

## Response to call for comment

### HESP Draft Standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes

#### General Comment

The ACDS considers the proposed framework and the draft standards both sensible and achievable. The standards set broad outcomes which will require interpretation for each institutional context. There is also considerable work to be done to establish appropriate evidence to demonstrate achievement of the standards. Specific comments are provided below.

*A: Feedback on the proposed format (e.g. style, clarity, pitch) for the revised standards (including the use of reference points), as represented by the two standards examples given*

*Q1. Do you broadly support the proposed format for the standards? If not, why?*

The proposed framework for the revised higher education standards is much more coherent than the current distinction between threshold and non-threshold standards. The framework provides a sense of the priorities and core activities of higher education institutions. Some overlap between standards is inevitable as functions overlap. Where this occurs some cross-reference may be necessary.

*Q2. Do you support the inclusion of Reference Points as proposed? If not, why?*

The inclusion of reference points is a very sensible solution to managing diversity. It is not appropriate to make detailed and contestable statements about individual disciplines or awards in a standard that must apply to all higher education providers. Reference points establish common ground between diverse institutions.

The LTAS project has been particularly important in providing national consensus on learning outcomes for disciplines that have no national agreement or professional accreditation. For Science and mathematics, which operates as a diverse group of allied disciplines, the Science threshold learning outcomes are the first and only nationally accepted statement of common ground. Consultation for development of the Science TLO statement was comprehensive, including repeated national ACDS learning and teaching conferences. The ACDS endorsed the Science TLO Statement and further development of the science TLOs into teaching applications is underway. A significant group of ACDS members are already using the statement to guide curriculum redevelopment.

It would be helpful to give some indication of the status that would be expected for a convincing external standard (eg nationally accepted, internationally referenced, benchmarked independently by professional bodies or between institutions). This could be achieved without endorsement of a specific statement that is not under the control of the HESP.

*Q3. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the format of the standards?*

The format of the revised standards is clear and concise. It may be helpful to include definition of terms and scope of the standard as a preamble rather than in the body of the standard. For example, point 3 in the course design standard encompasses both what the term course design refers to and then makes a requirement about publication.

**B: *Feedback on the proposed draft standards for Course Design (Coursework)***

*Q4. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Course design? If not, why?*

The proposed standard for course design includes key elements of course design and development. Institutions should be able to readily demonstrate achievement of the standard, which is in line with quality assurance practice in the sector.

*Q5. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?*

*Statement 5:* Development of higher education as a field of scholarship over the last few decades has produced a substantial body of knowledge about the how and why of learning and teaching at this level. This has shifted expectation of reasonable standard of teaching. The standard could include a brief reference requiring that the pedagogy, as well as the content of a course, is informed by current knowledge and scholarship in the relevant academic disciplines. This would recognize the scholarship of higher education and require that effective modes of learning and teaching are considered in course design.

**C: *Feedback on the proposed draft standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework) is invited by the Panel***

*Q6. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes design? If not, why?*

The Learning Outcome standard will focus attention on the quality of learning outcomes, which underpins the criteria for levels of study described in the Australian Qualification Framework. It calls for evidence-based learning and teaching practice and will facilitate institutional quality assurance at the all levels of a course of study from the unit level to whole-of-course.

*Q7. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?*

*Preamble:* It would be useful to define what is meant by a “unit of study” as opposed to a “course of study” as terms vary greatly between institutions. It is particularly important to avoid atomisation of curriculum into subject silos as noted in statement 6.

*Statement 2:* Although the standards must allow for diversity between universities it may be useful to acknowledge that learning outcomes will be appropriately influenced by university priorities and character.

*Statement 3:* The standard should define what is included in generic skills, which are usually learnt/taught in the context of a discipline. The term “transferable skills” or equivalent may be a better fit.

*Statement 4:* This statement implies institutional curriculum mapping. If that is the intention it would be helpful to include that phrase. There is some overlap with Statement 6 so it may be clearer to combine these two statements.

*Statement 5* could be clarified to refer to the *general* public rather than just the university community?

*Statement 6* could be reworded to include the generally accepted principle of constructive alignment which reinforces intended learning outcomes; for example, ‘The assessment of student learning, whether at unit level, course level, or in combination, *aligns* with all specified learning outcomes for each course of study and *is supported by teaching and learning activities.*’.

Statement 8: Ensuring validity, reliability and authenticity are core requirements and have substantial implications for current teaching practice which struggles with increased class size and student diversity. Universities should be aware that effective assessment of student learning is a complex and difficult task. Evidence of the quality of assessment tasks is likely to require external peer review.

Statement 9: This statement needs some clarification. Is this statement aimed at internal consistency (level of attainment in a course is accurately reflected by the grade achieved) or is it aiming at the more complex idea of the comparability of grades across different courses within the institution.

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