

Australian Learning and Teaching Academic Standards in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

National Update – May 2010

This newsletter is about the Australian national Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) project as it relates to the disciplines grouped under the general title Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH). These notes set out some background information on the context and purpose of the project, provide some detail on recent progress, and offer advice on ways of finding out more and getting involved. Two other newsletters updating work on the project will be sent out in August and November.

Background

The Australian Government is developing a new Higher Education Quality and Regulatory Framework as part of its Education Revolution. Among other things, the Government is establishing the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to regulate the sector against agreed standards for higher education. Five elements to the regulatory framework are likely:

Provider standards	Qualification standards	Learning and teaching standards	Research standards	Information standards
National protocols and ESOS Act	Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)	Threshold learning outcomes	Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA)	For the market and regulators

In developing learning and teaching standards, the Government has made clear it is committed to the active involvement of the academic community. To that end, the Government has commissioned the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) to manage the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) project. The approach is designed 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.

Value of standards

The LTAS project will help protect national and local academic reputations by setting out expectations about threshold standards for degrees in a range of subject areas. These standards will 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. As such, the standards may be of interest to prospective students and employers seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

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The LTAS project will **NOT** establish a national curriculum. Individual institutions will be free to set learning outcomes over and above national minimum outcomes and increase the number of learning outcomes they expect. They will also be free to determine the processes by which threshold learning outcomes are achieved, including curriculum, learning resources, learning activities and formative and summative assessment methods. It is expected however that the standards will offer a useful resource to assist those involved in program design, delivery and review.

ASSH in the LTAS project

The Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) aspects of the LTAS project are led by the ALTC Discipline Scholar, Professor Iain Hay, and his Project Officer, Jill Rashleigh (both based at Flinders University). They are working consultatively with the academics, students, employers and other stakeholders over 2010 to define the threshold (or core/minimum) learning outcomes for the bachelor level degree (as defined in the draft Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF]) with a major in Geography or History. Demonstrated achievement of these threshold learning outcomes is expected to be one aspect (among others) of TEQSA's evaluation of Australian universities. The specific ways in which TEQSA will monitor standards will be negotiated separately.

It is very important to note that although Geography is being handled within the ASSH grouping, all aspects of the discipline (e.g. physical, human-environment relations, GIS) will be considered in the establishment of Geography standards.

Geography and History as demonstration disciplines

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) recommended History and Geography as demonstration disciplines for this project. That recommendation was supported at a national forum held in Melbourne in February 2010 and subsequently accepted by peak discipline bodies – the Australian Historical Association (AHA) and the Institute of Australian Geographers (IAG) – following discussion with the Discipline Scholar.

By the end of 2010 a set of learning outcomes and a commentary on the process by which they were achieved will be available to advise those disciplines which will follow over the coming years. The Discipline Scholar has already been in communication with representatives from other fields including demography, food studies, sociology, and theology to discuss their approaches to developing standards.

Role of the Discipline Scholar

As the Discipline Scholar for Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Professor Hay will:

- engage discipline communities and higher education institutions in the standards setting agenda;
- facilitate disciplinary development of academic standards as minimum learning outcomes for programs/majors;
- provide resources to inform both the new regulatory framework and institutional development of standards related processes; and
- lay foundations for demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes by higher education institutions.

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Discipline Reference Groups

Discipline Reference Groups for History and Geography have been nominated by DASSH, the Australian Historical Association and the Institute of Australian Geographers to support the LTAS Project by:

- providing advice to the Discipline Scholar on the direction and implementation of the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project;
- drafting and/or reviewing drafts of project-related material, including statements of threshold learning outcomes; and
- facilitating and supporting engagement with key discipline group stakeholders.

The Discipline Reference Groups are:

	<i>Geography</i>	<i>History</i>
Chair and Discipline Scholar	Professor Iain Hay	Professor Iain Hay
President or nominee; peak discipline body	Professor Lesley Head	Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington
DASSH Nominee	Dr Stephen Legg	Associate Professor Deborah Gare
Discipline Expert	Dr Robyn Bartel	Professor Stuart Macintyre
Discipline Expert	Professor Kevin Dunn	Associate Professor Sean Brawley
Discipline Expert	Professor Nigel Tapper	Associate Professor Adrian Jones
Recent graduate	Mr Brad Ruting	Ms Louise Douglas
Discipline Expert - jurisdiction outside Australia	Dr Lorraine Craig	Professor Alan Booth
Relevant employer representative	Dr Donna Ferretti	Ms Helen Withnell

How to find out more

A full discussion of the LTAS project is available on the ALTC website at: <http://www.altc.edu.au/standards> This site includes answers to Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.altc.edu.au/standards/FAQs>

How to get involved

1. Sign up to receive a regular monthly 'Disciplines Setting Standards' Newsletter <http://www.altc.edu.au/standards/newsletter> from ALTC by sending a blank email to join-standards_newsletter@edna.edu.au
2. Contribute to the History and Geography forum discussions on the ALTC website at: <http://www.altcexchange.edu.au/group/ltas-project-history> or <http://www.altcexchange.edu.au/group/ltas-project-geography>

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3. Join the July discussions of the draft standards (see Events below for details).
4. Respond to calls for comments made through communications from the Institute of Australian Geographers and the Australian Historical Association (e.g. iag-list, AHA Newsletter, AHA and IAG websites).
5. Respond to draft standards when they are made available through the media including disciplinary listserves and the ALTC website. (1st versions expected about June).
6. Phone, write to, or email the Discipline Scholar.
7. Ask the Discipline Scholar to come speak to your organisation or institution about the LTAS Project.

Forthcoming events

- International panel session to discuss draft Geography standards to be held at the 2010 NZGS/IAG conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, 5-8 July. Details at: <http://www.nzgs2010.org.nz/>
- National panel session to discuss draft History standards to be held at the 2010 AHA conference in Perth, 5-9 July. Details at: <http://www.ahareviewinghistory.com/>
- Discussion at Head of Geography Programs meeting to be held in conjunction with the 2010 NZGS/IAG conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, 5-8 July.
- Discussion at Head of History Programs meeting to be held in conjunction with the 2010 AHA conference in Perth, 5-9 July. Details at: <http://www.ahareviewinghistory.com/>
- Presentation to discuss draft standards to be held at the 2010 DASSH conference in Fremantle WA, 29 September – 1 October. Details at: <http://www.dassh.edu.au/conference/2010/about>

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