



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
REVIEW OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION
PROVIDER CATEGORY STANDARDS
SUBMISSION

MARCH 2019

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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY DETAILS

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BACKGROUND

We note that the aim of the review of the Provider Category Standards is to ensure they support the Australian Government's goals for a diverse high quality higher education sector that meets the needs of students, employers, the sector and the wider community. Victoria University (VU) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the discussion paper.

Australia's conceptualisation of a 'university': the importance of teaching and research

VU's response here focuses on the first question: 'What characteristics should define a 'higher education provider' and a 'university' in the PCS? Our comments relate particularly to the requirement for research activity within universities, and the value in retaining the obligation for universities to be both knowledge providers and knowledge creators.

VU strongly affirms the importance of research in defining an Australian University, an expectation which is consistent with global expectations. We believe that any relaxation of this requirement would be to the detriment of the sector, for a range of reasons including:

- Teaching programs are enhanced within an organisation that is committed to creating new boundaries of understanding and knowledge. The teaching research nexus is multifaceted and there are very significant benefits for teaching that are realised when research is a core part of a university's mission.
- There are some degree/award professional accreditations – among them Law, Accounting and Social Work – which require demonstration of research activity in the discipline. Accordingly, a severance of research for these disciplines will seriously jeopardise HE institutions from offering a significant number of important courses.
- Research programs provide an important catalyst for relationships with industry, government and community organisations that are leveraged to provide experience and opportunities for students.
- International rankings and other reputational markers are significantly weighted by research performance, and the combined teaching and research activity has contributed to the international reputation and global opportunities for Australia's universities. Significant change to the category puts at risk the sector's future reputation, ability to attract international students and the associated export revenue.

Diversity, access and research

VU's response is framed against its vision as the 'the University of Opportunity and Success'. The University is committed to being open and excellent, creating exceptional value for any student from any background and uplifting the communities in which we operate. VU's mission states that:

As a university committed to supporting any student from any background, VU has made a fundamental commitment to there being no boundaries around the students we support. We also seek to break down a number of other boundaries.

Universities like Victoria University, which include a number of smaller, suburban and regional universities, provide access for students who might not otherwise attend university. This commitment and mission results in developing innovative approaches to providing pathways for students including pathways to research training. VU's commitment to the needs of diverse student groups has recently led to innovation in delivery of research training, the PhD (Integrated) program

<https://www.vu.edu.au/courses/international/UPPA>, which provides an alternative pathway to a Doctor of Philosophy for applicants who have not had the traditional research experience prerequisite through honours and masters programs. If research was not a core requirement, the experience, education and opportunity for students from these backgrounds would be diminished.

The research and teaching nexus

VU contests the assertion that there is little evidence of a relationship between research, teaching quality and student outcomes. One area of particular value is industry and community partnerships that stem from a research relationship. VU has many high profile, productive and successful partnerships that have started from an organisation recognising VU's research strengths. These partnerships have developed into a range of activities with direct benefits for learning, teaching and student outcomes, such as curriculum development in coursework programs, professional development for teaching staff, student enrichment and work integrated learning opportunities, which then have positive impacts on employability and further study outcomes.

Similarly, there are many instances – particularly at the postgraduate coursework level – where students are attracted to particular universities and programs because of the research profile.

Optimising the PCS: quantity and quality of research

The question of whether a quantity and quality threshold for research should be set, is one that Victoria University has recently addressed through its own transformation agenda.

The **VU Research Model**, which resulted in the formation of a University research department known as *VU Research*, has **prioritised the fields of research** in which the University's human and financial resources for research and research training are directed. The prioritisation of the University's fields of research was determined by measures of quality and quantity as well as alignment and contribution to the University's teaching programs and accrediting bodies' research expectations. The University recognises that its Priority Fields of Research will need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that the quality and quantity of research undertaken and contribution of these areas to the University's research agenda warrants continued preference.

We acknowledge that the current research criteria for universities is weakly defined and encourage the Commonwealth in looking at this further to:

1. Ensure that there is further, extensive consultation with the sector to define the quality and quantity research performance standards, so that any standards continue to facilitate diversity in research programs and outcomes.
2. That measures should include industry and community relevance and impact, not just the traditional academic research measures.
3. That the timeframes for assessing quality and quantity account for fluctuations in research activity and outputs that are most profound for smaller universities. .

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Victoria University thanks the Commonwealth Government for the opportunity to provide feedback and responses on the review of Provider Category Standards and looks forward to receiving advice on the outcome of this consultation process.