

08 March 2019

Emeritus Professor Peter Coaldrake  
Chair,  
Review of Higher Education Provider Category Standard Review

Dear Professor Coaldrake,

Review of Higher Education Provider Category Standards

*Torrens University Australia submission in relation to the review the Higher Education Provider Category Standards (PCS) issued by the Higher Education Standards Panel.*

## Review of Higher Education Provider Category Standards

Torrens University Australia (TUA) welcomes this opportunity to submit comments in relation to the Review of Higher Education Provider Category Standards.

### 1. Introduction to Torrens University Australia

As a new university reliant upon the success of our students for our institutional longevity, Torrens University Australia (TUA) is a naturally innovative organisation.

The mission of Torrens University Australia is to be a distinctive higher education institution that enables its students, graduates and staff to make positive social, economic and cultural contributions to the societies in which they live and work by creating an environment for learning, scholarship and research that is culturally diverse, career-oriented and with a distinctive global perspective.

Consistent with its Mission, the University is focused on being an Australian institution that is strongly focused on the intellectual and personal development of its students and staff within a unique education environment. Its development has reflected the following key goals:

**Student Engagement:** Distinctive curricula which demand and foster deep levels of student engagement with the knowledge and skills development critical to the practice of their discipline.

**Professional or Industry Engagement:** All students having an understanding of the history, role, future challenges and ethical issues of their intended area of professional practice with a period of professional or industry experience being an integral part of the curricula design in all bachelor degree programs.

**International Experience:** Development of a global and intercultural context to learning reinforced by arranging for all students enrolled in bachelor degree programs, where feasible, to spend a period of time studying at another institution in Laureate International Universities.

**Technology and the Learning Environment:** The learning environment being highly innovative in its use of learning, information and communication technologies.

**Intellectual Inquiry:** The learning, teaching and research activities supporting and protecting free intellectual enquiry and expression.

**External Community:** The University establishes mutually beneficial relationships with the local and national communities, especially professional bodies in its areas of focus in teaching and research.

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## 1.2 Torrens as a Greenfield University, established in 2013

It is fundamental that the focus of Higher Education (HE) providers, including universities, is on student success and educational quality taking into account the emerging and changing environmental trends. Torrens University Australia was established in 2013. It was established under the then provision which enabled 'greenfield' universities to meet the HE Standards and have a one-year plan to meet the three fields of research requirement.

### 1.3 The impact of Torrens University Australia

TUA's innovation and competitive focus, grounded in a commitment to the integrity of teaching, learning and research, can help to drive systemic quality improvements throughout Australian higher education. Coupled with an effective, sustainable and fair approach to the funding of university teaching, this can increase value for students and equip them with the skills required to fuel shared prosperity as globalization and digitalization drive profound changes in the Australian economy. TUA believes that establishing a balanced and fair higher educational policy environment is the best way of incentivizing both public and private universities to move nimbly to meet the needs of both students and their future employers.

TUA is clearly meeting student and industry needs as it has grown from a start-up cohort of 156 students in 2014 to 10,000 in 2019.

#### 1.3.1 Response from South Australian Minister of Education

In 2018 the South Australian Minister of Education wrote:

I write to confirm the strong and ongoing support of the South Australian Government for Torrens University. The State Government's vision for South Australia is the establishment of a dynamic, vibrant and global educational hub, in which Torrens and other South Australian universities drive innovation, expand economic opportunity, promote social inclusion and deepen the connections between South Australia and the world via our international network and diverse international student cohort. I have been impressed with the growth and development of Torrens over the last five years, as the University has established a strong and distinctive presence within the South Australian higher education community, based on a combination of close industry engagement and rigorous academic governance.

#### 1.3.2 Response from Australian Chamber of Industry and Commerce

In September 2018, the CEO of the Australian Chamber of Industry and Commerce wrote:

As Australia's newest comprehensive university, Torrens has built strong connections with Australian industry and the membership of the Australian Chamber. This has been achieved through Torrens' industry immersive approach, which integrates academic learning with its workplace application. Torrens is also a leader in collaborating with industry to co-create programs, ensuring that students' content knowledge and skills are relevant now and into the future. Torrens also works with industry to provide real and applied assessment briefs and learning modules for students, which enables students to learn the professional skills they need to thrive in industry.

Torrens and Laureate International facilitate entrepreneurship and applied learning through its own internal enterprises, including William Blue Dining, which is one of Sydney's finest restaurants and yet student-run. This is helping to equip Australia's hospitality sector with the next generation of highly skilled graduates and managers it needs for sustained growth.

Torrens has also made a substantial contribution to policy development in Australia since its foundation. The University's leaders have worked closely with government, policymakers and employers to ensure that policy settings in higher education are delivering the outcomes that Australia

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depends upon for its future collective prosperity. Torrens University's leaders are regular speakers at Australian Chamber events and act as an important bridge between academia and civil society.

### 1.3.3 Feedback from students

Student comments in the most recent annual Net Promotor Score survey said:

Great lecturers, great subject options, great student services, the subjects are very well put together.

I am very happy to be part of Torrens University Australia. Class structure and educational excellence are at the best.

My experience cannot be measured because with the opportunity that I have to develop and improve my-self academically is the best award that I have ever received in life. The experience was mind-blowing and overwhelming at first but with time I became used to the whole system and am very much happy to share this very experience of mind with friends and anyone who cares to listen. The best excitement is one gotten from a dream actualisation. I would say it is the best experience ever when compared with my previous experience, I would say I am blessed.

Positive supportive environment - excellent facilitators - high-quality and up-to- date learning material. Good online learning situation with constant effort to be dynamic and move with Education theory.

### 1.3.4 Building a strong interdisciplinary research culture

Torrens is building a strong, distinctive research culture that embraces interdisciplinary, applied and practice-based approaches. As a young University Torrens is well aware that building research programs and profile will take time and commitment. Strategic research priorities and framework have been firmly established across three major interconnected research themes (health, business and education) and research output is building in a positive and logical manner. One of our best examples is the work of the Public Health Information Development Unit, which has been located at Torrens University Australia since November 2015, assisting the monitoring of inequality in health and wellbeing, and supporting opportunities to improve Australian population health outcomes.

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## 2. TUA response to the discussion paper

As Australia's newest university, TUA does not have a vested interest in seeking to maintain the *status quo* for its own sake. We are relentlessly focused on delivering quality programs which expand access to higher education and ensure positive outcomes for our graduates.

- 2.1 TUA supports robust quality assurance arrangements, including strict requirements to use the 'university' title, help to assure Australia's reputation globally for high quality higher education provision and delivery, safeguarding its strong reputation and international standing. Over the past five years we have worked tirelessly to demonstrate how a private institution can meet this important set of standards.
- 2.2 Any future framework established by the Commonwealth should engender access to higher education for all those with the aptitude and interest in pursuing it, without imposing unsustainable demands upon Commonwealth expenditure or creating insuperable financial barriers for any student. They should incentivise providers to continually improve the quality of their teaching, learning and student support services, facilitate greater employability and build stronger connections between students and their desired occupation.

- 2.3 While the PCS has no direct relationship to Commonwealth Government funding for teaching and research, and funding considerations are not within the scope of this review, we believe it is important to remind the committee that the programs delivered by Torrens, which are tailored in response to changing industry needs, demonstrate that the quantum of public funding provided to universities is not the only driver for innovation and growth to occur. Increasingly competition can drive improvements and innovation which allow universities to deliver greater value and economically relevant outcomes with the funding they receive.
- 2.4 Based on this unique University “green field” case study we would recommend that a strengthening of the pathway/pathways to allow other high-quality institutions, either Greenfields or existing HE Providers who meet the required HE Standards, to follow a similar path to that allowed Torrens would be beneficial to increasing diversity of offerings to students while maintaining educational quality.
- 2.5 Finally, we remind the committee that through the provision of space for fair competition between private and public higher education institutions, policy settings should value the role played by both types of institution and enable them to do even more to deliver excellence and positive student outcomes.

Kind regards



Professor Justin Beilby  
Vice Chancellor.  
Torrens University Australia

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