Guidance note:
Academic and research integrity

Version 2.0 (2 February 2024)

TEQSA's guidance notes are concise documents designed to provide high-level, principles-based guidance on interpretation and application of specific standards of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*. They also draw attention to other interrelated standards and highlight potential risks to compliance. They do not introduce prescriptive obligations.

The definitive instruments that set out providers' obligations in delivering higher education remain the Threshold Standards (as written by the Higher Education Standards Panel) and the TEQSA Act.

In 2023, TEQSA consulted stakeholders with a draft version of the guidance note about academic and research integrity and considered all feedback.

This guidance note was finalised on 2 February 2024.

The purpose and intent of the guidance note about academic and research integrity is to support providers in ensuring they have the relevant policies, processes, training, oversight, and culture to protect and maintain the integrity of their academia and research.

For the full list of guidance notes and resources, please see the TEQSA website.

1. What do academic and research integrity encompass?

In the context of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, 'academic integrity' describes a provider's responsibility to ensure its staff and students act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility as they engage in learning and teaching in courses and units of study. (See TEQSA's resources on academic integrity).

Similarly, 'research integrity' describes a provider's responsibility to ensure research is conducted ethically and responsibly and to promote a culture of ethical and responsible research. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 (Responsible Conduct of Research Code) sets out a number of responsibilities and principles that apply to providers and researchers. Responsibilities relevant to providers include:

- the development and maintenance of current and readily available policies and procedures, which ensure institutional practices are consistent with the principles and responsibilities of the Responsible Conduct of Research Code

- providing mechanisms to receive concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Responsible Conduct of Research Code and investigate and resolve potential breaches

- ensuring breaches are investigated in an effective way in accordance with procedural fairness and the welfare of all parties to an investigation.

Breaches of academic integrity, also called 'academic misconduct' or 'academic dishonesty', can include plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating, recycling work, or fabricating information. (See TEQSA's resources on academic integrity for more details).

Breaches of research integrity, also called 'research misconduct', can include plagiarism, falsifying or fabricating data, omitting data to manipulate a result or misleading attributions of authorship. The National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research additionally sets out specific breaches including the absence of consent and coercion of participants.

The primary obligations related to academic and research integrity are found in Standard 5.2 of the Threshold Standards. Standard 5.2 is designed to:

- uphold and promote academic and research integrity across the sector, including maintaining accountability in third-party arrangements

- ensure providers have policies and procedures in place to prevent, respond to, and resolve claims of academic and research misconduct.

Protecting academic and research integrity is important in preserving both a provider's integrity and the credibility of its qualifications and research. This protection also serves to maintain the reputation and international standing of the Australian higher education system and the benefits of Australian research to individuals and society.

Therefore, academic and research integrity must remain a priority for all higher education providers, including in ensuring research collaborations with third parties meet the academic and research integrity obligations prescribed in the Threshold Standards (See TEQSA's guidance note on Delivery with Other Parties).

Standards 4.1 and 4.2 of the Threshold Standards relating to research and research training are also relevant to academic and research integrity but are only covered here in passing. (See TEQSA's Guidance Note on Research and Research Training).

2. What TEQSA will look for

TEQSA considers the Threshold Standards in the context of academic and research integrity, among which most notably are:

Part A: Standards for higher education providers	Key considerations
1.2.2(a)(b): Credit through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	• the best interests of the student are considered in the granting of RPL • granting credit through RPL is subject to maintaining the learning outcomes and integrity of the course of study
1.3: Orientation and Progression	• information about key procedures and policies are provided to students during orientation, including those relating to academic research integrity, student grievances and complaints procedures
2.4.3: Student Grievances and Complaints	• there are policies and procedures for delivering timely resolution of complaints and appeals against academic decisions, including those about breaches of integrity
4.1.1(a–e): Research Policy Framework	• there is a research and research training policy framework consistent with the principles outlined in the Responsible Conduct of Research Code
4.2.1(a, b, e, g): Research Training Policy Framework	
4.2.4: Research Training Induction	• research students participate in an induction which includes an explanation of responsibilities for upholding ethical behaviour and research integrity

5.2.1–4: Academic and Research Integrity	• there are policies and procedures for promoting and upholding academic and research integrity and addressing misconduct and allegations of misconduct
	• responsible staff are also trained to identify potential academic and research integrity breaches and take appropriate action
	• preventative action is taken to mitigate foreseeable risks and prevent recurrences of breaches
	• students are provided with guidance on:
	• what constitutes a breach of academic or research misconduct
	• penalties associated with academic misconduct and the support services available throughout the disciplinary process
	• the development of good practices in maintaining academic, ethical behaviour and research integrity
	• academic and research integrity is maintained in arrangements with other parties involved in the delivery of higher education and research
5.3: Monitoring Review and Improvement	• comprehensive reviews of courses take place to ensure learning outcomes and teaching methods consider emerging trends and developments in the field of education and associated risks, such as developments in artificial intelligence
	• policies and procedures can adapt to emerging trends that impact on the delivery of education, such as artificial intelligence
	• regular interim monitoring takes place to evaluate and guide course improvements to mitigate potential risks to the quality of the education provided
6.2.1(j): Corporate Monitoring and Accountability 6.3.2(d): Academic Governance	• the occurrence and nature of breaches of academic or research integrity are monitored, reported and action is taken to address underlying causes
	• there is robust oversight of academic and research integrity, including monitoring potential risks

7.2.2(c, d): Information for Prospective and Current Students	• information regarding student obligations, expected standards of behaviour, disciplinary procedures, academic misconduct, and academic integrity policies are made available to students prior to accepting an offer
7.3.3(b, c): Information Management	• information systems and records are maintained securely and confidentially, as necessary to prevent unauthorised or fraudulent access to information
	• processes and procedures are in place to document and record responses to allegations and breaches of academic or research integrity

Part B: Criteria for higher education providers	Key considerations
B2.5: Criteria for Seeking Self-Accrediting Authority (SAA)	• providers seeking unlimited SAA must demonstrate mature and advanced processes for the maintenance of academic integrity across at least three (2-digit) fields of education

TEQSA expects a provider to demonstrate it:

- supplies its staff and students with contemporary and adequate training and has current policies and procedures to support the protection of academic and research integrity

- ensures its training, policies and procedures evolve to respond to developments in technology, such as the rising prevalence of artificial intelligence

- applies adequate methods and practices to identify and mitigate risks to academic and research integrity

- undertakes ongoing monitoring, reporting and recording of breaches of academic or research integrity, and uses this information to continuously improve its practices

- has robust governance oversight to manage both the individual and root cause of breaches academic or research integrity.

Ensuring the above will assist:

- students in identifying and avoiding potential breaches, as well understanding the potential impacts of breaches

- staff in detecting, managing and avoiding breaches

- the broader institution in maintaining its reputation and the reputation of Australian higher education.

With the increase in online learning and online assessments, providers will ensure they have the knowledge, resources, tools or methods to effectively assure academic and research integrity in all environments. Some tools and methods that may assist providers in assuring integrity may include:

Category	Tools and methods
Fostering an environment of protecting academic integrity	• all students and staff complete academic integrity modules early in their career/course of study and receive regular refresher sessions • all research students and staff undertake a research integrity module including codes of conduct, research ethics, workplace health and safety, and intellectual property • promoting of a mutual understanding between the institution, staff, and students of what constitutes a breach of academic or research integrity, particularly in the online sphere • block student access to contract cheating websites (and potentially block proxy websites that allow users to bypass blocks put in place by an internet service provider) • co-design of academic/research integrity initiatives with students including student representatives • embedding academic integrity and academic artificial intelligence literacy in the curriculum
Mitigating the risk of academic cheating	• co-designing assessments with students and other partners • using different forms of assessment such as interactive oral assessments, practical and clinical exams, portfolio submissions and other assessments resistant to academic cheating • appropriate use of plagiarism, collusion, and appropriate use of technologies that can flag work suspected of academic misconduct for further investigation by staff
Ensuring staff are appropriately resourced and capable	• faculty members who are involved in the mentoring and supervision of research students are well resourced and provided training to support their students' mode of learning • up-skilling academic staff in detecting and addressing contract cheating in online and unsupervised assessment tasks
Establishing strong policy frameworks and reporting mechanisms	• well-designed policies cover breaches of academic and research integrity in the physical and online environment (e.g. sharing completed assessment tasks on third-party websites, or file-sharing of already graded assignments, or fabricating research data) • engaging research integrity advisors who may act as the primary confidential contact for reports of research integrity issues • publishing reports on the outcomes of research misconduct investigations • reporting how your institution complies with the Responsible Research of Conduct Code

Links to further resources and guidance relevant to protecting academic and research integrity are available on TEQSA's website: protecting academic integrity and assessments and academic integrity.

The TEQSA Act

The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) outlines offences relating to academic cheating services[1]:

- Section 114A prohibits the provision of academic cheating services
- Section 114B prohibits the advertisement of academic cheating services
- Section 64 also lists as an offence failing to comply with a notice from TEQSA for information or other materials concerning a contravention of section 114A or 114B.

For both sections 114A and 114B, criminal and civil penalties apply for commercial academic cheating services. Only a civil penalty applies where the academic cheating service is not commercial.

TEQSA encourages providers to report to TEQSA any academic cheating services it observes through the course of its work. Doing so will support and inform TEQSA's work in preventing access to these types of services. Academic cheating services can be reported via our website.

Obligations applying to providers of education to overseas students in Australia

Where it applies to a provider, TEQSA considers the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018* (National Code) and the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act).

Standards of the National Code relevant to safeguarding academic and research integrity are:

- **1.3** – providers cannot guarantee a successful education assessment outcome for a student or intended student
- **8.8** – providers must have policies promoting academic integrity, and processes to address misconduct and allegations of misconduct.

3. Identified issues

Within the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified a range of issues that are indicative of risks to academic and research integrity:

Staff and student training and support

- no evidence of staff or students being trained about academic integrity
- staff have inadequate training or support to identify and respond to breaches of academic integrity (including staff delivering higher education via a third party of the provider)
- students and staff are unaware of how to report, or who to contact about, potential issues with academic or research integrity.

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1. 'Academic cheating service' is defined in section 5 of the TEQSA Act.

Governance

- no evidence of a provider's governing body taking steps to prevent breaches of academic or research misconduct

- providers are unable to adequately self-assure courses of study or research collaborations with third parties meet the academic and research integrity obligations prescribed in the Threshold Standards

- a lack of evidence to show the provider is taking reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of breaches of academic integrity by students e.g., failing to review programs or assessments to ensure students' learning can be genuinely verified

- no evidence of the provider creating a holistic culture of protecting academic integrity.

Policies and procedures

- lack of clarity in reporting channels for academic or research integrity breaches

- either no or outdated policies and procedures to prevent, respond to, and resolve academic and research misconduct due to infrequent policy reviews

- inadequate policies and procedures in place for students to appeal any sanctions resulting from allegations of academic misconduct or research integrity

- inadequate policies and procedures to protect the anonymity and job security of academic and research misconduct whistle-blowers.
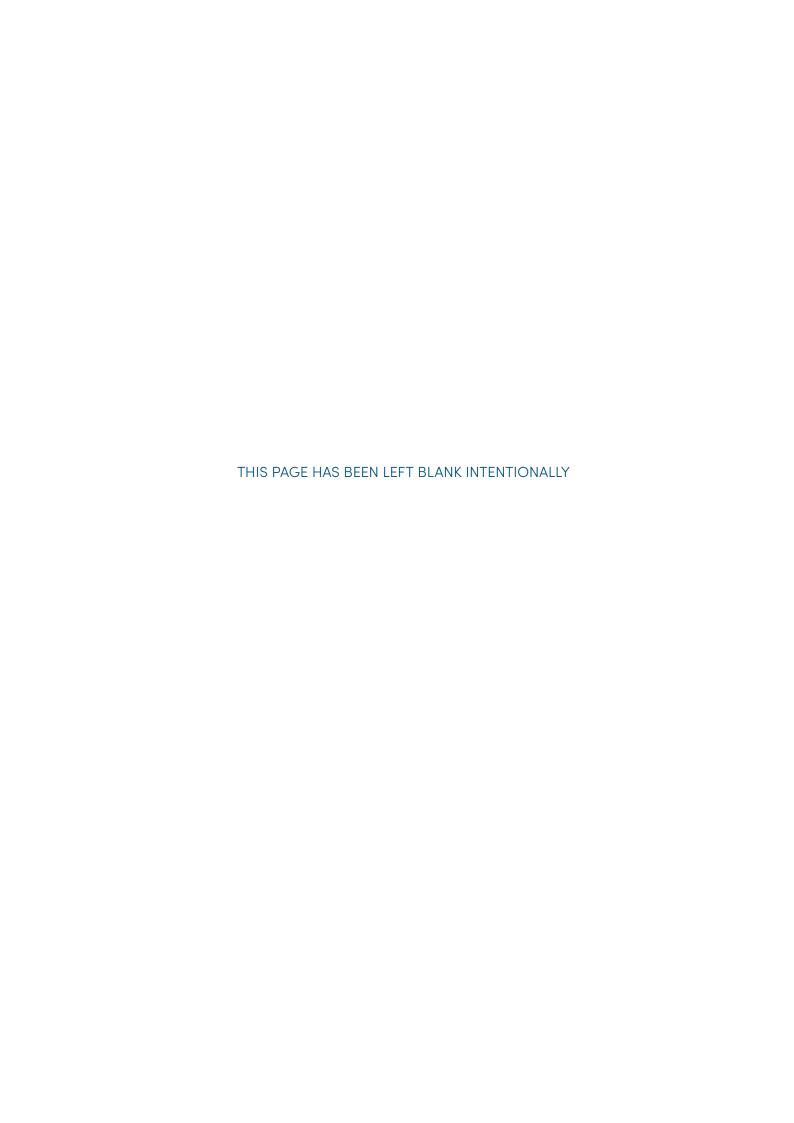
Information systems and records

- cyber security concerns regarding the vulnerability to manipulation of student assessment activities, admissions, research activity and outputs, and qualifications records.

Related resources

- Guidance note: [Research and research training](#)
- Guidance note: [Recognition of prior learning](#)
- Guidance note: [Delivery with other parties](#)
- Toolkit: [Academic integrity toolkit](#)
- Web portal: [Protecting academic integrity](#)
- Resources: [Assessments and academic integrity](#)
- Guidance: Principles for Assessment reform for the age of artificial intelligence [[under consultation](#)]
- National Health and Medical Research Council: [Australian code for the responsible conduct of research](#)
- National Health and Medical Research Council: [National statement on ethical conduct in human research 2023](#)
- Australian Council of Graduate Research: [Australian graduate research good practice principles](#)

Document information

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	19 August 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation
1.1	11 October 2017	Addition to 'What will TEQSA look for?' text box
1.2	28 March 2019	Incorporation of consultation feedback
2.0	2 February 2024	Major revision

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