

**Higher Education Standards Par  
Draft Standards for Research and Research Training  
Comments From Flinders University  
July 2013**

## General Comments

The following response has been compiled by the Dean of Graduate Research in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Flinders University supports the implementation of National Standards.

## Draft Standards for 4.1 Research

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.*

The standard is clear.

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.*

This standard addresses an important issue; however, the word 'direct,' as used in this standard, might be confusing because it does not apply to all types of supervision. For example, it does not take into account differences between the roles of Principal, Associate and/or Adjunct Supervisors. Flinders University Research Higher Degree Policies and Procedures (as do those of other universities) specifically define the roles of Principal, Associate and Adjunct.

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

Flinders agrees with the comments from the IRU that this standard might need additional clarification. The standard might want to differentiate between the general types of induction all staff members are required to undertake and others that apply only to research and/or supervisory roles. New university staff members undergo a general induction that might encompass research roles but, in addition, they might be required to undertake an induction program for research higher degree supervision.

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

Flinders believes that an institutional definition of 'research active' (that could be flexible) would assist institutions and staff with university research management, in particular eligibility to supervise research higher degree students.

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

The standard is clear.

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.

Flinders agrees with the IRU comment relating to institutional performance and the comment about standard 6c.

*Reference Points*

- i. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Australian Government, 2007).
- ii. Excellence in Research for Australia.

## **Draft Standards for 4.2 Research Training**

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.

Flinders agrees with the IRU comments that Standard 1.a. would benefit from referring to 'academic preparedness' specifically to aid clarity.

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.

The standard is clear.

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.

This is an important standard for research higher degree students. The standard does not distinguish clearly, however, between 'research active' and 'relevant research expertise.' It is unclear whether the standard means that both have a certain minimum research output and/or whether it refers to supervisory experience. Any reference to research active in the threshold standards should encompass non-traditional outputs to reflect the diversity of research and research higher degrees.

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.* It is not clear whether this standard suggests that someone supervising a Masters by Research student must hold a doctorate (or have equivalent research experience). Does equivalent research experience mean 'research active' here?

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.*

The standard is clear.

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.*

The standard needs flexibility to take into account disciplinary differences (such as in the Humanities, Creative Arts, Law, etc.) where it might be difficult to publish sections of the thesis before it is complete. Students often publish at the end of candidature or post-candidature.

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.*

Flinders agrees with the IRU statement for this standard with respect to the use of the term 'reviewing'. Does the standard mean to imply a formal process undertaken by the university?

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.*

The standard is clear; however, the implications of 8b are unclear. Does use of the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Research Good Practice Supervision guidelines as a Reference Point suggest acceptable minimum practice or best practice? In the latter case, these guidelines would help institutions to set aspirational targets.

#### *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.*

### **Draft Standards for 1.6 Learning Outcomes (Research Training)**

This section would be strengthened by a clarification of the ambit of 'Research Training.' The standards should make it clear (if this is the case) that they are **not** intended to cover the research components of Masters by Coursework degrees or only research components of Masters by Coursework degrees with a specific unit value. A logical conclusion might be that Research

Training pertains to courses eligible for Research Training Scheme places (i.e. research higher degree courses only). Nevertheless, Flinders University notes that the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Australian Government 2007) applies to all the research components conducted in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

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

The standard is clear.

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

The standard is clear.

*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.*

Flinders believes that the standard is clear; however, it agrees with the IRU comments with respect to 3e that it is relevant to some areas of research but not to all. It should, therefore, not be incorporated into the threshold standard.

*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.*

As mentioned in the general comments for this section, the above assessment standard needs to clarify whether it would cover the research components in Masters by Coursework degrees.

Professor Jeri Kroll  
Dean of Graduate Research