

**THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL
ON TERTIARY AWARDS**

**GUIDELINES
FOR THE
NATIONAL REGISTRATION
OF AWARDS IN
ADVANCED EDUCATION**

1986

Guidelines for the
National
Registration
of Awards in
Advanced
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Establishment

The Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA) was set up in January 1985 by the Australian Education Council, which consists of the Ministers for Education of the Commonwealth, the States and the Northern Territory. Its function is to develop and maintain a national register of tertiary courses in Advanced Education and Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

ACTA took over the work of the Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE) which was dissolved after presenting a final report to the Australian Education Council in October 1985. ACTA has a comparable role in respect of TAFE Awards.

Functions

ACTA was established to carry out the following functions:

- to promote consistency throughout Australia in the nomenclature used for tertiary awards and in the standards of courses leading to those awards;
- to encourage the development of consistent relationships between courses and their associated awards;
- to establish and maintain liaison with the accrediting authorities nominated by the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Ministers for Education, and with other relevant bodies;
- to provide an information service at a national level in connection with the courses and awards registered;
- to establish, maintain and publish a National Register of Tertiary Awards;
- to issue guidelines on the information to be contained in the Register, the nomenclature of awards and standards of courses for various awards, their registration and periodic re-registration, and the general conditions under which awards attaching to accredited courses may be included in the Register;
- to monitor adherence to these guidelines.

Powers

The Australian Education Council agreed that to carry out these functions ACTA should have the power to satisfy itself that the conditions and procedures used by the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory accrediting authorities in the assessment of courses are such as to merit national registration of associated awards.

Consideration of applications

ACTA will consider applications for registration submitted only by bodies authorised to do so by the Minister responsible for education in the Commonwealth, respective State or the Northern Territory.

Membership

Mr D. J. Little, AO, FIE Aust., Director General of Public Works in Victoria and Past President of the Institution of Engineers Australia, was appointed Chairman of ACTA by the Australian Education Council for a three year period.

Each member of the Australian Education Council appointed two members to ACTA, each with knowledge of, and experience in, advanced education or technical and further education.

The seventeen-member Council met three times in 1985 and expects to meet about every three months in the future.

Introduction

- 1 The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information on the policies and procedures adopted by the Council in carrying out those functions set for it by the Ministers which relate to the system of awards approved for national use in advanced education.
- 2 ACTA has adopted the guidelines of the former Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE) as its guidelines for registration of advanced education courses. ACTA will be reviewing these guidelines during the calendar year 1986 but the existing guidelines will continue to operate at least until the end of 1986.

The guidelines deal with levels and nomenclature of awards in advanced education and the general conditions under which the Council will accept these awards for inclusion in the National Register. The principles set down should assist the various accrediting authorities and the colleges to maintain a consistent national pattern of awards in advanced education.

Levels and nomenclature of awards

3 For the purpose of registering awards in advanced education, the Council has categorised courses in advanced education under five levels of awards which are defined in sections 9 to 20 of these guidelines. The Council has adopted, in respect of these five levels, the system of nomenclature of awards set out hereunder. In categories UG1, UG2 and PG2 the Council originally adopted five award titles, each of which was designed to cover a broad range of courses. The Council, after careful consideration and consultation, added two more generic titles in Architecture and Law. The generic title Music was added in July 1982. Titles of a more specific nature have been provided for in respect of awards in categories UG3 and PG1.

Undergraduate awards (UG)

Category UG1

Bachelor's Degree

- Bachelor of Applied Science (B. App. Sc.)
- Bachelor of Architecture (B. Arch.)
- Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
- Bachelor of Business (B. Bus.)
- Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.)
- Bachelor of Engineering (B. Eng.)
- Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.)
- Bachelor of Music (B. Mus.)

Category UG2

Diploma

- Diploma of Applied Science (Dip. App. Sc.)
- Diploma of Architecture (Dip. Arch.)
- Diploma of Arts (Dip. A.)
- Diploma of Business (Dip. Bus.)
- Diploma of Teaching (Dip. Teach.)
- Diploma of Engineering (Dip. Eng.)
- Diploma of Law (Dip. Law.)
- Diploma of Music (Dip. Mus.)

Category UG3—Associate Diploma

- Associate Diploma in *
- (Assoc. Dip. **)

*specific disciplinary area **area abbreviated

Postgraduate awards (PG)

Category PG1—Graduate Diploma

- Graduate Diploma in *
- (Grad. Dip. **)

*specific disciplinary area **area abbreviated

Category PG2—Master's Degree

- Master of Applied Science (M. App. Sc.)
- Master of Architecture (M. Arch)
- Master of Arts (M.A.)
- Master of Business (M. Bus.)
- Master of Education (M. Ed.)
- Master of Engineering (M. Eng.)
- Master of Laws (LL.M.)
- Master of Music (M. Mus.)

It should be noted that the term 'Teaching' has been adopted in the nomenclature of award for category UG2 in the subject area of 'Education' so as to avoid confusion with the established university award of Diploma in Education. However PG1 courses in Education are acceptable.

4 The Council will enter awards in the National Register under the titles listed above. Where colleges or accrediting agencies use award titles other than those set out in these guidelines, the local award will also be shown for reference in the National Register.

5 The Council is aware that colleges of advanced education have an important role to play in offering a number of courses to meet specific needs and which may be less than one year's full-time study or its equivalent. In the view of the Council, formal awards should not be given in respect of these courses.

General considerations for registration of awards

6 Undergraduate courses in colleges of advanced education normally require as level of entry the final year of secondary schooling in the Australian secondary school system or its equivalent. The conditions of entry may take into account maturity or work experience. In considering the registration of an award, the Council will be concerned with the standard of the course and the nomenclature of its award and the manner in which these compare with those of similar courses and awards elsewhere in Australia. The Council does not wish this to be interpreted as implying any restrictions upon innovation and variety in the development of courses.

7 Before registering an award, the Council will need to be assured by the accrediting authority concerned that appropriate consideration has been given to the following:

- 7.1 the general academic practices and standards of the educational institution;
- 7.2 the objectives of the particular course and the methods adopted to achieve these objectives;
- 7.3 the standards for admission to the course;
- 7.4 the duration of the course, having regard to the standards of entry and course objectives;
- 7.5 the breadth, depth and balance in the subjects involved and the amount of intellectual effort required by the course;
- 7.6 the methods of assessment of student progress;
- 7.7 the relative emphasis on the teaching of skills in relation to the study of the discipline;
- 7.8 any arrangements for practical training and experience as part of the course;
- 7.9 the teaching staff conducting the course, including numbers, professional qualifications and experience, and educational expertise;
- 7.10 the accommodation and facilities including equipment, library, laboratories, workshops and other instructional resources, as necessary for a particular course.

Guidelines for registration within award categories

8 The guidelines adopted by the Council as to the general conditions under which an award will be considered for national registration under each of the categories in section 3 are set out below.

Category UG3—associate diploma awards

9 Courses leading to awards in this category will usually require a minimum of two years' full-time tertiary study or its equivalent. However, the Council is willing to consider for national registration within this category 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.

10 Courses in this category will normally be designed to train students in a very specific field of knowledge. It is expected that in the majority of cases the courses will be characterised by a considerable emphasis on the development of skills in limited fields.

11 The Council will also consider for registration at this level courses which treat a number of subjects provided at a level appropriate to a general understanding of a field of knowledge without pursuit of particular depth in any one of them.

Notes for assistance and guidance of accrediting authorities and educational institutions

- An associate diploma course of any type should be designed as a terminal entity in order to produce a person capable of fulfilling certain identifiable vocational duties. Therefore, an associate diploma course should not be planned as a finite component of a degree or a diploma course.
- An associate diploma course is regarded as a more practical and/or more general course when compared with degree and diploma studies.
- While in general an associate diploma course may be seen as having an intellectual rigour less than degree or diploma courses and as having a less stringent entry level than degree or diploma courses, the rigour of some individual units of the course may be equivalent to that required in degree or diploma studies. This situation would most commonly arise in the type of course referred to in paragraph 10 of the guidelines although some units at this standard may also be appropriate in the type of course referred to in paragraph 11.

- It is expected that advanced education authorities will have developed policies concerning the entry of students into associate diploma courses consistent with paragraph 6 of the guidelines including the entry from certificate or other relevant courses.
- Educational institutions may offer, in the same field, a course at UG3 level and a course at UG2 or UG1 level. In such a case the two courses should meet different needs and have different objectives as well as having different standards consistent with the levels of their awards.
- Credit or advanced standing may be awarded to successful associate diploma students who wish to proceed to a degree course in that field. It is considered that an associate diploma course could give up to one year's advanced standing in a related diploma or degree course. The concept of considering the associate diploma course in its entirety is commended as providing a basis for awarding advanced standing.

Category UG2—diploma awards

- 12 Courses leading to awards in this category will usually require three years of full-time tertiary study or its equivalent. However, the Council is willing to consider for national registration within this category courses less than three years in duration which are designed to upgrade (to UG2 level) previous formal training.
- 13 Compared with UG3 associate diploma awards, these courses will treat a broader field of knowledge and will proceed to greater depth in individual units of the course.
- 14 It will normally be expected that UG2 diploma courses will be structured with defined major studies, which will be treated in some depth, and other studies. It would also be expected that broader background reading will be required than in UG3 courses and more demanding methods of student assessment used. Compared with UG1 courses, UG2 courses will give greater emphasis to practical skills; they would not normally be regarded as appropriate preparation for master's degree courses.

Category UG1—bachelor's degree awards

- 15 Courses leading to awards in this category will require a minimum of three years of full-time tertiary study or its equivalent.
- 16 Although it is not possible to define in detail what constitutes a degree level course there are certain general characteristics that should distinguish these courses from others. It may be found, however, that not all the criteria apply in every case.
- 17 The following are suggested criteria against which a degree course may be assessed:
 - 17.1 A significant literature is available on the major studies in the course.
 - 17.2 The subjects studied require a significant depth of intellectual effort.
 - 17.3 The major studies are open to, and suitable for, postgraduate study.
 - 17.4 The course should provide a progressive development of knowledge to a high level. The relationship between the different elements in the course and the contribution of each element to the whole should be clearly demonstrable.
 - 17.5 The course should provide an understanding of the basic organisation and structure of the discipline, the major principles and concepts which underlie the discipline and the methods of, and reasons for, their development and the method of their application. It should also give some concept of the direction in which the discipline is developing.
 - 17.6 The course should provide an understanding of the nature and development of the principal problem-solving techniques used in the discipline and the method of their application; some guidance should also be given in their limitation and evaluation.
 - 17.7 The student's experience in the course should give him/her the ability to absorb and evaluate new information, concepts or empirical evidence contained in journal articles, research reports etc. and to perceive how this information might be related and applied to practical problems.
 - 17.8 The course should convey some knowledge of the ways in which other disciplines may contribute to the definition or solution of practical problems and the possible difficulties of using information from other disciplines.

Category PG1—graduate diploma awards

18 Courses leading to awards in this category will usually require at least one year of full-time tertiary study or its equivalent, generally following the satisfactory completion of a category UG1 degree course or in some cases a UG2 diploma course with or without additional work.

19 Several types of courses may be offered at PG1 level. They may be designed to provide an extension within the field of a student's undergraduate studies, or they may be undertaken in a field which differs substantially from a student's undergraduate studies, or in a field partially related to a student's undergraduate studies.

19.1 Courses designed to provide an extension within the field of a student's undergraduate studies are expected to be substantially postgraduate in both content and standard. Such courses are seen as providing a specialised study in depth beyond undergraduate studies in an area which formed a significant part of a student's undergraduate program. Examples would include specialised courses 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. The Council would expect that students will normally be ineligible to enter a course of this kind offered in an area which is not based on their undergraduate studies.

19.2 Courses undertaken in a field which differs substantially from a student's undergraduate studies are not intended to provide an extension in depth of knowledge gained in an undergraduate course. Although it is expected that such courses will be designed for and conducted at a level and standard appropriate to a graduate intake, they will not necessarily be substantially postgraduate in content. Examples of such courses include those designed to provide a basic teaching qualification to graduates in disciplines other than education or teaching, and those in administration or librarianship designed for graduates from other disciplines.

Although an institution may require students to have completed certain prerequisite subjects at undergraduate level before entering a course of this type, such a course would not be undertaken in a discipline which comprised a major portion of a student's undergraduate studies.

19.3 Courses which are partially related to a student's undergraduate studies and intermediate between the above two categories.

Category PG2—master's degree awards

20 The Council appreciates that master's degree programs may range from those which are entirely by advanced course work to those which are entirely by thesis. Separate guidelines are given for master's by course work and thesis.

Master's degrees by course work

21 The Council expects that courses leading to awards in this category will usually require two years of full-time tertiary study or its equivalent. The Council believes, however, that where candidates are specially qualified in the relevant discipline at an advanced level, they may complete the requirements for a master's degree in less than two years. Nevertheless, the Council believes that exemptions would not normally be given for short refresher courses or short informal courses intended only to broaden the graduate's knowledge in his field without any substantial advancement in depth. The Council would expect that entry to master's degree courses would normally be restricted to those students who demonstrated exceptional ability at the undergraduate level, or who, in the pursuit of their occupation or by other means, have demonstrated their ability to successfully undertake studies at the master's degree level. Students holding UG2 diplomas and wishing to gain admission to a master's degree course would normally be expected to undertake additional studies before being considered for admission. Before approving a master's award for national registration the Council will need to be assured that appropriate attention has been paid to the general considerations for the registration of awards as set out in section 7 of these guidelines.

22 Master's degree courses will be expected to be postgraduate in time and substantially postgraduate in standard. Master's degrees are seen to differ from graduate diplomas not only in their length, but also in their objectives. A master's degree course aims to provide studies in depth in a significant part of a discipline at a high level, whereas the graduate diploma course as described in section 19.1 above is designed to provide a study in depth of one aspect of a discipline. Master's degree students would therefore be expected to attain a conceptual understanding of their discipline which is significantly higher than that expected within a bachelor's degree, and broader than that of the graduate diploma. A master's degree by course work should include some project work.

Master's degrees by thesis

23. The Council expects the entry to a master's degree by thesis would be negotiated on an individual basis, and normally restricted to students who have demonstrated exceptional ability in their first degree or graduate diploma studies. In other cases it is expected that a student's eligibility to enter master's degree candidature will be established by a qualifying program of studies completed at an appropriate standard, or after satisfying some other suitable test of fitness.

Because each candidature is individual and specific, the Council would not wish to be unduly prescriptive about the duration of study. The Council considers that two (2) years might be a normal time for completion of a master's degree by thesis but would accept that the minimum time for completion could be one calendar year from the date of registration. The degree would be awarded in this minimum time only if there were exceptional circumstances relating to the candidate's academic and/or professional background.

In relation to the examination of the thesis, the Council expects that two or more examiners would be appointed and, as the use of external examiners is to be encouraged, not more than one of the appointed examiners should be an internal examiner. The use of the project supervisor as an examiner is not acceptable.

In considering the registration of the award of a master's degree in this category, the Council will wish to be satisfied that the accrediting authority has given due regard to such matters as the following in the institution responsible for such an award:

- 23.1 the qualifications required for entry to courses;
- 23.2 the procedure for approval of projects;
- 23.3 the procedures and personnel for supervision of projects;
- 23.4 the assessment procedures, including the use of external examiners;
- 23.5 the facilities to undertake projects, including laboratory equipment, and library, as appropriate.

Period of review of registration of awards

24 The period of registration of an award submitted for initial registration or reregistration will be decided by the Council. The maximum period of registration for awards in all categories is five years from 31 December of the year in which registration is approved. After this period it will be necessary for a further application to be made for continued registration of an award. Registration of an award in respect of a course which has undergone a major change during the five-year period will also need to be reviewed by the Council at the time of the change. It will be left to accrediting authorities to determine when a 'major' change takes place. Awards by thesis will continue to be registered up to the time a major change effects the conditions under which an award was initially accredited. During its first six years of operation the Council accepted for national registration awards in respect of 'established' courses. These courses were not formally accredited by State authorities but were registered on the basis of long-standing community and employer acceptance. The Council has since determined that no new applications for registration of courses of this type were to be accepted, and that the registration of any such course would continue beyond 31 December 1977 only if it had been formally accredited by a State accrediting authority.

Grading of awards

- 25 The Council has decided that it will not provide in its National Register for recognition of any honours degree.
- 26 Inquiries by the Council have shown that a significant number of those concerned with advanced education in Australia are opposed to the introduction of honours courses. This attitude applies particularly to the provision of an honours year which follows immediately after the successful completing of a first degree course.
- 27 The Council recognises the need for awards for those students who wish to extend their basic qualifications and for this purpose has provided for graduate diplomas and master's degrees in its pattern of awards. Graduate diplomas, as described in section 19.1 in particular, are seen by the Council as fulfilling in many cases a role in advanced education similar to that of the final honours year in universities.
- 28 The Council believes that a number of advantages would accrue from a procedure which recognises excellence in student scholarship and, for this reason, is sympathetic to the idea of classifying the overall performance of students at all levels of awards. However, in the interests of promoting consistency in such a classification system throughout Australia the Council suggests that only outstanding students should be so recognised and that awards for such students should be graded by using the term 'distinction'. For example, amongst those undertaking degrees or diplomas in Arts, those with outstanding performance throughout the course would be graded 'B.A. with distinction' or 'Dip. A with distinction'.

Accrediting authorities

- New South Wales*
New South Wales Higher Education Board
13th Floor, ADC House
189 Kent Street
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Telephone (02) 237 6500
- Victoria*
Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission
21 Coppin Grove
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Hawthorn, Vic. 3122
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- Queensland*
Board of Advanced Education, Queensland
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* Responsible for advanced education courses in the Australian Capital Territory and at Commonwealth institutions such as the Australian Maritime College and the Australian Film and Television School.