Australian Government
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

TEQSA

Guidance note: *Course approval and accreditation*

> *Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time.*

1. What does course approval and accreditation encompass?

In the context of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (Threshold Standards):

- course approval refers to an internal process to be undertaken by each provider to approve their proposed higher education courses.

- course accreditation[1] refers to the process by which providers with self-accrediting authority (SAA) may accredit their own higher education course (provided their SAA covers the level and field of education in which the higher education course falls).

Providers without the appropriate SAA to accredit their courses need to apply to TEQSA for course accreditation.

This guidance note does not cover the process for applying for a course to be accredited by TEQSA or a provider applying to accredit its own courses. For this information, providers may go to our pages about applying for course accreditation and applying for self-accrediting authority.

Providers' obligations about course approval and accreditation are primarily found in Section 5.1 of the Threshold Standards. Under Section 5.1, providers are required to ensure:

- all courses leading to a higher education qualification go through an:

  - internal approval and, where a provider has the appropriate SAA, accreditation process, before a course is first offered

  - internal re-approval and, where a provider has the appropriate SAA, re-accreditation.

- institutional processes for course approval and accreditation are consistent and overseen by peak academic governance processes

- courses are subject to adequate academic scrutiny, are appropriately resourced and meet relevant requirements of the Threshold Standards.

The course approval and accreditation processes should be underpinned by effective academic monitoring, review, and improvement. Our guidance note about academic monitoring, review and improvement is a relevant consideration.

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[1] The accreditation process discussed in this guidance note is separate to the course accreditation undertaken by TEQSA as per section 49 of the TEQSA Act (and professional accreditation bodies). If a provider is seeking information on how to apply to TEQSA for course accreditation or renewal of accreditation, refer to the relevant application guides.

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Other parts of the Threshold Standards are relevant to course approval and accreditation. While elements of these standards are briefly addressed in this guidance note, additional information is available in the following guidance notes:

- Course design
- Learning outcomes and assessment (under development)
- Facilities and infrastructure
- Corporate governance
- Corporate monitoring and accountability (under development)

Approval and accreditation

Each provider will have its own approval and accreditation policy framework; there is no prescribed approach. Some examples of approaches to course approval and accreditation include:

- using a multiple stage process, where internal parties are involved in the consultation and drafting process at different points of a course's approval and accreditation
- working predominantly with the provider's discipline leaders throughout the course approval or accreditation process and subsequently engaging with the academic board for final approval and accreditation
- using external experts with the necessary knowledge and experience to support the case for approval or accreditation of a course
- undertaking benchmarking and moderation against similar courses by other providers.

Regardless of the approach taken, it is the provider's responsibility to demonstrate to TEQSA how its approach is compliant with the Threshold Standards.

Re-approval and re-accreditation

Course approval and accreditation focuses on the initial development of a course. Re-accreditation and re-approval processes focus on the monitoring, review, and improvement of a provider's course offering.

TEQSA expects a provider to perform comprehensive periodic reviews of all accredited courses of study at least every 7 years. The purpose of this is to:

- ensure the course and its materials remain current
- mitigate future risks
- use data collected on student progress, outcomes and feedback to inform and improve admission criteria, approaches to course design, teaching, supervision, learning and academic support and graduate outcomes.

Considerations for developing processes for course approval and accreditation

When developing or reviewing their processes for course approval and accreditation, providers should consider how their processes will ensure:

- consistent application throughout the institution, including across different campuses, faculties, schools and disciplines

- all courses go through a formal process of approval and accreditation before being offered to students

- data about student progress, outcomes, and feedback is collected to inform decision-making by the academic board

- business continuity plans are sufficient to mitigate risks to students undertaking the course.
  - risks posed include, but are not limited to, teach-out arrangements becoming invalid, professional accreditation being lost, a course ceasing to be delivered due to provider financial difficulties.

- the academic board (or equivalent) has sufficient knowledge and expertise to assess both the academic quality of a course and its operational components.
  - this includes, but is not limited to, assessing the staffing, facilities, and other resourcing needs of the course.

- accurate records are maintained about the decisions of the academic board (or equivalent) and the information it considered in deciding whether to approve or accredit a course

- the academic board (or equivalent) considers institutional compliance with the standards required for external accreditation of a course by TEQSA or a professional body, as well as all relevant:
  - Threshold Standards
  - obligations under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Framework
  - voluntary undertakings and registration or accreditation conditions applying to the provider.

Providers should also consider what artefacts it can produce to demonstrate compliance with the Threshold Standards. This can include, but is not limited to:

- minutes from meetings of the academic board related to the approval of courses

- staff profiles of the academic board and skills mapping to ensure key areas of knowledge are covered

- process maps showing how courses receive approval and/or accreditation

- the results of any relevant independent reviews (and subsequent action in response to those reviews as necessary).

2. What TEQSA will look for

TEQSA considers all standards from the Threshold Standard in the context of 'course approval and accreditation', among which most notably are:

Part A: Standards for HE Providers	Key considerations
1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment	• Courses are designed to ensure progressive and coherent achievement of learning outcomes consistent with the AQF level.
1.5.3 Qualifications and Certification	• Qualifications are awarded based on properly accredited courses and learning outcomes consistent with the AQF.
2.1 Facilities and Infrastructure	• Resourcing needs for courses are met and can be adapted to a variable student load where required.

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	• Electronic learning environments are adequately maintained and continuously available.
2.2 Diversity and Equity	• Consideration is given to how a course is structured to meet the diverse needs of students and student cohorts who will undertake the course.
3.1 Course Design	• Course design considers how learning outcomes are assessed, and ensures learning is done in a systematic manner. • Course design also takes into consideration requirements for a student to undergo professional accreditation if required.
3.2 Staffing	• Adequate staff are available to meet educational, academic, and administrative needs. • Staff have the necessary oversight, knowledge and teaching capacity to lead and assess students.
3.3 Learning Resources and Educational Support	• Learning resources are up to date and accessible. • Students have access to learning support services, consistent with their course of study.
5.1 Course Approval and Accreditation	• There is an internal process for course approval or accreditation that adequately assesses course quality and resourcing and is consistently applied across the institution.
5.3 Monitoring, Review, and Improvement	• Accredited courses are subject to periodic comprehensive reviews. • Future risks to the quality of education are mitigated through regular monitoring and improvement.
5.4 Delivery with Other Parties	• Course accreditation and approval processes are applied to courses delivered with other parties, including when courses are wholly delivered by the other party. • Work Integrated Learning (WIL), placements and other similar arrangements are regularly quality assured.
6.1 Corporate Governance 6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	• Governing body ensures competent academic governance and maintenance of the quality of education offered through appropriate oversight, accountability and delegation of authority, including policies that lead to the award of qualifications.
6.3 Academic Governance	• Processes and structures are established, and responsibilities are assigned to provide competent advice to the corporate governing body and management on academic matters, including developing, monitoring, reviewing, and providing advice on course approval and accreditation policies.
7.1 Representation 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students	• Representations of the course are not misleading. • Publicly available information about a course is sufficient for prospective and current students to make informed decisions about undertaking it.

3. Identified issues

In the context of the Threshold Standards, TEQSA has identified issues that may indicate risks to students and the quality of higher education regarding course approval and accreditation. These include, but are not limited to:

- Resourcing and planning
  - failing to adequately consider resourcing for a course beyond the first year of delivery, resulting in a lack of staffing, facilities or other resources required for the ongoing delivery of the course

– resource planning is undertaken without consideration of reliable enrolment projections

– records of course accreditation and approval do not demonstrate sufficient academic scrutiny

– resourcing is lacking in terms of facilities, staffing, location of delivery and delivery mode, for example:

  » facilities are not adequately staffed and resourced to handle a provider's student cohort to ensure the provider can adapt to variable student loads

  » for online course delivery, resources are not available to facilitate students' mode of learning including, for example, IT support, online English language support, availability of staff support within acceptable hours for students located in different time zones.

– the academic board lacks the shared knowledge or skills required to adequately assess courses for approval or accreditation e.g., lacking operational knowledge to adequately assess resourcing needs or lacking the academic experience or discipline knowledge to recognise when insufficient information has been provided to assess the quality of a course.

- Consistency and compliance

  – failing to consistently follow provider policies and processes across campuses, schools, disciplines, and different parts of the organisation, creating uncertainty around the quality and competency of the academic oversight across the institution

  – failing to consider all applicable Threshold Standards when approving courses, resulting in easily avoidable non-compliance

  – failing to review the validity of existing articulation or teach out arrangements as part of course approval or accreditation.[2]

  – failing to consider student progress, outcomes, and feedback (including grievance or complaint data) to inform course approval and accreditation decisions

  – insufficient information is given or made available to the academic board (or equivalent) to ensure the appropriate academic scrutiny of a course during the approval and accreditation process

  – lack of records to demonstrate what information an academic board (or equivalent) relied on to reach a decision to approve or accredit a course, which may lead to inconsistency in decision-making or doubts about the adequacy of the scrutiny applied to the process.

Related Resources

- Guidance note: Course Design (under review)

- Guidance note: Learning Outcomes and Assessment (under development)

- Guidance note: Learning Resources and Educational Support (under review)

- Guidance note: Academic Monitoring, Review and Improvement

- Guidance note: Facilities and Infrastructure

- Guidance note: Diversity and Equity (under review)

- Guidance note: Staffing

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[2] See the TEQSA Glossary of terms for a definition of 'articulation arrangements'.

- Guidance note: Delivery with other parties
- Guidance note: Work-integrated Learning
- Guide: Applying for course accreditation
- Guide: Applying for self-accrediting authority
- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

Version #	Date	Key changes