



AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION COUNCIL

REGISTER
OF
AUSTRALIAN
TERTIARY
EDUCATION
(RATE)

**MAJOR TERTIARY COURSE
AWARD LEVELS IN AUSTRALIA**

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REGISTER OF AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION (RATE)

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MAJOR NATIONAL TERTIARY COURSE AWARD LEVELS

Introduction

Academic awards in Australia can be classified into nine broad levels.

The titles of accredited awards reflect these levels.

This booklet describes the levels of awards and their associated titles. It also provides information on RATE, the national body responsible for developing the classification scheme, and the accrediting authorities in each State and Territory responsible for classifying courses in terms of the award levels.

All the State and Territory accreditation authorities currently observe RATE national guidelines on course classification and nomenclature.

In addition, all States and Territories have agreed that award level courses marketed to overseas students by registered private providers should conform to national nomenclature and standards.

General information on current national arrangements for the accreditation of privately-offered courses is contained in Section II. Private providers wishing to have their courses accredited should approach the relevant State/Territory accreditation authority, details of which are set out in the Appendix.

I ESTABLISHMENT AND ROLE OF RATE

Establishment

The Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE) was set up in January 1990 by the Australian Education Council (AEC) which consists of the Ministers with responsibility for education in the States, Territories and the Commonwealth.

RATE constitutes a single national register of authorities (including institutions) empowered by State/Territory or Commonwealth governments to accredit tertiary education award courses.

RATE replaced the national register of tertiary award courses established by its predecessor the Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA). Unlike ACTA, RATE does not register award courses, this function now being wholly the responsibility of the authorities empowered by governments to accredit tertiary award courses. [The ACTA register is, however, available for historical reference by outside bodies or persons who may wish to check on registration details from 1972 to 1989.]

RATE Functions [as specified by AEC resolution at the 61st (October 1989) meeting]:

- the development of a framework and set of principles for accreditation* of award courses in Australian tertiary education
- the establishment of national guidelines for course classification, length and nomenclature for common usage by all accrediting institutions and authorities
- the establishment of procedures for dissemination of information about the accreditation processes of the various authorities.

(* the term 'course approval' is more commonly used in the older universities)

RATE work is taking place in close consultation with the various tertiary education bodies such as the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC), the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) and its Higher Education Council (HEC) and Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC), the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC) and the National Training Board (NTB).

Changes within tertiary sector provision of education and training have resulted in some significant modification to award level criteria, in particular, signalling a move from time-based to competency-based criteria in courses where national competency standards agreed to by States/Territories and the Commonwealth have been established. An anticipated further result of this is the formal establishment of a system of national recognition of accredited courses in the training area, which will obviate the need for duplication of accreditation. It is expected that system-level accreditation authorities will incorporate into their procedures the details of such changes as they are developed over the next year and that subsequent editions of the RATE definitions will provide key information at the national level.

RATE has established a network of accreditation officers from each of the State/Territory agencies and the self-accrediting institutions, and maintains formal and informal contact with the private sector, in particular with the Australian Council of Private Education and Training (ACPET).

Major developments within the higher education and TAFE sectors since 1989 have favoured a more flexible approach to quality assurance in the provision of education and training.

A Working Party on Course Approvals has been set up by the AVCC to advise RATE on a set of principles and procedures for course approval in higher education, and a Working Party on National Recognition of Training established by VEETAC is developing new principles and procedures for the accreditation of training courses offered in TAFE and industry, many of these courses being tertiary award level or contributing towards such an award.

RATE will include these sets of principles and procedures, by way of fulfilment of its terms of reference from the AEC, in the next edition of Register information.

RATE has also established links with the National Office of Overseas Recognition (NOOSR) and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP).

RATE acts as a central national reference point for information on accreditation of award courses in Australian tertiary education and will this year participate in a major initiative to strengthen contacts between accreditation agencies internationally.

RATE operates within the AEC Secretariat located in Melbourne.

REGISTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An AEC Register Advisory Committee has been set up with the following membership:

- Chair:** Professor Kwong Lee Dow, Dean of Education,
University of Melbourne
- AEC:** Professor Glen Evans, School of Education, University of Queensland
Ms Frances Maber, Registrar, Murdoch University
- AVCC:** Mr Frank Hambly, Executive Director, Australian Vice-Chancellors'
Committee
Dr Colin Campbell, Director, Victoria College
- NTB:** Mr Ross Bushrod, Assistant Director (Vocational Training), NSW
Department of Industrial Relations and Employment
- NBEET:** Professor Ian Chubb, Chair, Higher Education Council, National
Board of Employment, Education and Training
- VEETAC:** Mr Barry Gear, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of
Employment and TAFE, South Australia
Ms Kath Phelan, Deputy Director (TAFE), Department of
Education and Training, Northern Territory

II ACCREDITATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR TERTIARY AWARD COURSES IN AUSTRALIA

Accreditation provides certification that the standards of a course are appropriate to the award to which it leads and that the course and the methods adopted in delivering it are likely to achieve the purpose for which the course was or will be introduced.

Accreditation powers in relation to tertiary award courses have been granted by State/Territory and Commonwealth governments to two types of authorities:

- i higher education institutions, empowered by their various acts of establishment to accredit/approve their own courses; and
- ii statutory bodies within each government system (or delegated through Ministers and/or Directors-General/Chief Executives) which accredit tertiary award courses offered through:
 - a institutions of technical and further education (TAFE);
 - b those few higher education institutions not self-accrediting; and
 - c private education and training providers.

Accreditation, functioning as a guarantee of tertiary award standards (which will include national competency standards where relevant) may take a number of different forms:

- i Where institutions of higher education are empowered to accredit their own courses, course development and approval takes place within the framework of the institution's strategic plan and its educational profile, generally operating on the basis of peer review through a hierarchy of committees and standing committees (faculty board/academic board/university council) with responsibilities for academic standards, course objectives, teaching/learning resources, admissions criteria, cross-faculty implications and the requirements of relevant professional bodies or employer groups.

Some institutions are utilising course advisory committees comprising a range of interested parties including practitioners, employers, community representatives and academic staff from other institutions, which enables ongoing review of content and relevance. This partnership model functions as a more efficient alternative to the periodic scrutiny of courses solely by professional bodies and promotes inter-institutional communication helpful to the maintenance of national standards.

- ii Where an external authority has responsibility for accreditation, it will most commonly appoint an assessment committee or panel (often in consultation with the course provider) to assess a course on its behalf.

Typically, the approved course provider will develop a course for which there is an identified industry/occupational need, and in accordance with national competency standards where these have been established. The course is reviewed against State/Territory and national accreditation requirements and national (RATE) standards and nomenclature for tertiary award levels and then submitted for accreditation to the relevant industry, vocational education or academic accreditation body through its course assessment panels, after which it is recorded on the relevant State register.

III LEVELS AND NOMENCLATURE OF NATIONAL TERTIARY COURSE AWARDS

There are nine major levels of tertiary course awards:

[the most common forms of award and course titling, including abbreviations, are given in the brackets below each award]

Certificate

[Certificate in...(field of study); Cert ... (field abbreviated)]

Advanced Certificate

[Advanced Certificate in ...(field of study); Adv Cert ..(field abbreviated)]

Associate Diploma

[Associate Diploma of ...(title reflecting field of study); Assoc Dip ...(field of study title, usually abbreviated). Where the specific subject area is included in the title it is often added in brackets or in the form 'in ... (subject area)']

Diploma

[Diploma of .../Dip ...; titling conventions as for Associate Diploma above]

Bachelor Degree

[Bachelor of .../B ...; titling conventions as for Associate Diploma above]

Graduate Certificate

[Graduate Certificate in .../Grad Cert ...; titling conventions as for Certificate above]

Graduate Diploma

[Graduate Diploma of .../Grad Dip...; titling conventions as for Associate Diploma above]

Masters Degree

[Master of .../M ...; titling conventions as for Associate Diploma above]

Doctoral Degree

[Doctor of Philosophy/PhD]

Titling of Courses

RATE encourages institutions to use generally accepted course titles in the interests of clarity and ease of recognition and understanding by students, institutions, professional bodies and the general community, both local and international. In addition, credit transfer arrangements will be enhanced if the course titles adopted by institutions are widely recognised and understood.

The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training *Field of Study Classification of Tertiary Education Courses*, Canberra 1990, may be used to determine the appropriate course title.

IV. DESCRIPTIONS OF NATIONAL TERTIARY COURSE AWARD LEVELS

Preface

The following paragraphs describe the chief characteristics of courses that are typically found at each academic award level within the public tertiary education system in Australia.

Courses at each award level are designed as complete educational programs.

The chief characteristics relate to the duration of courses, the requirements for entry to courses and the objectives of the course.

In framing these descriptions, the Register Advisory Committee is aware of the diversity that exists within each award level in terms of the purposes and length of courses and the standards that are required for entry.

In relation to the duration of courses, the Advisory Committee acknowledges that the primary determinant of course length is the time needed to achieve the objectives of the course, including the achievement of any relevant national competency levels as these are established by the National Training Board.

Variation in nominal course length may be allowed for by factors such as credit for prior learning, mode of course delivery — distance learning, self-paced learning, on-the-job training — and institutional definition of the academic year.

The references to course duration in the following paragraphs are nevertheless indicative of current practice in Australian tertiary education.

Certificate Awards

Courses leading to this award develop:

- (a) basic education or employment skills, or the knowledge and skills needed to undertake further education and training; or
- (b) the skills and associated knowledge for the performance of a limited range of skilled operations; or

- (c) the knowledge and skills required to work in a specific vocation, recognised trade or craft requiring a high degree of skill usually in a range of related activities, performed with a minimum of direction and supervision.

The entry level for certificate courses is often not specified, but some courses may require satisfactory completion of Year 10 in an Australian secondary school system or equivalent. Complementary work experience may be required.

Certificate courses vary in length from one semester to 1.5 years full-time or part-time equivalent study, depending upon entry level, relevant skills standards and required competency levels. It would be expected that attainment of the level of skills appropriate to the award would normally require two semesters at Year 10 entry and at least one semester at Year 11 entry.

Advanced Certificate Awards

Courses leading to this award develop knowledge and skills beyond the normal level of relevant skilled occupations and/or prepare students to work in first-level supervisory/administrative and management positions. Courses normally develop the abilities of students to identify, analyse and resolve problems typically found in work situations, to interact with individuals and small groups, to assure quality and productivity, and to communicate orally and in writing at a standard appropriate to this level of employment.

Students may enter from completion of a certificate course or from completion of compulsory schooling, generally Year 10 in an Australian school system or equivalent.

Advanced certificates designed for entry from a certificate should extend the skills and knowledge provided in the pre-requisite certificate course. Such courses usually require study over one year full-time or two years part-time or equivalent.

Advanced certificates designed for direct entry from compulsory schooling are programs which generally embrace both basic and advanced skills and knowledge relating to an advanced vocational outcome. These courses usually require at least two years full-time study or the equivalent.

Relevant work experience concurrent with study for the advanced certificate may be required.

Associate Diploma Awards

Courses leading to this award aim to produce diplomates capable of working in support of professionals or working in an employment category in its own right at a similar level of performance to paraprofessional personnel. Associate diploma courses cover a diverse field of specialised occupations requiring considerable skills in communication, judgment, diagnosis, quality control, planning, co-ordination and administration.

Two types of courses are recognised at this level:

- (a) courses which place considerable emphasis on the development of skills or knowledge of a specific area. These courses will normally be associated with employment in a designated occupation or vocation, either independently or in support of professional or other paraprofessional staff. They may give eligibility for membership of a paraprofessional association; and
- (b) courses which treat a number of subject areas at a level appropriate to general understanding of a field of knowledge and with emphasis on breadth rather than study in depth in one specific area.

It is expected that students will be considered for admission to such courses after completion of a full secondary education, but it is recognised that institutions will consider other factors such as practical experience, maturity and motivation relating to likely success.

Courses at this level normally require as the level of entry satisfactory completion of Year 12 in an Australian school system or equivalent. Students who have not completed Year 12 would be expected to complete bridging/supplementary studies which ensure an adequate preparation to achieve the educational objectives of the course, with the time taken depending upon the amount of recognition for prior learning that can be given and the mode of delivery of the bridging course.

These courses will normally require two years full-time or equivalent study. However, acceptable at this level are those courses of less than two years' duration if a condition of entry to such courses is previous experience relevant to the course of study being undertaken and if the course mode of delivery allows for self-paced learning.

An associate diploma course is designed as a complete educational program and should not be planned solely as a component of a diploma or a degree course, although transfer with appropriate credit through cooperative arrangements between institutions is envisaged.

Diploma Awards

The diploma award is the initial qualification for professional practice in such areas as the hospitality industry, design and performing arts and some areas of applied science and technology, where the diplomate may be expected to have developed a high order of the practical skills and an understanding of the knowledge base relevant to the assumption of primary responsibility for their area of work.

Two types of courses are recognised at this level:

- (a) courses which are designed to cover a specific field of activity, combining the acquisition of skills and knowledge in an integrated program leading to a basic qualification for some professions, usually prior to employment in the field. These courses will thus provide for development of basic professional competence and understanding of the problems of the profession sufficient to meet the registration requirements of specific professional bodies and the needs of major employers in these professional areas. This will usually involve significant periods of practical experience in developing professional skills, supported by the employers and the professions; and
- (b) courses not directly related to professional qualifications, broadly treating a number of subjects.

It is expected that students will be considered for admission to such courses after satisfactory completion of a full-time secondary education, but it is recognised that institutions will consider such factors as practical experience, maturity and motivation relating to likely success.

Courses in this category normally require as the level of entry, satisfactory completion of Year 12 in an Australian school system or equivalent.

The achievement of the accepted educational objectives for these courses will normally require three years of full-time (or equivalent) study. However, accepted within this category are courses less than three years in duration which give credit for relevant prior learning.

Bachelor Degree Awards

The bachelor degree is the initial award in professions such as health and education, architecture, engineering, law, business, and in the areas of the arts and the sciences.

Courses at this award level provide students with a systematic and coherent introduction to a body of knowledge, the underlying principles and concepts, and the associated problem-solving techniques. Students are expected to develop the academic skills and attitudes needed to comprehend and evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources, so that after completion of a degree, they can continue to review, consolidate, extend and apply the knowledge, using the techniques gained in their undergraduate studies. A bachelor degree course usually includes the provision of major studies in which significant literature is available, course content is taken to a significant depth and knowledge is progressively developed to a high level which provides a basis for post-graduate study.

Courses leading to this award normally require as the level of entry, satisfactory completion of Year 12 in an Australian school system or equivalent.

A bachelor degree is normally of three years' duration. However, many degree courses equip students with the practical skills and techniques needed to apply their knowledge effectively in a professional context, and such courses may be longer in duration.

Articulation between Diploma and Degree

Since a diploma is expected to have substantial time given to the acquisition of practical skills and techniques in preparation for a specific professional field, it is considered that at least one additional year of full-time academic study is necessary to extend the knowledge base to that of a three-year degree. This may be associated with or may post-date a period of professional experience.

Honours Degrees and Degrees with Honours

Conditions for honours are normally determined according to the length of the basic degree course.

In the case of degree courses of three years' duration, the award of an honours degree normally requires the completion of an additional year of full-time study, or its equivalent, by students who had a record of outstanding achievement from an early stage in the basic degree. The additional year typically includes a substantial research project.

In the case of degree courses of four or more years (for example, courses preparing students for professional practice in a field such as engineering), a degree with honours may be awarded to students who have recorded outstanding achievement in the four-year program.

It is considered desirable to ensure a consistency in the offering of honours awards. The Academic Standards Panel of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee is currently making a series of reports and detailed recommendations on academic standards in honours degrees in Australian universities, the first of which, on Physics, is available from the AVCC, GPO Box 1142, Canberra ACT 2601.

Graduate Awards

There is, in higher education, a coherent system of graduate awards within which each institution frames its graduate course offerings. These courses are designed to recognise the needs and aspirations of the participants and build upon their previous academic, professional and vocational experience.

Graduate Certificate Awards

Graduate certificate courses are designed for specific vocational purposes. They will broaden or develop professional knowledge and skills either already gained in an undergraduate program, or in a new area. Examples are Graduate Certificate in Information Technology following a Bachelor of Engineering or Graduate Certificate in Management, following a degree in a field other than Business.

Graduate certificate courses generally require a minimum of half a year full-time or a full year of part-time study following the satisfactory completion of a degree or diploma course or its equivalent.

Graduate Diploma Awards

Graduate Diploma courses either:

- develop a new academic, professional or vocational area; for example, a course designed to provide a basic qualification in fields such as teaching or librarianship for those who have satisfactorily completed an acceptable qualification in another area; or
- extend skills and knowledge in a professional area previously studied; for example, a specialised course in a certain aspect of engineering for graduates with an appropriate undergraduate degree in engineering or in a specialised area of teaching for fully qualified teachers.

Graduate diploma courses normally require one year of full-time study or the part-time equivalent, generally following the satisfactory completion of a degree or a diploma course or its equivalent.

Masters Degree Awards

Masters degree courses are intended to provide for in-depth study in a particular field, often focusing on professional development. There are two main types of programs, the masters degree by research which is often converted to or preparatory for a doctoral program, and the masters degree by coursework which is directed at enhancing specific professional skills and is often undertaken in conjunction with professional employment.

Candidates will have shown above average performance in studies for a bachelor degree, or have demonstrated in their professional activity potential to undertake masters degree studies. Candidates who have performed at a high level in graduate studies which take to a greater depth the field of previous undergraduate study may be considered to have completed part of the requirement for a masters degree.

The prerequisite for a masters degree by research is typically the completion of an honours degree, a qualifying year or equivalent — that is, four years of study, including some orientation towards research — and the masters program is designed for one calendar year of full-time study. The masters degree by coursework is normally entered

after a period of employment and has a professional orientation enabling entry from a pass degree with the program then being of two years duration.

In the case of the longer masters program which includes preparatory work for the substantive degree work, in some instances the course may be reviewed to enable exit from the preparatory year with either a graduate certificate or a graduate diploma.

Doctoral Awards

Doctoral degrees may be conferred on those who have undertaken an original research project resulting in a significant contribution to knowledge or understanding and/or the application of knowledge within the field of study. The work generally includes a searching review of the literature, some experimentation or other systematic approach to the acquisition of knowledge and the preparation of a substantial and well-ordered thesis demonstrating the relationship of the research to the broader framework of the discipline.

It is recognised that doctoral research awards serve a variety of purposes — those of the individual concerned, the academic institution and the agency which may be sponsoring the research. As the award is not confined to young researchers beginning an academic or research career, a traditional model of research program and supervision primarily on campus may not always be appropriate.

Accordingly, a variety of approaches to the selection of topics and supervisors is typical. Topics include multi-disciplinary problems suggested by bodies external to the institution, eg, industry, government and commerce, with joint supervisors appointed from both academic and outside environments. The doctoral work may be undertaken either full-time or part-time and either on-campus or at an off-campus location approved by the academic institution.

Where the doctoral program is specifically oriented towards advanced practice in a particular professional field it may be developed as a separate professional doctorate or accommodated under traditional PhD arrangements.

Candidates typically hold a masters degree, or a first degree with honours or equivalent, and have demonstrated potential, in study and/or professional performance, to undertake doctoral work.

The duration of the work for full-time candidates is normally three years.

APPENDIX

STATE/TERRITORY AUTHORITIES EMPOWERED BY GOVERNMENT TO CARRY OUT ACCREDITATION OF TERTIARY AWARD COURSES

NOTE:

- i. A list of tertiary institutions empowered by government to accredit their courses is available from RATE, GPO Box 202, Carlton South Vic 3053
- ii. Private providers should approach the authority appropriate to the type and level of course for which they are seeking accreditation.

Note: this included addresses and telephone numbers and hand written corrections.

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