



Guidance Note: *Admissions* (*coursework*)

Beta Version 1.0 8 February 2021

Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. They are not definitive or binding documents, nor are they prescriptive. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time.

Context

Admissions policies, requirements and procedures serve to establish the eligibility requirements to ensure students have the academic preparation and English language proficiency to participate in their intended study.

Transparency is a foundational element of a robust admissions framework. Providers need to make known the factors taken into account in selection – including student diversity and equity considerations – and ensure that students are given all the information they need before applying for a course to enable informed participation in their educational experience. Another foundational element is that where a provider is represented by agents or delivers courses or parts of courses through arrangements with third parties, the performance of those agents and third parties is monitored and prompt corrective actions are taken to address any identified issues. Once students are admitted, the monitoring and analysis of student performance is critical to enable review and improvement of admission policies and procedures, delivery of student support services and course quality.

The effectiveness of a provider's admissions framework and associated processes contributes to the integrity of the provider's academic activities. An effective admissions framework also ensures that there are no known limitations on a student's learning experience, course progression, and successful completion. Further, an effective admissions framework sets in place arrangements for the early identification of students at risk, and ensures that related issues are detected through the provider's ongoing monitoring of individual students and student cohorts, to which interim and comprehensive course reviews further contribute.

When providers systematically admit students via poor admissions practices, students may struggle or fail to succeed in their studies as a result, and, more broadly, the integrity and reputation of Australia's higher education sector may be undermined. In contrast, a robust admissions framework as described above, and its consistent and equitable application, contributes to safeguarding the quality and reputation of Australian higher education.



Relevant Standards

There are a number of Standards in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework) and in the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018* (National Code) pertinent to admission, grouped into the following themes.

Admission, credit, recognition of prior learning and student progress

Sections 1.1 and 1.2 of the HES Framework (Student Participation and Attainment) set out requirements for admission of students to a course of study and the granting of credit to students as part of that admission decision. Admission requirements include adequate academic preparation for the course and English language proficiency. Standard 1.3.5 requires the monitoring of the success of student cohorts as they progress through their studies. Such cohorts should include those identified according to the basis of student admission (for example, students grouped according to the determination of English language competence or amount of credit granted). Such monitoring will inform review and refinement of admission criteria to ensure those criteria continue to be effective.

The National Code further protects overseas students in Australia, including a number of requirements for admission, granting of credit and recognition of prior learning (Standards 2.2 and 2.3 of the National Code). These Standards ensure that overseas students have adequate protections, and that providers keep precise and accurate records of the entry criteria attained at the level of the individual student.

Inadequate admissions policies and processes, or the inconsistent application of those controls, exposes providers to significant risks in relation to both the student experience and the integrity of the provider's activities more broadly. Students who are admitted without the required academic preparation and proficiency in English may not be able to achieve the intended learning outcomes, progress through their course, and complete their studies.

Admission transparency

Standards 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 of the HES Framework require providers to publish accurate, timely and publicly available information regarding admissions and the provider's educational offerings.

Transparency and accuracy of information is essential to allow potential students to make informed choices about particular courses. This is especially salient for overseas students who may have different expectations or understanding based on their experiences in their home country.

Student welfare

Section 2.3 of the HES Framework requires providers to promote a safe environment and provide support services appropriate to the needs to student cohorts. If admissions practices are inadequate, a provider's student support services may be overwhelmed by demand for support from students who do not have the academic preparedness and English language proficiency needed to participate effectively in their course of study.



Academic integrity

Section 5.2 of the HES Framework requires that providers take action to prevent academic integrity breaches. Risks to academic integrity are increased when students experience difficulty in progressing through their course, since it is more likely that such students will engage in plagiarism or contract cheating. These risks are more pronounced for overseas students when English is not their first language but are not limited to them (Bretag et al. 2017).

Representation and delivery with other parties

Standard 7.1.4 of the HES Framework and Standard 4 of the National Code require that providers monitor the use of agents in representing the provider, and that corrective actions are taken to address misrepresentation or unethical conduct. Further, Standard 5.4.2 requires that courses of study delivered through such arrangements comply with the applicable requirements of the HES framework.

Where a provider engages third parties for administration of its admission processes, such activity must be monitored and quality assured by the provider. Providers can have less visibility and control over elements of their operations outsourced to a third party. Providers must assure themselves that those aspects are delivered with the same integrity as if the provider delivered them directly.

Flow-on impact on other Standards

When admissions policies, requirements and procedures lack transparency or rigour, a range of other Standards may be adversely impacted. Chiefly these Standards include those relating to: student progress and monitoring (Standards 2.2.3 and 5.3.7); support for students' achievement and wellbeing (Standards 2.3.3 and 2.3.4); benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes (Standards 6.3.1b and 6.3.2e); and detection and mitigation of risks to academic integrity (Section 5.2). These Standards all assume that students have the necessary academic preparation to participate effectively in their courses of study. Where admissions requirements have not been met, and students do not have the academic preparation needed, the provider may experience poorer student performance and non-achievement of institutional KPIs and benchmarks.

Such issues also impact corporate and academic governance (Sections 6.1- 6.3). Poor admissions practices indicate weaknesses in the governance arrangements meant to prevent such practices from occurring.

Standards from the National Code and ESOS Regulations

The *Education Services for Overseas Students Regulations 2019* (ESOS Regulations) introduced additional obligations for providers on 1 October 2019, requiring providers to record more detailed information in the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS), including information in relation to education agents (and in accordance with Standard 4.1 of the National Code) and English language proficiency tests and exemptions (if appropriate).

Under these additional obligations, providers must now give information on education agents for every student enrolment where the agent facilitated the student's acceptance for



enrolment. Providers must also give information on the English language proficiency of students in the following circumstances:

- If the student has undertaken an English language test for the purposes of a student visa, providers are required to report the name of the English language test, the date the student took the test and the score the student received.
- If a student was exempt from taking an English language test under the *Migration Regulations 1994*, providers must report the relevant class of applicant to which the student belongs (referred to as evidence exemptions in the *Migration Regulations 1994*).

What TEQSA will look for

This part of the guidance note covers the full extent of the Standards, and corresponding evidence that TEQSA may require, in relation to the analysis and understanding of student performance.

For new applicants seeking initial registration and course accreditation, TEQSA will require evidence to be provided in relation to all relevant Standards.

For existing providers, the scope of Standards to be assessed and the evidence required may vary. This is consistent with the regulatory principles in the TEQSA Act, under which TEQSA has discretion to vary the scope of its assessments and the related evidence required. In exercising this discretion, TEQSA will be guided by the provider's regulatory history, its risk profile and its track record in delivering high quality higher education.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website. Providers should discuss with the TEQSA case manager the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

Providers are required to comply with the Standards at all times, not just at the time of application, and TEQSA may seek evidence of compliance at other times if a risk of noncompliance is identified.

TEQSA's focus is on evidence that demonstrates a provider's compliance with the requirements of the HES Framework and National Code relating to student admissions policies and procedures. TEQSA expects providers to be able to demonstrate their compliance with these Standards by presenting the necessary evidence. This involves a provider's detailed consideration of each Standard, and the provider compiling evidence in a form that allows TEQSA to conduct an informed and accurate assessment.

Admission criteria

Central to admissions requirements under the relevant Standards is a clear admissions policy and procedure that is up-to-date, regularly reviewed, appropriate to the level of qualification (including for nested courses), requires adequate academic preparation and



English language proficiency for entry into the course, and specifies delegated authorities to approve exemptions that are monitored by relevant governance bodies.

This information must be accurate and publicly available, and should be supported by an academic delegations register that records the officer(s) responsible for admission approvals and related admission decisions. Admission processes for overseas students have additional requirements for recording and reporting of each student's basis of admission.

General academic admissions criteria affect all students and need to be set at the standard required to uphold the integrity of courses and the reputation of the provider and the sector. These criteria, whether based on qualifications, relevant experience, or both, should be sufficiently rigorous to ensure students who enrol have a realistic chance of making academic progress and achieving the learning outcomes of their course.

Admission transparency

TEQSA expects that admissions requirements are presented in a clear and consistent manner. This information should include all equivalences of the basis for admission. For example, the admission criteria for an MBA may specify alternatives like a bachelor degree and three years' work experience at managerial level, or an advanced diploma and five years' work experience at managerial level.

Similarly, all acceptable equivalences for qualifications of English language proficiency should be specified. Providers should record any informal testing undertaken to determine that a student has reached a certain level of English proficiency, whether by deeming educational experience as equivalent, providing English waivers (see TEQSA's [Communication](#), 18 May 2020) or other methods. Relevant information such as those relating to fees, courses, facilities and support should be made publicly available.

Following the release of The Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) report [Improving the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions](#), the Admissions Transparency Implementation Working Group (a sector-led working group) released its report [Improving the transparency of higher education admissions: Phase two common terminology and information sets](#) in July 2018. This report sets out a suggested approach to framing terminology included in provider admissions policies in order to achieve common language use and data definitions across the sector in relation to undergraduate courses for domestic students. TEQSA suggests that providers apply the recommended approach outlined in that report as part of a provider's measures to improve the transparency of its admissions information.

TEQSA also recommends that providers clearly specify the academic standards required for admission to each course, and publish a table of equivalence for qualifications obtained in jurisdictions other than Australia (refer to Standard 7.2.2 of the HES Framework). Similarly, English language proficiency requirements obtained through various standard tests and their equivalent values, including for the provider's own tests (if any), should be clearly stated. Furthermore, there is benefit in articulating the basis of any equivalent criteria being specified. For example, if a provider considers English language proficiency to be adequate because of a completed qualification obtained in English from an institution in an English-speaking country within a recent timeframe, or from a pathway provider offering intensive English tuition, this needs to be clearly stated.



Information management

Accurate, reliable, and secure record keeping practices will assist providers in demonstrating that their admissions frameworks are effective and appropriate, and are applied consistently and equitably. Relevant records may include:

- certified copies of students' prior qualifications
- the basis of admission
- the source of the student's recruitment (for example, the name of the agent)
- the name and role of the decision maker certifying the admission
- other relevant documentation as applicable, for example, documentation in relation to the waiving of fees

In the case of a student applicant who does not meet a provider's established admissions criteria but is admitted to the course of study, the authorised decision maker should be clearly identified in the academic delegations register (or elsewhere, such as within the admission policy). A detailed record of the decision should be kept to ensure the provider can demonstrate that such approvals have been made in a manner consistent with its own established policies and procedures.

If exemptions from the publicised entry criteria are allowable, the officer authorised to approve exemptions should be clearly identified in the academic delegations register (or within the policy/procedure), and the provider should be able to demonstrate that approvals have been made by that officer. Similarly, in the case of exemptions from stated requirements for English language proficiency, the provider should record for each student the name of the test, the date the test was taken, the score achieved and the basis of any exemption, including the person who granted the exemption.

TEQSA has published a [Communication](#) on the circumstances in which it considers a provider to have granted an English waiver. TEQSA would expect circumstances in which a student is admitted entry on this basis to be very limited; where an English waiver is granted, the reason(s) for the provider's decision should be clearly documented.

In relation to overseas students, it is good practice to maintain records of individual students in PRISMS. Such records include all required information regarding the basis of admission:

- certified copies of the student's academic qualifications
- records of any credit or recognition of prior learning granted with a signed agreement from the student
- information on the education agent used (if any)
- information on the English language test used (the test's name, date of testing and result)
- a record of the name and position of the person who approved the admission
- comprehensive and up-to-date information about the student's progress, such as extensions to Confirmation of Enrolments, and records of complaints, appeals and other relevant matters

Representation and delivery with other parties

Agents and other parties that are involved in representing the provider in the recruitment and admission of students should be monitored for their performance, and prompt corrective action taken in the event or likelihood of misrepresentation or unethical conduct. A



framework for engagement and monitoring of agents and other parties engaged by the provider, and related quality assurance controls, is pivotal in assuring the integrity of the admission process and the academic preparedness of admitted students.

The *Guidance Note on Third Party Arrangements* outlines the relevant considerations in third-party arrangements; regarding admissions, it is the provider's responsibility – supported by robust governance and oversight controls – to ensure that the third party adheres to the provider's admissions policies, requirements and procedures. A provider's capacity to maintain effective oversight of its higher education admissions with third parties is critical to TEQSA's confidence in the provider's capacity to meet its obligations under the HES Framework.

Diversity and equity

Under the diversity and equity considerations of Section 2.2 of the HES Framework, admissions policies should take into account and accommodate the different admissions pathways for various identified groups. Standard 2.2.3 requires providers to monitor participation, progress and completion of identified student subgroups to inform admission policies.

TEQSA suggests that providers refer to the recent *Guidance Note: Monitoring and Analysis of Student Performance*, which is helpful in identifying particular cohorts relevant to admission standards. TEQSA suggests that providers apply the approach outlined in the Guidance Note to understand areas of risks and ensure students admitted are equipped to participate effectively in their intended study.

Progression, monitoring and review

Providers are required to monitor the progress of cohorts of students, which may include overseas students or students admitted on a particular basis of admission, such as with credit, and this should inform institutional review and improvement. Such monitoring includes monitoring progress (retention, progression and completion) on the basis of admission types and initiating action in cases of identified issues. The *Guidance Note: Monitoring and Analysis of Student Performance*, which outlines expectations around cohort analysis is of particular relevance here. Diagnostic analysis of rates and trends of student performance should be used to inform and review admission policies and procedures, entry requirements, and improvements to course design, teaching, learning and support strategies, which is a requirement of Standard 5.3.7 of the HES Framework.

Given the size and importance of overseas student cohorts in some providers, TEQSA encourages monitoring and analysis of cohorts defined in multiple ways such as on the basis of admission by country, cross-classified by the method of English testing or by the level of English proficiency attained, and by course level from undergraduate to postgraduate degrees.

Of key concern to TEQSA is whether providers' corporate and academic governing bodies are exercising sufficient oversight of operations to ensure that these Standards relating to progression, monitoring and review are being met. Providers should therefore be able to give evidence to demonstrate this effective oversight, for example, through evidence of:

- the approval of admission requirements for specific courses
- oversight and review of policies, delegations, requirements and procedures relating to admissions



- scrutiny of reports of student cohorts or identified student subgroups
- monitoring trends in student performance to enable review and improvement in accordance with institutional benchmarks, and
- utilisation of results of regular interim monitoring and comprehensive reviews to inform admission criteria.

Benchmarking admission standards

Admission policies will vary across the sector depending on the type of provider and its focus. Nonetheless, as highlighted previously, admission policies and requirements must be subject to regular periodic review, form part of the policy register of the institution, and be made publically available.

Various standards in the HES Framework relate to external referencing, benchmarking and other forms of external reviews. It is vital that a provider's admission requirements for academic standards and English language proficiency are appropriately rigorous in order to uphold the reputation of Australian higher education. For this reason it is essential that relevant policies, criteria and processes are benchmarked with comparable providers, and the results are readily available. Benchmarking will enable providers to assess whether their admissions processes and procedures match (or exceed) the standards applied by like providers, and to glean useful lessons for further improvement of those policies and procedures.

For example, providers need to be assured that their stipulated English language requirements are met, and that the level of those standards are sufficient for the demands of the course. Aside from existing formal tests such as the IELTS, TOEFL and Pearson Test of English, where providers conduct their own English proficiency tests, these should be regularly reviewed and benchmarked against other equivalent formal testing arrangements. Benchmarking is a useful tool to measure the standard of the provider's English proficiency test to ensure that the provider's test assesses all relevant areas (speaking, writing, and listening) and is comparable to existing formal tests in its level of difficulty.

The evidence gathered may include the results of external benchmarking with comparable providers of similar courses; external benchmarking of processes and outcomes; internal and external review of courses and associated admission and credit standards; internal or external review of organisational units such as marketing, and student support; and internal audit of compliance with processes and delegations.

Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. They are not definitive or binding documents. TEQSA recognises the diversity of educational delivery across the sector and acknowledges that its Guidance Notes may not encompass all of the circumstances seen in the sector. TEQSA also recognises that the requirements of the HES Framework can be met in different ways according to the circumstances of the provider. TEQSA will not prescribe how they are to be met. If in doubt, please consult your TEQSA case manager.



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Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	8 February 2021	Made available as beta version for consultation.