



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Guidance note: Research requirements for Australian universities

Version 2.1 (30 April 2024)



TEQSA



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 instrument that sets out providers' obligations in delivering higher education remains the Threshold Standards as written by the [Higher Education Standards Panel](#).

In late 2022, TEQSA consulted stakeholders with a draft version of Research Requirements for Australian Universities and considered all feedback.

This guidance note was finalised on 30 April 2024.

The purpose and intent of the guidance note about research requirements is to support providers who aspire to enter and remain within the Australian University provider category ensure they undertake research at the level and depth required for Australian Universities.

For the full list of guidance notes and resources, please see the [TEQSA website](#).

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 (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 level.¹

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 and 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 (B1.3.19a)
- research of national standing in fields specific to Australia, in the case of research that is not easily captured by existing standard indicators (B1.3.19b).

Providers registered in a category using the title 'university' before the 2021 Threshold Standards came into effect

For any provider registered in the 'Australian University' category after the Threshold Standards 2021 came into force on 1 July 2021 and registered immediately prior to that date in a provider category permitting the use of the word 'university', there are two transitional research requirements (B3.2):²

- Within 5 years, providers must undertake research that meets one or both benchmark standards for research quality and leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour in:
 - 30%, or at least three, broad Fields of Education in which the provider delivers courses of study (whichever is greater), or
 - (for universities with a specialised focus) all broad Fields of Education for which the provider has authority to self-accredit (B1.3.17).

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.

2. The provider categories that permitted the use of the word 'university' before the Threshold Standards (2021) commenced on 1 July 2021 were: 'Australian University', 'Australian University College', 'Australian University of Specialisation', 'Overseas University', and 'Overseas University of Specialisation'.

- Within 10 years, providers must undertake research that meets one or both benchmark standards for research quality in:
 - 50%, 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 broad Fields of Education for which the university has the authority to self-accredit (B1.3.16).

Providers not registered in a category using the title ‘university’ before the 2021 Threshold Standards came into effect

For any provider that becomes registered in the ‘Australian University’ category after the Threshold Standards came into force on 1 July 2021 and which was not immediately prior to that date registered in a provider category permitting the use of the word ‘university’, there are two transitional research requirements:

- upon entry to the ‘Australia University’ category, providers must meet the requirements of B1.3.17, and
- within 10 years from entry to the ‘Australian University’ category, meet the requirements of B1.3.16.

Moreover, regardless of when a provider is registered in the ‘Australian University’ category, once it has met the requirements of B1.3.16 it will be assessed against that standard and not the more relaxed B1.3.17.

Indicators of research quality

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, ANZSRC³). 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 (ASCED⁴) to the ANZRC Fields of Research (**Attachment A**).

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

3. [Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification \(ANZSRC\), 2020](#)

4. [Australian Standard Classification of Education \(ASCED\), 2001](#)

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 (see [Research and Research Training](#)). As set out in the Determination 2021, TEQSA must also consider measures of quality such as the quantity of citations of publications and quality of the publication in which research outputs appear, the prevailing practices for a given discipline, Australian Research Council (ARC) research assessments such as the 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 look for a provider's systematic approach to self-assurance of research quality. This approach must be embedded in its governance framework, policies and institutional quality assurance and performance mechanisms. Further, like academic quality requirements, this approach must have appropriate oversight by the provider's governing bodies to assure themselves of compliance with the Threshold Standards.

In assessing whether a provider meets the research requirements for Australian Universities, 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, evidence to demonstrate a provider has a suitable research environment.

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

The below table sets out relevant requirements of these two instruments:

Threshold Standards (2021)	Key considerations
3.2.3a: Staffing	Staff responsible for academic oversight/with teaching and supervisor roles hold knowledge informed by continuing scholarship, research or advances in practice.
5.2: Academic and Research Integrity	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	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	Academic governance processes and structures maintain academic oversight of research.
B1.3 'Australian University' Category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers the required proportion of research at national standing or world standard • Meets the requirements to become and remain an Australian University.
B3.2 Transitional research requirements	Providers registered in the 'Australian University' category after the 2021 Threshold Standards comes into force, and, immediately before the commencement date were in a provider registration category that permitted use of the word 'university', achieves benchmarks set out in B1.3 within the required timeframes.

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
- 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 chapters.⁵

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

'National standing' refers to research not easily captured by existing standard indicators. Examples of research to which this may apply is research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Australian history.

National standing is not a lesser standard than that of world standard. The category of 'national standing' is intended to allow researchers to convey their research in a way that is sensitive to recognised cultural practices and beliefs in Australia. This is most relevant to the field of research Indigenous Studies.

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
- 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 equivalent 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.

5. See for example: [ERA 2023 Submission Guidelines](#).

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. Assessors will review this evidence and take into consideration the requirements (at a minimum) outlined in the Determination 2021.

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.
- Failing to link evidence provided in support of an application to the Australian University category to the standards and expectations set out by the Australian Research Council (or equivalent).
- Failing to provide any evidence of competitive research grants or other direct funding for research noting that providers may participate in applications with established universities and seek out other categories of research funding.
- Lack of evidence demonstrating sustained research quality over time.
- 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 world standard and/or of 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.
- Poor alignment in the four-digit Fields of Research and two-digit Fields of Education; any mapping between the two must be underpinned a strong, clear rational methodology that can be evidenced.
- An absence of peer review to ensure quality assurance of research outputs in either in the following two forms:
 - 'developmental and supportive' peer review: peer review that seeks advice from other researchers, industry, or the wider community through seminars, conferences, and participation in committee or institutional activities to strengthen research and identify opportunities for collaboration
 - 'blind' or 'at arm's length' peer review: peer review that involves impartial and rigorous reviews of research according to sector-wide or global standards of excellence.

Related resources

- [Guidance note: Research and research training](#)
- [Guidance note: Academic and research integrity](#)
- [Guidance note: Academic governance](#)
- [Quality of Research Determination 2021](#)
- [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#)

Document information

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	29 July 2022	Initial release for consultation
2.0	18 January 2023	Post-consultation updates and public release
2.1	30 April 2024	Further updates

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 cannot use the same body of research 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	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES
		31	BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
		32	BIOMEDICAL AND CLINICAL SCIENCES
		34	CHEMICAL SCIENCES
		37	EARTH SCIENCES
		41	ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
		49	MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES
		51	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	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES
		41	ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
		45	INDIGENOUS STUDIES
06	HEALTH	30	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES
		32	BIOMEDICAL AND CLINICAL SCIENCES
		42	HEALTH SCIENCES
		45	INDIGENOUS STUDIES
07	EDUCATION	39	EDUCATION
		45	INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Field of Education (ASCED 2001)		Field of Research (ANZSRC 2020) ¹	
FOE Broad Field of Education	FOE Description	FOR Division	FOR Description
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
10	CREATIVE ARTS	52	PSYCHOLOGY
		36	CREATIVE ARTS AND WRITING
11	FOOD, HOSPITALITY AND PERSONAL SERVICES	47	LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE
		30	AGRICULTURAL, VETERINARY AND FOOD SCIENCES
12	MIXED FIELD PROGRAMMES	35	COMMERCE, MANAGEMENT, TOURISM AND SERVICES

1. [Correspondence between ANZSRC 2020 and ANZSRC 2008.](#)

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