



TEQSA Guidance Note

Academic Leadership

Overview

Academic leadership is fundamental to the capacity of a higher education provider to successfully design, deliver and oversee quality higher education. The requirement that all providers build and maintain an adequate capability in this area is both explicit and implicit in the Threshold Standards.

This Guidance Note reflects TEQSA's interpretation of the Threshold Standards in their entirety as they relate to the topic, with particular regard to specific standards and accepted (and demonstrated) practice within the Australian higher education sector.

Specific standards referenced are

- ▶ PRS 3 Corporate and academic governance: The higher education provider shows sound corporate and academic governance of its higher education operations.
 - ▶ PRS 3.2 The higher education provider's corporate governing body has a majority of external members and uses a full range of expertise required for effective governance of the higher education provider, including higher education expertise and independent financial expertise, through its membership and/or through external advisors.
 - ▶ PRS 3.4 The higher education provider's corporate governing body regularly monitors potential risks to the higher education provider's higher education operations and ensures the higher education provider has strategies to mitigate risks that may eventuate.
 - ▶ PRS 3.8 The higher education provider's corporate and academic governance arrangements demonstrate:
 - the effective development, implementation and review of policies for all aspects of the higher education provider's academic activities including delivery of the higher education provider's courses of study by other entities;
 - the maintenance of academic standards, with appropriate mechanisms for external input, in accordance with international conventions for good academic practice; and,
 - effective quality assurance arrangements for all the higher education provider's higher education operations, encompassing systematic monitoring, review and improvement.
- ▶ PRS 4 Primacy of academic quality and integrity: The higher education provider maintains academic quality and integrity in its higher education operations.
 - ▶ PRS 4.5 Where the higher education provider has an arrangement in place with another entity to manage or deliver some or all of a course of study on its behalf, the higher education provider has effective mechanisms to manage and quality assure all aspects of the arrangement, including admission and support of students and delivery of the course of study to ensure student learning outcomes equivalent to those for the same or a cognate course of study when delivered by the higher education provider.

- ▶ PRS 5 Management and human resources: The higher education provider's higher education operations are well managed and human resources are appropriate.
 - ▶ PRS 5.1 The higher education provider has sufficient appropriately qualified personnel to manage and to provide academic leadership for the higher education provider's higher education operations.
 - ▶ PRS 5.2 The higher education provider has the necessary staff positions, filled by appropriately qualified and experienced personnel, and access to other human resources, to achieve its higher education objectives, which include achievement of expected student learning outcomes.
- ▶ CAS 1: Course design is appropriate and meets the Qualification Standards
 - ▶ CAS 1.2 There are robust internal processes for the design and approval of the course of study ...

Points of guidance

1. What is academic leadership in higher education?

- 1.1. *Academic leadership* is a broad capability and function across a higher education institution, reflected in leadership in governance, both corporate and academic, and in operations.

Academic leadership relates to judgments about the courses and curricula to be offered; the students to be admitted to these courses; academic staff to be employed and their deployment to best effect; the development of learning resources and systems; the appropriate academic policy framework and its implementation; student assessment; the leading, supervision and development of staff; the monitoring and improvement of the quality of courses; and how stakeholders will be assured of academic standards.

Academic leadership reduces risk – the risk of any decline in accountability and quality, and risk to academic operations arising from changes to discipline or professional accreditation frameworks .

- 1.2. *Effective academic leadership* requires oversight of these matters. Higher education, of its nature, is built on communities of scholarship, on diverse perspectives and on academic freedom. Consequently, *academic leadership cannot reside in just one individual or with individual academics teaching at the subject level, but requires the contribution of many people in many roles*. So effective academic governance can include how and to who responsibility for leadership is delegated, and the rationale for delegations.
- 1.3. *Rigorous academic leadership should be embedded in governance arrangements, committee structures, and operations*. The diffusion of academic leadership ensures the intrinsic attributes of higher education are realised 'on the ground' and in each discipline offered. For this reason, TEQSA has defined a risk indicator around the number of senior academic leaders in each of the disciplines delivered by a higher education provider.

2. Academic leadership at the course level

Fundamental aspects of academic leadership required at the corporate governance and academic governance levels are elaborated in dedicated Guidance Notes on corporate and academic governance. This note acknowledges that it must reside at the governance, discipline and course levels.

2.1. *Beyond the governance level, academic leadership* is likely to involve:

- a) *Course leadership*: academic direction over individual courses and relevant clusters of courses, mindful of their significant interdependence and relatedness.
- b) *Course design and review*: academic leadership of the course design and review function, working with internal and external experts as appropriate. While academic governance committees and external experts will play a significant role in this area, academic leaders at the operational level are critical to this process.
- c) *Student admissions*: academic oversight of student admission policies and processes. While also overseen through academic governance arrangements, specifically through review cycles, this function requires leadership at the operational level to ensure appropriate decision-making about, adequate review of and continual reporting on student admissions.
- d) *Student assessment*: academic oversight of student assessment policies and processes. While also overseen through academic governance arrangements, operational-level leadership ensures appropriate assessment decision-making and adequate and continual review and reporting between governance review cycles.
- e) *Academic staffing profile*: responsibility for, or an advisory role in, determining the appropriate academic staffing profile of the organisation to support the achievement of scholarship – taking into account higher education objectives, planned courses, projected student numbers and programs. The staffing profile for each discipline offered includes considerations such as the total number of staff, staff qualifications, the student-staff ratio, class sizes, the definition of equivalence of professional experience, permanent/part-time/sessional staff mix, internal/external staff mix, and staffing structures to be deployed.
- f) *Supervision of academic staff*: supervision and mentoring of academic staff, including performance review, and input to the academic staff development policy which underpins this.
- g) *Promotion of academic staff*: contributing to academic staff promotion decisions, eg via institution-wide academic promotions committees, and input to the academic staff promotion policy which underpins this.
- h) *Scholarship*: providing leadership to support scholarship, including leadership of academic staff scholarship within the discipline, and input to the ongoing development of scholarship of teaching and learning in the discipline.

- i) *Learning resources*: input to decisions about the nature of learning resources, eg libraries, online subscription packages, specialist facilities, and support services, eg language support, required by specific student cohorts.
- j) *Quality assurance mechanisms*: input to the design and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms to assure the maintenance of academic standards and positive outcomes for students, including:
 - ▶ *Monitoring quality assurance approaches*: input to the specification and design of performance monitoring systems to ensure appropriate data on student outcomes is captured, analysed, reported and disseminated. Typically, this data includes information about student characteristics; admissions; rates of attrition, progression and completion; achievement of learning outcomes; graduate destinations; and student and staff surveys.
 - ▶ *Benchmarking*: input to the specification and design of academic benchmarking programs, including the purpose, scope, frequency and methods of benchmarking; the choice of benchmarking partners; and the framework for reporting on and responding to results.
 - ▶ *Reviewing courses and disciplines*: input to reviews of academic operations, eg course reviews, in terms of an organisational response to recommendations made in these reviews, and of bringing an understanding of relevant developments in the discipline/s

3. **Where does academic leadership reside?**

- 3.1. *Academic leadership capability should reside principally with the registered entity.* Although delivery of services and programs can be outsourced, academic leaders of the registered provider will provide academic oversight and accountability. Many of the requirements and responsibilities of a registered entity under the Standards, at their heart, require the judgment of academic leaders.
- 3.2. *Academic leadership should function and be manifest holistically and broadly by the registered provider.* Academic leadership is exhibited at multiple levels and in many facets.
 - a) *In corporate governance*: The corporate governing board has responsibility for all higher education operations, including the quality of its courses and awards. It exercises judgement on academic matters referred through academic governance mechanisms located in a separate structure, and by the member or advisors to the corporate board who bring higher education expertise.
 - b) *In academic governance*: Academic expertise, including academic leadership experience, is implicitly required to acquit the relevant standards. Academic governance exhibits academic leadership in action – setting policy, influencing design, overseeing quality and, ultimately, ensuring appropriate academic standards are met.
 - c) *At the academic operational level*: Academic leadership ensures that academic policies are applied, academic risk is managed, academic staff are provided sufficient direction and oversight, and a community of scholarship is created and maintained.

- d) *By individual academics*: Higher education academics possess significant capacity for judgment and self-directed activity. Academics are able to demonstrate academic leadership at their level consistent with the academic traditions of intellectual inquiry, scholarship and teaching and learning.
- e) *The outsourcing of the delivery of higher education to a third party*: If a higher education provider outsources the delivery of higher education to a third party, an academic leadership capability within that delivery environment commensurate with the scope and scale of the role assumed by the third party is expected. Academic leadership in relation to the delivery arrangements should be demonstrated by the registered provider and would, most probably, also be demonstrated by the third party.
- f) *The delivery of higher education in multiple locations*: If a provider delivers higher education in multiple locations, whether domestically or overseas, academic leadership should be effectively demonstrated across all delivery sites.

Academic leadership in practice

The paths to quality in higher education are diverse. Hence, the Threshold Standards do not prescribe how the standards must be met. In practice, academic leadership may involve:

- ▶ a mix of internal and external sources of leadership
- ▶ blended leadership across the operational, management and governance levels
- ▶ collaborative leadership, with multiple, senior, experienced academics working together to provide students and staff with academic leadership
- ▶ multidisciplinary leadership, with heads or leaders of multiple disciplines working together to realise peer review and contemporary approaches
- ▶ the use of mechanisms to actively support individual academic teaching staff to develop advanced academic scholarship in their field and to contribute their knowledge in the design and review of courses.

Things to Consider

Higher education providers may need to carefully consider whether their academic leadership capability at the operational level is sufficient and is appropriately deployed to meet the requirements of the Threshold Standards. Some key questions include:

Are there senior academic leaders for each broad field of education? (Refer to TEQSA's Risk Assessment Framework, especially Risk Indicator 8 – Senior Academic Leaders).

Does academic leadership reside beyond the governance level?

How is academic leadership vested and is there a balance between the academic leadership role of internal full time staff, external or part time staff and committee members?

How are academic leaders involved in staff development and meeting the learning needs of different student cohorts and the use of technology?

If a significant part of higher education delivery is outsourced to third parties, are the 'in-house' academic leadership resources which are dedicated to overseeing, managing and quality-assuring third party delivery of higher education adequate?

If a provider uses multiple delivery sites in Australia and/or overseas, how is effective academic leadership maintained and assured across all sites?

Do a provider's academic staff report through a senior academic employee in the relevant discipline?

Do academic leadership position descriptions cover the range of leadership roles and functions set out in section 2.1 above?

Other relevant references

- ▶ Scott, G., Coates, H. & Anderson, M. (2008). Learning leadership in times of change: academic leadership capabilities for Australian higher education. University of Western Sydney, Australian Council of Educational Research & Australian Learning & Teaching Council: Sydney, Melbourne & Canberra.
<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-learning-leaders-change-uws-2008UK> Quality Code
- ▶ Ramsden, P. (1998) Managing the effective university, Higher education research and development. Vol. 17. No. 3 pp. 347-370

TEQSA contact

For further information about or discussion of *academic leadership* please contact your case manager in the first instance.