

IRU Response to TEQSA discussion paper on Scholarship

Overview

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has proposed five principles to guide a revised approach to how TEQSA considers whether a higher education provider is achieving the standards that involve 'scholarship'.

IRU members seek to create a culture of scholarship supported through university wide leadership, plans and actions.

'Scholarship' is mentioned nine times in the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF), five of which relate to the categories of providers and the holding of self-accrediting powers. The four relating to the delivery of education require that:

- current and recent scholarship inform the content of each course (3.1)
- staff knowledge is informed by continuing scholarship *or* research *or* advances in practice [IRU highlights use of 'or' not 'and'] (3.2); and
- research training takes place in an environment of several factors including scholarship (4.2.2).

TEQSA points to other standards concerning the overall approach to teaching where it sees the notion of scholarship behind the words and hence it argues relevant to assessing those standards. These standards focus on the courses provided and the learning outcomes achieved.

It is critical that TEQSA continues to assess against the standards and not create enhanced requirements for what is sufficient to provide higher education. A discussion of what scholarship means and involves is useful. It is not useful for TEQSA to attempt to be prescriptive about what is involved or to put more emphasis on one concept than the standards support.

With the growing need for providers to engage with industry and initiate work-based learning opportunities, the notions of scholarship need to interact effectively with these newer ways to educate students and not contradict the policy driving industry linkages.

As ever the need to ensure that the regulatory approach is proportionate to risk and necessity is paramount. It must support development of future higher education while ensuring current delivery is consistent with expectations of the higher education standards framework.

The assessment of scholarship must achieve a sensible outcome of a focus at the institutional approach within the university and its major teaching components, that draws on the precise activity and achievement of individual staff members as illustrative.

Principle 4, the expectation of an institutional plan and its successful implementation, should be the core requirement for an effective TEQSA assessment of scholarship.

Approach to five principles

In response to each of the principles and related questions:

1. the IRU supports TEQSA using Principle 1, that scholarship be based in an established typology, with the proviso that TEQSA does not endorse any given typology;
2. the IRU does not support Principle 2, which ignores the breadth of ways in which scholarship is developed to require too direct a link from action to broad outcome;
3. the IRU proposes that Principle 3 be rewritten in the positive:
“Activities such as professional and community engagement, professional development and routine professional/artistic practice that are consistent with Principles 1 &2 will be regarded as scholarship”;
4. the IRU supports principle 4, with its focus on the institutional plan and its successful implementation, as the core requirement for an effective TEQSA assessment of scholarship;
5. the IRU supports Principle 5 - that different approaches to scholarship are acceptable; and
6. the IRU does not agree that the provider categories form a useful basis from which to outline different approaches to scholarship. The approach to scholarship should be driven by the nature of the higher education provider’s courses and delivery.

The following sections consider each of the principles and the final question about the relationship of provider types to scholarship.

Principle 1. To provide evidence of scholarship for regulatory purposes, the proposed scholarly activity must be consistent with an established typology of ‘scholarship’.

The IRU supports the expectation that scholarly activity has a scholarly underpinning, which could be expressed as a typology. However, the application of the HESF does not lend itself to one model.

This means that TEQSA needs to avoid endorsing a particular model or even models. Rather, it is for the university and the staff who work for it to demonstrate how the models chosen are well based and used effectively.

Typically, the risk for the quality body is to be more aware of longer standing typologies at the risk of hampering development of newer and potentially more relevant examples.

For example, the discussion paper expends considerable time using the Boyer model, 1990, as its exemplar. O’Brien et al (2019) argue that while the Boyer model continues to broadly capture key types of scholarship, it fails to capture the interconnectedness of these activities nor their strategic intent. Arising from their qualitative study of health education scholarship units they identified three strategic purposes of scholarship:

1. supporting a scholarly approach to education;
2. supporting educational scholarship throughout the institution;
3. supporting an individual’s scholarship.

The Teaching Category broadly refers to classroom research and there is a considerable value examining more systematic models of research such as Design Based Research (DBR) (Reeves, 2006; McKenney & Reeves, 2014). DBR is showing considerable research promise particularly in technology enhanced learning settings (Figure 1).

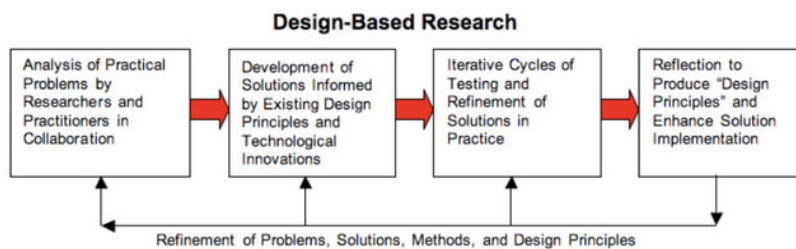


Figure 1: Representation of the design-based research model (Reeves, 2006, p. 59)

Another typology is that of Trigwell (2013) who outlines three defining features of scholarship:

1. There must be public knowledge of and access to actions;
2. Actions should be available for critical review and evaluation;
3. Actions should be made available for use by others.

These illustrate that there are several potential typologies with more recent scholarly work advancing on the Boyer concepts.

The IRU supports TEQSA using Principle 1, that scholarship be based in an established typology, with the proviso that TEQSA does not endorse any given typology

Principle 2. 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.

Principle 2 does not work. It is unnecessary against the expectation of Principle 4 that there be a plan that guides the activities to strengthen scholarship across the university. Consistent with that plan there needs to be links from the intent to activities to effort to assess the impact of the activities for the university's education outcomes.

It is difficult to quantify scholarship outputs or outcomes, disentangling them from a range of activities, without hampering the effective running of the university or HE provider.

IRU member submissions highlight the breadth of relevant activities and outcomes from scholarly activity of staff, some which lead directly to notable changes in course delivery and student outcomes, while many others which lead to important personal improvements in knowledge and capability of individual staff members that would be foolish to attempt to assess precisely.

For the institution, scholarship should be underpinned by quality systems and processes which are informed by the application of contemporary knowledge, with a focus on reporting student outcomes as indicators of successful application of scholarship.

For individuals, the outcomes will relate to changes in knowledge and skills that will support better delivery program by program. Institutions should have internal means to be confident that this

happens but the detailed application should be beyond the scope for a standard registration or accreditation process.

The suggestions in the paper that TEQSA would expect to consider the scholarship activity and outcomes for individual staff extends the broad use of scholarship in the standards beyond its requirements. The effect, if applied literally and in detail, would be to distort scholarship activity to those elements with simpler outputs of a document or publication away from the many actions that enhance staff effectiveness.

The IRU does not support Principle 2, which ignores the breadth of ways in which scholarship is developed to require too direct a link from action to broad outcome.

Principle 3. 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 & 2.

The activities of scholarship should be considered within the context of professional and community engagement. The need to strengthen industry relevant outcomes for students including use of people from industry linkages will support contemporary developments in teaching which lend themselves to scholarship activity. Imposing individual reporting on industry partners may deter engagement with providers.

The HE Standards at 3.2 (3) (a) indicate that knowledge of contemporary developments can be informed by one of scholarship, research or advances in practice. Through being clear about the breadth permitted, universities and other providers will then have more scope to engender scholarship broadly but allow individuals to emphasise different aspects of academic work including practice.

This suggests the principle should be rewritten to have a positive emphasis.

The IRU proposes that Principle 3 be rewritten in the positive:

“Activities such as professional and community engagement, professional development and routine professional/artistic practice that are consistent with Principles 1 & 2 will be regarded as scholarship”.

Principle 4. 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 content of the requirements of the HES Framework.

Principle 4 addresses the major area of focus for a TEQSA assessment. It goes to how the whole institution approaches scholarship and its internal capability to deliver its plan. Local level success and impact should provide supporting evidence rather than be the subject of detailed regular scrutiny. As with most aspects of delivery it is the university’s (or provider’s) ability to act on weaknesses and promote good practice that matters more than the individual cases.

IRU members seek to create a culture of scholarship supported through university wide leadership, plans and actions. The assessment of how well the plan meets the expectations for support of scholarship and its implementation should be the TEQSA focus in registration assessments.

The IRU supports principle 4, with its focus on the institutional plan and its successful implementation, as the core requirement for an effective TEQSA assessment of scholarship.

Principle 5. TEQSA will accept different approaches to scholarship that reflect the nature of the provider.

This approach is appropriate and aligns with the intent of the HESF. The varied interpretations of scholarship and their application in the context of individual providers should be considered without imposing a defined approach.

The IRU supports Principle 5 that different approaches to scholarship are acceptable.

Question 6. Are there specific types of scholarship inputs and outputs within each provider type that should be considered as integral requirements to ensure that the reputation of the sector is upheld?

The provider categories give a general description of the attributes of the provider that are common to others in the category. Most providers fit into a general HE provider group that contains a wide variety of providers.

Assuming the proposed new category for well-established teaching focused providers is created, which is likely in 2021, that group will cover a range of individual institutional aims and approaches to education delivery.

The current category standards refer to general providers having “academic staff active in scholarship” and that universities, university colleges and specialised universities “demonstrate sustained scholarship”.

As proposed, the future standards for the established HE providers and for universities would require that they “demonstrate systematic support for scholarship and demonstrate scholarly activities and outcomes that inform teaching, learning, and professional practice and make a contribution to the advancement and dissemination of knowledge”.

None of this indicates that the nature of scholarship should be distinctive to a particular category. Rather the wording of the standards, current and proposed, leaves the approach to scholarship to each provider to determine consistent with its mission and the broad concepts of scholarship discussed in response to the five principles.

The IRU does not agree that the provider categories form a useful basis from which to outline different approaches to scholarship. The approach to scholarship should be driven by the nature of the higher education provider’s courses and delivery.