



Australian Universities Quality Agency

Chair: Emeritus Professor Deryck Schreuder

Executive Director: Dr David Woodhouse

Level 10 123 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000
Australia

Tel: +61-3-9664-1000
Fax: +61-3-9639-7377
Email: admin@auqa.edu.au

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The article in the HES of 23/09 on reactions to the AUQA discussion paper on academic achievement standards did not recognise any of the positive responses or comments in the submissions. Most responses – even the critical ones – contained suggestions for further progress. The IRU submission has a particularly helpful agenda, and the Go8 submission concludes by saying that educational qualifications should “testify to achievement at least at the nationally set minimum threshold standards” which means standards should be set and be measurable, which is the point that the discussion paper is making.

The article also fails to acknowledge that several bodies are considering taking the work forward in various ways that build on or respond to the points made in the submissions.

1. Several respondents said we had not paid enough attention to the ATN's work on standards. Consequently, Curtin and RMIT have agreed to write up this work in a publicly available form.
2. Other respondents said that terms should be used more precisely. When the ATN work is complete, the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at The University of Melbourne will look at defining precise terminology that is relevant to both the ATN usages and the discussion paper itself.
3. The ACER is drafting a proposal for a project to develop principles that should underlie and underpin any work on standards.
4. Several respondents said that what is needed is for institutions to define learning outcomes and the processes for evaluating them, and that an external body should then determine whether the institution was doing this rigorously and effectively. (This is a strengthening of AUQA's current approach and processes.) AUQA is commissioning a project to look at institutional good practice in this regard, and propose improvements, in conjunction with the DVCs(Academic).
5. Finally, the AUQA Working Group includes a nominee of the ALTC to ensure that the work of the Group could build on the ALTC's work in its discipline groupings. The ALTC now intends to take forward six pilot projects (one in each of its discipline groupings) to see whether the suggestions in the discussion paper are feasible.

The article, and some quoted respondents, are erecting straw men. Of course there should not be a prescribed curriculum, conformity or standardisation. Why would AUQA suddenly propose this when its core brief and energetic commitment have been to institutional diversity?

But there must be a way of reporting on and explaining graduate performance, which is not solely about input measures or satisfaction measures or other proxies. This will need both relevant data and professional judgement.

Dr David Woodhouse
Executive Director