# Guidance Note: *Learning resources and educational support*

Version 1.0 (7 09 2022)

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| Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time. |

## What do Learning Resources and Educational Support encompass?

In the context of the [*Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2022C00105)(Threshold Standards), the sections on:

* learning resources refer to the academic resources made available for a course of study
* educational support refers to support a provider gives students to develop their capacity for independent learning and inquiry.

The primary obligations related to learning resources and educational support are found in section 3.3 of the Threshold Standards.

Facilities and resources that are more of a general nature and do not form part of a particular course of study are covered in other parts of the Threshold Standards:

* Facilities and Infrastructure (section 2.1) [hyperlink forthcoming]
* Wellbeing and Safety (section 2.3) [hyperlink forthcoming]
* Staffing (section 3.2). [hyperlink forthcoming]

Learning resources and educational support for research training fall within section 4.2 of the Threshold Standards and are not considered as part of this guidance note.

### Learning Resources

The Threshold Standards require a provider to ensure students:

* have access to learning resources that are up to date and directly relevant to the course of study
* receive timely training if learning resources are delivered over a learning management system (online)
* are not subjected to unexpected barriers, such as the cost of technological requirements when needing to access required resources.

When assessing learning resources, TEQSA will consider:

* the educational materials
* their availability/accessibility, and
* their quality.

The Threshold Standards do not dictate the form learning resources take (they can include physical books, journals, or online databases). However, a provider must ensure learning resources are:

* in a form that is accessible to all students, including those with a disability, regardless of the mode of study (e.g. online only)
* appropriate for the level of qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
* relevant and up to date.

The Threshold Standards do not explicitly state a provider needs to have a physical library and physical learning materials. However, there is an expectation that providers will ensure its students are able to readily access materials and resources referred to in their course of study[[1]](#footnote-2). TEQSA will not accept a model where a provider makes no learning resources available and refers its students to a public library, or similar.

When assessing the quality of learning resources, TEQSA may engage the assistance of an external subject matter expert. Information regarding learning resources will need to be of sufficient detail for the expert to form a view on their quality and appropriateness for the course of study.

If a provider seeks to have the provision of learning resources dealt with by other parties (see also Guidance Note: Delivery with Other Parties [hyperlink forthcoming]) it must be able to demonstrate:

* the arrangement with the other party is part of a formal agreement
* delivering the resources in this way is practical for students and does not create unreasonable barriers to access.

### Educational Support

In general, TEQSA will expect providers to give students the educational support necessary to allow them to develop their capacity for independent learning and inquiry.

TEQSA will expect providers to:

* have educational support services available to its students consistent with their course of study
* have qualified staff that can help students locate the information they need
* give training to students on how to locate and use resources relevant to their course of study
* have support services for students who are at risk (or potentially at risk) of not making progress with their studies.

Under section 3.3.4 of the Threshold Standards, providers are also required to provide students with more general support services to:

* develop study skills
* develop English language proficiency
* assist in their transition to living in Australia.

## What TEQSA will look for

TEQSA considers relevant standards from the Threshold Standards in the context of ‘learning resources and educational support, among which most notably are:.

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| **Part A: Standards for HE Providers** | **Key considerations** |
| 1.3.1 and 1.3.4: Orientation and Progression | * orientation is provided to students with specific considerations for international students adjusting to living and studying in Australia * assessment and monitoring methods to ascertain student progress, pass rates, retention and completion. |
| 2.2.3: Diversity and Equity | * participation, progress, and completion are monitored to improve teaching and learning strategies to support identified ‘at risk’ student cohorts. |
| 3.2.5: Staffing | * teaching staff are accessible to students seeking individual assistance with their studies * teaching staff have the requisite knowledge, skills and time to provide adequate support to students |
| 3.3.1-4: Resources up to date and accessible | * the learning resources are up to date and accessible * access to electronic learning management systems is timely and training is available to use the systems * access to learning resources does not present any unexpected barriers costs or technology requirements * student access to educational support services is consistent with their course requirements, mode of study and learning needs. |

### Obligations applying to providers of education to overseas students

Where it applies to a provider, TEQSA considers the [*National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017L01182)(National Code) and the [*Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2022C00066)(ESOS Act).

Sections of the [National Code](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017L01182) relevant to learning resources and educational support are:

**2.1.5** – before accepting a prospective student for enrolment, a provider must make information about campus locations, facilities and learning resources available in plain English

**6.1** – a provider must support overseas students adjusting to study and life in Australia by providing information and culturally appropriate orientation on:

* **6.1.2** – English language and study assistance programs
* **6.1.5** – its facilities and resources
* **6.1.8** – support services available to assist students with general or personal circumstances adversely affecting their education in Australia

**6.3** – a provider must give reasonable support to overseas students to enable them to achieve expected learning outcomes regardless of place or mode of study, at no additional cost to the student

**6.4** – a provider must facilitate access to learning support services consistent with the requirements of the course, mode of study and learning needs of the student.

**8.22** – a provider must take all reasonable steps to support overseas students who may be disadvantaged while engaging in distance or online learning.

### Obligations applying to providers receiving financial support from the Commonwealth

Providers subject to the [*Higher Education Support Act 2003*](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2022C00005) (HESA Act) may have additional obligations regarding learning resources and educational support.

The HESA Act sets out, amongst other things, the parameters of what a provider can charge students for the services it provides. Providers subject to the HESA Act must not charge students for learning resources and educational support where to do so would be contrary to the HESA.

For example, consistent with section 36-45 of the HESA Act providers cannot ask students to make contributions toward the cost of a unit beyond specified limits.

## Identified issues

TEQSA has identified several issues which may indicate risks to students and non-compliance with obligations related to learning resources and educational support. These include, but are not limited to:

* students not being made aware of the cost of resources required for a course before accepting an offer
* students not being made aware of how to access information and resources relevant to their course of study
* inadequate monitoring of the performance of subgroups of student cohorts to improve learning resources and educational support, which can negatively impact the subgroups’ progression and completion rates
* using poor quality resources in a course of study (e.g. irrelevant, obsolete, non-authoritative material) including outdated versions of textbooks in its library.
* students facing barriers to accessing resources such as:
  + being required to use uncommon or unreasonably costly software
  + having limited access to science or computer labs that are only open during regular working hours
  + access to online resources requires impractically high internet speeds
  + an online-only student, being unable to access learning materials because they are only available to students attending on campus
  + a student with a disability being unable to access learning materials because they are not in the form the student needs to be able to use or access them.
* students not receiving timely and/or sufficient feedback on assessments. This may lead to students being unaware they are at academic risk until too late in the study period to take corrective action.

## Related resources

* Guidance note: Facilities and Infrastructure (under development) [hyperlink forthcoming]
* Guidance note: Wellbeing and Safety (under development) [hyperlink forthcoming]
* Guidance note: Diversity and Equity (under development) [hyperlink forthcoming]
* [Guidance note: Research and Research Training](https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/publications/guidance-note-research-and-research-training)
* [Higher Education Support Act 2003](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2022C00005)

| **Version #** | **Date** | **Key changes** |
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1. This is separate to supplemental material such as suggested reading, which a student may decide to acquire on their own initiative. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)