



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Guidance note: Research and research training

Version 2.1 (11 December 2024)



TEQSA



TEQSA's guidance notes are concise documents designed to provide high-level, principles-based guidance on interpretation and application of specific standards of the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#). They also draw attention to other interrelated standards and highlight potential risks to compliance. They do not introduce prescriptive obligations.

The definitive instruments that set out providers' obligations in delivering higher education remain the Threshold Standards (as amended on advice from the [Higher Education Standards Panel](#) to the Minister for Education from time to time) and the [TEQSA Act](#).

The purpose and intent of this guidance note about research and research training is to explore how providers can ensure the integrity and quality of research and research training is upheld at their institution.

For the full list of guidance notes and resources, please see the [TEQSA website](#).

1. What does research and research training encompass?

For the purposes of the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) (Threshold Standards), research is defined as ‘the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way by a higher education provider so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings’. Research can be carried out in and between all fields and may involve a range of tools and media.

Undertaking research can be considered:

- at the level of individual activity (e.g. part of an individual’s personal research or professional practice), or
- across a provider (e.g. policy frameworks, resource allocation, institutional expectations, staff development).

At a minimum, research:

- leads to and/or transmits new knowledge or advances in creative or professional practice in a field
- is a planned, purposive intellectual inquiry
- produces outputs that are subject to external, independent scrutiny.

For the purposes of the Threshold Standards, ‘research training’ is a formal course of graduate study leading to the acquisition of advanced skills, techniques, and knowledge in the conduct of research. Research training also builds towards the production of a contribution to the field of research or creative or professional practice. Research training is a key characteristic of the Masters Degree (Research) and all Doctoral Degrees at AQF 10 (sometimes referred to as higher degrees by research) (Australian Qualifications Framework). In the case of Doctoral Degrees, the Threshold Standards requires a significant and original contribution to the field of research or creative or professional practice.

Bachelor Honours degrees may include a significant research component and be a pathway to further research training. However, TEQSA will not assess coursework degrees (including Bachelor Honours Degrees) against the research standards.

2. What TEQSA will look for

Given the investment and resources necessary to successfully offer and support postgraduate research degrees, TEQSA expects to see well developed and mature course design, research supervision, review, and quality assurance processes.

TEQSA's considerations relevant to other aspects of the Threshold Standards include:

Threshold Standards (2021) Part A	Key considerations
1.3.3 Orientation and Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research candidate's program progression is monitored and feedback provided.
1.4.5–1.4.7: Learning Outcomes and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research candidates acquire the relevant skills, their major assessable research outputs are assessed by suitably qualified external assessor(s) and contribute to the development of the field.
2.1: Facilities and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities and infrastructure are fit for purpose and can accommodate the research needs of the course, research candidates and staff.
4.1: Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a research policy framework and research is conducted consistent with this policy framework. Research is conducted and overseen by suitably qualified staff. Research outputs of staff and research candidates are recorded and records are current.
4.2: Research Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an institutional research training policy framework. An appropriate environment, induction, supervisory arrangements and resources that support research training are in place. Coursework components meet the governance and quality requirements for coursework set by a provider. Supervisors of research have the requisite knowledge and skill to supervise a research candidate.
5.2: Academic and Research Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and procedures uphold research integrity, mitigate risks, ensure guidance is provided, and integrity maintained in third party arrangements. Promotion and fostering of a culture of research integrity and institutions meeting their responsibilities with respect to the provision of ongoing research integrity training and education for relevant staff and students.
5.4: Delivery with Other Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider quality assures placements and internships (where applicable) and ensures that research training delivered by third parties (such as industry and higher education partners) is consistent with the Threshold Standards.

6.1.3c: Corporate Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing body ensures that research and research training are governed by institutional policies.
6.3.1 and 6.3.2: Academic Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic governance processes and structures maintain academic oversight of research and research training.
7.3.1j Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about arrangements with other parties delivering research training is publicly available.

TEQSA may further consider:

- referencing of policies to external requirements, particularly regarding research ethics
- how any allegations of research misconduct have been investigated and resolved, and whether improvements were made to policies or procedures to prevent recurrence of breaches
- data management and the adequacy of a provider's arrangements for recording research outputs
- whether academics supervising research students are 'active in research'.
 - in determining whether an academic is 'active in research', TEQSA will consider whether the academic, in accordance with policies of their institution, currently and meaningfully participates in research
 - considerations will include whether current staff have peer reviewed research outputs, for example, journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, presentations, and non-traditional research outputs within the past five years in a relevant field.
- whether an institutional environment that is supportive of academics being 'active in research' is fostered. Examples of factors TEQSA may consider include whether:
 - position descriptions for future staff require staff to have recent outputs and indicate that they must continue to be active in research
 - policies exist that actively support staff to participate in research outside of teaching hours and provide assistance for staff to apply for research funding and grants
 - there are sufficient staff to ensure availability to supervise HDR students
 - policies ensure regular reviews of staff research activities, such as maintaining a research register to track progress and outputs.

3. Identified issues

Research

Within the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified a range of issues which are indicative of risks to the integrity and quality of research. These include, but are not limited to:

- lack of appropriate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples where relevant (2.2.2, 4.1.1a,b,d, 6.2.1g)
- physical or psychological harm to people or animals, as subjects of the research, to associated communities, to the persons conducting the research and to the environment (Standard 4.1.1a)
- breaches of Australia's laws on intellectual property protection, as well as disputes over ownership of, or effective control over, intellectual property (Standard 4.1.1b)
- breaches of the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research (Standard 4.1.1)
- improper or inaccurate attribution of authorship to research outputs, not reflective of the personnel (staff or research candidate) who conducted the work (Standard 4.1.1a, d)

Research training

Within the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified a range of issues which are indicative of risks to the integrity and quality of research training. These include, but are not limited to:

- Policies, procedures, resourcing and environment
 - inadequate policies and procedures for addressing research candidate grievances (Standard 4.2.1g and Section 2.4)
 - providers having insufficiently strong research cultures surrounding research candidates, including working with other research candidates and having peer support (Standard 4.2.2)
 - a lack of awareness of safety protocols for laboratories or of the dangers in particular environments (Standard 4.2.4)
 - inadequate resourcing for research candidates' projects, including inadequate on-campus facilities and a less than stimulating intellectual environment (Standard 4.2.2).
- Delivery by third parties
 - lack of oversight of issues in third party relationships involved in delivering Higher Degrees by Research (Standard 5.4.2).
- Examination of theses
 - poor choice of examiners or the dispatch of a thesis for examination that is under-prepared (Standard 4.2.1c-e).

- Supervision of research
 - providers not sufficiently guiding the research candidate in the development of the project concept and expected outcomes (Standards 4.2.1a and 4.2.3)
 - providers not paying adequate attention to ensuring sufficient progress is maintained by research candidates. Any lack of progress should be identified early by supervisors and fresh targets established with the candidate (Standard 4.2.1c)
 - inadequate supervision, whether due to selection of the supervisor (internal or external to provider), insufficient training and preparation of supervisors, policies supporting supervision not being fit for purpose, and/or weak support for the supervisory relationship (Standards 4.2.1a-b and 4.2.3)
 - lack of explicitly and mutually agreed expectations between the research candidate and supervisor. This prevents research candidates from determining whether the supervisory service is reasonable or not. Such requirements would cover, for example, timeliness of work required by both candidate and supervisor and expectations around tasks such as review of chapters or whole thesis at given points (Standard 4.2.1a)
 - making frequent or repeated change of supervisor(s), especially if a new supervisor has less interest in the candidate's research or lacks appropriate experience or qualifications than the original supervisor (Standard 4.2.3)
 - the principal supervisor not being suitably qualified and experienced in research in the relevant field, such as having little or low quality published research output in that field (Standard 4.2.3a).

Related resources

- [Guidance note: Research requirements for Australian Universities](#)
- Australian Research Council: [Evaluating Research](#)
- Australian Council of Graduate Research: [Australian Graduate Research Good Practice Principles](#)
- National Health and Medical Research Council: [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

Document information

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	21 October 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation.
1.1	30 August 2017	Revised in response to consultation feedback.
1.2	11 October 2017	Minor amendment to 'What will TEQSA look for?' text box.
1.3	5 July 2018	Updates to Resources and References section for new publications and changed hyperlinks.
2.0	5 September 2022	Major revision.
2.1	11 December 2024	Minor updates including additional information on 'active in research'.

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