



Guidance note: *Qualifications and certification*

(August 2025)

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. What do qualifications and certification encompass?

The [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) (Threshold Standards) include provisions for registered higher education providers (providers) around the award and certification of qualifications.

The provisions concerning qualifications and certification are primarily in Section 1.5. However, other sections are also important, including admissions (Section 1.1), learning outcomes (Section 1.4), course design (Section 3.1), and course approval and accreditation (Section 5.1).

The overarching provision regarding qualification and certification is that the governing body can assure itself that the provider awards qualifications legitimately (Standard 6.2.1h). This requires being able to assure itself that:

- there is suitable academic oversight involved when approving or accrediting courses of study that lead to qualifications
- certification documents are accurate, authenticable, informative and protected against unauthorised issue and reproduction.

Qualifications

The Threshold Standards recognise that providers may confer qualifications that align with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and qualifications that do not align with the AQF (non-AQF qualifications).

To delineate relevant qualifications that do align with the AQF, the Threshold Standards define a 'Higher education qualification' as equivalent in meaning to a 'Higher education award' as defined in section 5 of the [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#) (TEQSA Act). The TEQSA Act defines a 'Higher education award' as:

- a diploma, advanced diploma, associate degree, bachelor degree, undergraduate certificate, graduate certificate, graduate diploma, masters degree or doctoral degree; or
- a qualification covered by level 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 of the AQF; or
- an award of a similar kind, or represented as being of a similar kind, to any of the above awards, other than an award offered or conferred for the completion of a vocational education and training course.



To be able to assure themselves that they are awarding qualifications legitimately, providers should:

- have rigorous academic governance mechanisms in place to oversee the internal approval or re-approval process, and internal accreditation or re-accreditation when self-accrediting, any courses of study that lead to higher education qualifications (Section 5.1)
- maintain formal arrangements with other parties to ensure academic and research integrity standards are upheld in the delivery of any joint qualifications (Standard 5.2.4)
- ensure academic oversight of qualifications and certifications is supported by academic monitoring, review, and improvement (Section 5.3).

Certification

All awardees of qualifications should be issued with certification documentation designed to protect against fraudulent issue and prevent unauthorised reproduction. Certification documents should also be designed to be traceable and authenticable to ensure easy verification of the awarded qualification, e.g. for potential employers.

The Threshold Standards state that each awardee of a higher education qualification should receive two kinds of certification documentation:

- a testamur
- a record of results and/or an Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS).¹

Standards 1.5.4 through to 1.5.8 of the Threshold Standards prescribe further content requirements for each kind of document.

While Section 1.5 does not explicitly mention the certification of joint or dual qualifications involving 2 (or more) providers, its provisions are consistent with one or more testamurs being issued to the awardee. Testamurs for a joint award should correctly identify the providers and persons authorised to issue the joint award.²

In the case of non-AQF qualifications, the Threshold Standards state that the qualification must not:

- purport to be recognised as equivalent to an AQF qualification
- use the terminology of AQF qualifications in their description.

In the case of 'honorary qualifications', such as honorary masters degrees or honorary doctoral degrees, which do deploy some of the terminology of the AQF qualifications, the Threshold Standards state that the certification of the qualification must unambiguously identify the qualification as an honorary qualification.

2. What TEQSA will look for

TEQSA considers the Threshold Standards in the context of qualifications and certifications, among which most notably are:

Part A: Standards for HE Providers	Key considerations
1.4.1 Learning Outcomes and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• learning outcomes for each course of study must be consistent with the qualification awarded

¹ See the [TEQSA Glossary](#) for definitions of 'testamur' and 'record of results'.

² See the [TEQSA Glossary](#) for definitions of 'joint awards', 'dual awards', and 'nested courses of study'.



1.5.1–1.5.3, 1.5.9, 1.5.11 Qualifications and Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• if a provider awards a higher education qualification:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– a course of study leads to its award (except for Higher Doctoral Degrees)– the requirements of the course of study have been met– the expected learning outcomes are consistent with the AQF level of the qualification– the course of study is either self-accredited under authority to self-accredit or accredited by TEQSA.• if a provider awards a non-AQF qualification, the qualification:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– is not implied to be an AQF qualification or equivalent to one– does not use the terminology of the AQF framework.• where applicable, the provider has specific policies and academic governance requirements for the award of Higher Doctoral Degrees
1.5.4–1.5.8, 1.5.10 Qualifications and Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• certification documents must be issued with the required information specified by Standards 1.5.4 - 1.5.8, including with protections to mitigate fraudulent production and allow for authentication and verification• students who complete one or more units of study but do not obtain an award have access to an authorised record of results for units undertaken• documentation issued with an honorary qualification unambiguously identifies the qualification as such
3.1.1a Course Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the design of any course of study specifies the qualification(s) to be awarded upon completion
5.1.1 Course Approval and Accreditation 5.2.4 Academic and Research Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• there are processes for internal approval of the delivery of a course of study, or, where a provider has authority to self-accredit, internal accreditation, of all courses of study leading to a higher education qualification• in the case of joint awards of qualifications, academic and research integrity and accountability measures are maintained through formal arrangements with other involved parties
6.2.1h Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the governing body assures itself that all qualifications have been awarded legitimately
6.3.2c Academic Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the internal approval or internal accreditation of qualifications is quality assured by appropriate academic oversight
7.1.1 Representation 7.3.2b–c, 7.3.3a Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• qualification titles accurately represent the accredited course of study that led to the award of the qualification• each provider has a publicly available list of all courses of study including the qualification(s) offered, and whether the qualification is recognised in the AQF• secure and confidential records are kept for all qualifications awarded.



Other relevant Australian legislation and guidelines

The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act)

Section 107 of the TEQSA Act makes it an offence for a provider to offer or confer a higher education award (not as an honorary award) to a student without requiring the completion of a course of study.

The *Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the Guidelines for Presentation of the Australian Higher Education Graduate Statement (2022)* (The Guidelines)

The [AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy](#) (included within the AQF) and the Guidelines include detailed provisions for the issuance and verification of AQF qualifications and AHEGS respectively.

Like the Threshold Standards, the AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy and the Guidelines include provisions concerning certification documentation requirements. But these instruments also encompass matters such as the correct use of postnominal titles by graduates. Providers should carefully consider how such provisions both complement and go beyond the provisions of the Threshold Standards.³

3. Identified issues

In the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified issues that may indicate risks to compliance regarding qualifications and their certification. These include, but are not limited to:

- certification documents for AQF awards missing required information, such as:
 - a testamur is missing the AQF logo (or the sentence ‘This qualification is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework’) when issued without an AHEGS
 - a record of results is missing unit weights for each of units.
- reasonable steps not being taken to ensure certification documentation is verifiable and protected against fraud, such as when providers fail to:
 - include a corporate identified or unique watermark
 - put in place mechanisms to enable interested parties (e.g. employers) to easily and readily authenticate and verify certification documentation.
- qualification titles not accurately representing an AQF-level qualification type, such as introducing a qualification title like ‘Advanced Master of X’, which implies a qualification type of a level higher than Level 9 in the AQF, as opposed to ‘Master of X (Advanced)’
- qualification or award titles including specialisations in brackets that do not correctly mirror the title of the accredited course, such as when a student is awarded a ‘Bachelor of Business (Marketing)’ but the student has only completed a course of study accredited under the title ‘Bachelor of Business’

³ On one minor point, the Threshold Standards and the AQF conflict. Where the Threshold Standards require a record of results of AHEGS that includes either the AQF logo or the words ‘This qualification is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Network’, the AQF requires such certification to include either the AQF logo or the words ‘The qualification is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Network’. Providers are advised to use the wording of the Threshold Standards.



- including the details of only one higher education institution on certification documents for a joint qualification rather than all involved higher education institutions
- providing inaccurate, misleading or insufficient information for students from different providers about joint or dual arrangements
- excessive or inappropriate granting of credit between mutually interdependent courses of study, resulting in 'double counting' and:
 - credit granted for learning outcomes not achieved
 - employers and other stakeholders being led to believe that graduates have undertaken more study than is in fact the case
- granting students credit toward a course of study without properly verifying that the students' work or life experience or completion of other courses, such as microcredentials or VET courses, demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the units of study being credited.

Related resources

- Guidance note: [Changes in a course of study that may lead to accreditation as a new course](#)
- Guidance note: [Course design](#)
- Guidance note: [Credit and recognition of prior learning](#)
- Guidance note: [Academic governance](#)
- TEQSA webpage: [Australian Qualifications Framework](#)
- [Australian Qualifications Framework 2013 Second Edition](#)
- [Australian Qualifications Issuance Policy](#)
- [Guidelines for the Presentation of the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement](#)
- Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement: [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0		