

# HISTORY IN PRACTICE

## Applying standards to tertiary-level history

Policy, challenges and the *After Standards* project

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This paper discusses the challenges of applying standards to the teaching of tertiary-level history. It gives a critical overview of the emerging standards process in Australia, re-emphasising the importance of disciplinary input in producing a workable and acceptable regulatory framework under the aegis of Australia's recently-established Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). To this end, it argues for the importance of building capacity within the history discipline both to engage with policy makers in coming months, and to take an active role in defining and implementing national standards for tertiary history. It suggests the potential of grassroots initiatives such as the *After Standards* project to assist historians in meeting this challenge.

This article has been peer-reviewed.

The prospect of applying national standards to the teaching of tertiary-level history within a national regulatory environment presents the discipline of history with challenges and possibilities. The possibilities can only be realised if historians are actively involved in designing and implementing new learning and teaching outcomes for history – whether they are based on the discipline-generated Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) released by the now obsolete Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in December 2010, or on new criteria to be formulated under the recently established Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

This article will provide a brief history of the standards process, showing the importance of disciplinary input into the translation of draft standards into a workable regulatory framework. It will also suggest some of the ways in which the history discipline community may play a significant role in the emerging regulatory environment. We emphasise the importance of grassroots involvement in discussions about curriculum reform and the standards implementation process – both among historians from every program in Australia, and between Australian historians and overseas experts. Only through such widespread engagement, we argue, can our discipline develop an informed consensus about how abstract criteria might be applied to ensure minimum standards while still encouraging creativity and innovation. We also argue that the discipline community needs urgently to build capacity to meet the challenge of standards. We suggest that the Australian Historical Association (AHA) has a role to play, leading disciplinary engagement with the standards design and implementation process. To fulfil this potential, the AHA will need a formal Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) presence, with the capacity both to engage with government policy development and, potentially, to assist in the compliance process itself.

Finally, we will show how our ALTC-funded *After Standards* project (ALTC 2011), administered by the University of New South Wales, the University of New England and the University of Queensland, is helping to build disciplinary capacity.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, we hope that the *After Standards* project will facilitate a sector-wide engagement with standards implementation by addressing challenges facing the discipline under the national Higher Education Standards Framework, gathering and sharing knowledge about the practice of teaching history around Australia and instigating the translation of standards into a shared process of reflection on excellence and best practice in Australian tertiary-level history teaching.

## The standards process

In the last decade, higher education systems across the world have developed quality assurance and quality improvement frameworks to evaluate what students actually gain from a university education.

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1 ALTC 'After standards: engaging and embedding history's standards using international best practice to inform curriculum renewal', 2011. Updated 19 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.altc.edu.au/project-after-standards-engaging-and-embedding-historys-standards-using-international-best-practice->.

The British Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Honours Benchmark Statements (2004), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005), the Spellings Inquiry into Higher Education in the United States (2006), the Bologna Declaration and Process (2007), the 'Tuning' process in Europe and Latin America, and, most recently, the OECD's Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes Project (2009) are all strong examples of this global trend. These developments have taken place against a backdrop of increasing engagement in SOTL by discipline practitioners in Europe, North America and Australasia.<sup>2</sup>

In their examination of the institutional impact of the British QAA, Janet Hargreaves and Alexa Christou discussed some of the shortcomings of higher education's quality assurance practices before this new, regulatory turn.<sup>3</sup> Quality before the QAA, they suggested, had been secured through collegial and self-regulatory practices that were usually implicit and deployed at the level of individual courses. Evaluation of learning focused on what a student learned within each separate course; it did not seek to measure what he or she derived from the degree or program as a whole.

Denise Bradley's Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 reached a rather different conclusion. Bradley found that some Australian programs did measure the quality of teaching and learning at the program or degree level, but she noted that this 'fitness for purpose' approach remained isolated within institutions. In line with international trends and domestic drivers, such as the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2003, Bradley advocated a new approach driven by 'excellence and standards'. Among other things, she recommended the creation of systems by which quality in learning and teaching could be examined not only within particular disciplines or areas of study but across and beyond individual institutions. Invoking the standards framework developed in the United Kingdom, she advocated subject benchmarking: in other words, the comparison of teaching practices and outcomes across disciplinary programs.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Sean Brawley, T Mills Kelly and Geoff Timmins 'SoTL and national difference: musings from three historians from three countries', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 8, 2009, 8–25.

3 Janet Hargreaves and Alexa Christou 'An institutional perspective on QAA subject benchmarking', *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* 10 (3), 2002, 187–191.

4 Australian Government *Review of Higher Education*, 2008, 130, 128, 136 (Bradley Report).

Given the commodification of education in Australia and the massification of the sector in the 1990s, federal governments of both political persuasions were inclined to favour systems that could both assure and improve quality. Kevin Rudd's Labor Government embraced Bradley's call for a standards approach to quality in teaching and learning, and in 2009 commissioned AUQA to compile the *Setting and Monitoring Academic Standards from Higher Education* Report. Later that year, the Government asked the ALTC to oversee what became known as the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project (LTAS). Following Bradley's suggestions that standards needed to reflect 'the judgement of those who are expert in it', the LTAS project sought 'to ensure that discipline communities define and take responsibility for implementing academic standards within the academic traditions of collegiality, peer review, pre-eminence of disciplines and academic autonomy'.<sup>5</sup> After extensive consultation, the project produced a series of draft TLOs which, the ALTC envisaged, would provide the basis for a standards implementation process grounded in disciplinary expertise.<sup>6</sup>

The catastrophic storms and floods that lashed Australia early in 2011 dramatically altered the standards landscape. Claiming that expenditure must be reduced to meet the extraordinary financial burdens created by the floods, Julia Gillard's Government declared its intention to abolish the ALTC in September 2011.<sup>7</sup> The impending demise of the ALTC has prompted a sudden change in the rhetoric of standards implementation. In late June 2011, legislation was passed establishing TEQSA, a body designed to consolidate existing organisations such as AUQA and the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) and to manage the new 'Higher Education Standards Framework' including institutional, educational and research standards. The legislation gives the agency an expansive role. TEQSA will assume many of the functions of the ALTC, and will play a leading role in the definition of standards and

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5 ALTC 'History standards: Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project – History Academic Standards Statement December 2010', 3. Accessed 26 July 2011. Available from: [http://www.altc.edu.au/system/files/altc\\_standards\\_HISTORY\\_280211.pdf](http://www.altc.edu.au/system/files/altc_standards_HISTORY_280211.pdf).

6 ALTC 'Learning and Teaching Standards Project, Final Report, 2010'. Accessed 28 July 2011. Available from: [http://www.altc.edu.au/system/files/altc\\_standards\\_finalreport.pdf](http://www.altc.edu.au/system/files/altc_standards_finalreport.pdf).

7 Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 'The Australian Learning and Teaching Council', 2011. Accessed 26 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Programs/Quality/Pages/ALTC.aspx>; Bernard Lane 'Champion of learning and teaching gets the chop', *Australian*, 27 January 2011. Accessed 18 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/champion-of-learning-and-teaching-gets-the-chop/story-e6frgcyj-1225995531923>.

their implementation. The agency is pegged to become an independent 'next generation regulator',<sup>8</sup> with responsibility to register providers of higher education and to measure their performance every seven years against a Standards Framework to be promulgated by the Minister for Tertiary Education and/or the Minister for Research on the advice of a 'Standards Panel'.<sup>9</sup> Troublingly, this legislative framework provides little guarantee of sustained disciplinary involvement in the definition or application of standards.

The abolition of the ALTC and the creation of TEQSA have been accompanied by a sustained attack on the TLOs generated with disciplinary support by the LTAS project. The Group of Eight universities (which have created and started to trial their own quality verification system), have spearheaded growing agitation against the LTAS project, mostly through the Higher Education Supplement in *The Australian*.<sup>10</sup> More ominously, the interim chair of TEQSA, Denise Bradley, has dismissed the LTAS process and claimed the standards that it produced were not fit for purpose because they lacked 'rigour'.<sup>11</sup>

In this uncertain environment, the Interim TEQSA Commission released a much anticipated discussion paper in June 2011: 'Developing a Framework for Teaching and Learning Standards in Australian Higher Education and the Role of TEQSA'. This document calls for further conversation about and feedback on proposed approaches to developing uniform standards in Australian higher education. 'Developing a Framework' explains TEQSA's concept of 'standards', outlines how it envisages its own role and proposes some new means for articulating standards in Australian higher education. Again, this discussion document significantly downplays the role of discipline communities in defining and administering the standards to be applied to university programs.

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8 Christopher Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations) 'World leading regulator builds on transformative higher education reform', Media release 23 June 2011. Accessed 26 July 2011. Available from: [http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/evans/media/releases/pages/article\\_110623\\_085018.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/evans/media/releases/pages/article_110623_085018.aspx).

9 Bernard Lane 'Panel will be ready to advise on standards', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 2011. Accessed 18 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/panel-will-be-ready-to-advise-on-standards/story-e6frgcjx-1226097770733>.

10 'ALTC standard high on aspiration but lacks objectives', *Australian*, 6 April 2010.

11 Bernard Lane 'Pilot standard grounded', *Australian*, 13 April 2011. Accessed 18 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/pilot-standard-grounded/story-e6frgcjx-1226038077325>.

## The LTAS Project under the ALTC

The LTAS project was charged with defining minimum discipline-specific 'learning outcomes' that would form the basis of learning and teaching standards in the Government's framework.<sup>12</sup> Responsibility for coordinating the project in the Arts and Social Sciences was given to Professor Ian Hay, a geographer from Flinders University who had recently been appointed the ALTC Discipline Scholar for the Arts and Social Sciences. With a large and diverse range of disciplines in the Arts and Social Sciences, Hay decided to approach the project by selecting two 'demonstration disciplines'. After some consultation with the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts and Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), Geography and History were chosen. A History Discipline Reference Group was chaired by Hay with nominees from the AHA and DASSH, three 'discipline experts' and employee and student representatives.

During the year-long LTAS project, the Discipline Reference Group conducted meetings, consulted with key stakeholders and referred to national and international benchmarks, such as the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statements and European Tuning descriptors, to prepare a draft set of TLOs for Level 7 (the bachelor degree). The draft statement became a consultation paper in mid 2010. It was then presented to the Heads of History, and debated in a panel session at the AHA Conference in Perth in July 2010 and at ten specially convened public meetings across Australia in August–September 2010. Written submissions were also sought. Finally, the statement was reviewed by an independent consultant. The consultation period of LTAS came to an end in September 2010 and the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement for History was finalised in October.<sup>13</sup> The statement was then endorsed by a variety of stakeholders, culminating with the AHA's endorsement of the TLOs in December 2010. In hindsight, the ALTC described the process as a 'truly a community effort'.<sup>14</sup>

The History TLOs, as shown below, were stated in terms of 'minimum discipline knowledge, discipline-specific skills and professional capabilities, including attitudes and professional values expected of a graduate from a specified level of program in a specified discipline area'.<sup>15</sup>

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12 ALTC 'History standards', 4.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, 2.

15 Ibid, 3.

## Threshold Learning Outcomes for History

Upon completion of a bachelor degree with a major in History, graduates will be able to:

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|---------------|---|
| Knowledge     | 1. Demonstrate an understanding of at least one period or culture of the past.  |
|               | 2. Demonstrate an understanding of a variety of conceptual approaches to interpreting the past.                                 |
|               | 3. Show how History and historians shape the present and the future.  |
| Research      | 4. Identify and interpret a wide variety of secondary and primary materials.  |
|               | 5. Examine historical issues by undertaking research according to the methodological and ethical conventions of the discipline. |
| Analysis      | 6. Analyse historical evidence, scholarship and changing representations of the past.   |
| Communication | 7. Construct an evidence-based argument or narrative in audio, digital, oral, visual or written form.                           |
| Reflection    | 8. Identify and reflect critically on the knowledge and skills developed in their study of History.                             |

These TLOs may be achieved through a combination of individual and collaborative work.

The ALTC's *Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project Final Report (LTAS Final Report)* indicated that the TLOs produced were intended to form the 'bottom line' of a standards evaluation process. While it acknowledged a variety of approaches to standards implementation, the ALTC argued that measuring learning outcomes was the best way to test the 'discipline-specific capacity' imparted by tertiary programs.<sup>16</sup> It also suggested the importance of discipline involvement in standards implementation, and recommended that 'discipline expert panels' formed through Expressions of Interest from disciplinary peak bodies and individuals should be entrusted with the work of implementing standards. Finally, it proposed that funding support be provided to

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16 ALTC 'Learning and Teaching Standards Project', 34.

discipline bodies to 'ensure their capability to engage effectively with the system'.<sup>17</sup> In short, the *LTAS Final Report* advocated the centrality of disciplines to all phases of the standards process.

## Defining 'Standards' under TEQSA

The emerging regulatory regime seems to take a very different approach to the role of discipline communities in the definition and implementation of standards.

TEQSA's role in defining and promulgating standards is defined by the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (Cth) which received Royal Assent on 29 June 2011. The Act gives TEQSA responsibility, among other things, for accrediting programs of study in Australia by applying a standards-based quality framework. Sections 58(3) and 58(4) invest the Minister for Education with power to define and enforce standards. However, the minister is required by the legislation to consult with a council consisting of Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for Higher Education, the Research Minister and TEQSA; and must have regard to the panel's draft standards and any advice given to the minister by the panel, Ministerial Council, Research Minister or TEQSA. The legislation, then, gives TEQSA and the Standards Panel a pivotal role both in the definition of standards and in the design of the standards implementation framework.

TEQSA's 'Developing a Framework' discussion paper broadly outlines its approach to the definition and implementation of standards. The document defines 'teaching and learning standards in higher education' in a way that moves beyond the learning-threshold approach taken by the LTAS project. It sees standards as encompassing:

- those dimensions of curriculum, teaching, learner support and assessment that establish the pre-conditions for the achievement of learning and educational outcomes fit for the awarding of a higher education qualification, and
- the explicit levels of attainment required of and achieved by students and graduates, individually and collectively, in defined areas of knowledge and skills.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Ibid, 36.

18 Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) 'Developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA', TEQSA Discussion Paper, June 2011, 3. Accessed 26 July 2011. Available from: [http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/teqsa/Documents/Teaching\\_Learning\\_Discussion\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/teqsa/Documents/Teaching_Learning_Discussion_Paper.pdf).



Teaching standards include ‘curriculum design, the quality of teaching, student learning support, and the infrastructure which directly supports the process of teaching and learning’.<sup>19</sup> Learning standards indicate student attainment of ‘desired areas of knowledge and skills and the levels of attainment required for graduation and for the award of grades at pass level or above’.<sup>20</sup> While TEQSA’s definition of learning standards is broadly similar to that developed in the LTAS project, it de-emphasises disciplinary context. The LTAS project explicitly aligned disciplinary identity with expected graduate outcomes when it stated that TLOs ‘describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define the skills, knowledge and other attributes that can be expected of a graduate in that discipline’.<sup>21</sup>

‘Developing a Framework’ announces TEQSA’s role both as a ‘national regulator’ and ‘a national quality assurance agency’,<sup>22</sup> charged with establishing a ‘transparent and rigorous’ yet ‘efficient and streamlined’ approach to regulation and quality assurance.<sup>23</sup> The document pledges that TEQSA will operate according to the following broad principles:

1. The autonomy of institutions will be respected and TEQSA’s processes will accommodate innovation in curricula and support the role of institutional assessment and evaluation activities.
2. Course and discipline-specific skills and knowledge, as well as the generic skills developed through higher education, will be considered by TEQSA when reviewing learning standards.
3. National teaching and learning standards must accommodate the diversity of stakeholders and their viewpoints on standards. TEQSA is not the only custodian of standards, nor are higher education institutions. This responsibility is distributed and shared more widely, including with disciplinary communities and professional associations.
4. National standards for teaching and learning need to be able to respond to change and emerging situations. Standards should be subject to regular review.
5. Institutional standards for teaching and learning will differ but all institutions must meet or surpass national standards.

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 ALTC ‘History standards’, 3.

22 TEQSA Discussion Paper, 4.

23 Ibid, 5.

6. National teaching and learning standards should provide information that can be used by institutions for monitoring and accountability and to assist with their own quality improvement.
7. Experts will play a key role in the development and application of teaching and learning standards by TEQSA.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to suggesting some tentative reference points for setting teaching standards, the report also surveys some potential methods for assessing compliance with learning and teaching standards. These include a standardised test for measuring learning outcomes for graduates and external peer review as used in the United Kingdom. The document notes, however, that while peer review is most often used to assess curriculum design and teaching, it is less often used to assess learning outcomes; it is also costly and presents transparency issues.<sup>25</sup>

The document then outlines its vision of the architecture of a national standards framework. This architecture proposes that standards statements, measures and indicators be assessed by 'expert review', noting the importance of 'professional' input especially in those areas that have no professional accreditation or registration bodies. While 'expert' and 'professional' are not defined clearly in the document (and both are implicitly distinguished from UK-style peer review), 'Developing a Framework' does ultimately concede that 'discipline communities, broadly conceived, have an important role to play'.<sup>26</sup>

## Uncertainties and challenges

The 'Developing a Framework' discussion paper, along with the broad mandates given to the Minister for Education and TEQSA under the new legislation, concern us because they suggest a retreat from the ALTC's commitment to discipline-led standards processes.

First, the legislation and 'Developing a Framework' do not guarantee that the discipline-endorsed LTAS project will be used as a starting point for developing standards in the history discipline. Section 58(5) of the *TEQSA Act* expressly allows ministerial standards to apply, adopt or incorporate 'any matter contained in an instrument or other writing', effectively allowing the minister to use the LTAS TLOs to form the content of new standards. However, the subsection imposes no obligation or preference for doing so. Similarly, 'Developing a Framework' mentions the LTAS initiative

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid, 12–13.

26 Ibid, 16.

and suggests that in developing explicit standards statements, reference could be made to the statements developed by the project.<sup>27</sup> This reference has been characterised as no more than a mere ‘hat tip’ to the LTAS project and the role it advocated for discipline communities in developing, enforcing and monitoring compliance with standards.<sup>28</sup> While ‘Developing a Framework’ acknowledges the international and local precursors for standards design in Australia, it describes the LTAS TLOs as ‘as guides to curriculum design only’, since they did not address ‘teaching modes, learning activities, or assessment methods’.<sup>29</sup> This, combined with Denise Bradley’s public criticisms of the LTAS TLOs,<sup>30</sup> suggests a marked retreat from the collaborative and disciplinary processes that had characterised standards discussions overseen by the ALTC.

Second, the legislation does not guarantee discipline communities a strong place in either the development of standards or the design of the implementation process. Under sections 58(3) and 58(4), the minister need only consult fellow ministers, the Standards Panel and TEQSA before promulgating standards. The degree of disciplinary input in the process of standards drafting, then, is left entirely to the discretion of the Higher Education Standards Panel. Although this Panel includes some checks and balances, it does not guarantee sustained disciplinary input. The Panel’s four to eleven members must include ‘an appropriate balance of professional knowledge and demonstrated expertise ... in higher education and the development of quality standards’ (sections 167(1) and 167(2)(a)); and the panel is also required to ‘consult interested parties’ when performing its functions (section 167(2)). We fear that while these stipulations would certainly include senior university executives and quality assurance experts, they may not include members of specific disciplines. The AHA has submitted that it is concerned by the lack of precision about the composition of the Standards Panel and that it fears that ‘experts’ ‘will be found in the bureaucracy and amongst educational theorists or central teaching and learning centres in institutions, and not within disciplines’.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, it is unclear how discipline communities and peak disciplinary bodies like the AHA will be utilised, if at all, in TEQSA’s assessment of compliance with standards. The broad powers given to TEQSA and the Standards Panel to implement and assess standards in Australian

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27 Ibid, 16–17.

28 ALTC ‘Learning and Teaching Standards Project’, 34–38.

29 TEQSA Discussion Paper, 11.

30 Lane ‘Pilot standard grounded’.

31 Australian Historical Association ‘Submission to TEQSA: developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA’, 21 July 2011.

universities are cause for concern.<sup>32</sup> For example, the 'Group of Eight' has expressed concern that TEQSA will be 'too intrusive and inflexible'.<sup>33</sup> While these concerns are addressed explicitly at the institutional level in TEQSA's principles of operation, the document gives no comfort to discipline communities.<sup>34</sup> 'Developing a Framework' instead seems to conflate academic discipline communities with other stakeholders, variously denoted as 'experts', 'professionals' and 'discipline communities, broadly conceived'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, 'Developing a Framework' does not appear to recognise discipline communities and their peak organisations as autonomous bodies alongside institutions and TEQSA, another uncertainty which the AHA has flagged as problematic.<sup>36</sup> These factors, combined with the document's manifest ambivalence about the value of peer review, render the role that the discipline community of history might play in monitoring standards very uncertain.

The uncertainties surrounding the policy framework, however, do not mean that disciplinary feedback cannot play an important role in the system. They merely mean that the discipline and the AHA need to monitor the process of standards definition and implementation carefully and make sure their perspective is heard. It is clear that policy makers are receptive to feedback about the process. For example, since the 'Developing a Framework' discussion paper, ALTC CEO Carol Nicholl has been appointed to the position of chief commissioner of TEQSA. Her previous experience with the LTAS project should ensure that TEQSA is more attuned to the importance of disciplinary perspectives informing the process and its outcomes as the standards regime unfolds.

## Ways forward: *After Standards*

We contend that if standards are to succeed, the history discipline must play an active role both in their formulation and in monitoring and verifying institutional compliance. This model has been adopted in the United Kingdom where discipline-led external peer review has become an important part of the institutional review process overseen

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32 See Parts 6, 7 and 8 of the *TEQSA Act* which outline TEQSA's investigative powers, enforcement powers and functions respectively.

33 Dan Harrison 'Moves to protect the value of degrees', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 2010. Accessed 26 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/moves-to-protect-the-value-of-degrees-20101116-17vzl.html#ixzz1SbhBI7IF>.

34 TEQSA Discussion Paper, 5.

35 TEQSA Discussion Paper, 16.

36 AHA 'Submission to TEQSA'.

by the QAA.<sup>37</sup> Such an approach is essential for a number of reasons. First, Australian history departments contain expert teachers heavily involved in SOTL, with the expertise to judge the standard of teaching and learning within this disciplinary context. Second, collaborative processes around standards generation, audit and compliance will build on grassroots consensus about which approaches are effective. A collaborative, discipline-led approach has much more potential to encourage curriculum reform based on best practice in history, than abstract notions of useful assessment practices generated without reference to disciplinary skills and learning outcomes.<sup>38</sup> It will also ensure the disciplinary 'buy-in' necessary to effect meaningful assessment and improvement of university programs. Third, collegial assessment panels can act to increase the interface between tertiary history teachers and SOTL. In short, as we will argue below, a discipline-led implementation of standards presents an opportunity for historians around Australia to share knowledge of best practice teaching, to commit themselves to widespread curriculum renewal in the discipline and to achieve a sense of ownership of the standards process, which is essential for the effective implementation of any initiative at a local level.<sup>39</sup>

The most significant obstacles for the history discipline community in meeting this challenge arise from the fact that the discipline has no professional accreditation or registration body. In many other fields (medicine, law, psychology, teaching, social work and engineering, for example) peer organisations provide external disciplinary reference points against which institutional teaching and learning standards can be benchmarked and are often formally accredited. Thus, the history discipline's most urgent task lies in capacity building: in finding ways to record, model, demonstrate and evaluate what our history programs actually do. It can then build disciplinary consensus about standards definition by demonstrating the value of core disciplinary teaching practices, sharing knowledge about best practice teaching methods and showing the widespread use of best practice teaching methods in current history curricula. The discipline can also more effectively represent itself in upcoming policy debates about standards implementation, and take its rightful leading role in the process of standards implementation.

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37 Roger Brown 'The current brouhaha about standards in England', *Quality in Higher Education* 16 (2), 2010, 129–137.

38 For a study of the specificity of historical teaching and learning, see Indiana University's History Learning Project: <http://www.iub.edu/~hlp/>.

39 Cynthia E Coburn 'Rethinking scale: moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change', *Educational Researcher* 32 (6), 2003, 8.

## *After Standards* and the future of history

The ALTC-funded Priority Project *After Standards* has begun the work of helping the discipline meet this urgent challenge. The central ambition of *After Standards* is to build a ‘community of practice’<sup>40</sup> through which Australian historians can – systematically, universally, collegially, reflectively and effectively – respond to standards implementation and the resulting opportunities for curriculum renewal.<sup>41</sup> This community of practice will have the capacity to implement and monitor change and, where necessary, to assume or support an advocacy role for the discipline within the higher education sector and with government. The project also aims to investigate how minimum standards based on TLOs might be used as a means of driving curriculum renewal and the adoption of best practice in teaching and learning across a discipline. It is our conviction that a discipline-led standards implementation process will broaden awareness of the value of SOTL for history and provide an opportunity to share many cutting edge teaching practices already employed in history curricula across the country.

Our approach is multi-faceted. Our first goal is to ensure that historians in every history program in Australia have the opportunity to engage with the institutional challenges posed by standards. To this end, we sought to involve every history program in Australia in the project, first by securing their in-principle support for the project, and then by inviting each of them to ask two representatives to volunteer to participate in the project. This grassroots approach aimed to ensure widespread participation among historians. Self-nomination, as Lefoe *et al* have pointed out, is important for potential leaders in academic environments;<sup>42</sup> and the involvement of all Australian history programs in a discussion about implementing standards creates the potential for broad, community ownership of the challenge of documenting practice and implementing reform in history curricula.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Etienne Wenger *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2007.

41 Sean Brawley, Jennifer Clark, Chris Dixon, Lisa Ford and Shawn Ross ‘After Standards: engaging and embedding history’s standards using international best practice to inform curriculum renewal’, ALTC Priority Project Application, 2010. Accessed 28 July 2011. Available from: <http://www.afterstandards.org/>.

42 Geraldine Lefoe, Dominique Parrish, Gail Hart, Heather Smigiel and Linda Pannan *The GREEN Report: Development of Leadership Capacity in Higher Education*, ALTC Final Project Report, 2008, 2–4. Accessed 12 March 2010. Available from: <http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-green-report-uow-2008>.

43 Gina Curro and Robin McTaggart ‘Supporting the pedagogy of internationalisation’, *Securing the Future for International Education: Managing Growth and Diversity Conference Proceedings*, 17th Australian International Education Conference, Melbourne 2003.

Nominees then began the work of cataloguing teaching and learning practice in their programs. This process has produced a wealth of useful data – currently being processed by the project team – about how history is taught across the country. Recording discipline practice (auditing), is a useful first step in building disciplinary consensus around standards processes, and also provides the building blocks for audit and compliance processes within individual programs.<sup>44</sup> Gathering and sharing this data also revealed the breadth of teaching and learning excellence already evident in Australian history programs.<sup>45</sup>

In the next phase of the project, participants from all but three history programs attended a national workshop at UNSW (27–29 April) both to engage with the standards debate and to share their best-practice teaching methods. Eight world leaders in SOTL of history came to Sydney to help facilitate these discussions. The primary goal of the meeting was to ensure that historians around Australia understood the standards debate both here and overseas, and had an opportunity to think through the challenges of implementation – ranging from the institutional context of standards implementation, to the mechanics of incorporating progression into our curricula and gathering data to demonstrate student learning outcomes. To this end, four separate workshops and two plenary meetings were dedicated to examining the uncertainties of the standards environment and the institutional interface of standards with government, university infrastructures and schools. In addition, our visitors from the United Kingdom brought first-hand accounts of how a discipline-led standards regime can operate. As well as noting the way in which external compliance regimes can bolster disciplinary interests within institutional contexts, United Kingdom experts were vehement in their recommendation that historians coordinate a national approach to the standards process through a single peak body.

The second goal of the meeting was to invite participants to reflect on the relationship among tertiary standards, their own teaching practice and history's growing body of SOTL. Pecorino and Kincaid have argued forcefully for the importance of academic teachers engaging with

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44 Mantz Yorke 'Benchmarking academic standards in the UK', *Tertiary Education and Management* 5 (1) 1999, 81–96.

45 Note that the work of documenting excellence in history programs was begun by Marnie Hughes-Warrington *et. al.* in 2009. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Jill Roe, Adele Nye, Matthew Bailey, Mark Peel, Penny Russell, Amanda Laugeson, Desley Deacon, Paul Kiem and Faith Trent, 'Historical thinking in higher education: an ALTC discipline based initiative', *Australian Learning and Teaching Council*, 1–45.

such scholarship.<sup>46</sup> However, despite the fact that teaching ‘occupies a significant amount of professional time, and represents a strong personal commitment for many academics’,<sup>47</sup> historians around the world have ignored or resisted the scholarship of teaching practice and instead often follow ‘haphazardly shared folk wisdom ... totally ignorant of the pedagogical discoveries of colleagues teaching in the next classroom’.<sup>48</sup> The workshop started to address these issues in two ways. Our international participants not only facilitated workshops introducing best practice teaching methods, they invited participants to collaborate in new research projects in the SOTL field.

The national workshop demonstrated that history programs around Australia share many core strategies in their approaches to teaching and learning and that many programs were already heavily involved in curriculum improvement. Consequently, Australian history programs at present deploy many cutting-edge teaching strategies that could be shared and disseminated through a discipline-driven standards implementation process. The *After Standards* project aims to build on this strong start by inviting project participants to contribute teaching strategies to our project website: [www.afterstandards.org](http://www.afterstandards.org). Workshop delegates have also been charged with disseminating information about standards and helping to formulate institutional responses with colleagues. They will report back to the community at a dedicated SOTL strand at the 2012 AHA meeting.

Participants in the workshop also formed working parties to build further capacity within the discipline. The first, chaired by Jennifer Clark, has explored ways in which the discipline community might develop its own audit/compliance processes. The second, chaired by Chris Dixon, undertook to design new standards for the consideration of the discipline community at AQF Level 8 (honours) and AQF Level 9 (masters), which it has subsequently released for discussion by the

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46 Philip Pecorino and Shannon Kincaid ‘Why should I care about SOTL? The professional responsibilities of post-secondary educators’, *Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 1 (1), 2007, 2, 6; Ernest Boyer *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, San Francisco: Josey Bass 1990.

47 Alan Booth and Paul Hyland *History in Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, London: Blackwell 1995, 2.

48 David Pace ‘The amateur in the operating room: history and the scholarship of teaching and learning’, *American Historical Review* 109 (4), 2004, 1172; A Booth ‘Rethinking the scholarly: developing the scholarship of teaching in history’, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 3 (3), 2004, 247–266. For Australia see, Jennifer Clark ‘What use is SOTL? Using the scholarship of teaching and learning to develop a curriculum for first year university history classes’, *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 6 (2), 2009, 1–17. Accessed 15 January 2010. Available from: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1122&context=jutlp>.



discipline community. The third working party, chaired by Stephen Wheatcroft, seeks to explore the consequences of Field of Study coding and cluster funding on teaching practice.

This capacity-building initiative has already had an impact on the standards discussion. At the AHA Conference in Launceston in July 2011, the Audit/Compliance party called on the AHA to consider playing an active role in teaching and learning generally and the standards process specifically.<sup>49</sup> The AHA responded by inviting the *After Standards* project leader Sean Brawley to join the AHA Executive to assist in its deliberations on the subject. In July, the AHA demonstrated its potential as an advocate for the discipline by responding to TEQSA's 'Developing a Framework' discussion paper. It made the case that any teaching and learning standards audit/compliance process must not simply be a discussion between TEQSA and institutions but also actively engage disciplinary communities. As the ALTC LTAS project had earlier observed: 'Disciplines, not institutions, "own" and define the core (or threshold) attributes of their discipline'.<sup>50</sup>

Much remains to be done, however, both within and beyond the scope of the *After Standards* project. With strong support across the discipline, the project has begun the work of building a community of practice in history. However, the discipline's members need to continue to work together if the community is to have a strong voice in the standards process and the AHA's role here is, we think, critical. Our discussions with overseas leaders in the SOTL of history confirmed there is much of excellence in Australian history programs. We must collaborate to ensure that minimum tertiary standards assess what we value, encourage creativity and innovation, and allow our curricula to maintain their excellence.

## Conclusion

Australian universities face an uncertain regulatory environment. It is crucial in late 2011 and 2012 that historians remain engaged with the development of standards under the new TEQSA framework, and that we insist on the centrality of discipline-led standards formulation and implementation. It is also vital to increase capacity through grassroots involvement and ensure that a standards framework builds upon what we do well as teachers, while encouraging initiative within disciplinary boundaries.

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49 Jennifer Clark *Report to the AHA Executive*, AHA Regional Conference, Launceston 2011.  
50 ALTC 'Learning and Teaching Standards Project'.

The *After Standards* project has begun the work of institution building, uncovering broad and deep interest in best-practice teaching methods throughout Australia. We are working with the AHA to ensure that the discipline's response is representative of all tertiary-level history programs and that history's needs are recognised in Canberra. However, the real work of the discipline relies on historians across the country. Now is the time to ensure that a standards-based regulatory framework enhances our teaching resources instead of, like so many central regulatory schemes, detracting from the time we have to engage creatively with the challenge of teaching history.

## About the authors

This paper was produced by a team of researchers involved in the ALTC-funded project: *After Standards: Engaging and Embedding History's Standards using International Best Practice to Inform Curriculum Renewal*. The research team comprises Associate Professor Sean Brawley (UNSW, project leader), Professor Jennifer Clark (University of New England), Associate Professor Chris Dixon (University of Queensland), Dr Lisa Ford (UNSW), Dr Shawn Ross (UNSW) and Dr Stuart Upton (UNSW, research officer). Ms Leah Grolman also assisted in the research and preparation of this paper.

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