



Guidance Note: Research requirements for Australian universities

Version 2.0 (January 2023)

Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time.

1. Research requirements for Australian Universities

The undertaking of research that leads to new knowledge and original creative endeavour, together with research training, represents a fundamental and defining feature for any higher education provider seeking status as an 'Australian University'.

This guidance note focusses on the requirements specifically applying to Australian Universities and the quality and quantity of research that is undertaken at an institutional level¹.

In accordance with the [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#) (TEQSA Act) s59A(1), the quality of research undertaken by a provider must be considered by TEQSA if the provider is:

- applying under section 18 for registration in the Australian University category
- applying under section 38 to change to the Australian University category
- currently in the Australian University category.

Standards B1.3.16-19 of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (Threshold Standards), set threshold levels for the breadth of research and the quality of research for a provider in the Australian University category.

The 'benchmark standards' for research quality are:

- research that is World Standard measured using best practice indicators, and/or
- research of National Standing in fields specific to Australia, in the case of research that is not easily captured by existing standard indicators (B1.3.19).

Existing Australian Universities of ten or more years must undertake research that meets one or both benchmark standards set out above and leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour in:

- 50 per cent, or at least three, broad Fields of Education in which the university delivers courses of study (whichever is greater), or

¹ TEQSA's guidance note on [Research and Research Training](#) provides more detailed guidance on these areas in relation to Part A of the Threshold Standards.



- for universities with a specialised focus, all broad fields of education for which the university has authority to self-accredit (B1.3.16).

For providers entering the 'Australian University' category from 1 July 2021 or have been established as an 'Australian University' for less ten years (and are yet to meet the standard in B1.3.16), the university must undertake research that meets one or both benchmark standards for research quality in:

- 30 per cent, or at least three, broad Fields of Education in which the university delivers courses of study (whichever is greater), or
- for universities with a specialised focus, all Fields of Education for which the university has the authority to self-accredit (B1.3.17).

However, within ten years of entry into the 'Australian University' category, these providers must meet the requirements outlined in B1.3.16. Once a university has met the requirements of B1.3.16 it must maintain that standard.

TEQSA recognises the quality requirements for research in the Threshold Standards are based on Fields of Education whereas many indicators of research quality are based on Fields of Research (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ANZSRC). Indicators of research quality based on Fields of Research include national, or other assessments conducted by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and measures of research activity and performance outlined in the [Quality of Research Determination \(2021\)](#) (Determination 2021). To assist, TEQSA has developed a concordance table that maps the Fields of Education (ASCED²) to the ANZRC³ Fields of Research (**Attachment A**).

TEQSA also acknowledges that the review of the Australian Research Council, announced in 2022 by Minister Clare and led by Professor Margaret Sheil, may recommend changes to the current Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) methodology. TEQSA's processes obviously will adapt to any research regime changes implemented by the Australian government.

2. What TEQSA will look for

TEQSA acknowledges there is no single approach to assessing research quality. This is reflected in the Determination 2021, which sets out a variety of matters that TEQSA must have regard to when assessing the quality of research at a regulated entity.

In considering research quality, TEQSA will rely on a number of approaches. For example, it will consider whether the provider can demonstrate through the marshalling of evidence that it meets the standard of research required under the Threshold Standards. As set out in the Determination 2021, TEQSA also will consider existing measures of quality, such as the prevailing practices for a given discipline, Australian Research Council (ARC) research assessments, such as ERA (or alternatives), and other verifiable data collections. TEQSA will calibrate its approach to assessment with reference to each provider's self-assurance maturity, risk profile and the Fields of Education in which it delivers courses of study.

TEQSA will also consider a provider's systematic approach to self-assurance of research quality, with this embedded in its governance framework, policies and institutional quality

² [Australian Standard Classification of Education \(ASCED\), 2001 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

³ [Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification \(ANZSRC\), 2020 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)



assurance and performance mechanisms. Further, like academic quality requirements, this approach should have appropriate oversight by the provider’s governing bodies to assure themselves of compliance with the standards relevant to research and research quality.

In addition to the matters set out in the Determination 2021, TEQSA will refer to standards within Part A that may impact compliance with the criteria in Part B of the Threshold Standards that support research quality.

The below table sets out requirements of these two instruments, which may be relevant:

Threshold Standards (2021) Part A	Key considerations
3.2.3a: Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff responsible for academic oversight/with teaching and supervisor roles hold knowledge informed by continuing scholarship, research or advances in practice
4.1: Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A research policy framework exists, and research is conducted consistent with this policy framework Research is conducted and overseen by suitably qualified staff Research outputs of staff and research students are recorded, and records are current.
5.2: Academic and Research Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and procedures uphold research integrity, mitigate risks, ensure guidance is provided, and integrity maintained in third-party arrangements.
6.1.1: Corporate Governance, and 6.2.1k: Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing body of the provider assures itself of compliance with the Threshold Standards and that any lapses are identified and addressed, including the requirement to meet the research quality benchmarks.
6.3.1 and 6.3.2: Academic Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic governance processes and structures maintain academic oversight of research.
Threshold Standards (2021) Part B	Key considerations
B1.3.16-19: Research Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Standard and National Standing: providers must meet the research quality benchmarks in at least 30 per cent and then at least 50 per cent of the 2-digit fields in which they teach in the abovementioned timeframes.
Determination 2021	Key considerations
Paragraphs 5(a) – (g)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This Determination sets out matters that TEQSA must have regard to for the purposes of section 59A of the TEQSA Act.

TEQSA may request additional evidence including:

- the provider’s processes for evaluation of research quality including the nature and extent of any peer review processes
- the results from an external expert review of the provider’s research quality
- copies of reporting to and assurance of corporate and academic governing bodies



- data, such as citation and quality metrics, and benchmarks against which the data has been compared
- the volume of research outputs over time or other evidence of sustained research quality
- evidence of success in securing competitive research funding
- other evidence as per the Determination 2021, where applicable. For example, to assess a suitable research environment.

Benchmark standards for quality of research

Overall, in considering an application, TEQSA will assess a provider's evidence against the two research quality benchmarks specified in Part B1.3.19.

In assessing a provider's evidence of research at either World Standard or National Standing, TEQSA will rely on:

- evidence of achievements which meet agreed definitions of research, and
- evidence of research quality assessments informed by expert, external review.

This includes nationally agreed approaches to the assessment of non-standard research outputs, approaches to peer review and citation profile analysis, and the assessment of published works, such as books and book chapters⁴.

Research at World Standard

Where a Field of Education is covered sufficiently by one or more Fields of Research that have been assessed via a national assessment system, weight will be given to this assessment.

The ARC has the expertise and responsibility to assess the quality of research in Australian higher education institutions, including the establishment of benchmarks relative to research conducted nationally and internationally to determine whether the provider's research meets the 'World Standard' benchmark. In its evaluations, the ARC recognises research in fields specific to Australia may be published less frequently in highly ranked international journals and/or be cited less by overseas researchers. The ARC has the expertise to assess these matters when evaluating those Fields of Research. Therefore, TEQSA will give weight to the ARC's expertise when assessing the World Standard benchmark.

TEQSA also acknowledges that there may be other international measures that align to World Standard. Where a provider relies on international measures, evidence must demonstrate to TEQSA that these measures align to World Standard and are equivalent in quality and volume.

Research of National Standing in fields specific to Australia

The circumstances where TEQSA will look to the benchmark of National Standing in fields specific to Australia include, but are not limited to:

- a provider applying to the Australian University category, where a national assessment of World Standard cannot be evidenced

⁴ See for example: https://www.arc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/era_2023_submission_guidelines_0.pdf



- an existing provider where a national assessment of World Standard cannot be evidenced due to it being ineligible or not meeting volume thresholds for ERA (or alternative assessment)
- the research of a provider is not easily captured by typical indicators of World Standard.

TEQSA does not expect evidence beyond the requirements in the Threshold Standards and the Determination 2021. TEQSA will look for the use of national indicators and quality metrics that are common and accepted in the relevant field, as well as robust processes, such as peer reviews which demonstrate sustained research of quality. TEQSA may request additional information, where relevant, as outlined above.

Mapping from 4-digit Fields of Research to 2-digit Fields of Education

In demonstrating the quality of research for a 2-digit Field of Education meets the requirements of the Threshold Standards, a provider may also undertake its own mapping from the 4-digit level of Fields of Research to the 2-digit Field of Education. This mapping must be underpinned by a clear and rational methodology. In relying on this mapping, a provider must supply TEQSA with evidence of both its mapping and methodology for consideration.

When research requirements are not met

In some situations, a provider in the category 'Australian University' may not comply with the research quality requirements. In these situations, TEQSA will expect to see evidence of a robust research strategy and framework that outlines how the provider will meet the requirements within the timeframe set out in the Threshold Standards.

Where TEQSA is not satisfied a provider is compliant or will return to compliance within a reasonable period, it may take regulatory action.

3. Identified issues

Within the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified issues which warrant further consideration. These items may prompt closer scrutiny by TEQSA assessors as they could indicate risk of non-compliance. These include, but are not limited to:

- In the evidence provided with an application, there is an overreliance on certain projects, sub-fields, or researchers without appropriate contingency plans to account for if a key project fails or a key researcher leaves
- Lack of evidence demonstrating sustained research quality over time
- Lack of external scrutiny or peer review of research quality
- The application relying on research quality assessments that are singular or unique and are not benchmarked:
 - internationally, in the case of the World Standard, or
 - nationally (against national indicators or metrics), in the case of the National Standing.



- Claiming that research in a Field of Education meets the benchmark because some parts meet one benchmark while others meet another benchmark; the 2-digit Field of Education must be of World Standing and/or National Standing
- Claiming that a field of research passes the National Standing test only because:
 - it cannot be compared to international research, but it is nonetheless important for the national interest or another national reason, or
 - it is about an Australian topic.
- Insufficient investment of resources in research necessary to maintain research quality over the period of a provider's registration in the Australian University category. For example, casual employment of high-profile researchers for part of a year to augment the provider's research profile and output when the researcher is under the auspices of another provider.

Related resources

- [Guidance note: Research and Research Training](#)
- Guidance note: Academic and Research Integrity (under review)
- Guidance note: Academic Governance (under review)
- [Quality of Research Determination 2021](#)
- [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#)

TEQSA welcomes the diversity of educational delivery across the sector and acknowledges that its Guidance Notes may not encompass all of the circumstances seen in the sector. TEQSA also recognises that the requirements of the Threshold Standards can be met in different ways according to the circumstances of the provider. Provided the requirements of the Threshold Standards are met, TEQSA will not prescribe how they are met. If in doubt, please consult your TEQSA case manager.

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	29 July 2022	Initial release for consultation
2.0	18 January 2023	Post-consultation updates and public release



Attachment A

Concordance Table

Concordance has been provided at the 2-digit level only, acknowledging that some Fields of Research (at the Group (4-digit) and Field (6-digit)) align to more than one Field of Education.

Standards B3.1.16 and B3.1.17 of the Threshold Standards require that evidence of research quality be demonstrated in the Fields of Education in which the provider delivers higher education courses. In contrast, the Determination 2021 requires TEQSA to have regard to indicators of research quality based on Fields of Research for the purposes of section 59A of the TEQSA Act. Providers must therefore present their evidence of research quality within a given Field of Research that most appropriately aligns with the Field of Education of course delivery to demonstrate compliance with the standards.

In some cases, a body of research within one Field of Research might align to more than one Field of Education. In this instance, the provider will need sufficient research evidence in that Field of Research to be proportionally split across, and separately mapped to, each Field of Education to demonstrate alignment in more than one Field of Education. That is, the same body of research evidence cannot be used to demonstrate activity across multiple Fields of Education.



Field of Education (ASCED 2001)		Field of Research (ANZSRC 2020) ¹	
FOE Broad Field of Education	FOE Description	FOR Division	FOR Description
01	NATURAL AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES	30 31 32 34 37 41 49 51	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES BIOMEDICAL AND CLINICAL SCIENCES CHEMICAL SCIENCES EARTH SCIENCES ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES PHYSICAL SCIENCES
02	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	46	INFORMATION AND COMPUTING SCIENCES
03	ENGINEERING AND RELATED TECHNOLOGIES	40	ENGINEERING



04	ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING	33	BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN
05	AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND RELATED STUDIES	30 41 45	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES INDIGENOUS STUDIES
06	HEALTH	30 32 42 45	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES BIOMEDICAL AND CLINICAL SCIENCES HEALTH SCIENCES INDIGENOUS STUDIES
07	EDUCATION	39 45	EDUCATION INDIGENOUS STUDIES
08	MANAGEMENT AND COMMERCE	35	COMMERCE, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND SERVICES



09	SOCIETY AND CULTURE	36	CREATIVE ARTS AND WRITING
		38	ECONOMICS
		43	HISTORY, HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY
		44	HUMAN SOCIETY
		45	INDIGENOUS STUDIES
		47	LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE
		48	LAW AND LEGAL STUDIES
		50	PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
		52	PSYCHOLOGY
10	CREATIVE ARTS	36	CREATIVE ARTS AND WRITING
		47	LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE
11	FOOD, HOSPITALITY AND PERSONAL SERVICES	30	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES
		35	COMMERCE, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND SERVICES



12	MIXED FIELD PROGRAMMES		

1. Correspondence between ANZSRC 2020 and ANZSRC 2008 can be found at:
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-research-classification-anzsrc/latest-release>