![Australian Government — Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency] **TEQSA**

Guidance Note: *Staffing, Learning Resources and Educational Support*

Version 1.3 (22 November 2017)

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.

What do 'staffing', 'learning resources' and 'educational support' encompass?

In the context of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework), the Sections on Staffing, Learning Resources and Educational Support encompass academic resources specifically made available for a particular course of study such as:

- the complement of staff[1] (academic, professional or other staff) who are involved directly in the supervision and/or delivery of the course

- the learning resources that are specific to supporting learning within that course (e.g. specific online reference material), even if provided from a general resource such as a library collection

- the educational (academic) support services that foster learning more generally for students in that course (e.g. learning management system).

Other staffing, facilities and resources that are of a more general nature and are not primarily academic services or specific to a particular course of study are covered elsewhere in the HES Framework, e.g. under Sections 2.1 (Facilities and Infrastructure) and 2.3 (Wellbeing and Safety). Staffing for research and research training is dealt with separately in the research Standards (Domain 4).

Relevant Standards in the HES Framework

The Standards concerned with staffing are at Section 3.2 and learning resources and educational support are covered at 3.3. Staffing related to research is encompassed by Standards 4.1.2 and 4.2.3, and is not covered by this guidance note.

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[1] For the purposes of the HES Framework, 'staff' means those who undertake particular roles, irrespective of whether they are actually employees of the provider, e.g. may include volunteers.

Intent of the Standards

The overall intent of the staffing Standards for each course of study is to ensure that sufficient staffing is provided of a level and type that reflects the nature and level of the course and the educational and other needs of the students concerned (Standard 3.2.1). This implies that some form of analysis is undertaken by the provider to understand and meet the needs of students, including needs for individual student access to staff outside of formal teaching (3.2.5).

The Standards address the teaching qualifications and skills of staff in three different ways, through:

- the provision of oversight of the course at a level appropriate for academic leadership of the level of the course concerned as well as the level of teaching resources (3.2.2)

- specific detailed requirements for academic leadership, supervision and teaching within a course of study (3.2.3)

- requirements for supervision of teachers who are involved with limited or specialised components of a course of study (3.2.4).

The Standards (at 3.2.4) recognise the practical reality that it is often desirable to involve some teachers who may not fully meet the requirements of 3.2.3 but nonetheless meet a particular educational need in a course (e.g. involvement of experienced practitioners), provided their involvement is guided and overseen by staff who do meet the requirements of 3.2.3.

The teaching qualifications, skills and experience needed in staff will vary according to their levels of responsibility, and a useful point of reference for this is the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework.

The Standards concerning the capability of teachers (including contemporary knowledge, continuing scholarship and relevant teaching skills) presuppose continuing professional development of teaching staff if a provider is to meet and continue to meet the Standards, although the Standards do not specify how this might be achieved.

The intent of the Standards for learning resources and educational support (at Section 3.3) is to ensure that the learning resources for a course are specifically and directly relevant, up-to-date and accessible to students when needed, including via a learning management system if applicable. The Standards seek to preclude unexpected barriers to access to learning resources, including:

- those resulting from significant charges for access to resources that were not made known to students before they enrolled

- mandatory use of uncommon or unduly expensive technology or platforms

- requirements for impractically high internet speeds

- limited physical access points.

The Standards also intend to ensure that learning resources and access to them are consistent with the learning needs of students, irrespective of their mode of participation. This includes resources that are specific to a course of study as well as more general learning support (Standard 3.3.4) such as support for:

- developing study skills

- development of English language proficiency

- international students who are unfamiliar with living in Australia.

Risks to Quality

The focus of the Standards on staffing is to avoid students being taught by inexperienced and/or underqualified staff, particularly staff whose level of qualifications, teaching and professional/practical experience is lower than the level of course they are teaching (including research experience for research training if applicable to the provider). The Standards also seek to avoid an environment where academic leaders have insufficient academic skills and experience to provide the necessary scholarly leadership to credibly guide and oversee teaching and learning. This includes, for example, the leadership necessary to determine academic policies and standards for the provider overall, and to guide and supervise less experienced staff. In addition, the Standards seek to prevent erosion of the quality of teaching that is inevitable if individual staff do not undertake continuing professional development appropriate to their role.

The Standards for learning resources seek to prevent:

- poor quality resources (e.g. irrelevant, obsolete, non-authoritative or insufficiently rigorous material) being provided or used

- non-timely provision, and/or

- barriers to access (insufficient resources, complex learning systems, specialised technology requirements, ineffective outsourcing of provision or inappropriate provision such as relying on the resources of a community library).

The Standards for learning resources also seek to provide more general academic support where needed for students to participate effectively in higher education at their chosen level of study, to prevent students from becoming at risk of reduced academic progress.

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 staffing, learning resources and educational support.

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.

TEQSA's case managers will discuss with providers the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website.

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 non-compliance is identified.

Staffing

TEQSA will want to be satisfied that the level and type ('profile') of staffing for all courses of study meet the requirements of the HES Framework in respect of the overall planned or current complement of staff and the capabilities of individual teachers.

New applicants applying for registration for the first time will need to provide a workforce plan showing how they will systematically build the staff needed to support students to achieve the learning outcomes of the planned courses.

The suitability of current teaching staff will be assessed in relation to their knowledge, teaching capability and qualifications (see Standard 3.2.3) as relevant to the particular course of study. TEQSA will need to be satisfied that teachers have knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline or field they are teaching, and that they have skills in contemporary teaching methods appropriate to their role.

The requirements of the Standards presuppose continuing professional development to maintain the currency and competence of teachers, e.g. through a relevant combination of continuing scholarship (of the field of education, specific discipline, and/or of teaching and learning), research or advanced practice. TEQSA will need to be satisfied that a provider's staff are indeed maintaining their capabilities as required by the Standards. TEQSA will not seek to prescribe how such development occurs, but will require a provider to provide evidence that the development occurs and that it is fit for purpose and effective in meeting and continuing to meet the relevant Standards for teachers, both individually (Standard 3.2.3) and collectively (Standard 3.2.2).

In relation to qualifications, staff who have significant teaching roles and/or responsibility for oversight and leadership of the course of study must have a qualification at least one level[2] higher than the level of course/qualification they are teaching, or have relevant equivalent

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[2] For this purpose 'level' means a level of qualification in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) or equivalent.

experience[3]. Where a provider recognises equivalent experience in place of a higher qualification, TEQSA will want to be assured that this reflects the particular educational needs of the course of study (rather than simply a matter of convenience for the provider) that cannot reasonably be addressed in other ways, and that the process of recognition of equivalent experience is guided by a credible policy that is applied consistently.

TEQSA will expect the staffing of a current or planned course of study to be determined by the learning outcomes of the course and analyses of the learning needs of students, including needs for access to staff outside of formal teaching.

TEQSA will also seek evidence that the overall staffing of the provider includes a level of academic leadership that is consistent with the provider's scale and level of educational offerings, and capable of developing and maintaining a higher education learning environment. Students are entitled to expect that their educational experiences are grounded in a strong foundation of academic leadership and communities of scholarship. In the case of a new applicant, this should be made evident through the workforce plan, but TEQSA also expects that overall academic leadership would need to be in place during the planning phases.

TEQSA has found academic leadership to be a critical success factor, especially for providers applying to enter higher education for the first time.

Learning resources and educational support

In assessing the learning resources and educational support that is offered overall, TEQSA will be concerned with three broad dimensions:

- quality

- sufficiency

- access.

In relation to the quality of the resources, TEQSA will need to be satisfied that the resources are:

- relevant to the expected learning outcomes

- appropriate to the level of study

- authoritative, and up to date.

TEQSA may seek the views of experts in the relevant field of education.

TEQSA will assess the adequacy of information resources overall as well as for each field of education offered (in the context of an application for registration) and the adequacy of information resources for each course (in the context of an application for course accreditation). This will include the availability and accessibility of full-text digital access for information resources listed (as required) on academic outlines, including book chapters, journal articles and conference papers, and to support scholarship and research in the field of education.

TEQSA recognises that information resources are increasingly available online, and that the Standards do not explicitly require the provision of a physical library space with physical books.

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[3] Academic, professional or practice-based.

If a physical library is not provided, TEQSA will expect the provider to ensure that students can readily access all the materials they are referred to by their lecturers, including those online and in various textbooks. A provider may also reach agreement with another provider for students to access its library for supplementary resources. In such cases, the library resources must be readily accessible to the students and the provider must ensure that the available resources (either provided directly or through the arrangement with the provider) are capable of meeting student needs.

Standard 3.2.1 requires in general that: '*The staffing complement for each course of study is sufficient to meet the educational, academic support and administrative needs of student cohorts undertaking the course'*.

TEQSA will expect students to have access to appropriately qualified staff, such as a librarian, to help them locate the information resources they need. If not located onsite, these qualified staff members should be accessible online. This is necessary to support students in developing their capacity for independent learning and inquiry. Students should also be given training in locating information resources during their orientation program (Standard 1.3.1).

In addition, Standard 2.1.1 requires that facilities are fit for purpose and accommodate the education activities of students and staff, and 2.1.3 requires: '*The learning environment, whether physical, virtual or blended, and associated learning activities support academic interactions among students outside of formal teaching'*. If a library space is not provided, in the case where students are taught at a campus TEQSA will expect to see some other form of open-access space where students can study and collaborate.

TEQSA will also assess the adequacy of more general educational support provided to students who are at risk (or potentially at risk) of not making sufficient progress, such as support for language development and building of academic study skills (e.g. see Section 3.3). In so doing, TEQSA will have regard to the adequacy of educational facilities overall (see Sections 2.1 and 2.3) for the relevant student cohorts and their level and mode of participation.

Evidence of processes to manage and review the provision of learning resources and how a provider ensures that they are appropriate may also be sought.

Should a provider wish to outsource provision of learning resources, e.g. to another higher education provider, TEQSA will need to be satisfied that:

- the arrangement is subject to a formal agreement

- there are no unreasonable barriers to access

- it is practicable for students (e.g. not involving unreasonable travel time).

TEQSA will not accept a model in which the provider makes no provision for information resources itself and refers students to a public library, which is unlikely to provide full access to the scholarly resources required.

Resources and references

Australian Qualifications Framework Council (2013), *Australian Qualifications Framework Second Edition January 2013,* <https://www.aqf.edu.au/>.

Australian Library and Information Association website, <https://www.alia.org.au/>.

The University of Western Australia, Murdoch University, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University and Notre Dame University, *Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework*, <http://uniteachingcriteria.edu.au/>.

Council of Australian University Librarians (2016), *Principles and Guidelines for Australian Higher Education Libraries 2016*, <http://www.caul.edu.au/content/upload/files/best-practice/principles-guidelines2016public.pdf>.

Council of Australian University Librarians website, <http://www.caul.edu.au/>. Quality Assurance Agency (March 2015), *Subject Benchmark Statement: Librarianship, Information, Knowledge, Records and Archives Management*, <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance>.

TEQSA (2016), *Explanations of terms in Part A of the HES Framework 2015*, <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/explanations-hes-framework-terms>.

TEQSA (2016), Guidance Note on *Determining Equivalence of Professional Experience and Academic Qualifications*, <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/hesf-2015-specific-guidance-notes>.

TEQSA welcomes 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 HESF can be met in different ways according to the circumstances of the provider. Provided the requirements of the HESF are met, TEQSA will not prescribe how they are met. If in doubt, please consult your TEQSA case manager.

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	19 August 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation. Replaces previous guidance notes on 'Workforce Planning' and 'Information Resources'.
1.1	1 March 2017	Additional CAUL resource added.
1.2	8 March 2017	Updated to refer to the need for a workforce plan for prospective providers.
1.3	22 November 2017	Clarification that students must have access to a qualified librarian, and addition to 'What will TEQSA look for?' text box.