

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Setting and Monitoring

Academic Standards for

Australian Higher Education

Feedback on Responses to the Discussion Paper

Over 50 responses were received. There was broad support for the sector developing a better understanding of standards, and making standards more explicit, but different perspectives on the best way forward. Some respondents were positive about the ideas in the discussion paper, some were critical, and some were cautionary. Many offered useful suggestions for ways in which AUQA could take the matter forward.

General Messages

Comments on the following featured in many responses:

- Any work on standards should make use of the professions and professional accreditation. (This was the intention of the paper, as also use of any other relevant discipline-based groups or activities.)
- Systems in place at the moment are sufficient. These include institutional specification of learning outcomes, external benchmarking, and assessment moderation, together with AUQA audit of the extent to which each institution is achieving the outcomes.
- Some respondents feel that the levels and outcomes specified in a qualifications framework should suffice. Therefore, as the AQF is being revised it should take on this work also and specify the standards to be achieved.
- Ensure that the project builds on current work, both national and international, particularly the ATN's standards project, Tuning and AHELO.
- Where do generic skills and interdisciplinary work fit into this proposal?

Main Criticisms

The main negative reactions can be summarised as follows.

- The proposal would be homogenising, would lead to standardisation and a national curriculum, and would deter innovation.
- It would be impossible to achieve the intended goals: if the process were specific enough to make the intended definitive statements, it would be too intrusive into institutional activities; but if not, then it would be too general to be useful.
- The project would be extremely expensive. A cost-benefit analysis should be carried out before any further work is done.
- Any initial outputs of the project would need constant revision and updating to remain current (further adding to the cost).

Other Issues

The following matters were also mentioned.

- The project does not make reference to value-adding.
- Such specifications would entrench the current perceptions of which institutions are prestigious.
- Such specifications would not assist in achieving the new access targets.

- The proposals do not cover (adequately or at all) research, HDR level study, or community engagement.
- What is the role of the graduation statement? Could it be extended to cover what is proposed?

The Advisory Group also commissioned an 'environmental scan'. This has looked at work on describing, assessing and reporting standards in several countries, and will feed into any further work carried out or initiated by the Advisory Group.

AUQA's Advisory Group considered the responses and identified several next steps.

A list of submissions that respondents said could be made public is on the AUQA website, along with the submissions themselves.