



# ACS Accreditation Update September 2020

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ACS has endeavoured to communicate regularly with accredited institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. We issued a COVID-19 email update on 17 March, a COVID-19 notice on 31 March, and a COVID-19 email update on 12 May linking to a [Joint Statement of Principles for Higher Education Sector as a result of the COVID-19 situation](#) (“Joint Statement”) that ACS co-drafted. On 1 July we sent an email inviting accredited institutions to participate in a survey on the impact of COVID-19. We are now writing to share the findings of that survey and to seek [expressions of interest](#) in online facilitated sessions to exchange practices and experiences.

## Survey of ACS-accredited institutions on the impact of COVID-19

Thank you to all those who responded to our recent survey. Your responses have been interesting and insightful. We have attached a summary report with key findings and proposed ACS response actions. Our actions reflect the survey findings, our observations from recent accreditation cases and enquiries, and publicly available research and guidance from others.

We see the key areas of risk for ICT educational outcomes and accreditation compliance during COVID-19 as:

- **Academic integrity ensuring outcomes for all graduates;**
- **Preparation of all graduates for professional practice; and**
- **Staffing and leadership to adapt and sustain ICT programs.**

We see the key areas of opportunity for ACS to promote excellence in ICT higher education during COVID-19 as:

- **Facilitating exchange of practices and experiences between ICT schools;**
- **Highlighting publicly available research and guidance;**
- **Reiterating our expectations of institutions maintaining learning outcomes; and**
- **Continuing to exercise flexibility and communicating our approach to this.**

These matters are further discussed below.

## Maintaining Academic Integrity

Academic integrity was already a growing issue prior to COVID-19 program adaptation. Risks have been accentuated by COVID-19 adaptations with greater reliance on assessment methods that are more susceptible to compromise. The pre-COVID research and guidance nevertheless still stands and ACS still looks to accredited institutions to manage academic integrity and demonstrate that educational outcomes accrue to all graduates.

The ‘[Joint Statement](#)’ (refer above) notes that higher education providers remain responsible for adaptation choices, outcomes and keeping informed; eg:

*Principle 2c: When higher education providers change teaching, learning and student support, they keep abreast of teaching innovations and incorporate best practices and maintain standards.*

*Principle 3a: When adapting assessments, higher education providers keep abreast of options and innovations, and incorporate best practices and maintain assessment integrity.*

TEQSA provide substantial resources regarding academic integrity (including the links below). TEQSA emphasises that academic integrity needs to be managed with a holistic approach by the institution and that academic integrity can’t be managed just by addressing assessment methods. Accredited institutions should utilise these and other available resources in developing academic integrity plans.

- [Academic integrity toolkit](#)
- [Good Practice Note: Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity](#)
- [Academic integrity and the Higher Education Standards Framework](#)
- [Academic integrity and decision making: an integrated approach](#)



## Preparation for Professional ICT Practice

Preparation of ICT graduates for professional practice was already an area of ACS concern prior to COVID-19, and risks are likely to be accentuated by COVID-19 adaptations.

The ACS report *2019 Accreditation Outcomes* released in March 2020 highlighted six problem areas in the match between programs and the good practice criteria of the ACS Accreditation Manual. One of these six areas was *Preparation for Professional ICT Practice*. This referred to equipping graduates for initial professional practice including workforce entry, progression and adaptability, and developing professional attributes as listed in ACS accreditation Criterion F:

- being adaptable through a capacity for life-long learning
- using and designing modern ICT tools effectively
- being both innovative and entrepreneurial
- appreciating ICT professional activity in a global economy
- staying in touch with the professional and research literature in their areas of expertise and being able to apply it.

Accredited programs often address this through work-integrated learning (WIL), internships and capstone projects. Our COVID-19 impact survey indicates that many WIL programs and arrangements have recently been adapted for the pandemic conditions. That is not surprising but confirms this as an area for collective attention.

The [‘Joint Statement’](#) (refer above) notes the need for collaboration in maintaining graduate capabilities; eg:

*Principle 4a: Higher education providers, in partnership with the industry sector, remain responsible for ensuring that graduates develop required practical, professional, occupational and workplace skills, and work with the industry sector to develop new strategies and methods as needed.*

*Principle 4b: Higher education providers should keep abreast of professional practice and skill development options and innovations to adopt best practices or effective alternatives.*

ACS will accordingly seek expressions of interest in an online session to facilitate exchange of practices and experiences between ICT schools (see below).

## Staffing and leadership

Our survey indicates that many ICT schools have been impacted by freezes on recruitment; some have also been impacted by reductions in permanent academic staff. In addition, there has been much recent media attention on loss of work for casual teaching staff in universities.

ACS has the following specific accreditation criterion (with additional detailed provisions):

*Appropriate staffing and leadership will provide the strong, cohesive school environment necessary for curriculum maintenance, development of best practice pedagogy, quality assurance of assessment, consistent academic support of students and development of an appropriate learning culture in the ICT disciplines which will effectively support student learning.*

There is risk of erosion to staffing and leadership at time of need for capacity to adapt and sustain ICT programs. ICT schools are asked to keep ACS informed of significant change to staffing or leadership for accredited programs.

## ACS accreditation during the COVID-19 pandemic

As set out in our 31 March notice *ACS Accreditation in 2020*, ACS continues to exercise flexibility to allow higher education providers to direct their efforts to immediate educational priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current accreditation requests and actions include:

- Some institutions continuing with accreditation submissions for new programs and scheduled accreditation reviews for existing programs;
- Some scheduled accreditation reviews being postponed to later in 2020;
- Some institutions being granted accreditation extensions subject to circumstances;
- Many online meetings and remote campus inspections, with provisions for future campus visits.



Our 2019 accreditation process reforms have served us well during campus closures and travel restrictions, given the shift to digital analysis and reduced reliance on the campus visit. ACS, together with participating institutions, is refining our approaches for effective online meetings and remote campus inspections. We believe that there will always be merit in physical campus visits, but that accreditation can continue, and the crisis can be an opportunity to make progress in remote review methods for future benefit.

Accredited institutions should note that ACS flexibility is directed at COVID-19 temporary conditions to allow prompt temporary adaptations ensuring continuity of educational delivery. Temporary adaptations that remain through subsequent semesters should be validated by rigorous internal review and may be subject to future ACS audit. Permanent changes to accredited programs remain subject to pre-COVID accreditation standards and requirements and should be disclosed at the earliest opportunity.

### ACS new accreditation process and specialisms

In June we released an [overview](#) information sheet summarising the new ACS accreditation process (after 2019 reforms), including a diagrammatic representation. We hope this is helpful for those new to the changes.

The ACS **Specialist Accreditation in Cyber Security** was introduced in 2019. We have since accredited several specialist cyber security degree and master programs and after an early learning curve have refined our approach. We now have a cyber security expert on contract to assist with reviews and ensure timely turnaround. The federal government [Cyber Security Strategy 2020](#) released last month calls for specialist courses for professionals (refer pp32-33) so it would be timely to get your specialist program recognised!

### ACS Digital Pulse 2020 – Unlocking the potential of Australia’s technology workforce

Digital Pulse, the annual report on Australia’s IT sector produced annually by ACS and Deloitte Access Economics, is now in its sixth year. The 2020 report was launched mid-September.

This year’s Digital Pulse explores six key areas to improve the performance and competitiveness of Australia’s digital economy and workforce:

- 1) Upskilling and reskilling
- 2) Investment in digital capacity
- 3) Research and development (R&D)
- 4) Shaping the digital landscape through e-invoicing
- 5) Encourage technology start-ups through employee share schemes (ESS)
- 6) Improving the measurement of the ICT sector’s contribution to the Australian economy

### Expressions of interest in online collaboration sessions

ACS invites expressions of interest in online facilitated sessions to exchange practices and experiences between ICT/IS schools on the following topics:

- **Good practices in academic integrity**
- **Preparation for ICT practice during COVID-19**
- Other suggested topics

[REGISTER FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST](#)

**For further information**, please contact us at [accreditation@acs.org.au](mailto:accreditation@acs.org.au) or +61 (0) 2 9299 3666

For Accreditation Scheme documents: <https://www.acs.org.au/cpd-education/acs-accreditation-program.html>

### Attached:

*Report on a Survey of ACS Accredited Universities regarding the Impact COVID-19 on ICT Higher Education*