



CISA Comments on Draft Standards

Course Design and Learning Outcomes

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To Whom It May Concern

The Council of International Students Australia (CISA) would like to thank the Higher Education Standards Panel for accepting comments on the drafts entitled Course Design (Coursework) and Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

CISA was established in 2010 through efforts of the National Union of Students (NUS), Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and the Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS). CISA is recognized by these student groups and the wider higher education sector as the peak representative body for international students in Australia. CISA members include international student organizations and student organizations on campus that represent the interests of international students across Australia. Our Executive includes individuals elected from our member organizations as well as ex-officio representatives from NUS, CAPA and AFIS.

CISA has an interest in ensuring that the quality of coursework is maintained as a large population of international students travel to Australia to complete coursework degrees. CISA has divided this commentary into **Part 1**, which addresses the Format of Draft Standards, **Part 2**, which addresses the questions relating to the draft standards for Course Design (Coursework), and **Part 3**, which addresses the questions relating to the draft standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework).

CISA believes that Course Design and Learning Outcomes are highly related as Course Design will determine what students learn. CISA feels strongly that Higher Education Providers should engage students in terms of getting feedback in terms of particular Course Design and Learning Outcomes, and CISA has recommendations to this effect in response to the questions addressed in Part 2 and 3 of this commentary. CISA's primary recommendation is to ensure that the draft standards in question call for Higher Education Providers to consider student feedback and representation, as Course Design and Learning Outcomes do impact on the student experience at large.

CISA would like to thank the Higher Education Standards Panel for its time and consideration in considering CISA's responses and recommendations.

Should you have any queries pertaining to the above, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours Sincerely,

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Part 1: Format of the Draft Standards - Response to Questions

Overall, CISA supports the idea that the Threshold Standards require Draft Standards that are proposed as CISA agrees that the current Threshold Standards document lacks consistency, concision and clarity as a result. To contrast, the two standards samples which are addressed in this commentary (Course Design (Coursework) and Learning Outcomes (Coursework)) are quite clear. Their language is transparent, the layout is crisp, consistent and easy to follow, and the splash of colour in the heading gives the document some visual diversity. CISA looks forward to a Thresholds Standards document, which follows these standards samples.

CISA has addressed the specific questions below:

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

Response: CISA supports the proposed format reform for the Threshold Standards largely because these standards look inconsistent in their current form, and their clarity would be much improved by format reformation. CISA thinks consolidating the standards statement will lead to a more concise and clear document. As they stand, the current Threshold Standards also lack consistent capitalization and punctuation, and the headings do not seem to separate each section appropriately. (For example, the headings in the Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 sections are not consistent with the headings in Chapter 2 sections in terms of capitalization, but the sections in Chapter 2 look more definitive and cleaner). Therefore a standard format throughout the document would make the document look cleaner and more professional.

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

Response: CISA thinks the inclusion of Reference Points is a good way to draw readers of this document to information. The Reference Points will help guide readers who may desire more information or background while referring to the Threshold Standards. It would be great if the Reference Points could include links to the references in question where possible.

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

Response: CISA believes that by and large, documents of this nature need to be streamlined and maintained in such a way that subjects are easy to find so people seeking specific information can easily access the information they need. CISA also supports a clean and transparent language in these documents so individuals unfamiliar with government documents can easily access what the document is actually saying.

Part 2: Course Design (Coursework) - Response to Questions

CISA believes the proposed standards for Course Design are strong however CISA would recommend that institutions perhaps engage students or former students in an evaluation on particular Course Design to assess whether that Course Design is fulfilling their expectations in terms of the course in question.

CISA has addressed the specific questions below:

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

Response: CISA is in support of these standards, and thinks the proposed standards for Course Design are straightforward, and allow for enough flexibility for Higher Education Providers to adapt coursework for the best purpose in relation to their programs.

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

Response & Recommendation: As with Learning Outcomes, CISA would like to see the Course Design standards consider skills needed in fields of employment related to the courses in question. CISA believes the document could be enhanced with links to the Reference Points where appropriate, and to the AQF where it is referred to.

Finally, CISA recommends that the proposed standards for Course Design engages students and former students when reviewing and improving the design of each course of study.

Part 3: Learning Outcomes (Coursework) – Response to Questions

Overall, CISA believes the proposed standards for the Learning Outcomes Coursework are beneficial, however CISA recommends that these standards should involve the students on a more engaging platform. For example, it might be beneficial to encourage institutions to consider what students expect in terms of Learning Outcomes, and perhaps evaluate whether students believe their Learning Outcomes were met when courses conclude. CISA believes this recommendation is crucial particularly because students now pay for their education, and international students are paying larger sums of money, and may have high expectations in terms of their Learning Outcomes.

CISA has addressed the specific questions below:

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

Response: CISA believes the standards for Learning Outcomes are strong, particularly where the outcomes are informed by communication skills, and employment related to the study in question. CISA also feels strongly about item 5, which calls for Learning Outcomes to be available and transparent to staff and students. Finally, the need to review the standards for Learning Outcomes is a good measure to maintain that Learning Outcomes stay consistent with contemporary standards in education and industry.

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

Response & Recommendation: In terms of item 3d, CISA would suggest a reference to updating Learning Outcomes based on employment updates that may occur less than every five years as is the case with industries heavily reliant on digital technology.

As the Learning Outcomes impact on students, CISA believes standards around Learning Outcomes should require student engagement. Students should have the opportunity to review their learning experience at the end of each course to assess whether their personal expectations of the Learning Outcomes were met. Likewise, institutions would benefit from engaging students or former students at the periodic reviews.