and timely referral to academic or other support.
3. Methods of assessment or monitoring that determine progress within or between units of study or in research training validly assess progress and, in the case of formative assessment, provide students with timely feedback that assists in their achievement of

learning outcomes.

4. Processes that identify students at risk of unsatisfactory progress and provide specific support are implemented across all courses of study.
5. Trends in rates of retention, progression and completion of student cohorts through courses of study are monitored to enable review and improvement.
6. Students have equivalent opportunities for successful transition into and progression through their course of study, irrespective of their educational background, entry pathway, mode or place of study.

## 1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

1. The expected learning outcomes for each course of study are specified, consistent with the level and field of education of the qualification awarded, and informed by national and international comparators.
2. The specified learning outcomes for each course of study encompass discipline-related and generic outcomes, including:
  - a. specific knowledge and skills and their application that characterise the field(s) of education or disciplines involved
  - b. generic skills and their application in the context of the field(s) of education or disciplines involved
  - c. knowledge and skills required for employment and further study related to the course of study, including those required to be eligible to seek registration to practise where applicable, and
  - d. skills in independent and critical thinking suitable for life-long learning.
3. Methods of assessment are consistent with the learning outcomes being assessed, are capable of confirming that all specified learning outcomes are achieved and that grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment.
4. On completion of a course of study, students have demonstrated the learning outcomes specified for the course of study, whether assessed at unit level, course level, or in combination.
5. On completion of research training, students have demonstrated specific and generic learning outcomes related to research, including:
  - a. a detailed understanding of the specific topic of their research, within a broad understanding of the field of research
  - b. capacity to scope, design and conduct research projects independently
  - c. technical research skills and competence in the application of research methods, and
  - d. skills in analysis, critical evaluation and reporting of research, and in presentation, publication and dissemination of their research.
6. Assessment of major assessable research outputs for higher degrees by research, such as theses, dissertations, exegeses, creative works or other major works arising from a candidate's research incorporates assessment by at least two assessors with international standing in the field of research, who are independent of the conduct of the research, competent to undertake the assessment and do not have a conflict of interest, and:
  - a. for doctoral degrees, are external to the higher education provider, and
  - b. for masters degrees by research, at least one of whom is external to the higher education provider.
7. The outputs arising from research training contribute to the development of the field of research, practice or creative field and, in the case of doctoral degrees, demonstrate a

significant original contribution.

## 1.5 Qualifications and Certification

1. Qualifications, other than higher doctoral or honorary qualifications, are awarded only if a course of study leads to the award of that qualification and all of the requirements of the course of study have been fulfilled.
2. Higher doctoral qualifications require significant, sustained original contributions to a field of research over and above the requirements of a doctoral degree and are awarded in accordance with the higher education provider's specific policies and academic governance requirements for the award of Higher Doctoral Degrees.
3. When an Australian Higher Education Qualification is offered, the course of study leading to the qualification is either self-accredited under authority to self-accredit or accredited by TEQSA and the learning outcomes for the qualification are consistent with the level classification for that qualification in the *Australian Qualifications Framework*.
4. Awardees of qualifications are issued with authorised certification documentation including a testamur, and either a record of results or an Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (graduation statement) that state correctly:
  - a. the name of the registered higher education provider issuing the documentation
  - b. the full name of the person to whom the documentation applies
  - c. the date of issue
  - d. the name and office of the person authorised by the higher education provider to issue the documentation, and
  - e. if the qualification is recognised in the Australian Qualifications Framework, the testamur and/or the graduation statement is certified with either the logo of the Australian Qualifications Framework or the words, 'This qualification is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework'.
5. All certification documentation issued by the higher education provider is:
  - a. unambiguously issued by the registered higher education provider
  - b. readily distinguishable from other certification documents issued by the higher education provider
  - c. protected against fraudulent issue
  - d. traceable and authenticable
  - e. designed to prevent unauthorised reproduction, and
  - f. replaceable by the higher education provider through an authorised and verifiable process.
6. Testamurs state correctly, in addition to the requirements for all certification documentation:
  - a. the full title of the qualification awarded, including the field or discipline of study
  - b. any subsidiary component of the qualification (such as integrated honours, an area of specialisation or a major study), and
  - c. if any parts of the course of study or assessment leading to the qualification were conducted in a language other than English, except for the use of another language to develop proficiency in that language.
7. Records of results state correctly, in addition to the requirements for all certification documentation:
  - a. the full name of all courses and units of study undertaken and when they were undertaken and completed

- b. credit granted through recognition of prior learning
  - c. the weighting of units within courses of study
  - d. the grades and/or marks awarded for each unit of study undertaken and, if applicable, for the course overall
  - e. where grades are issued, an explanation of the grading system used
  - f. where a course of study includes a significant particular focus of study such as honours, an area of specialisation or a major study, a definition of that component of significant focus, and
  - g. any parts of a course or units of study or assessment that were conducted in a language other than English, except for the use of another language to develop proficiency in that language.
8. Graduation statements contain, in relation to a particular course of study and the qualification awarded, the information contained in a record of results, presented in a form that conforms with the requirements for an Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement.
  9. Qualifications that do not align with a qualification that is recognised in the *Australian Qualifications Framework* are not described using the nomenclature of the *Australian Qualifications Framework* or implied to be a qualification recognised in the *Australian Qualifications Framework* or an equivalent qualification.
  10. Students who complete one or more units of study that do not lead to the award of a qualification have access to an authorised record of results for the units undertaken.
  11. Any documentation issued with the award of an honorary qualification unambiguously identifies the qualification as an honorary qualification.

## 2 Learning Environment

### 2.1 Facilities and Infrastructure

1. Facilities, including facilities where external placements are undertaken, are fit for their educational and research purposes and accommodate the numbers and educational and research activities of the students and staff who use them.
2. Secure access to electronic information and adequate electronic communication services is available continuously (allowing for reasonable outages for maintenance) to students and staff during periods of authorised access, except for locations and circumstances that are not under the direct control of the provider.
3. The learning environment, whether physical, virtual or blended, and associated learning activities support academic interactions among students outside of formal teaching.

### 2.2 Diversity and Equity

1. Institutional policies, practices and approaches to teaching and learning are designed to accommodate student diversity, including the under-representation and/or disadvantage experienced by identified groups, and create equivalent opportunities for academic success regardless of students' backgrounds.
2. Specific consideration is given to the recruitment, admission, participation and completion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. Participation, progress, and completion by identified student subgroups are monitored and the findings are used to inform admission policies and improvement of teaching, learning and support strategies for those subgroups.

## 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety

1. All students are advised of the actions they can take, the staff they may contact and the support services that are accessible if their personal circumstances are having an adverse effect on their education.
2. Timely, accurate advice on access to personal support services is available, including for access to emergency services, health services, counselling, legal advice, advocacy, and accommodation and welfare services.
3. The nature and extent of support services that are available for students are informed by the needs of student cohorts, including mental health, disability and wellbeing needs.
4. A safe environment is promoted and fostered, including by advising students and staff on actions they can take to enhance safety and security on campus and online.
5. There is a critical-incident policy together with readily accessible procedures that cover the immediate actions to be taken in the event of a critical incident and any follow up required.

## 2.4 Student Grievances and Complaints

1. Current and prospective students have access to mechanisms that are capable of resolving grievances about any aspect of their experience with the higher education provider, its agents or related parties.
2. There are policies and processes that deliver timely resolution of formal complaints and appeals against academic and administrative decisions without charge or at reasonable cost to students, and these are applied consistently, fairly and without reprisal.
3. Institutional complaints-handling and appeals processes for formal complaints include provision for confidentiality, independent professional advice, advocacy and other support for the complainant or appellant, and provision for review by an appropriate independent third party if internal processes fail to resolve a grievance.
4. Decisions about formal complaints and appeals are recorded and the student concerned is informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons, and of further avenues of appeal where they exist and where the student could benefit.
5. If a formal complaint or appeal is upheld, any action required is initiated promptly.

# 3 Teaching

## 3.1 Course Design

1. The design for each course of study is specified and the specification includes:
  - a. the qualification(s) to be awarded on completion
  - b. structure, duration and modes of delivery
  - c. the units of study (or equivalent) that comprise the course of study
  - d. entry requirements and pathways
  - e. expected learning outcomes, methods of assessment and indicative student workload
  - f. compulsory requirements for completion
  - g. exit pathways, articulation arrangements, pathways to further learning, and
  - h. for a course of study leading to a Bachelor Honours, Masters or Doctoral qualification, includes the proportion and nature of research or research-related

study in the course.

2. The content and learning activities of each course of study engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry consistent with the level of study and the expected learning outcomes, including:
  - a. current knowledge and scholarship in relevant academic disciplines
  - b. study of the underlying theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the academic disciplines or fields of education or research represented in the course, and
  - c. emerging concepts that are informed by recent scholarship, current research findings and, where applicable, advances in practice.
3. Teaching and learning activities are arranged to foster progressive and coherent achievement of expected learning outcomes throughout each course of study.
4. Each course of study is designed to enable achievement of expected learning outcomes regardless of a student's place of study or the mode of delivery.
5. Where professional accreditation of a course of study is required for graduates to be eligible to practise, the course of study is accredited and continues to be accredited by the relevant professional body.

### **3.2 Staffing**

1. The staffing complement for each course of study is sufficient to meet the educational, academic support and administrative needs of student cohorts undertaking the course.
2. The academic staffing profile for each course of study provides the level and extent of academic oversight and teaching capacity needed to lead students in intellectual inquiry suited to the nature and level of expected learning outcomes.
3. Staff with responsibilities for academic oversight and those with teaching and supervisory roles in courses or units of study are equipped for their roles, including having:
  - a. knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline or field, which is informed by continuing scholarship or research or advances in practice
  - b. skills in contemporary teaching, learning and assessment principles relevant to the discipline, their role, modes of delivery and the needs of particular student cohorts, and
  - c. a qualification in a relevant discipline at least one level higher than is awarded for the course of study, or equivalent relevant academic or professional or practice-based experience and expertise, except for staff supervising doctoral degrees having a doctoral degree or equivalent research experience.
4. Teachers who teach specialised components of a course of study, such as experienced practitioners and teachers undergoing training, who may not fully meet the standard for knowledge, skills and qualification or experience required for teaching or supervision (3.2.3) have their teaching guided and overseen by staff who meet the standard.
5. Teaching staff are accessible to students seeking individual assistance with their studies, at a level consistent with the learning needs of the student cohort.

### **3.3 Learning Resources and Educational Support**

1. The learning resources, such as library collections and services, creative works, notes, laboratory facilities, studio sessions, simulations and software, that are specified or recommended for a course of study, relate directly to the learning outcomes, are up to date and, where supplied as part of a course of study, are accessible when needed by students.
2. Where learning resources are part of an electronic learning management system, all users have timely access to the system and training is available in use of the system.

3. Access to learning resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off campus.
4. Students have access to learning support services that are consistent with the requirements of their course of study, their mode of study and the learning needs of student cohorts, including arrangements for supporting and maintaining contact with students who are off campus.

## **4 Research and Research Training**

### **4.1 Research**

1. Research and its associated activities are conducted in accordance with a research policy framework that is designed to achieve:
  - a. ethical conduct of research and responsible research practice
  - b. clarification of ownership and management of intellectual property
  - c. successful management of research partnerships
  - d. clarification of requirements for publication and authorship, and
  - e. resolution of allegations of misconduct in research.
2. Research is conducted, or overseen, by staff with qualifications, research experience and skills relevant to the type of research undertaken and their role.
3. A system for accurate and up-to-date recording of the research outputs of staff and research students is maintained.

### **4.2 Research Training**

1. Research training is guided by an institutional research training policy framework that is designed to achieve:
  - a. definition and recognition of the rights and responsibilities of research students and supervisors
  - b. induction and orientation of research students and supervisors to their roles
  - c. monitoring of the progress of research students
  - d. assessment and examination of students' work
  - e. independence of examiners
  - f. presentation and communication of research outputs by students, and
  - g. resolution of disputes.
2. Students are admitted to research training only where the training can be provided in a supervisory and study environment of research activity or other creative endeavour, inquiry and scholarship, and the supervision and resources required for their project are available.
3. Each research student is supported by continuing supervisory arrangements, including:
  - a. a principal supervisor who holds a doctoral degree, or has equivalent research experience, and who is active in research and publishing in, or otherwise making original contributions to, a relevant field or discipline
  - b. at least one associate supervisor with relevant research expertise, and
  - c. the principal supervisor is a member of the staff of the higher education provider, or has a relevant adjunct appointment, or is otherwise formally contracted and accountable to the provider for supervisory duties.

4. Research students participate in an induction to research that includes codes of conduct, ethics, occupational health and safety, intellectual property and any additional matters that are necessary for the type of research to be undertaken.
5. Coursework that is included as a formal assessable requirement in a course of study that involves research training, whether as a component of or an adjunct to the research training, meets the academic governance and quality assurance requirements required of other coursework offered by the higher education provider.

## 5 Institutional Quality Assurance

### 5.1 Course Approval and Accreditation

1. There are processes for internal approval of the delivery of a course of study, or, where a provider has authority to self-accredit, internal accreditation, of all courses of study leading to a higher education qualification.
2. Course approval and self-accreditation processes are overseen by peak institutional academic governance processes and they are applied consistently to all courses of study, before the courses are first offered and during re-approval or re-accreditation of the courses.
3. A course of study is approved or accredited, or re-approved or re-accredited, only when:
  - a. the course of study meets, and continues to meet, the applicable Standards of the *Higher Education Standards Framework*
  - b. the decision to (re-)approve or (re-)accredit a course of study is informed by overarching academic scrutiny of the course of study that is competent to assess the design, delivery and assessment of the course of study independently of the staff directly involved in those aspects of the course, and
  - c. the resources required to deliver the course as approved or accredited will be available when needed.

### 5.2 Academic and Research Integrity

1. There are policies that promote and uphold the academic and research integrity of courses and units of study, research and research training activities, and institutional policies and procedures address misconduct and allegations of misconduct.
2. Preventative action is taken to mitigate foreseeable risks to academic and research integrity including misrepresentation, fabrication, cheating, plagiarism and misuse of intellectual property, and to prevent recurrences of breaches.
3. Students are provided with guidance on what constitutes academic or research misconduct and the development of good practices in maintaining academic and research integrity.
4. Academic and research integrity and accountability for academic and research integrity are maintained in arrangements with any other party involved in the provision of higher education, including placements, collaborative research, research training and joint award of qualifications.

### 5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement

1. All accredited courses of study are subject to periodic (at least every seven years) comprehensive reviews that are overseen by peak academic governance processes and include external referencing or other benchmarking activities.
2. A comprehensive review includes the design and content of each course of study, the

expected learning outcomes, the methods for assessment of those outcomes, the extent of students' achievement of learning outcomes, and also takes account of emerging developments in the field of education, modes of delivery, the changing needs of students and identified risks to the quality of the course of study.

3. Comprehensive reviews of courses of study are informed and supported by regular interim monitoring, of the quality of teaching and supervision of research students, student progress and the overall delivery of units within each course of study.
4. Review and improvement activities include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study, including:
  - a. analyses of progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates and, where applicable, comparing different locations of delivery, and
  - b. the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of study.
5. All students have opportunities to provide feedback on their educational experiences and student feedback informs institutional monitoring, review and improvement activities.
6. All teachers and supervisors have opportunities to review feedback on their teaching and research supervision and are supported in enhancing these activities.
7. The results of regular interim monitoring, comprehensive reviews, external referencing and student feedback are used to mitigate future risks to the quality of the education provided and to guide and evaluate improvements, including the use of data on student progress and success to inform admission criteria and approaches to course design, teaching, supervision, learning and academic support.

## 5.4 Delivery with Other Parties

1. Work-integrated learning, placements, other community-based learning and collaborative research training arrangements are quality assured, including assurance of the quality of supervision of student experiences.
2. When a course of study, any parts of a course of study, or research training are delivered through arrangements with another party(ies), whether in Australia or overseas, the registered higher education provider remains accountable for the course of study and verifies continuing compliance of the course of study with the standards in the *Higher Education Standards Framework* that relate to the specific arrangement.

# 6 Governance and Accountability

## 6.1 Corporate Governance

1. There is a formally constituted governing body, which includes independent members, that exercises competent governance oversight of and is accountable for all of the higher education provider's operations in or from Australia, including accountability for the award of higher education qualifications, for continuing to meet the requirements of the *Higher Education Standards Framework* and for the provider's representation of itself.
2. Members of the governing body:
  - a. are fit and proper persons, and
  - b. meet the Australian residency requirements, if any, of the instrument under which the provider is established or incorporated, or otherwise there are at least two members of the governing body who are ordinarily resident in Australia.

3. The governing body attends to governance functions and processes diligently and effectively, including:
  - a. obtaining and using such information and advice, including independent advice and academic advice, as is necessary for informed and competent decision making and direction setting
  - b. defining roles and delegating authority as is necessary for effective governance, policy development and management; and monitoring the implementation of those delegations
  - c. confirming that the provision of higher education and research training and the conduct of research, whether by the provider or through an arrangement with another party, are governed by the registered provider's institutional policies, and the operations of the provider and any associated party(ies) are consistent with those policies
  - d. undertaking periodic (at least every seven years) independent reviews of the effectiveness of the governing body and academic governance processes and ensuring that the findings of such reviews are considered by a competent body or officer(s) and that agreed actions are implemented, and
  - e. maintaining a true record of the business of the governing body.
4. The governing body takes steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of intellectual inquiry is upheld and protected, students and staff are treated equitably, the wellbeing of students and staff is fostered, informed decision making by students is supported and students have opportunities to participate in the deliberative and decision making processes of the higher education provider.

## 6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability

1. The provider is able to demonstrate, and the corporate governing body assures itself, that the provider is operating effectively and sustainably, including:
  - a. the governing body and the entity comply with the requirements of the legislation under which the provider is established, recognised or incorporated, any other legislative requirements and the entity's constitution or equivalent
  - b. the provider's future directions in higher education have been determined, realistic performance targets have been established, progress against targets is monitored and action is taken to correct underperformance
  - c. the provider is financially viable and applies, and has the capacity to continue to apply, sufficient financial and other resources to maintain the viability of the entity and its business model, to meet and continue to meet the requirements of the *Higher Education Standards Framework*, to achieve the provider's higher education objectives and performance targets and to sustain the quality of higher education that is offered
  - d. the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of the entity are monitored regularly and understood, financial reporting is materially accurate, financial management meets Australian accounting standards, effective financial safeguards and controls are operating and financial statements are audited independently by a qualified auditor against Australian accounting and auditing standards
  - e. risks to higher education operations have been identified and material risks are being managed and mitigated effectively
  - f. mechanisms for competent academic governance and leadership of higher education provision and other academic activities have been implemented and these are operating according to an institutional academic governance policy framework and are effective in maintaining the quality of higher education offered

- g. educational policies and practices support participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and cultures
- h. qualifications are awarded legitimately
- i. there are credible business continuity plans and adequately resourced financial and tuition safeguards to mitigate disadvantage to students who are unable to progress in a course of study due to unexpected changes to the higher education provider's operations, including if the provider is unable to provide a course of study, ceases to operate as a provider, loses professional accreditation for a course of study or is otherwise not able to offer a course of study
- j. the occurrence and nature of formal complaints, allegations of misconduct, breaches of academic or research integrity and critical incidents are monitored and action is taken to address underlying causes, and
- k. lapses in compliance with the *Higher Education Standards Framework* are identified and monitored, and prompt corrective action is taken.

### 6.3 Academic Governance

1. Processes and structures are established and responsibilities are assigned that collectively:
  - a. achieve effective academic oversight of the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training
  - b. set and monitor institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes
  - c. establish and maintain academic leadership at an institutional level, consistent with the types and levels of higher education offered, and
  - d. provide competent advice to the corporate governing body and management on academic matters, including advice on academic outcomes, policies and practices.
2. Academic oversight assures the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training effectively, including by:
  - a. developing, monitoring and reviewing academic policies and their effectiveness
  - b. confirming that delegations of academic authority are implemented
  - c. critically scrutinising, approving and, if authority to self-accredit is held, accrediting or advising on approving and accrediting, courses of study and their associated qualifications
  - d. maintaining oversight of academic and research integrity, including monitoring of potential risks
  - e. monitoring and initiating action to improve performance against institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes
  - f. critically evaluating the quality and effectiveness of educational innovations or proposals for innovations
  - g. evaluating the effectiveness of institutional monitoring, review and improvement of academic activities, and
  - h. monitoring and reporting to the corporate governing body on the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training.
3. Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance.

## **7 Representation, Information and Information Management**

### **7.1 Representation**

1. Representation of the higher education provider, its educational offerings and charges, whether directly or through agents or other parties, is accurate and not misleading.
2. Courses or units of study that are offered or intended to be offered are not described as accredited, whether by TEQSA or by a professional accreditation body for the purposes of registration to practise, until such accreditation has been obtained.
3. Where units of study are offered separately from a course of study and are represented as eligible for gaining credit towards a course of study or a qualification:
  - a. the course(s) of study and qualification(s) for which credit may be gained are specified, and
  - b. the terms on which credit may be granted are defined.
4. Agents and other parties that are involved in representing the higher education provider are bound by formal contracts with the provider, their performance is monitored and prompt corrective action is taken in the event or likelihood of misrepresentation or unethical conduct.
5. Representations, whether expressed or implied, about the outcomes associated with undertaking a course of study, eligibility for acceptance into another course of study, employment outcomes or possible migration outcomes are not false or misleading.

### **7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students**

1. Accurate, relevant and timely information for students is publicly available and accessible, including access for students with special needs, to enable informed decision making about educational offerings and experiences.
2. Information for students is available prior to acceptance of an offer, written in plain English where practicable, accompanied by an explanation of any technical or specialised terms, and includes:
  - a. information to assist in decisions about courses or units of study, including the course design, prerequisites, assumed knowledge, when and where courses/units are offered, application dates, arrangements for recognition of prior learning, standing credit transfer arrangements, pathways to employment and eligibility for registration to practise where applicable
  - b. information to assist in planning for and participation in educational and other activities, including contact points, advice about orientation and induction, delivery arrangements, technical requirements for access to IT systems for online activities, timetables, access to learning resources, avenues to participate in decision making and opportunities to participate in student representative bodies
  - c. information to outline the obligations of students and their liabilities to the higher education provider including expected standards of behaviour, financial obligations to the higher education provider, critical deadlines, policies for deferral, change of preference/enrolment and leave of absence, particular obligations of international students, disciplinary procedures, misconduct and grounds for suspension or exclusion
  - d. information to give access to current academic governance policies and requirements including admission, recognition of prior learning, transition, progression, assessment, grading, completion, qualifications, appeals, academic integrity, equity and diversity, intellectual property and withdrawal from or cancellation of enrolment

- e. information to facilitate access to services and support including the types of services available such as educational resources including English language support, personal support services, cultural support and ancillary services, hours of availability, how to access services and emergency contact details where applicable
  - f. information to assist in resolution of grievances, including an explanation of processes for resolution of grievances and complaints and internal and external appeals processes, guidance on how to participate in the processes and sources of assistance including advocacy, and
  - g. information to assist international students studying in Australia if applicable, including indicative costs of living and studying in Australia, accommodation options, arrangements for health care and, where applicable, schooling obligations related to school-aged dependants (including the possibility that school fees may be incurred).
3. There are policies and processes that ensure information and advice given to international students holding or applying for an Australian student visa and decisions taken in relation to such students meet statutory requirements.
  4. Students are given reasonable notice of changes to a higher education provider's operations including information about increases in fees and associated costs and any consequences that may affect their choice of, or ability to participate in, an intended course(s) of study.

### **7.3 Information Management**

1. There is a repository of publicly-available current information about the higher education provider's operations that includes:
  - a. the registered name of the higher education provider, trading name(s) if different, regulatory status and authority to provide courses of study to international students studying on an Australian student visa
  - b. the instrument establishing the entity
  - c. the members of the governing body and senior executive
  - d. the financial standing of the provider
  - e. indicative total student enrolments
  - f. a high-level organisational chart that includes the organisational units that deliver courses of study, such as schools or faculties
  - g. the locations at which higher education is offered, including overseas if applicable
  - h. an overview of teaching campuses, facilities, learning resources and services provided for students
  - i. a list of all higher education courses of study that are offered, including indicative estimated annual enrolments
  - j. arrangements with other parties to deliver courses of study or to conduct research training
  - k. where public annual reports are required of the provider, the three most recent annual reports
  - l. how to lodge a complaint about the higher education provider, and
  - m. contact details.
2. The list of all higher education courses of study within the repository of information includes:
  - a. the accreditation status of each course of study

- b. the qualification(s) offered
  - c. whether the qualification is recognised in the *Australian Qualifications Framework*
  - d. confirmation of recognition of each course of study by the relevant professional body(ies) if such recognition is required for registration of graduates to practise
  - e. whether each course of study is authorised to be offered to international students studying on an Australian student visa, and
  - f. the duration of each course of study
3. Information systems and records are maintained, securely and confidentially as necessary to:
- a. maintain accurate and up-to-date records of enrolments, progression, completions and award of qualifications
  - b. prevent unauthorised or fraudulent access to private or sensitive information, including information where unauthorised access may compromise academic or research integrity
  - c. document and record responses to formal complaints, allegations of misconduct, breaches of academic or research integrity and critical incidents, and
  - d. demonstrate compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework.

## **PART B: Criteria for Higher Education Providers**

### **B1: Criteria for Classification of Higher Education Provider Categories**

All providers of higher education that gain registration by TEQSA through meeting the Higher Education Standards Framework become 'Higher Education Providers'. This title signals to the public that the provider is a bona fide provider of quality higher education in Australia.

Higher education providers are able to seek approval within a particular provider category under subsection 18(1) of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011. There are several provider categories that use the word 'university':

- Australian University
- Australian University College
- Australian University of Specialisation
- Overseas University
- Overseas University of Specialisation.

A higher education provider must meet the additional criteria for use of a provider category that uses the word 'university'.

#### **B1.1 “Higher Education Provider” Category**

The higher education provider offers an Australian higher education qualification and/or an overseas higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider meets the Higher Education Standards Framework and offers at least one accredited course of study.
2. The higher education provider has a clearly articulated higher education purpose that includes a commitment to and support for free intellectual inquiry in its academic endeavours.
3. The higher education provider delivers teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry.
4. The higher education provider's academic staff are active in scholarship that informs their teaching, and are active in research when engaged in research student supervision.

#### **B1.2 “Australian University” Category**

The higher education provider offers an Australian higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider self-accredits and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate courses of study that meet the Higher Education Standards Framework across a range of broad fields of study (including Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in at least three of the broad fields of study it offers).
2. The higher education provider has been authorised for at least the last five years to self-accredit at least 85% of its total courses of study, including Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in at least three of the broad fields of study.
3. The higher education provider undertakes research that leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour at least in those broad fields of study in which Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) are offered.

4. The higher education provider demonstrates the commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to the systematic advancement and dissemination of knowledge.
5. The higher education provider demonstrates sustained scholarship that informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses of study are offered.
6. The higher education provider identifies and implements good practices in student teaching and learning, including those that have the potential for wider dissemination nationally.
7. The higher education provider offers an extensive range of student services, including student academic and learning support, and extensive resources for student learning in all disciplines offered.
8. The higher education provider demonstrates engagement with its local and regional communities and demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility in its activities.
9. The higher education provider has systematic, mature internal processes for quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity.
10. The higher education provider's application for registration has the support of the relevant Commonwealth, State or Territory government.

### **B1.3 “Australian University College” Category**

The higher education provider offers an Australian higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider has realistic and achievable plans to meet all the criteria for an “Australian University” Category within five years of its approval to use the title “Australian University College”.
2. The higher education provider self-accredits and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate courses of study that meet the Higher Education Standards Framework across a range of broad fields of study (including Masters Degrees (Coursework) in at least three broad fields of study and Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in at least one of the broad fields of study it offers).
3. The higher education provider undertakes research that leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour at least in those broad fields of study in which Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) are offered.
4. The higher education provider demonstrates the commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to the systematic advancement and dissemination of knowledge.
5. The higher education provider demonstrates sustained scholarship that informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses of study are offered.
6. The higher education provider identifies and implements good practices in student teaching and learning, including those that have the potential for wider dissemination nationally.
7. The higher education provider offers an extensive range of student services, including student academic and learning support, and extensive resources for student learning in all disciplines offered.
8. The higher education provider demonstrates engagement with its local and regional communities and demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility in its activities.
9. The higher education provider has systematic, well developed internal processes for quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity.
10. The higher education provider's application for registration has the support of the relevant Commonwealth, State or Territory government.

#### **B1.4 “Australian University of Specialisation” Category**

The higher education provider offers an Australian higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider self-accredits and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate courses of study that meet the Higher Education Standards Framework in one or two broad fields of study only (including Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in these one or two broad fields of study it offers).
2. The higher education provider has been authorised for at least the last five years to self-accredit at least 85% of its total courses of study in one or two broad fields of study only, including Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in these broad field/s of study.
3. The higher education provider undertakes research that leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour at least in those broad fields of study in which Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) are offered.
4. The higher education provider demonstrates the commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to the systematic advancement of knowledge.
5. The higher education provider demonstrates sustained scholarship that informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses of study are offered.
6. The higher education provider identifies and implements good practices in student teaching and learning, including those that have the potential for wider dissemination nationally.
7. The higher education provider offers an extensive range of student services, including student academic and learning support, and extensive resources for student learning in all disciplines offered.
8. The higher education provider demonstrates engagement with its local and regional communities and demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility in its activities.
9. The higher education provider has systematic, mature internal processes for quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity.
10. The higher education provider’s application for registration has the support of the relevant Commonwealth, State or Territory government.

#### **B1.5 “Overseas University” Category**

The higher education provider offers an overseas higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider is recognised as a university by its home country registration or accreditation authority or equivalent governmental authority, the standing and standards of which are acceptable to TEQSA.  
AND
2. The higher education provider meets criteria equivalent to those for the “Australian University” Category.

## **B1.6 “Overseas University of Specialisation” Category**

The higher education provider offers an overseas higher education qualification

1. The higher education provider is recognised as a university by its home country registration or accreditation authority or equivalent governmental authority, the standing and standards of which are acceptable to TEQSA.

AND

2. The higher education provider meets criteria equivalent to those for the “Australian University of Specialisation” Category.

## **B2: Criteria for Seeking Authority for Self-Accreditation of Courses of Study**

### **Providers with Authority to Self-Accredit some or all Courses of Study**

Registration of a higher education provider in certain categories of provider may confer self-accrediting authority on the provider. A higher education provider that is registered in the ‘Australian University’ provider category and meets the requirements under Section 45(1) of the TEQSA Act 2011 is authorised under the TEQSA Act 2011 to self-accredit each course of study that leads to a higher education qualification that it offers or confers. TEQSA will authorise a higher education provider that is registered in the ‘Australian University College’ provider category to self-accredit all of its courses of study. A higher education provider that is registered in the ‘Australian University of Specialisation’ provider category self-accredits some of its courses of study and TEQSA may authorise the provider to self-accredit all of the courses of study it offers, in its one or two broad fields of education only.

### **Types of Self-Accrediting Authority that may be Sought**

1. A higher education provider that is registered in the ‘Higher Education Provider’, ‘Overseas University’ or ‘Overseas University of Specialisation’ provider category, or any other registered provider that proposes to extend the scope of its self-accrediting authority, may seek authorisation from TEQSA to self-accredit:
  - a. one or more existing courses of study
  - b. one or more existing courses of study and new course(s) of study at the same qualification level in the same narrow or broad field of education
  - c. one or more existing courses of study and new course(s) of study at the same qualification level in nominated new narrow or broad field(s) of education
  - d. one or more existing courses of study and new courses of study at one or more new qualification levels in the same narrow or broad field of education
  - e. one or more existing courses of study and new courses of study at one or more qualification levels in nominated new narrow or broad fields of education, or
  - f. all higher education courses of study that it offers, or may offer, irrespective of level of qualification or field of education.

## Providers Seeking Authority from TEQSA to Self-Accredit Nominated Courses of Study

2. A provider that is seeking authorisation to self-accredit a nominated course(s) of study as specified in 1a – 1e above is able to demonstrate:
  - a. sustained and sustainable achievement of all of the Standards for Higher Education (Part A) that apply to the provider, including for course approval processes in particular and any delivery arrangements with other parties
  - b. there are no unresolved compliance matters with TEQSA, or conditions outstanding from the most recent registration and course accreditations by TEQSA or a recognised registration or accreditation authority, and there is no history of significant continuing compliance problems in any other assessments, audits or reviews of its higher education operations conducted by TEQSA, professional bodies or government agencies
  - c. a history over at least five years of successful delivery of the course(s) of study for which self-accrediting authority is sought, which is supported by evidence of student success based on analysis of trend data including completion rates and times, attrition rates and grades awarded that are referenced against credible national or international comparators and encompass at least three cohorts of graduates from each course of study
  - d. where a cycle of review and improvement is required by the Standards for Higher Education (Part A) in relation to courses of study and their oversight (see Table 3), the provider has, in relation to all course(s) of study proposed for self-accreditation:
    - i. completed at least one cycle of review and improvement in relation to all relevant standards
    - ii. demonstrated successful implementation of evidence-based improvements arising from the reviews, and
    - iii. has established these review and improvement activities as effective sustainable features of the provider’s operations across all courses of study.

**Table 3 – Standards Referring to Review and Improvement Activities**

Higher Education Standards	Applicable Standards
<b>2. Learning Environment</b>	
2.2 Diversity and Equity	2.2.3
<b>5. Institutional Quality Assurance</b>	
5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement	Entire section
<b>6. Governance and Accountability</b>	
6.1 Corporate Governance	6.1.2d
6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	6.2.1f
6.3 Academic Governance	6.3.2

### **Providers Seeking Authority from TEQSA to Self-Accredit All Courses of Study**

3. Where a provider is seeking self-accrediting authority under Criterion 1f for all courses of study that it offers, or may offer, in addition to meeting Criteria 2a – 2d, the provider is able to demonstrate the necessary capacity and capability to provide new courses leading to any level of higher education qualification in any field of education, including:
  - a. processes for the design, delivery, accreditation, monitoring, quality assurance, review and improvement of existing courses of study that are transferrable to any new courses of study and any new level of qualification offered
  - b. capability in planning and establishment of new courses of study in new broad fields of education
  - c. capacity for competent academic governance, oversight and scrutiny of the accreditation of new courses in new broad fields of education
  - d. sufficient breadth and depth of academic leadership, scholarship and expertise in relevant disciplines to guide entry into and sustain new levels and broad fields of higher education, and
  - e. where professional accreditation is applicable to otherwise self-accredited courses, professional accreditation can reasonably be expected to be obtained and maintained.