



Higher Education Standards Panel Executive  
GPO Box 1672  
Melbourne VIC 3001

Email: [info@HEstandards.gov.au](mailto:info@HEstandards.gov.au)

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2013

Dear Higher Education Standards Panel Executive,

**Re: Comments on the Draft Standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft Standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes currently under development by the Higher Education Standards Panel. Macquarie University has circulated the Draft Standards among key stakeholders in the areas of research and research training and the following is a summary of the comments made.

An initial and general comment would be that the University would like to receive further information from the Higher Education Standards Panel around the move towards establishing Threshold Standards for research, research education and learning outcomes. To provide informed and useful comments, Macquarie University would seek to better understand the impetus for the change from research being categorised as a 'Non-Threshold Standard' to a 'Threshold Standard' that will be the subject of regulation and what the potential outcomes or processes may be that will impact on universities.

Similarly, universities need to have an understanding of the assessment methods that will be used to regulate the criteria outlined in the Standards and to understand the possible implications in instances where the Standards are very broad, subjective, or rely heavily on the context of a particular environment.

A further general point is that in many instances the 'Standards' are not actually standards but rather a description of necessary structural requirements (eg: an accurate, secure and up-to-date repository of the research outputs of staff and research students is maintained"), or a requirement that a University should have standards without any qualification as to what the standard should be (eg: Research Performance is monitored and reported against institutional goals, both in aggregate and by field of research").

Lastly, a helpful addition to the Standards would be the inclusion of a clear definition of Research and Research Training. This is particularly important given the new emphasis on research in undergraduate programs and the need to clearly understand where the dividing line falls. Embedding the Standards within a rich understanding of the purpose of research and research training will do much to add meaning to the Standards as a means of reinforcing quality across the sector.

More specific comments follow over the page.

### **Guiding Principles**

While point 3 outlines elements necessary to a successful research training experience and outcome such as culture and context, we need to be careful that such principles are interpreted within the context of a particular area, discipline or university which may be developing new areas of research or looking to build strength and capacity in areas in which it does not have a tradition of research.

Similarly, in point 4, how will the capability, resources and infrastructure for a proposed candidate be judged as sufficient in a manner that is consistent across universities, disciplines, and emerging vs well established areas of research? The principle that an HDR candidate should be supervised only by a 'research-active supervisor' is fundamental but the definition of 'research active' varies greatly across disciplines and universities and there may be a place for guidelines regarding a minimum level of research activity.

Lastly, Macquarie University would add to point 11 that standards developed for research and research training should not inhibit activity in emerging areas of research.

### **Terminology**

On pages 2 and 3 reference is made to 'course of study' and 'Course Design'. In particular on page 3 it states "...the overall course of study undertaken by research students will be addressed by standards for Course Design....". Macquarie University recommends that the word 'course' is not used to describe a PhD or a Master of Research and would wish to have the opportunity for early and comprehensive input into any process to develop standards for Course Design that would apply to a PhD or Master of Research.

### **Research Training Standards**

Point 3 may be enhanced by acknowledging valid forms of supervision beyond the traditional Principal and Association Supervisor model (eg: Panel Supervision, Co-supervision) and that a supervisor may be chosen from sectors such as industry or the professions in order to provide a necessary knowledge base or expertise to an HDR candidate.

### **Learning Outcomes (Research Training) Standards**

Again, the use of the phrase 'courses of study' is not be appropriate in reference to a PhD or Master of Research.

Regarding point 3e, Macquarie University is interested to receive more information on how it is anticipated that a graduated HDR student would demonstrate "generic skills required for research, including capacities to transfer across different environments and fields of research" as this is not something that would be easily assessable as part of the examination of a PhD or Master of Research thesis.

We hope that these comments are useful but if you require clarification or further feedback please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of  
**Professor Sakkie Pretorius**  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)**  
**Macquarie University**