



James Cook University  
Submission to the Higher Education Standards Panel on the Higher  
Education Standards Framework  
Call for Comment No. 2 – Research, Research Training and Learning  
Outcomes (Research Training)

James Cook University (JCU) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft standards for research, research training and learning outcomes (research training) developed by the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) as part of the review of the Higher Education Standards Framework. JCU acknowledges and is appreciative of the constructive and consultative approach that the HESP has adopted to date.

JCU is broadly supportive of the submissions made by Universities Australia and the Innovative Research Universities in relation to the second call for comment on the draft standards.

In addition JCU makes the following comments. JCU has used the framework as set out in the HESP Call for Comment No 2 Discussion Paper, May 2013 to guide its response.

James Cook University grants permission to the Higher Education Standards Panel to make this submission public on its website.

*For further information please contact:  
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## **Draft Standards for Research**

**Q1. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Research? If not, why?**  
See response and comment set out below.

**Q2. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?** See response and comment set out below in relation to each of the draft standards.

*1. All research activities of staff and students, including research conducted as part of research training, are carried out in accordance with the provider's academic governance requirements for research, encompassing:*

- a) ethical conduct of research and responsible research practice*
- b) ownership and management of intellectual property*
- c) research partnerships*
- d) publication and authorship*
- e) resolution of allegations of misconduct in research, and*
- f) compliance with prevailing regulatory requirements that are applicable to the field of research.*

Comment:

- This addresses important subject matter.
- Many of these requirements are dealt with under the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. The Code also includes the management of research data and primary materials as a key and substantial subject; it is suggested that this could be included in the list.

*2. Research is conducted by or under the direct supervision of staff with relevant qualifications, research experience and skills in the fields of research concerned.*

Comment:

- "Direct" suggests a high level of oversight not generally necessary or appropriate for independent research.
- It is recommended that "direct" be deleted.

*3. Staff engaged in research are formally inducted into their roles.*

Comment:

- It is unclear why specific mention of induction need be made in the research context.
- It is recommended that staff induction be dealt with under the People Standards and that this standard be deleted.

*4. The concept of 'research-active' staff is defined and complied with in the implementation of research policy and practices.*

Comment:

- It is unclear what is meant by the concept of research-active staff being "complied with" in the implementation of research policy and practices. Institutional research policy governs the undertaking of research, whether or not staff cross a threshold of 'research-activity'.
- The concept of 'research-active' may vary across institutions and within institutions across disciplines and career levels. Institutions may choose to define the concept either for particular research management purposes or

generally; in the latter cases institutions invariably set a low threshold in order to accommodate discipline and level variation.

- It is recommended that this standard, and any references to ‘research-active’ throughout the standards, be removed.

See also the comments below regarding Research Training proposed standard 3.

*5. An accurate, secure and up-to-date repository of the research outputs of staff and research students is maintained.*

Comment:

- Agreed.
- As per the comment at standard 1, it is suggested that maintaining a repository of research data should also be required.

*6. Research performance is:*

- a) monitored and reported against institutional goals, both in aggregate and by field of research,*
- b) analysed by reference to national or international comparators, and*
- c) assessed against goals for improvement.*

Comment:

- If the intention is that this standard applies to institutional, rather than individual, performance, this should be made clear.
- Institutions should be entitled to evaluate their performance by units of organisation of activity, research or otherwise, at their discretion. There is no reason why those units should correspond to fields of research or even disciplines; evaluation by fields or disciplines will not measure performance in interdisciplinary research. It is recommended that the reference to fields of research as a required standard for assessment of research performance be removed.
- Item (c) is redundant given assessment against institutional goals as per (a).

*Reference Points*

*i. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Australian Government, 2007).*

*ii. Excellence in Research for Australia.*

Comment – ERA and Fields of Research:

- The Guiding Principles note that ERA 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”. As such, ERA should not be a Reference Point for research standards.
- It is recommended in the comment on standard 6, above, that the reference to ‘fields of research’ be removed. Inevitably the use of the term ‘fields of research’ connotes its use in the ERA performance evaluation context. ‘Discipline’ is a standard academic term without that connotation and of more general and international use; it is recommended that it replaces ‘fields of research’ at all remaining points in the Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes (Research Training) Standards.

## ***Draft Standards for Research Training***

- Q3. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Research Training? If not, why? See response and comment set out below.
- Q4. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards? See response and comment set out below in relation to each of the draft standards.

*1. Research training is conducted in accordance with the provider's academic governance requirements for research training, encompassing:*

- a. requirements for admission and approval of candidature that take into account the preparedness of the candidate, the availability of qualified, competent and accessible supervision and the resources necessary for the candidature*
- b. the rights and responsibilities of students and supervisors*
- c. induction and orientation of students and supervisors*
- d. monitoring and maintaining progress*
- e. assessment, examination and the independence of examiners*
- f. publication of research findings, and*
- g. resolution of disputes.*

### Concerns

- As written a. is beyond scope of a higher education provider.
- 'HDR candidate' is a more inclusive and respectful term than 'research student' and better reflects the nature of the relationship.

### Suggested rewording

- a. Change a. to 'academic preparedness of the candidate'.
- b. Replace 'research student' with 'HDR candidate' throughout

*2. Coursework formally included in a course of study that involves research training, whether as a component of or an adjunct to research training, meets the academic governance and quality assurance requirements required of other coursework offered by the provider.*

### Concern

- Some 'coursework formally included in a course' may comprise generic skills workshops rather than coursework per se.

### Suggested rewording

'Formal coursework formally included in a course of study'

*3. Each research student is supervised by a principal supervisor who is research active in the relevant field of research, there is at least one associate supervisor with relevant research expertise and continuity of relevant supervisory expertise is maintained throughout the candidature.*

*4. In the case of supervision of students in a course of study that leads to a research higher degree, the principal supervisor holds a doctoral degree or has equivalent research experience.*

### Concerns

- 'Research active' implies a defined standard which if applied across Higher Education Providers and disciplines: (1) is likely to lead to a very low common

denominator' and (2) may not be flexible enough to allow for supervision in research disciplines where non-traditional outputs are common.

- Output quality is important as well as quantity.
- An associate supervisor may not be actively publishing but bring other important skills to the advisory panel.
- As expressed the draft standard may not deal well with cross-disciplinary research.

Suggest combining 3 and 4 and rewording as follows:

*3. Continuity of relevant supervisory expertise is maintained throughout the candidature of each research student, and involves:*

- a) a principal supervisor who holds a doctoral degree or equivalent research experience in a discipline relevant to the project and who is, under normal circumstances, actively carrying out relevant research and producing high quality research outputs; and*
- b) at least one associate supervisor with expertise relevant to the project.*

*5. Research students receive an induction about codes of conduct for research, ethics, occupational health and safety, intellectual property and additional matters that are specific to the field of research.*

Comment: Clear and addresses important matter.

*6. Research students are guided and supported to shape the directions of their research, to develop capacities for independent research and to present and publish their research findings.*

Comment : Important but likely to be hard to measure.

Suggested change: Nil.

*7. The standing of research arising from research training is monitored, including by reviewing all examiners' reports independently of supervisors to obtain:*

- a. informed external views on the standing of the work in the field of research, and*
- b. in the case of doctoral degrees, evidence of a significant original contribution to the field of research.*

Comment: The intent of this standard is unclear. Is its aim to require each higher education provider to have a process for reviewing examiners' recommendations independently of supervisors to ensure an appropriate institutional decision and response by the candidate? or To have independent discipline –based reviews of the examiner's reports of the theses in a discipline over time?

Suggested rewording:

*7. The higher education provider ensures that the standing of research arising from research training is monitored by an independent committee that reviews all examiners' recommendations and makes decisions that accord with the requirements for the degree.*

*8. The quality and extent of research training is monitored against institutional goals, both in aggregate and by field of research, encompassing:*

- a. durations of candidature and rates of progression, completion and attrition*
- b. quality of supervision*
- c. contributions of research students to institutional research performance*

- d. *feedback from students, and*
- e. *actions taken to improve research training.*

Comment:

- Should field of research be replaced by discipline or interdisciplinary field as in Australian Qualifications Framework?
- Small sample sizes will make it impossible to make meaningful interpretations of measurements for some fields of research in some smaller higher education providers because of sample size .
- How is quality of supervision measured? Results of PREQ? If so covered under d.

Suggested rewording

*8. The processes and outcomes of research training are monitored against institutional goals using appropriate quantitative performance indicators and quantitative and qualitative feedback from current and recent research higher degree candidates.*

**Reference Points**

- i. *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Australian Government 2007).*
- ii. Guidelines developed by the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research.

Comment : Potentially appropriate. Guidelines developed by the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research are not yet finalised.

Relevant sections of AQF should be added as reference points.

***Draft standards for Learning Outcomes (Research Training)***

- 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?

Overall question

The Panel asks whether this standard should be separate or integrated with 1.5 Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

Comment: In terms of simplifying and focusing the standards, an integrated approach is better.

1. *The learning outcomes for all courses of study are specified.*

Comment: This standard is clear and addresses an important issue.

2. *The learning outcomes are comparable to those for the same or similar qualifications offered elsewhere in Australia, and are informed by international comparators.*

Comment: The standard is clear and addresses an important issue. The wording allows for reference to the Australian Qualification Framework to assess consistency with the qualification.

- 3. On completion of research training, candidates will have demonstrated, at a level consistent with the qualification awarded:*
- a. a detailed understanding of the specific topic of research, located within a broad understanding of the field of research*
  - b. the capacity to scope, design, plan and conduct research projects independently and in collaboration*
  - c. technical research skills and competency in the application of research methods*
  - d. skills in analysis, criticism, presentation, reporting and publication of research findings, and*
  - e. generic skills required for research, including capacities to transfer across different environments and fields of research.*

Comment:

- With reference to point b, not all research is collaborative, so it is not clear whether and how all research degree graduates should demonstrate the capacity to conduct research projects in collaboration.
- The statement in point e “including capacities to transfer across different environments and fields of research” seems:
  - inappropriate for some fields of research and
  - inconsistent with the statement in DRTS-3 requiring supervisors to be research active “in the relevant field of research.” See suggested modification to DRTS-3 above.

- 4. Assessment of theses, dissertations, exegeses, creative works or other major assessable research outputs and materials is undertaken:*
- a. for doctoral degrees, by at least two independent experts with international standing who are external to the provider and any collaborating institution involved in the work, and*
  - b. for masters degrees, by at least one independent expert who is external to the provider and any collaborating institution involved in the work.*

Comment: This reads like a standard rather than a learning outcome. Perhaps it could be covered in a modified version of DRTS-7 about examination standards see above for suggestion.

### **Overall General 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?

The draft standards are silent on:

- Several important issues e.g. intellectual climate and resources. Are these being addressed under the Learning Environment Standards?
- The scope of applicability for these standards. Do they solely refer to the research components of higher degree by research programs as defined in Levels 9 and 10 of the AQF with at least 66% research component. If this is the case, then JCU is very supportive of all of the standards listed. However, if there is an expectation that these standards are to cover any minor

research projects within a coursework degree or a Level 8 Honours program, clauses 3, 4 and 7 would be problematic in their current states.

- The relationship between these standards and the Australian Qualifications Framework Doctoral and Masters by Research Degree descriptors. Suggest AQF be added to reference points as above.