

8 July 2013

Higher Education Standards Panel Executive
GPO Box 1672
Melbourne VIC 3001
info@HEstandards.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

RE: Call for Comment Number 2. Standards for Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes (Research Training)

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Higher Education Standards Panel Call for Comment (Number 2, 28 May 2013). CAUL supports the decision to incorporate Research, Research training and Learning outcomes (research training) in the review of the Draft Standards. Our response focuses on research training for research students in particular and includes some initial comments followed by specific responses to the questions posed in the Call for Comment.

University libraries play a key role within their institutions in enabling users at all stages in their academic careers to develop effective information skills. Those skills, particularly the “high end” information and information management skills (including, increasingly, data management and data sharing skills) are essential elements of any rigorous research training program and libraries are well placed to work with supervisors and other campus agencies to facilitate their delivery.

Such skills need to be continually developed and refreshed in response, for example, to the dynamic changes within the scholarly dissemination and scholarly publishing environments as well as in response to the increasingly multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary nature of much research. It would be inappropriate, and a disservice to research students in particular, to assume that any prior information skills training will meet their needs – not least because approximately 50% of HDR students, as identified in the Commonwealth’s investigation of research training (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research *Defining quality for research training in Australia: a consultation paper October 2011*), were working full-time prior to commencing their research degree and approximately 20% had earned their research degree entry qualification more than ten years before.

Such skills are not explicitly addressed in the Draft Standards and are therefore, by default, implicitly categorised as “generic skills”. We note that the *Guiding Principles* state that “orientation and further development of generic skills are essential components of research training, as are effective policies and procedures, high-level academic oversight of research training and mechanisms for monitoring and developing supervisors”. Whilst understanding the rationale for not being prescriptive about what constitutes “generic skills”, and whilst respecting institutional autonomy, there is a risk that failing to identify information, information management, research dissemination and research data management skills explicitly will lead to ad-hoc and inadequate provision. This is not in the interests of either the research students concerned nor the broader health of research in Australia.

CAUL believes that these elements of research training are sufficiently critical to warrant explicit mention, as indicated in our responses below.

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

CAUL broadly supports the proposed standards.

Q2. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

CAUL suggests that item 5 could be strengthened by including specific reference to research data in addition to “research outputs” as follows:-

“An accurate, secure and up-to-date repository of the research outputs (including research data) of staff and research students is maintained”

Q3. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for research training? If not, why?

CAUL broadly supports the proposed standards.

Q4. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

CAUL suggests that item 6 could be strengthened by including specific reference to information, information management, research dissemination and research data management skills as follows:-

“Research students are guided and supported to shape the directions of their research, to develop capacities for independent research (including the requisite information, information management, research dissemination and research data management skills) and to present and publish their research findings.”

Q5. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes (Research)? If not, why?

CAUL broadly supports the proposed standards.

Q6. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

CAUL believes that item 3 could be strengthened by extending point d) as follows:-

3d). *“skills in analysis, criticism, presentation, reporting and publication of research findings (including research data)”*

This response was prepared for CAUL by Anne Bell, University Librarian of the University of Sydney.

Yours sincerely,

Cathrine Harboe-Ree,

CAUL President,
and University Librarian, Monash University