Submission in response to the Higher Education Standards Panel Call for Comment (Number 3, 23 April 2014)

June 2014

Submitted on behalf of the Australian Library and Information Association:
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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (www.alia.org.au) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

We approach this submission from two perspectives. Firstly, we are the professional body that accredits library and information science courses in higher education institutions. Secondly, our members include University libraries and the library and information professionals who work in them.

2. Purpose of our submission

We welcome the review of the Higher Education Standards Framework:

1. We are keen to work collaboratively with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and other professional bodies to reduce duplication, improve efficiency and ensure the quality of LIS courses within Australian Universities.

2. We seek to support TEQSA's role by providing a stronger framework and guidelines for the assessment of library and information service provision to all students, researchers and educators, allowing for flexibility and variety in delivery methods and ensuring a baseline level of quality across the sector.

3. Detailed response

These are our comments in relation to the proposed Higher Education Standards Framework. ALIA is mainly concerned with Part A, Standards for Higher Education.

Domain 1: Student participation and attainment

1.5 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

We seek to remind the panel of the role of library and information professionals in research training for students. On completion of research training it is imperative that students have the knowledge and skills for disseminating their research outcomes in an increasingly open access environment. Including 'dissemination' in 1.5.5 provides an additional element to the standard for review and benchmarking. We propose that 1.5.5.d. read 'skills in analysis, criticism and reporting or research, and presentation, publication and dissemination of their research.'

We note there is no reference to an institutional repository as a requirement for higher education providers and yet we see the creation of metadata, the storage, facilitation of long term access and dissemination of research as fundamental to a university's responsibilities.

Domain 2: Learning environment

2.1 Facilities

The requirement for facilities to be fit for purpose, provide adequate capacity and secure access to information and communication, and support interactions outside of formal teaching speaks to the library agenda. Library facilities and services, physical and virtual, are essential to student success and are of relevance to all providers. University libraries, VET libraries and public libraries have as their mission to support students in their learning, and agreements and partnerships with all types of providers are currently in place.

2.2 Diversity and Equity

2.2.1 'Institutional policies, practices and approaches to teaching and learning are designed to accommodate student diversity' can extend to diversity of collections and support from library staff for students from diverse backgrounds, especially those for whom English is a second language.

Domain 3: Teaching

3.1 Course Design

3.1.5 'Where professional accreditation of a course of study is required for graduates to be eligible to practise, the course of study is accredited and continues to be accredited by the relevant professional body.' We would like to see this amended to read, 'Where professional accreditation of a course of study is desirable or required for graduates to be eligible to practise, the course of study is accredited and continues to be accredited by the relevant professional body.' Library and information professionals, for example, are not required to undertake an accredited course of study in order to work in libraries, but it is highly desirable, as many positions are advertised seeking applicants who are eligible for ALIA professional membership ie have studied an ALIA accredited course.

3.3 Learning Resources & Educational Support

We support the following proposed amendments to this section:

To ensure that students have access to core resources, services and facilities to facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes, an explicit reference to library and library collections should be made within section 3.3. An example of how this could be addressed is offered below:

3.3 Learning and Library Resources and Educational Support

1.   The learning and library resources* that are specified or recommended for a course of study relate directly to the learning outcomes, are up to date and, where supplied as part of a course of study, are accessible when needed by students.

2. Where learning and library resources are part of an electronic learning management system, all users have timely access to the system and training is available in use of the system.

3. Access to learning and library resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off campus.
4. Students have access to learning and library support services that are consistent with the requirements of their course of study, their mode of study and learning needs of student cohorts, including arrangements for supporting and maintaining contact with students who are off campus.

* 'learning and library resources' includes library collections, literature, creative works, notes, laboratory facilities, studio sessions, simulations and software.

In addition, for the final point, 3.3.4 'Students have access to learning support services ...', we would like to draw the panel's attention to the role of libraries and library and information professionals, as providers of learning support services to students on- and off-campus. As flexible approaches and flipped classroom trends increase, students are using attractively designed and modern library environments as part of their growing use of informal learning spaces.

Domain 4: Research and Research Training

We note that libraries have significant value to add in research training, not only in information literacy, but also in supporting better data management and providing repository services, software tools and expert guidance. More resources are needed in this area, not only for the benefit of students, but also for academics.

Domain 5: Quality assurance

5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement

5.3.2 The role of professional bodies in supporting TEQSA's accreditation at the course level could be specifically mentioned in this section.

4. In conclusion

ALIA is both the professional body accrediting library and information science courses in higher education institutions and we are Association representing library and information professionals who work in University libraries.

As an accrediting body, we look forward to working with TEQSA to support its work in maintaining standards of excellence across all our higher education providers.

As the Association representing library and information professionals, we seek to ensure that the Higher Education Standards Framework reflects the need for students, researchers and educators to have ready access to quality library and information services. We are

concerned that in condensing the existing Threshold Standards, the proposed new Framework could water down the requirements for higher education providers and result in a reduced focus on quality library and information services.

We note that standards and guidelines being developed by the Council of Australian University Librarians will assist accrediting bodies measure and evaluate library and information services against industry benchmarks and best practice.