



# TEQSA Guidance Note: Equivalence of professional experience to academic qualifications

## Overview

The Provider Course Accreditation Standards (specifically 4.2) require registered higher education providers to ensure that academic staff appointed to teach students are appropriately qualified in the relevant discipline for their level of teaching. In particular, the Threshold Standards specify that academic teaching staff must be qualified to at least one AQF qualification level higher than the course of study being taught, or have equivalent professional experience. This Guidance Note explains how TEQSA addresses this requirement in line with the Threshold Standards.

The qualifications and experience of staff in the organisation as a whole may also be assessed by TEQSA under Provider Registration Standard 5 (specifically 5.1 and 5.2).

This Guidance Note is designed to assist providers when developing or reviewing a formal approach to determining, where required, the equivalence of professional experience of current and/or prospective academic staff who do not hold a qualification at least one AQF level higher than the course of study being (or proposed to be) taught.

Other Guidance Notes provide some complementary guidance on the staff profile itself, especially those on Academic Leadership and Workforce Planning.

## Points of Guidance

### What is the requirement under the Threshold Standards?

Higher education students are entitled to expect that they are being taught by a person who is qualified in the particular field of study at a level more advanced than the level of the course being taught and that the teacher's expertise has been clearly established through an assessment of formal academic qualifications, equivalent professional experience, or a combination of both.

Where providers identify a need to rely on an assessment of professional equivalence for the purpose of appointing staff, TEQSA expects that they have a policy and procedure under which professional equivalence is determined and approved.

### Key features of an effective policy for assessing professional equivalence

Equivalent professional experience goes well beyond a measure of the time spent by a person working in a particular profession. Assessment must also take into account how the professional experience demonstrates achievement that is equivalent to the specific knowledge and skills established in the learning outcomes of the required AQF level being considered. A provider's policy and procedures should recognise that these learning outcomes are specific for each field of education as well as AQF level and that necessarily, the criteria for equivalence that would apply will need to be tailored to the field of education under consideration.

A provider may find it useful to benchmark the knowledge and skills that can be attained through professional experience against the learning outcomes of its own courses, or those of other providers.

In addition, any policy dealing with the assessment of professional equivalence should include consideration of:

- ▶ the full range of professional experience, including teaching experience (i.e. teaching at lower AQF levels, conducting professional development seminars, giving public lectures), scholarship and professional practice
- ▶ a minimum requirement for academic qualification(s); for example where staff are able to meet the AQF+1 requirement through professional experience, they could be required nonetheless to hold an academic qualification at least equivalent to the AQF level of the course of study being (or proposed to be) taught; and
- ▶ the specific criteria for assessing professional equivalency. Where a policy points to multiple criteria, the policy should be clear about whether each criteria is sufficient on its own, or is to be assessed in combination.

The evidence that may be considered when assessing the professional experience of an individual includes for example evidence of: leadership in the development of professional standards; performing in a role that requires high order judgement and the provision of expert advice, or roles have been at a senior level; managing significant projects in the field; testimonials, awards or other recognition that acknowledges leadership or expertise in the field of education; contributions in the field of study through participation in advisory boards and professional networks; peer reviewed publications in the field of study; other publications such as books and reports; leadership or management of research acknowledged by peers.

TEQSA recognises that in fields of study that are professionally focused, emergent academic disciplines or highly professional specialist subjects within a discipline, a policy may allow for some flexibility in its application, while maintaining the robustness of the policy intent. However, TEQSA would expect that where staff may not yet strongly meet all the criteria outlined in the policy, there would be an explicit and time limited professional development plan, or other strategies put in place such as mentoring or team teaching, to enable the individual to make the transition to academic teaching successfully.

## Things to consider and demonstrate

TEQSA recognises that approaches to assessing professional equivalency are likely to vary between providers, but in establishing the effectiveness of the implementation of such a policy, a provider should be able to demonstrate:

- ▶ How the policy is communicated to current and future academic teaching staff and to human resource staff
- ▶ Who is delegated to apply the policy and that there are processes for ensuring transparency and equity in relation to its application.
- ▶ Who is able to approve decisions made under this policy
- ▶ How the provider assures itself that the policy can be applied to all existing staff, as well as new appointments
- ▶ How the outcomes of any assessment of professional equivalency may inform a staff member's professional development activities.
- ▶ How the policy will be subject to periodic review

## References

Australian Qualifications Framework (2013), <http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/in-detail/2nd-ed-jan-2013/>

## TEQSA Contact

For further information about or discussion of *equivalence of professional experience* please contact your case manager in the first instance.