

What are the ‘Threshold Standards’ and why they are important in the higher education context

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The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) was refreshed in 2021 with very few minor changes in fact. The standards articulate the requirements that must be met (threshold) for both registration and accreditation as a Higher Education Provider - <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/higher-education-standards-framework-2021>

There are 7 domains in all – student participation; learning environment; teaching; research and research training; institutional quality assurance; governance and accountability; representation, informational and informational management.

Student participation and attainment

The framework aims at ensuring student participation and attainment. The fundamental being providing students (both domestic and international) with a safe, well-tuned and supportive environment where they can achieve an appropriate certified qualification. And at the same time feel safe and supported in their endeavours.

Each domain is segmented so that the Standard can be viewed in considerable detail. The sub setting/sections are guides to what is needed to meet the standards and provide a useful framework to provide the necessary evidence and supporting documentation. The standards are designed to be useful to providers in the process of internally assuring what is best practice.

Our own institutions address **6** of the 7 Standards – given the fact that we currently do not teach research (Standard 4) nor offer research awards. The 6 Standards are summarised accordingly –

STANDARD 1 | STUDENT PARTICIPATION & ATTAINMENT

Institutional Confidence Rating:	<p>This Domain (Sections 1.1-1.5) within the <i>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</i> (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the basis for admission of students to a course of study, including requirements for adequate academic preparation for the course and formal explicit contractual arrangements between the provider and studentsassurance that any credit granted for prior learning does not disadvantage the student concerned or compromise the integrity of the course of studyorientation to a course of study, support for transition to a course of study, early feedback on student performance, detection and support for students at risk of unsatisfactory progress and monitoring of success rates at cohort levelequivalence of opportunities for success irrespective of a student's background or mode of participationspecification, assessment, achievement and external referencing of expected learning outcomes, andlegitimate issuing and certification of qualifications.
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STANDARD 2 | LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*Institutional Confidence Rating:	<p>Evidence [where applicable]</p> <p>This Domain (Sections 2.1-2.4) within the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the nature, access to and fitness for purpose of the learning environment under the control of the provider (without presupposing any <u>particular model</u> of participation or delivery), diversity of participation and the wellbeing of staff and students, andAccess to effective mechanisms to address students' grievances should they arise. <p>Much of the background material to demonstrate that these Standards are met must be publicly accessible (see Domain 7)</p>
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STANDARD 3 | TEACHING

*Institutional Confidence Rating:	<p>This Domain (Sections 3.1-3.3) within the <i>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</i> (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• specific requirements for the specification of the course design and requirements for engagement with advanced knowledge and enquiry, current knowledge, theoretical frameworks and concepts, related scholarship and emerging ideas• coherent achievement of learning outcomes and professional accreditation of a course of study if applicable• sufficiency of staffing, capability of teaching staff, student access to staff, and• the nature, appropriateness, quality and level of access to learning resources that are specific to the course of study.
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STANDARD 5 | INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Institutional Confidence Rating:	<p>This Domain (Sections 5.1-5.4) within the <i>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</i> (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• whether the provider has a credible and effective process for internal approval of all courses of study that is applied consistently and involves competent academic oversight and scrutiny independent of those directly involved in the delivery of the courses of study (5.1)• the effectiveness of the policy framework and processes that are applied to maintain academic integrity throughout the provider's academic activities (including arrangements with other parties) and to address and prevent lapses in academic integrity (5.2)• the mechanisms for regular review of the quality of higher education activities and how the findings of such reviews are used to bring about improvements (5.3), and• How delivery arrangements with other parties are quality assured, including verification of the continuing compliance of those arrangements with the requirements of the HES Framework (5.4).
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STANDARD 6 | GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*Institutional Confidence Rating:	<p>This Domain (Sections 6.1-6.3) within the <i>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</i> (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specification of an accountable governing body with some elaboration of its key governance roles• Specific corporate accountabilities to be demonstrated by the provider, which the governing body also assures itself are met, and• Requirements for academic governance oversight of a provider's higher education activities.
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STANDARD 7 | REPRESENTATION, INFORMATION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

<p>*Institutional Confidence Rating:</p>	<p>Unique Standards Proposition – Our Institution, Our Strategy Adding Value Through the Standards</p> <p>"Greater collaboration with researchers to create alignment between research and the problems they are facing, with the aim of developing innovative solutions to old and new problems that will deliver improved outcomes".</p> <p>"In order to fully capitalise on this new paradigm, Australia's higher education providers will need to innovate their business models and underlying value propositions to remain competitive – ensuring they are more 'nimble and enterprising' than they have ever been. This will involve exploring new markets and segments and developing innovative products and services to meet changing demands of learners and industry" - Deloitte Strategy 2016</p> <p>This Domain (Sections 7.1-7.3) within the <u>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015</u> (HES Framework) encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whether the provider's representations (whether directly or through other parties) about itself and the <u>courses</u> of study it offers are accurate, ethical and not misleading in their claims (7.1)• Whether there is sufficient publicly available information to assist students in making informed choices about selecting a course of study, to enable effective and informed participation in a chosen course of study and to resolve grievances if necessary, including the <u>particular needs of international students studying in Australia</u> (7.2)• The existence of a readily accessible public description of the provider and its operations, and• The requirement that the provider's information management system meets certain critical requirements concerning content, security and integrity (7.3).
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The importance of regular auditing

It is essential to be cognisant of the requirements of the various standards and regularly review the institution against the standards by way of ongoing Threshold Standards Audits. *This needs to be done regularly and consistently – ideally quarterly.*

Further, the issue of risk is significant - and a similar process should be followed using regular reviews (rolling audits) of a formal Risk Register that overviews risk at the institution and provides the Board of Directors (and Academic Board) with a clear understanding of the prevailing issues and what kind of mitigation is in place – as needed.

Combined, the two sets of regular audits – standards and risk - provide a high level of sureness for the organisation and at the same time highlight issues or domains that need more attention or focus.

Ongoing audit against external standards is essential to maintain the health of the institution. Augmenting this with regular external auditing (this includes external membership of audit committees and independent reviews) also proves extremely useful and makes the process of registration and accreditation much more efficient and focussed.

Also worth reading –

Rolling Audits – a mechanism for self-assurance (August 2024) -

[6113ad_beb80a2de7ae43dc9fb8c7bedfa4e78b.pdf](#)

Self-Assurance is the name of the game (June 2025) -

[6113ad_01ebe83fd03b40568654a89c9b4d714b.pdf](#)

The yellow line and the giraffe – revisited (June 2025) -

[6113ad_7ceeeffef164cdbae32e84a11b16cd5.pdf](#)

Understanding self-assurance at an organisational level (August 2025) -

[6113ad_77fe58912c6a4a7ab91de7696116a391.pdf](#)

The importance of HESF Standards 5 and 6 (September 2025) -

[6113ad_090b49407fa34d32a81578d596f8976a.pdf](#)

Key elements of a compliance frame work (November 2025) -

[6113ad_d95f29b687154f17928aa93da956a45b.pdf](#)

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