

2019 Accreditation Process Reform

Overview

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ACS is striving to be an exemplar in professional accreditation. We are aiming to minimise compliance costs while maintaining standards, improving process integrity and providing a more valued service.

These reforms are based on the findings of recent government enquiries into accreditation across professions and seek to align ACS Accreditation with the Universities Australia/Professions Australia *Joint Statement of Principles for Professional Accreditation* (2016). They are also guided by faculty feedback and ACS internal process reviews.

The reforms align ACS Accreditation with the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF), emulating TEQSA models of assessment and risk management, and giving recognition to the internal program reviews and quality assurance processes of accredited institutions. Our criteria are clearer, our process documents simpler, and our submission requirements more flexible. In piloting this change, we seek feedback, assess outcomes and make refinements.

ACS accreditation reform objectives are to:

1. Simplify process
2. Align standards with TEQSA, the HESF and the AQF
3. Be clear on criteria but flexible on forms of evidence
4. Reduce duplicate information and duplicate analysis
5. Streamline submissions & reduce compliance costs
6. Seek a more authentic evaluation

INTRODUCTION

ACS accreditation of ICT higher education programs plays a critical role in improving the professionalism of the ICT industry through increasing the quality of educational programs and in complementing the Society's professional certification and migration skills assessment activities.

The ACS accreditation process aims to keep up to date and reflect changing professional practices and workplace needs, so to remain useful. We also aim to maintain the standing of ACS accreditation with higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. With established approaches to professional accreditation being reviewed across professions, it is timely for the ACS to implement reforms.

This document provides an overview of reforms to the ACS system of accreditation of ICT-related higher education programs. These reforms were planned and developed in late 2018 for implementation from early 2019. This document is intended to inform internal and external stakeholders.

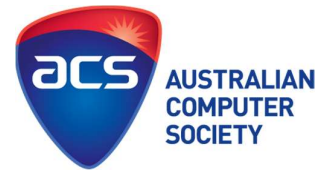
A range of communication and consultation actions started with a presentation and discussion at the ACSW2019 conference for the members of CORE (Computing Research and Education Association of Australasia) and meeting with ACPHIS (Australian Council of Professors and Heads of Information Systems) and ACDICT (Australian Council of Deans of ICT).

Further information will be made available on the ACS website

Recap on ACS program accreditation:

The ACS conducts accreditation of higher education programs on request, to provide assurance to local and international students and stakeholders that the program meets recognised threshold standards for graduate outcomes.

The ACS evaluates university and non-university higher education programs on request of the institution, with the goal of professional accreditation of those programs. ACS accreditation signifies that a course of study meets essential



criteria in the training and education of its students in ICT or related disciplines, and that graduates achieve the professional competencies and learning outcomes necessary for entry into professional practice in Australia.

The ACS conducts around 25 accreditation visits a year, evaluating programs on commencement or major review, and otherwise five-yearly. Around 40 education providers and 340 ICT programs hold current ACS accreditations.

ACS accreditation of higher education programs aims to uphold the interests of the community and the profession, while providing a valued service for educational institutions.

The ACS charges fees for accreditation services and relies on voluntary panellists from many accredited institutions but does not profit financially from accreditation. The ACS recognises that accredited institutions incur significant compliance costs arising from the hours of paid personnel associated with accreditation submissions and responses.

Aims of ACS accreditation:

According to Universities Australia and Professions Australia (2016) “Professional accreditation of university courses of study is intended to ensure that a course of study meets essential criteria in the training and education of its students in the relevant professional discipline, and that graduates from that discipline achieve the professional competencies and learning outcomes necessary for entry into the relevant level of professional practice.”

ACS accreditation aims to:

- serve a public good upholding the interests of the ICT profession, students, graduates, employers, governments and the higher education sector;
- provide an independent quality process assuring that graduates meet the criteria and standards for entry into professional practice in Australia;
- assist Higher Education providers in the improvement of the quality of their programs;
- aid student and graduate recognition and mobility within Australia and internationally; and
- promote ethical competence and conduct.

International recognition and the Seoul Accord:

The ACS is a signatory to the Seoul Accord and complies with its standards for ICT program accreditation. This assures international recognition of Australian ICT qualifications and mobility for graduates. Seoul Accord status requires an accrediting body to act independently, and to examine a full spectrum of educational standards indicators. There is a sensitivity to intervention by governments. The ACS will keep the Seoul Accord informed of reforms and will need to ensure that reform design and implementation do not stray outside Accord boundaries.

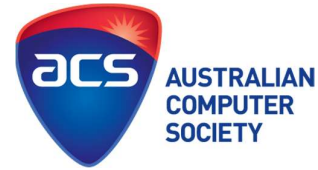
THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Over the last ten years the Australian government has:

- conducted a major review of higher education (The Bradley Review)
- formed a national quality assurance and regulatory agency (TEQSA)
- revised the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- established a standards framework for higher education providers (HESF Framework)

Australian higher education has also become more business-like and adapted to a competitive global market.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA - Australian Government) now has oversight of university governance, educational delivery and quality control, and ensures that Universities conduct structured internal educational program reviews.



Professional representative bodies such as ACS are still needed, as we are uniquely placed to ensure alignment between higher education and professional practice. The established systems of professional accreditation are however being questioned and rethought.

Australian universities through Universities Australia have been raising issues with professional accreditation for some time. Universities Australia (UA - representing the Vice-Chancellors) has been working with Professions Australia (PA - representing the professional bodies) to address professional accreditation practices. An initial outcome was the 2016 *Joint Statement of Principles for Professional Accreditation*, commended by (then) Education Minister Simon Birmingham. Other UA-PA initiatives are in development.

In 2017 the Federal Government commissioned two enquiries by Prof Michael Woods and Phillips KPA on professional accreditation, and in 2018 took advice from its Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP). The Department of Education and Training (DET) is currently consulting with professional bodies and others on options for change, and the ACS is actively contributing.

The ACS is a substantial player in professional program accreditation and, while not immune from some of the issues raised by UA, is well-positioned to lead change. It is hoped that the current reform journey at ACS accreditation contributes to future directions in accreditation across the professions.

ACS ACCREDITATION PROCESS REFORM

The ACS accreditation process has been redesigned in response to external feedback and internal review. The new scheme maintains the rigour of the old, but the quality criteria have been clarified and brought into alignment with TEQSA requirements. The ACS views its accreditation criteria as an ICT disciplinary specific implementation of the HESF and AQF. This approach should fit with an institutions internal processes rather than being seen as just another burdensome adjunct.

Two other reforms have been implemented. Firstly, the redesign of the accreditation application now requires significantly less information to be provided. Large bespoke hard-copy submissions are replaced with digital submissions linking into, rather than reproducing, publicly available web information and, where feasible, linking into internal systems. Panel access to learning management systems will be requested, in lieu of hard-copy assessment samples. There will be more pre-visit analysis and a lesser reliance on visit day evidence.

An ACS Case Manager will maintain an ongoing relationship with the education provider, and will provide pre-application advice on the application process, provider risk profile and forms of evidence. The objective will be to minimise repackaging of information and to maximise usage of existing internal and external program and provider reviews. The case manager will funnel feedback to the ACS Accreditation Committee. The ACS is aiming for simplified process leading to potential overall cost reductions and a more authentic evaluation.



Key ACS documents and requirements – what will stay:

The ACS **CBOK** (Core Body of Knowledge for ICT Professionals) (2015) will be reviewed in future but remains unchanged for now, and programs will continue to be expected to meet the intent of this document in terms of graduate capabilities. We will however refresh our briefings to Panels and institutions may detect a shift in thinking. We recognise a need to balance standard-setting with support for educational innovation and adaptive change.

SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age, SFIA Foundation) remains our key international point of reference for alignment of higher education programs with career paths. We are now working to SFIA 7 (2018). We will however be receptive to considering demonstrated program alignment with other internationally-recognised frameworks, particularly in emerging specialisms such as cyber security.

Key ACS documents and requirements – what will change:

The revised ACS Accreditation Manual comprises:

Volume 1: Accreditation Procedure

Volume 2: Accreditation Criteria

Volume 3: Application Template

The new scheme is in a pilot phase during 2019 and will fully replace the old by the end of the year. The new documents will be shorter and more concise, with much referencing to the government's HESF Threshold Standards. The new documents are clearer on the criteria we are seeking to examine, but more flexible on the forms of evidence we will consider. Alternative forms of evidence are suggested and encouraged, with a view to reducing duplication and compliance costs, and a preference for more authentic forms of evidence.

Accrediting programs in specialist areas:

The redesigned accreditation criteria and process accommodate specialist accreditation that aligns with the specialist certification scheme. Specific criteria for accreditation of programs for Cyber Security are provided in the new accreditation manual. Other specialisms may be considered for future inclusion.

ACCREDITATION REFORM PILOT

The new scheme is in its pilot phase during 2019 and will fully replace the old by the end of the year.

The ACS welcomes your comments, questions, requests for information or feedback.

Please contact us at:

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