

Australian Catholic University

Feedback to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

Discussion Paper: Making and Assessing Claims of Scholarship and Scholarly Activity

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Feedback to TEQSA on Making and Assessing Claims of Scholarship and Scholarly Activity

Australian Catholic University (ACU) acknowledges the opportunity to provide feedback to TEQSA in response to the *Discussion Paper: Making and Assessing Claims of Scholarship and Scholarly Activity* (Discussion Paper).

The Discussion Paper proposes a set of principles to guide providers when offering evidence of their capacity to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) in relation to scholarship, and to inform TEQSA's assessments of claims of scholarship and scholarly activity.

ACU broadly supports the principles proposed in the Discussion Paper. It is imperative, however, that TEQSA develop clear and supportive guidance notes to inform higher education providers on how scholarship and scholarly activities will be measured and assessed in practice, particularly with respect to the evidencing of scholarly outputs or outcomes. Furthermore, providers should be afforded adequate lead time to respond to, and implement, these reforms to ensure they satisfy TEQSA's assessment requirements and reporting obligations.

ACU provides the following feedback in response to the principles and issues raised in the Discussion Paper.

Principle 1. Classification of an activity as scholarship for regulatory purposes

Principle 1 relates to classifying an activity as scholarship for regulatory purposes. Namely, to provide evidence of scholarship for regulatory purposes, the proposed scholarly activity must be consistent with an established typology of "scholarship". TEQSA proposes that evidence of scholarly activity would need to be consistent with one of the following types of activity:

- an activity consistent with *at least one* of the forms of scholarship described in the framework developed by Boyer (1990); that is the scholarship of (i) discovery, (ii) integration, (iii) application or (iv) teaching; or
- an activity of a similar kind that is consistent with subsequent peer-reviewed adaptations of the Boyer framework; or
- an activity of a similar kind that is evidently consistent with some other credible typology of scholarship that embraces similar principles and is acceptable to TEQSA. (Discussion Paper, p. 3)

ACU supports the use of the framework developed by Boyer and its four dimensions of scholarship.

Principle 2. Demonstration of outputs or outcomes arising from scholarship

Principle 2 provides that "evidence of scholarship must include demonstrable links to intended outputs or outcomes of that scholarship and be accompanied by mechanisms to monitor and evaluate those outputs or outcomes." (Discussion Paper, p. 4)

ACU supports the proposed approach to demonstrating the application of Principle 1, as outlined in the Discussion Paper. However, in the examples of Principle 2 and its application, particularly with respect to demonstrating outcomes or outputs from scholarly activities and improvements, the following could explicitly be incorporated:

1. Advancement in the assessment of learning outcomes (not just the advancement of the learning outcomes as referenced in this section).
2. Increases in student engagement as evidence of scholarship.
3. Scholarship influencing the structure and design of teaching (for example, class size, lectures vs. workshops, synchronous vs. asynchronous models of learning).
4. An increased focus on the student perspective and student satisfaction as evidence of scholarship.

Principle 3. Activities that are not necessarily seen as scholarship

Principle 3 provides that “activities such as professional and community engagement, professional development and routine professional/artistic practice will not be regarded as scholarship unless they meet the requirements of Principles 1 and 2.” (Discussion Paper, p. 6)

ACU supports this principle and its application. It is appropriate that, for example, if a community engagement activity/project is linked directly to curriculum and demonstrates evidence of improving the delivery of that curriculum with improved learning outcomes and student engagement, then it could be classified as “scholarship.”

ACU supports TEQSA’s acknowledgement that while the HESF applies to all providers, those requirements “may manifest in a variety of different practices according to context”, and that “the nature of scholarly activity and evidence of its outputs may vary between campuses” (Discussion Paper, pp. 2-3). At ACU, for example, Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Units (SESU) provide scholarly expertise and research assistance to organisations working in areas central to ACU’s mission and ethos as a Catholic university.¹ This form of community engagement sees ACU researchers participating in stakeholder engaged scholarship projects which are guided by the needs of the organisations ACU partners with.

It is important that TEQSA’s assessment of scholarship or scholarly outcomes duly recognises activities such as institutional mission-based community engagement activities (including the examples noted above) which fit into the broad Boyer framework, as scholarship.

Principle 4. Provider involvement in scholarship

Principle 4 provides that higher education providers “will be able to present a plan to create an environment of scholarship, which is monitored and reviewed, together with an aggregate representation of their involvement in scholarship within the context of the requirements of the HESF.” (Discussion Paper, p. 7).

ACU supports this principle but recommends TEQSA provide some exemplars of this principle in practice to guide providers, as it refers to quite a broad and in-depth aspect of the HESF. Scholarship has benefits to the individual academic, academic discipline(s) and the institution as a whole. While scholarly activity is widely evident in universities it is linked to individual academics and/or individual activities, and often at the discipline level. Aggregating the wide range of activity for the purposes of adhering to Principle 4 will require careful consideration and potentially additional resourcing.

Principle 5. Diversity of approaches to scholarship across the sector

Principle 5 provides that “TEQSA will accept different approaches to scholarship that reflect the nature of the provider.” (Discussion Paper, p. 8).

ACU broadly supports this principle and the examples provided, also noting the comments above regarding Principle 3.

However, ACU seeks further guidance from TEQSA on how scholarship and scholarly activities will practically be assessed, particularly with respect to evidencing outputs or outcomes.

Fundamentally, it is imperative that TEQSA provides clarity, through guidance notes, as to the level of expectation on providers when it comes to measuring and reporting on activities. For example, it is foreseeable that issues may arise in relation to how providers utilise the different options (definitions) for evidencing scholarly activity. To this end, ACU seeks specific advice on the following:

- How will TEQSA objectively determine the appropriateness of a scholarly activity and the evidence to support it?

¹ For further information see <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/community-engagement/stakeholder-engaged-scholarship-unit>

- What provisions will be made to provide individual providers with guidance and feedback on whether their chosen measures and reporting on scholarly activities will be deemed as appropriate measures by TEQSA? What outputs or outcomes will be considered as appropriate evidencing of scholarly activity?
- What is the timeframe over which outputs or outcomes of scholarly activities will be assessed by TEQSA, and when will providers be required to report?

Essentially, providers will require advice from TEQSA about the appropriateness of evidence they propose to provide to demonstrate scholarly activity and to ensure long-term adherence with the principles. TEQSA should provide such advice, and feedback to individual providers, at the outset; before scarce resources are dedicated to meeting any new reporting obligations. Furthermore, especially given evidence may need to be gathered and routinely documented over time, providers should receive this guidance from TEQSA early on, rather than leaving it to the point of assessment.

Finally, TEQSA's timeline to introduce these reforms should afford providers sufficient lead time to implement any changes that may be required to ensure arrangements for internal reporting and evidencing of scholarly activities meet TEQSA's requirements.

ATTACHMENT A - Australian Catholic University Profile

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none, and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition.

ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with eight campuses, across four states, one territory, and overseas. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD), Adelaide (SA), and Rome (Italy). ACU's campus in Blacktown (NSW) will open in 2021.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world. Today, ACU has around 32,000 students and 2,000 staff.²

ACU is ranked first in Australia when it comes to graduate employment outcomes.³ ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning.

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education. ACU produces more nursing and teaching graduates than any other university in Australia, serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas.⁴

ACU has four faculties: Health Sciences; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. This consolidation of ACU's previous six faculties in 2014 has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU has also moved towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its research intensification efforts, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in its research institutes.⁵ ACU is a world-leading research university in its priority areas of education, health, and theology and philosophy.

² Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

³ QILT 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey, Longitudinal, full-time employment (August 2020).

⁴ Department of Education and Training, '2017 Special Courses' in *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data* (2018). Accessible via <https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2017-student-data>.

⁵ See Australian Catholic University, 'Research at ACU' via <http://www.acu.edu.au/>.