

## DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

### RESPONSE TO CALL FOR COMMENT ON DRAFT STANDARDS BY HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS PANEL (NUMBER 1, MARCH 2013)

16 April 2013

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Deakin University welcomes the opportunity to comment on the format and content of draft standards for Course Design (Coursework) and Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

The University is in favour of the general approach to improving the format, style and organisation of the current Threshold Standards as illustrated in the two specific examples provided. Feedback on each of the questions for comment follows.

When the full suite of draft standards relating to teaching and learning is released, we would appreciate the opportunity to provide further comments on the standards included in this first Call for Comment.

FORMAT OF DRAFT STANDARDS		
	Question	Feedback
Q1	Do you broadly support the proposed format for the standards? If not, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The revised standards are generally clear and easy to read. Suggestions for further simplifying and clarifying the wording of particular standards are provided below.</li><li>• There are significant overlaps between the two sets of standards which are noted below.</li></ul>
Q2	Do you support the inclusion of Reference Points as proposed? If not, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The inclusion of Reference Points is useful but their status and relative weight needs to be clarified. For example, is it a requirement, expectation or strong suggestion that learning outcomes be informed by the reference points listed? Are all standards listed of equal weight (e.g. OLT learning outcomes and AQF specifications)? Are external reference points which are not listed of equal weight to those which are listed? If alternative reference points include different process or achievement standards, which take precedence?</li></ul>
Q3	Do you wish to make suggestions in relation to the format of the standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No comment.</li></ul>

<b>COURSE DESIGN (COURSEWORK)</b>		
	<b>Question</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Q4	Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Course Design? If not, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning outcomes are the first element of course design and it is artificial to separate them. This has resulted in significant overlaps between the two sets of standards which are noted below.</li> <li>Other elements of course curriculum design (including student feedback, learning experiences and learning resources) are not included in the standards circulated for comment. It is not clear whether these matters will be covered in separate sets of standards. If so, it will be important to ensure that the requirements do not overlap.</li> </ul>
Q5	Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggestions in relation to specific content of the standards are provided below.</li> </ul>
<b>Draft Course Design (Coursework) Standards</b>		
1	The provider utilises defined processes for designing and assuring the quality of the design of each course of study and the qualifications to which it leads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To further streamline the standards, this standard could be merged with standard 2 (see below).</li> </ul>
2	Processes for course design are approved and overseen by the provider's peak academic governing body.	<p><b>Possible merger of standards 1 and 2:</b></p> <p><i>'Processes for assuring the quality of the design of each course and the qualification to which it leads are approved and overseen by the provider's peak academic governing body.'</i></p>
3	Course design encompasses the rationale for the course of study, course structure, modes of delivery, learning outcomes, methods of assessment, entry requirements and pathways, programmed student workload, articulation arrangements, exit pathways, pathways to further study and any compulsory requirements for completion and that these features of all courses of study are documented and publically accessible in a current version.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This standard appears to have two separate purposes: (1) to articulate required elements of course design (that would be included in course documentation for internal quality assurance purposes) and (2) to ensure that relevant course information is publicly available (presumably to inform decision-making by prospective and current students). If so, the standard should be split into two and the purpose of each should be clear.</li> <li>Course curriculum design encompasses matters in addition to those listed, including learning experiences and the use of resources.</li> <li>This standard overlaps with Learning Outcomes standard 5 (see below).</li> </ul> <p><b>Possible wording of standard relating to public provision of information:</b></p> <p><i>'The following features of all courses of study are documented and publically accessible in a current version to</i></p>

		<i>inform decisions by prospective and current students: rationale, course learning outcomes, structure, modes of delivery, methods of assessment, entry requirements, programmed student workload, articulation arrangements, exit pathways, pathways to further study and any compulsory requirements for completion.'</i>
4	The nature and scope of the course and the expectations for student learning are consistent with the qualification to be awarded and informed by the Australian Qualifications Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The terminology 'nature and scope of the course and expectations for student learning' is not aligned to the language used in the AQF.</li> <li>• There is no explicit requirement relating to the standards of achievement that graduates are expected to achieve at different levels. The words 'informed by the Australian Qualifications Framework' are vague and it is unclear whether providers are expected to comply with the specifications and criteria in the AQF.</li> <li>• This standard overlaps with Learning Outcomes standard 2 (in relation to 'expectations for student learning' which are expressed as learning outcomes) but the requirements are not identical. This is confusing and the two standards should be aligned or merged.</li> </ul>
5	<p>The content of each course of study:</p> <p>a. is drawn from current knowledge and scholarship in relevant academic disciplines</p> <p>b. includes study of the underlying theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the academic disciplines and the field of study, and</p> <p>c. encompasses relevant emerging concepts that are informed by recent scholarship, current research findings and advances in practice (where practice is applicable to the field of study).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is suggested that the word 'discipline' be inserted before the word 'content' to make it clear that this standard is not referring to generic content.</li> </ul>
6	Each course of study is designed to enable equivalent student learning outcomes regardless of a student's place or mode of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reference to student learning outcomes in this standard reinforces the close link between learning outcomes and course design and the artificiality of separating them into two sets of standards.</li> </ul>
7	The peak academic governing body of the provider oversees periodic (at least every 5 years) review and improvement of the design of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This standard could be merged with Learning Outcomes standard 7.</li> <li>• Learning Outcome 7 includes a requirement that reviews take account of relevant external reference points. A similar requirement would be appropriate in this standard. For</li> </ul>

	each course of study.	example, feedback from peak professional bodies in the discipline would help to ensure that course content remained relevant.
	<p><b>Reference Points</b></p> <p>i. <i>Australian Qualifications Framework (January 2013)</i>.</p> <p>ii. The requirements for professional accreditation of the course of study and registration of graduates where applicable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See comments above in relation to status of reference points generally and of the AQF in particular.</li> </ul>

<b>LEARNING OUTCOMES (COURSEWORK)</b>		
	<b>Question</b>	<b>Feedback</b>
Q6	Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes? If not, why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning outcomes are the first element of course design and it is artificial to separate them. This has resulted in overlaps between the two sets of standards which are noted below.</li> <li>• It would be better to include standards relating to learning outcomes as the first section of the standards on course design.</li> </ul>
Q7	Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions in relation to specific content of the standards are provided below.</li> </ul>
<b>Draft Learning Outcome (Coursework) Standards</b>		
1	The learning outcomes to be achieved on completion of a course of study are specified for each course of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This requirement is already covered in Course Design standard 3 and could be deleted.</li> </ul>
2	The learning outcomes for each course of study are consistent with the qualification awarded, are comparable with those for courses of study that lead to the same or a similar qualification in Australia and are informed by international comparators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This standard overlaps with Course Design standard 4 but the requirements are not identical. Significantly, the Australian Qualifications Framework is referred to in Course Design standard 4 but not in this standard.</li> <li>• The meaning of 'are consistent with the qualification awarded' is unclear. Query whether this is a reference to the 'purpose and level of the qualification awarded'.</li> <li>• We have serious concerns about how international comparisons of course learning outcomes can be made. Discipline-specific outcomes are likely to be culturally relative.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested minor rewording:</b></p> <p><i>Substitute "Course learning outcomes" for "The learning outcomes for each course of study".</i></p>
3	The learning outcomes for each course of study are informed by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is suggested that the word 'mastery' be deleted from paragraph (a). It is unclear how 'mastery' is to be determined.</li> </ul>

	<p>a. the mastery of specific disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary knowledge and skills that characterise the field of study</p> <p>b. the generic skills and attributes required of graduates</p> <p>c. the application of generic skills and attributes in the context of the field of study including the communication skills required, and</p> <p>d. the requirements of employment related to the field of study.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paragraphs (b) and (c) could be merged.</li> <li>• Regarding para (d), some graduates seek to use their qualification for further study and not for employment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested rewording:</b></p> <p><i>‘Course learning outcomes are informed by:</i></p> <p><i>a. disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary knowledge and skills that characterise the field of study</i></p> <p><i>b. the generic skills and attributes including communication skills required of graduates and their application in the context of the field of study</i></p> <p><i>c. the requirements of employment or future study related to the field of study.’</i></p>
4	The relationship between the overall learning outcomes for each course of study and the learning outcomes for units that contribute to the course of study is demonstrable.	<p><b>Suggested minor rewording:</b></p> <p><i>‘The relationship between the course learning outcomes and contributing unit learning outcomes can be demonstrated.’</i></p>
5	The specified learning outcomes for each course of study are available to the staff and students who are involved and are publically accessible in a current version.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The standard overlaps with Course Design standard 3 and should be deleted.</li> </ul>
6	The assessment of student learning, whether at unit level, course level, or in combination, encompasses all specified learning outcomes for each course of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is unclear whether there will be a separate set of standards relating to <i>Assessment</i>. Standards 6-10 in the draft Learning Outcomes set (below) do not cover all of the aspects of assessment that are in the current Higher Education Threshold Standards (e.g. ensuring consistent approach to assessment, qualifications of academic staff, feedback to students).</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested rewording to add clarity:</b></p> <p><i>‘Achievement of all specified course learning outcomes is assessed at a unit level, course level or in combination.’</i></p>
7	Learning outcomes for each course of study and the methods for assessment of those outcomes are informed by periodic reviews (at least every 5 years), which take account of external reference points that are relevant to the course of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This standard should be merged with Course Design standard 7. The review of course learning outcomes and course design are integrally linked and the requirements relating to each should be the same.</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested minor rewording if retained in current form:</b></p> <p><i>Substitute “Course learning outcomes” for “The learning outcomes for each course of study”.</i></p>

8	Methods of assessment are consistent with the types of learning outcomes being assessed and are capable of validly and reliably confirming that specified learning outcomes are achieved.	<p><b>Suggested streamlined rewording:</b></p> <p><i>'Assessment methods are capable of confirming that course learning outcomes are achieved.'</i></p>
9	The grades awarded to students reflect the level of their attainment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This standard should be deleted or reworded. There are occasions where ungraded passes are appropriate.</li> </ul>
10	The grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units within courses of study is referenced periodically (at least every 5 years) against the grading of students' achievement in comparable units or courses in other Australian institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While we support the intent of this standard, we note that there may not always be comparable units or courses in other Australian institutions. It is unclear whether this requirement applies to <u>all</u> courses.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Reference Points</b></p> <p>i. <i>Australian Qualifications Framework (January 2013).</i></p> <p>ii. Learning outcomes statements developed for the field of study by Office for Learning and Teaching discipline communities or other disciplinary or professional bodies.</p> <p>iii. The requirements for professional accreditation of the course of study and registration of graduates where applicable.</p>	See comments above in relation to status of reference points generally and of the AQF in particular.