TEQSA's 'Core +' model for course accreditation

TEQSA Consultation Paper

March 2015

Responding to this paper

Responses to the consultation questions posed on page 5 of this paper, and other relevant feedback, are requested via email to consultation@teqsa.gov.au.

Submissions close at **5.00pm on 27 April 2015**.

Interested parties can also email consultation@teqsa.gov.au with queries about this paper, or to seek clarification of the consultation questions.

Please note that TEQSA intends to publish submissions received. If you do not wish for your submission to be published, please indicate this in your response. TEQSA may alter the format or content of submissions before they are published, or decline to publish particular submissions, having regard to the requirements for Australian Government websites.

Background and purpose

All higher education courses offered by registered providers without self-accrediting authority require accreditation and cyclical renewal of accreditation by TEQSA under provisions of the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act).

In this paper TEQSA sets out its proposal for further development of the risk-based model for course accreditation for existing providers. The objectives of this improved model are to:

‣ build upon the 'Core +' model that was successfully implemented for renewal of registration processes (and partially for course accreditation) following TEQSA's sector wide consultation in October 2013; and

‣ substantially reduce evidence requirements and application assessment times for low risk providers.

In the previous round of changes, TEQSA reduced evidence requirements for course accreditation applications from providers with a generally low risk profile.

In 2015, TEQSA proposes to further reduce evidence requirements for many providers by restricting core requirements to a sub-set of particular Standards, and by assessing risk using indicators more closely related to an individual course, as well as organizational risk indicators.

The revised approach to course accreditation that is described below is intended for application against the current Higher Education Standards Framework (2011). TEQSA has also mapped the proposed new Higher Education Standards Framework onto the 'Core +' course accreditation model for future application.
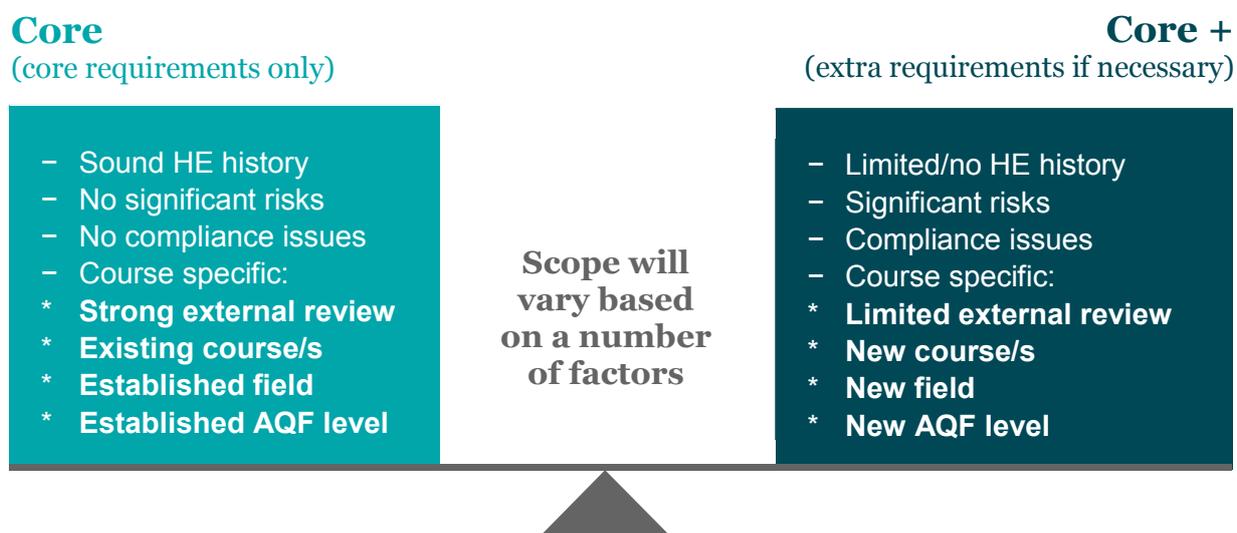
Planned reforms of course accreditation

TEQSA intends to introduce a full 'Core +' model of course accreditation in which applicants will address a sub-set of standards and provide a minimum core of evidence relating to these standards. Any extension beyond the core set of standards will be based on risk. The following principles will apply:

‣ **reducing the scope of assessment** for most providers based on TEQSA's risk assessment of the provider (including course level risk), regulatory history and history of higher education delivery

‣ **reducing the amount of evidence required** for most providers by tailoring assessment processes and application requirements, and drawing on TEQSA's accumulated information about a provider gained from TEQSA's assessment activities and national data collections

‣ **providing clearer guidance about the amount and nature of information required** to reduce the overall amount of information submitted, while maintaining an emphasis on provider choice as to the evidence considered most useful to submit to TEQSA; and

‣ **building upon the strengths of TEQSA's case management model** by supporting dialogue between providers and Case Managers in order to facilitate streamlining and tailoring of requirements.

Under the improved 'Core +' model for course accreditation, providers with a sound history of higher education delivery and no significant compliance or risk concerns will benefit from a reduced scope of assessment (requiring less evidence and information at time of application) compared to those with a limited track record of higher education delivery or with compliance or risk concerns.

Figure 1 shows how TEQSA proposes to take into account a provider's track record of higher education delivery and risk profile to scope and determine requirements for course accreditation regulatory processes.

Figure 1: Overarching design of the reform proposals

Core
(core requirements only)

- Sound HE history
- No significant risks
- No compliance issues
- Course specific:
  * **Strong external review**
  * **Existing course/s**
  * **Established field**
  * **Established AQF level**

Scope will vary based on a number of factors

Core +
(extra requirements if necessary)

- Limited/no HE history
- Significant risks
- Compliance issues
- Course specific:
  * **Limited external review**
  * **New course/s**
  * **New field**
  * **New AQF level**

'Core +' model of course accreditation

Applications for course accreditation can be of three types:

▸ new provider - new course

▸ existing provider – new course

▸ existing provider – renewal of existing course

It is proposed that applications for initial accreditation from new providers will be assessed against all of the standards applicable to course accreditation (current Provider Course Accreditation Standards and Qualifications Standards; or following transition to the new Higher Education Standards Framework, an identified sub-set of standards relevant to course accreditation).

All other applications will be handled under the 'Core+' model. There will be two distinct sets of 'Core' standards:

▸ a set for accreditation of new courses from existing providers; and

▸ a set for renewal of course accreditation.

Any extension to the core scope of standards will be determined by consideration of TEQSA's institutional risk assessment of the provider, student data against risk indicators for the relevant course or its field of education and AQF level, any previous assessment activities and other exceptional course attributes specific to each application. Further details of the criteria for extension to the core are provided below.

Underpinning the 'Core +' model is TEQSA's commitment to focus on student outcomes and testing the capacity of providers to self-assure. This is reinforced by analysis of TEQSA's regulatory work to date which has confirmed that the most common issues identified across assessments of all types relate to quality assurance mechanisms.

The Tables below show the difference between the core standards selected for accreditations of a new course from an existing provider as opposed to the renewal of accreditation of a course. In the former case, more emphasis is placed on course design, admission criteria and teaching and learning; in the latter case, more emphasis is placed on assessment and student outcomes, and course monitoring and review.

Core Standards: Course Accreditation Existing Provider (Table 1)

The 15 standards chosen as the core represent 33 percent of the full complement of the current Provider Course Accreditation Standards.

COURSE ACCREDITATION – CORE STANDARDS (EXISTING PROVIDER)	
COURSE DESIGN	PCAS: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7
COURSE RESOURCING	PCAS: 2.1, 2.4
ADMISSION CRITERIA	PCAS: 3.1, 3.3
TEACHING AND LEARNING	PCAS: 4.1, 4.2
ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES	PCAS: 5.1, 5.5
COURSE MONITORING AND REVIEW	No core standards specified

Core Standards: –Renewal of Accreditation (Table 2)

The 13 standards chosen as the core represent 29 percent of the full complement of the current Provider Course Accreditation Standards.

RENEWAL OF COURSE ACCREDITATION – CORE STANDARDS	
COURSE DESIGN	PCAS: 1.1, 1.2, 1.6, 1.7
COURSE RESOURCING	PCAS: 2.1, 2.4
ADMISSION CRITERIA	No core standards specified
TEACHING AND LEARNING	No core standards specified
ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES	PCAS: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6
COURSE MONITORING AND REVIEW	PCAS: 6.1

Extension beyond the 'Core'

TEQSA has developed a framework to establish clearly and consistently the criteria for extension beyond the core scope of standards, founded in TEQSA's level of confidence in the provider's ability to consistently meet the Course Accreditation (and other) Standards. The framework considers:

▸ identified risks, including at the field of education or course level, using existing data obtained through HEIMS and TEQSA's annual Provider Information Request

▸ applications for new courses that represent a new disciplinary area or a different AQF level than existing courses delivered by the provider

▸ verified effectiveness of quality assurance systems in combination with known student outcomes and prior history of applications to TEQSA

Other instances where the assessment may need to be expanded include where the course of study involves:

▸ use of different teaching and learning spaces (premises) to those that have been previously assessed by TEQSA;

▸ delivery by a third party;

▸ online-only delivery

▸ delivery in a language other than English;

▸ delivery in an offshore location;

▸ conduct of research leading to a thesis or dissertation that is a major component (two thirds or more) of the overall course requirements; or

▸ a significant work integrated learning component.

TEQSA's case management model will enable effective communication and application planning. TEQSA will hold a meeting or otherwise liaise with the provider to finalise the assessment scope at least six months prior to the application due date. During this meeting, the TEQSA case manager will explain the reasons for any proposed extension of scope and give an opportunity for the provider to explain any controls in place before making its decision.

It is a requirement of registration that providers continue to meet all Provider Course Accreditation Standards (PCAS). If TEQSA identifies concerns during the assessment of evidence, TEQSA may at any stage of the process, request further evidence or determine an extension of the Standards to be reviewed.

Ongoing dialogue with providers will also help to identify opportunities for further efficiencies in the application processes and reduce the regulatory burden for low risk providers.

Consultation questions: Course accreditation
▸ **Question A1**: Do you agree with TEQSA's proposed approach for the introduction of a core plus model for course accreditation and renewal of course accreditation? If not, why, and what would you propose instead?
▸ **Question A2:** Are the proposed core standards (Tables 1 and 2) and evidence requirements as listed at **Attachment B** appropriate? If not, why, and what would you propose instead?

Consultation process

This paper is being made available on TEQSA's website (www.teqsa.gov.au) and has been sent directly to all higher education providers and peak bodies for providers and students.

Responses to the questions posed in this paper and other relevant feedback can be provided through the following email address consultation@teqsa.gov.au.

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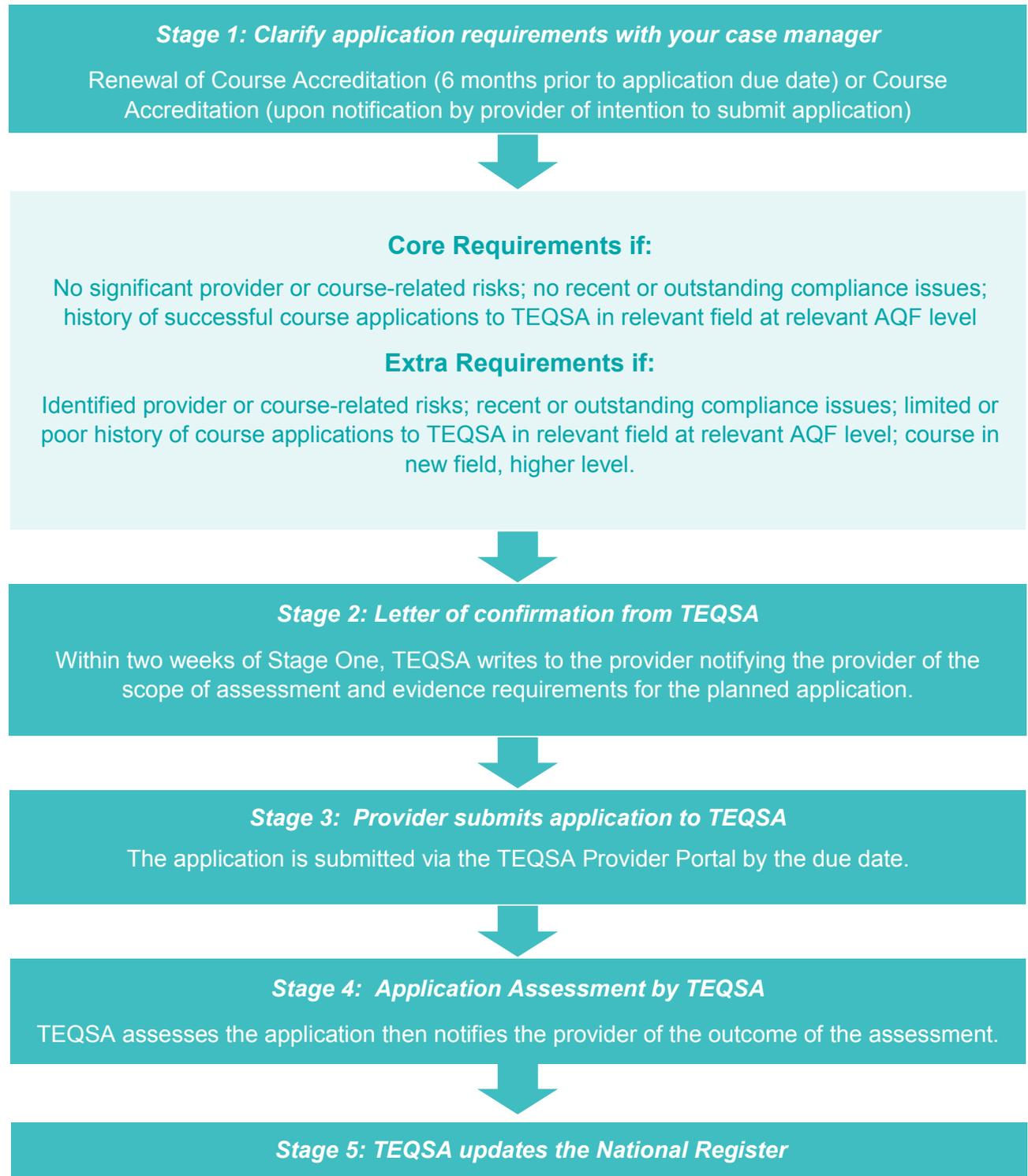
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A summary of feedback received will be incorporated into TEQSA's announcement of the new processes.

Appendix 1:

Overview of (re) accreditation process and primary responsibility for each stage

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Stage 1: Clarify application requirements with your case manager

Renewal of Course Accreditation (6 months prior to application due date) or Course Accreditation (upon notification by provider of intention to submit application)

⬇

Core Requirements if:

No significant provider or course-related risks; no recent or outstanding compliance issues; history of successful course applications to TEQSA in relevant field at relevant AQF level

Extra Requirements if:

Identified provider or course-related risks; recent or outstanding compliance issues; limited or poor history of course applications to TEQSA in relevant field at relevant AQF level; course in new field, higher level.

⬇

Stage 2: Letter of confirmation from TEQSA

Within two weeks of Stage One, TEQSA writes to the provider notifying the provider of the scope of assessment and evidence requirements for the planned application.

⬇

Stage 3: Provider submits application to TEQSA

The application is submitted via the TEQSA Provider Portal by the due date.

⬇

Stage 4: Application Assessment by TEQSA

TEQSA assesses the application then notifies the provider of the outcome of the assessment.

⬇

Stage 5: TEQSA updates the National Register

Core Standards: Course Accreditation Existing Provider (Table 1)

CORE STANDARDS	MINIMUM EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS (ATTACHMENTS)
1. COURSE DESIGN (PCAS: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7)	- Course proposal as provided to the academic governance body - Table showing the alignment of course and unit learning outcomes and assessment against the AQF specifications - Unit outlines (unit overview, unit learning outcomes, assessment tasks and references). - Course advisory committee meeting minutes - Course rules for progression including any pre-requisites.
2. COURSE RESOURCING (PCAS: 2.1, 2.4)	- List of specific resource requirements and specialist resources (if any) - Information for prospective students that includes course design, course structure, delivery sites, application date, credit arrangements, pathways to employment or further study
3. ADMISSION CRITERIA (PCAS: 3.1, 3.3)	- Course admission criteria (including articulation, RPL and credit arrangements) - Admission procedures for applications that do not meet admission requirements (if applicable).
4. TEACHING AND LEARNING (PCAS: 4.1, 4.2)	- Workforce plan - Staff professional equivalency policy. - Evidence of (existing and prospective) staff scholarship
5. ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES (PCAS: 5.1, 5.5)	- Plans for external moderation/benchmarking of student assessment - Reports of professional accreditation body (if any) and provider response
6. COURSE MONITORING AND REVIEW No core standards specified	No core evidence specified

Core Standards: Renewal of Accreditation (Table 2)

CORE STANDARDS	MINIMUM EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS (ATTCHMENTS)
1. COURSE DESIGN (PCAS: 1.1, 1.2, 1.6, 1.7)	- Summary of material changes to the course since the last accreditation including rationale - Table showing the alignment of course and unit learning outcomes and assessment against the AQF specifications. - Course review report as provided to the academic governance body - Unit outlines (for reference).
2. COURSE RESOURCING (PCAS: 2.1, 2.4)	- A list of academic staff (including academic leaders) and their qualifications. - List of specific resource requirements and specialist resources (if any) - Information for prospective students that includes course design, course structure, delivery sites, application date, credit arrangements, pathways to employment or further study
3. ADMISSION CRITERIA No core standards specified	No core evidence specified
4. TEACHING AND LEARNING No core standards specified	No core evidence specified
5. ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES (PCAS: 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4)	- Sample course performance reports (including the data specified in PCAS 5.4) and evidence of response (e.g. minutes of meetings) - Minutes or other records of moderation meetings.
6. COURSE MONITORING AND REVIEW (PCAS: 5.5, 5.6, 6.1)	- Reports of professional accreditation body and/or Internal and external course review reports (if applicable and if available) and provider response - Reports of professional accreditation body (if any) and provider response