

SCU's AQF Award Structures and Levels of Learning Guidelines

Preamble

On 7 March 2013, the Academic Board resolved the following:

- (a) Academic Board Notes the Discussion Paper: SCU's AQF Award Structures and Levels of Learning, and agrees members will provide feedback to the Chair of Academic Board by 21 March, and subject to the extent of proposed changes, the Chair present a revised paper and associated Policies and Guidelines to the April 2013 Academic Board meeting.
- (b) Academic Board approves the circulation of this paper, together with the TEQSA and the Australian Qualifications Framework Questions and Answers (2013) attached to the Chair's Report, across Schools to be used in the interim as Guidelines for course and unit development and revision.

Aims and Objectives

We will provide inspirational learning experiences for our students through high quality teaching engaged with scholarship (SCU Strategic Plan 2011-2015, Goal 1).

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it seeks to establish the principles for Policies and Guidelines for the structure of SCU's undergraduate and postgraduate coursework awards. Secondly, it presents a Policy framework and Guidelines to support the development of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework awards which are compliant with the specifications of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The paper is well-aligned with the Design element of the Working Towards a Distinctive Impact Framework incorporated in SCU's Teaching and Learning White Paper entitled, *The Teaching and Learning Landscape 2012-2015*, approved by Academic Board at its August 2012 meeting, and the subsequent Teaching and Learning Plan 2013-2015.

The objectives of this discussion paper, then, are to:

1. Describe a level of learning classification for coursework awards at AQF levels 5-9 (Diploma to Masters);
2. Present a Policy framework and Guidelines to compile awards using units from different AQF levels (and including examples of integrated and nested qualifications¹);
3. Propose a reconceptualization of the 8+8+8 structure for Bachelor degrees (see [Course Planning and Approval Policy](#)), which continues to support specialist and university-wide majors, the availability of electives, and student choice.

¹ Terms such as integrated qualification, nested qualification, formal learning, informal learning, non-formal learning, knowledge, skills, learning outcomes and recognised prior learning (RPL) are defined in the AQF 2013 (<http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/Documents/2013%20docs/AQF%202nd%20Edition%20January%202013.pdf>)

Guiding Principles

Award courses are the cornerstones of most students' engagement with the University and their experiences of it. SCU's coursework awards will:

1. Support student learning to meet the AQF's specific and generic learning outcomes
2. Support student learning to meet the University's graduate attributes, specific course learning outcomes and professional body requirements
3. Support student learning through high quality, flexible, innovative and appropriately diverse curricula, underpinned by the University's Policies concerning Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment
4. Incorporate relevant pure, strategic and applied research
5. Challenge students in their acquisition and application of knowledge and skills
6. Recognise prior learning, whether that learning be formal, informal or non-formal
7. Ensure appropriate scaffolding of learning in each course to ensure students are able both to broaden and deepen their knowledge and skills, and to apply knowledge and skills in a discipline or applied field, with the exception of courses up to 1 year duration, for which either broadening or deepening is appropriate
8. Comply with external legislation, standards and specifications, including the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) and the AQF
9. Meet SCU course accreditation standards and professional and other external accreditation standards as required
10. Wherever possible:
 - I. Ensure students have opportunities to engage in Community Engaged Learning and thereby promote employment outcomes for graduates
 - II. Ensure students are provided opportunities to broaden their knowledge outside their course discipline or applied field (e.g., study abroad; student exchange; university wide majors; availability of electives from Schools outside the School responsible for the award; integrated study options in collaboration or partnership with other institutions, including through multi-badged awards).

Under the AQF, each accredited course aligns with an AQF Level. These levels are differentiated through specifications for each AQF award level, particularly by way of a course's volume of learning and learning outcomes. AQF levels in terms of learning outcomes relate to courses and not to individual units in a course of study. Consistent with the AQF Issuance Policy, Universities self-accredit courses at AQF levels 5 to 10 (Diploma to Doctorate), and may self-accredit other non-AQF awards.

Within each course there will exist a number of units. Each unit² within a course will contribute to the course learning outcomes in a manner that allows students to develop and apply skills and knowledge as they progress through a course. Each unit, through its unit learning outcomes and assessment, maps back through SCU's Graduate Attributes to the Course Learning Outcomes. This approach, which integrates the development of courses, units and assessment in SCU's course accreditation processes, ensures that there is a whole of course approach, and that specific and generic³ course learning outcomes specified by AQF are demonstrated. To demark the level of a unit within a course, it has been agreed that SCU adopt the concept of 'level of learning'.

Level of Learning and Proposed Structures

Level of learning is a classification for units within a course. Depending on its volume of learning (or duration), a course may have from one to three levels:

- Level 1 is Foundational;
- Level 2 is Intermediate;
- Level 3 is Advanced⁴.

In a Bachelor degree, these levels may relate to the years of study, but this is not a necessary condition. For example, a level 2 (Intermediate) unit may be undertaken in the second session of year one; and in distance education or part time study, a level 2 unit may be taken in year 2, 3 or 4 or perhaps later. Rather than being a year of learning/enrolment equivalent, *level of learning in fact reflects an increasing sophistication of the unit learning outcomes so that scaffolding of learning is explicit within a course.*

A Bachelor degree will typically have 3 to 4 years of full time study (volume of learning), and therefore 3 levels of learning are easily and appropriately included in a scaffolded manner. In shorter courses, such as associate degrees, graduate diplomas and masters degrees, however, it is more typical (but not mandatory) that only two levels of learning will occur; in a course such as a graduate certificate, perhaps only one level of learning.

The level of learning is relative to a course. Table 1 presents the proposed levels across programs of study. Again, these are examples only. The critical issue is that course structure, content, assessment and specific and generic learning outcomes are well aligned, justified and evidence-based. In addition, we note these proposed models for different AQF award levels make no references to detailed accreditation requirements of courses and disciplines in areas such as health, law, engineering, and teacher education.

² A Unit of learning is the basic element of a course of study. For example Mathematics 1 is a single unit within a Bachelor of Science course. Typically a unit has a student workload of between 130 to 150 hours, undertaken over 12 teaching weeks and 3 learning weeks (assessment and study periods). Variations in the length of study may occur in community or work based units or in units utilising intensive modes. The unit curriculum is specified in the unit outline.

³ Generic learning outcomes fall into four broad categories: fundamental skills; people skills; thinking skills; and personal skills... In the higher education sector they are generally known as graduate attributes and are defined by each higher education institution (e.g., see AQF Second Edition January 2013, p. 95 of Glossary; also see pp. 11, 40, 46, 49)

⁴ Draft descriptions of these levels of learning are being developed.

Table 1: Examples of Typical Structures

AQF Level	Volume of Learning	Level of Learning Alternatives	Proposed Unit Codes	Credit Points (cp)
Level 5				
Diploma	1-2 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 3 - Advanced	51*** 53***	96 cp
Level 6				
Advanced Diploma	1.5 to 2 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 3 - Advanced	61*** 63***	144 to 192 cp
Associate Degree	2 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 3 - Advanced	61*** 63***	192 cp
Level 7				
Bachelor Degree	3 to 4 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 2 - Intermediate Level 3 - Advanced	71*** 72*** 73***	288 to 384 cp
Level 8				
Bachelor Honours (typically 1 year following a Bachelor Degree).	1 year	Level 3 - Advanced	83***	96cp
Level 8				
Bachelor Honours⁵ (embedded in a Bachelor Degree typically as an additional year).	4 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 2 - Intermediate Level 3 - Advanced	83***	384cp
Graduate Certificate	0.5 to 1 year	Level 1 – Foundational Level 2 - Intermediate	81***	48 to 96 cp
Graduate Diploma	1 to 2 years	Level 1 – Foundational Level 2 - Intermediate Level 3 - Advanced	81*** 82*** 83***	96 to 192cp
Level 9				
Masters (Coursework)	1 to 2 years <u>Same discipline</u> – 1.5 years after Level 7 1 year after Level 8 <u>Different discipline</u> – 2 years after Level 7 1.5 years after Level 8	Level 1 – Foundational Level 3 - Advanced	91*** 93***	96 to 192cp
Masters (Extended)	3 to 4 years After Level 7	Level 1 – Foundational Level 2 - Intermediate Level 3 - Advanced	91*** 92*** 93***	288 to 384cp

⁵ This description is oversimplified and further clarification regarding embedded Honours is being sought.

Compiling Awards using Units from Different AQF Levels (Nested Awards)

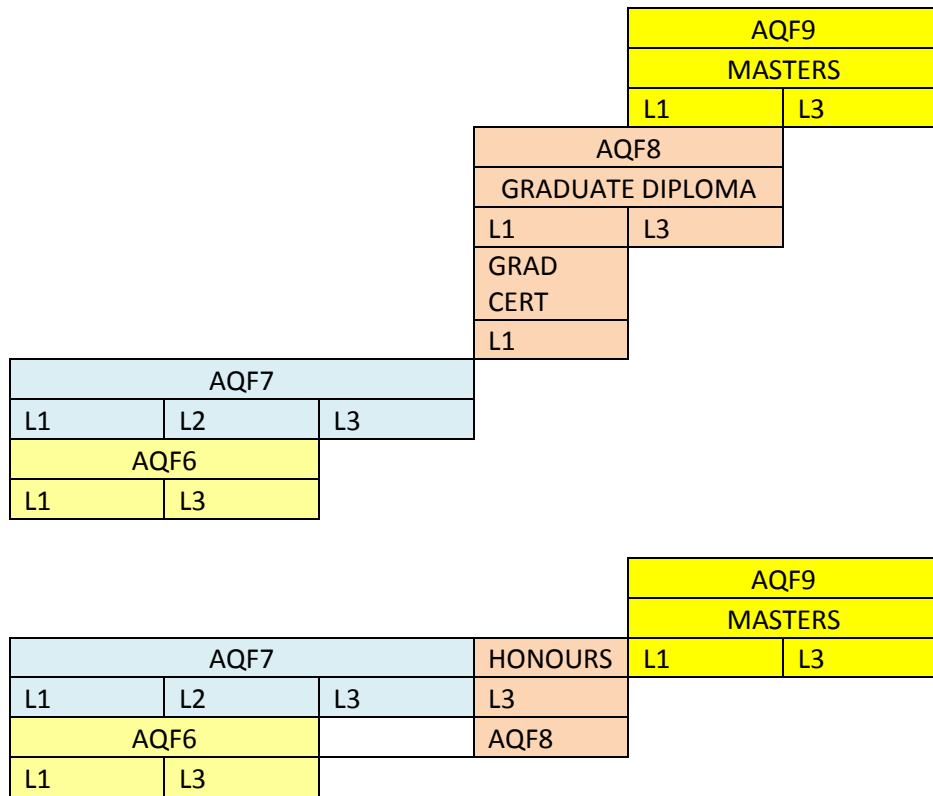
It is possible to use units designed for one AQF level in another AQF level course as long as the course learning outcomes in the receiving course can be achieved in a justified, transparent manner. As mentioned above, it is the combination of units within a course, incorporating a mapping of AQF learning outcomes with graduate attributes, course and thence unit learning outcomes, and finally assessment, which demonstrate the specified and generic learning outcomes of a course.

It is proposed that SCU follow a set of principles for the use of units across AQF levels when implementing this practice. The proposed principles are:

- Units designed originally for one AQF level should be labelled with that AQF level even if used in another course with a different AQF level;
- Units designed originally for one AQF level with a nominated level of learning should keep this nominated level of learning even if used in another course with a different AQF level;
- Units designed originally for one AQF level with a nominated level of learning should keep this nominated level of learning, unless the course is abolished or the unit removed from the award and incorporated in another course with a different AQF level;

There will be many ways of structuring awards, for example, because of: the complex array of potential student pathways to entry into an award; the possibilities of integrating and/or nesting awards; the ability to use a single unit in more than one AQF award. Therefore, in order to help ground our discussions, a simplified visual model for structuring, integrating and nesting awards from the same discipline is presented in Figure 1. Examples giving more detail with regard to possible ways of structuring, integrating and nesting awards in the same discipline and across disciplines are then presented in Attachment 1.

Figure 1: Two simplified models of award integration and nesting in the same discipline



Proposed Reconceptualization of the 8+8+8 Structure for Bachelor Degrees

The [Course Planning and Approval Policy](#) indicates that each undergraduate degree shall normally comprise a core of at least eight (8) units and eight (8) of these units will be delivered in the first year⁶. It also prescribes that courses conform to one of a number of course structures, incorporating combinations of core, major, university-wide major, electives. With the new possibilities created by AQF levels, levels of learning, integrated awards, nested awards and recognised prior learning (i.e. formal, informal and non-formal learning), the agreed 8+8+8 structure may now not be adequate or flexible enough for SCU's Bachelor awards. Indeed, this structure may inhibit or constrain innovative approaches to course development, articulation and credit transfer, collaboration in course development, and pathways practices.

(a) ⁶ The Course Planning and Approval Policy (<http://policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00073>) states:

(b) Part B - Undergraduate Course Structures

(39) Undergraduate courses will as far as possible comply with the following principles:

- a. Structure
 - i. Each undergraduate degree shall comprise a core and will conform to one of the course structures in (e) below.
- b. Core
 - i. ***The core of each undergraduate degree shall comprise at least eight (8) units and eight (8) of these units will be delivered in first year.***
 - ii. ***In exceptional circumstances*** a case may be made to Academic Board:
 - to approve a core with less than eight (8) units; or
 - for less than eight (8) core units to be delivered in first year.

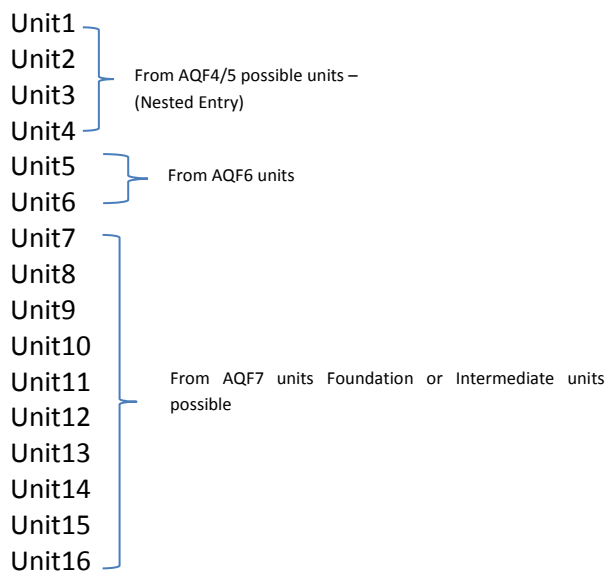
Attachment 1: Examples of Possible Frameworks for Awards

Associate Degree (AQF 6) – 2 years

Associate Degrees, normally

- have an entry requirement of AQF 4 or 5 (or relevant RPL) or senior school certificate
- are 16 units to match possible volume of learning of 2 years,
- may be composed of -
 - AQF6 units at foundational and advanced levels
 - Mixture of AQF 6 units completed after units from AQF4 or 5 vocational courses
 - AQF7 foundation level units completed after completion of AQF4, 5, or 6 units

Associate Degree (2.0 years)

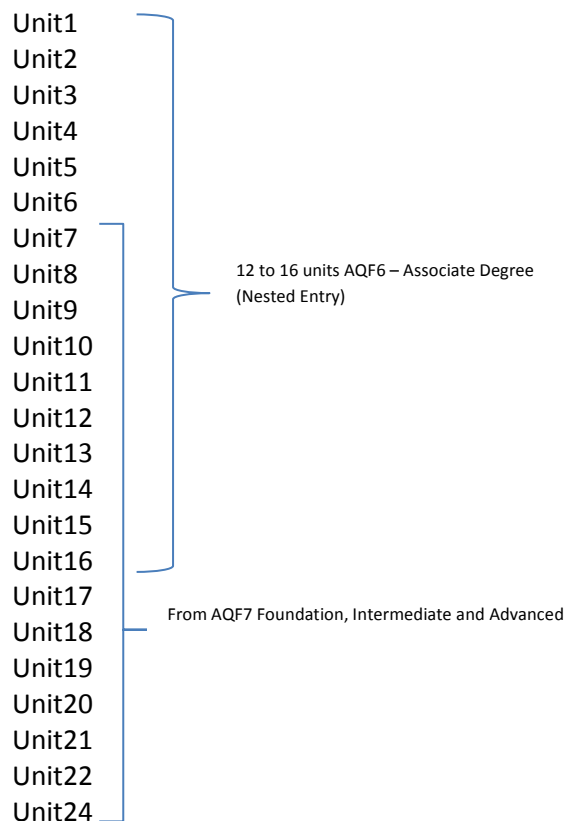


Bachelor Degree (AQF7) - 3-4 years

Bachelor Degrees, normally

- have an entry requirement of AQF 5 or 6 (or relevant RPL) or senior secondary certificate
- are 24 units or 32 units to match possible volume of learning of 3-4 years
- can possess a nested Diploma (AQF5) and/or Associate Degree (AQF6)
- will have most units at AQF 7 foundation, intermediate and advanced levels

Bachelor Degree (AQF 7)



Bachelor Honours Degree (AQF8) – 4 years (with embedded honours)

Bachelor Degrees with embedded honours, normally

- have an entry requirement of AQF 5 or 6 (or relevant RPL) or senior secondary certificate
- are 32 units to match possible volume of learning of 4 years
- can possess a nested Diploma (AQF5) and/or Associate Degree (AQF6)
- most units will be at AQF 7 foundation, intermediate and advanced levels
- final units incorporating an honours project will be at AQF 8 level

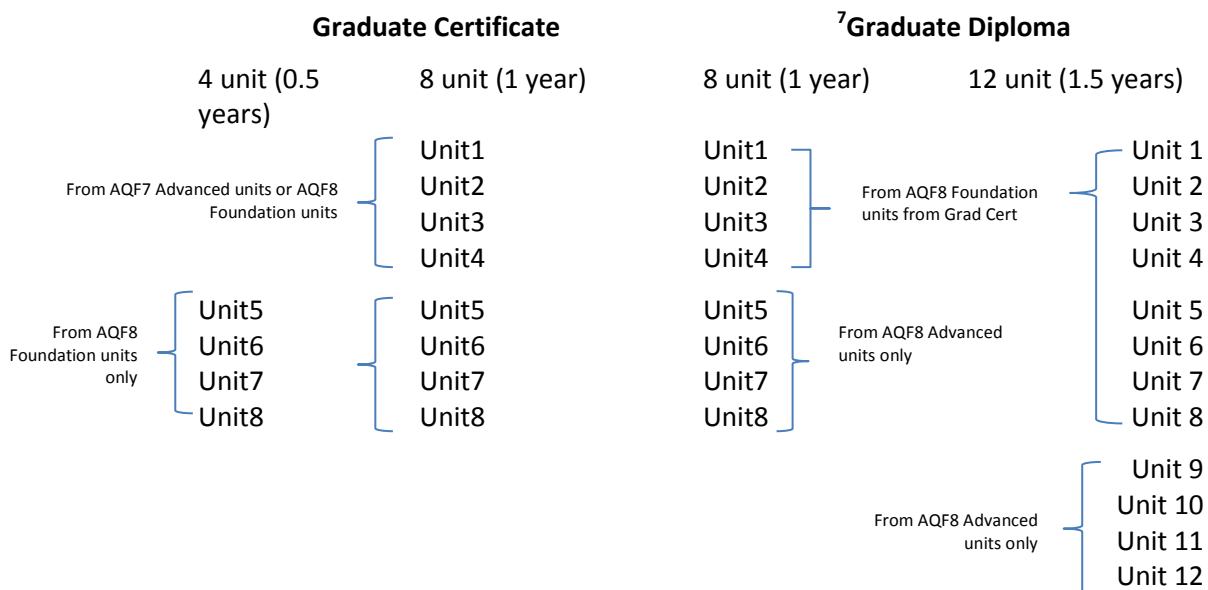
Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas – AQF 8

Graduate Certificates, normally

- have an entry requirement of AQF 7 or relevant RPL
- are between 4-8 units to match possible volume of learning of 0.5 to 1 year
- if volume of learning is 0.5 year, will contain no units from AQF 7 and will have all units at the AQF 8 foundation level
- if volume of learning is 1.0 year, may contain up to four units from AQF 7 intermediate or advanced and will have 4 units at AQF 8 foundation level
- can be nested within a Graduate Diploma (AQF 8) and/or Masters (Coursework, Extended) (AQF 9)

Graduate Diplomas, normally

- have an entry requirement of AQF 7 (or relevant RPL) or AQF 8 (Honours/Graduate Certificate)
- are between 8-16 units to match possible volume of learning of 1 to 2.0 years
- if volume of learning is 2.0 years will contain up to 4 units from AQF 7 advanced plus 4 to 8 units at AQF 8 foundation level plus 4 to 8 units at AQF 8 advanced level
- if volume of learning is 1.5 years will contain 4 to 8 units at AQF 8 foundation units level plus 4 to 8 units at AQF 8 advanced level
- if volume of learning is one year, will have up to 4 units at AQF 8 foundation level and a minimum of 4 units at AQF 8 advanced level
- can be nested within a Masters (coursework or extended) award (AQF 9)



⁷ Grad Dip 2 years not displayed

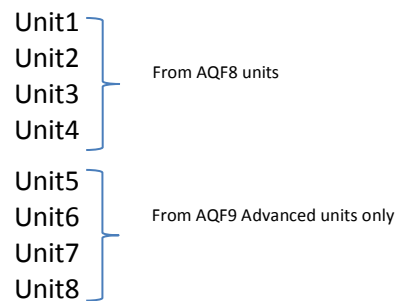
Masters (coursework) same discipline (1 year) – AQF 9

Masters (coursework) of 1 year duration, normally

- is 1 year (8 units) to match 1 year volume of learning
- has an entry requirement of AQF 8 (Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma) in the same discipline
- will contain no AQF7 units
- will contain a maximum of 4 units at AQF 8 advanced level or AQF 9 foundation level
- will contain a minimum of 4 units at AQF 9 advanced level

Masters Coursework (1 year)

8 unit (1 year)

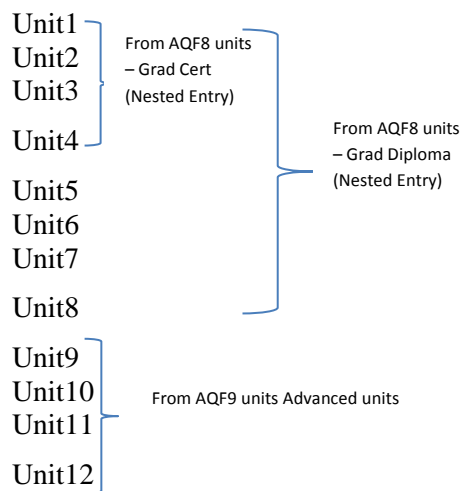


Masters coursework (1.5 years) – AQF 9

Masters (coursework) of 1.5 years in duration, normally

- Is 1.5 years (12 units) to match 1.5 years volume of learning
- has an entry requirement of AQF 7 (same discipline) or AQF8 (different discipline)
- will contain no AQF7 units
- will have up to 4 units at AQF 8 foundation level
- will incorporate units at AQF 8 advanced level or AQF 9 foundation level
- will have a minimum of 4 units at AQF 9 advanced level

Masters Coursework (1.5 Years)

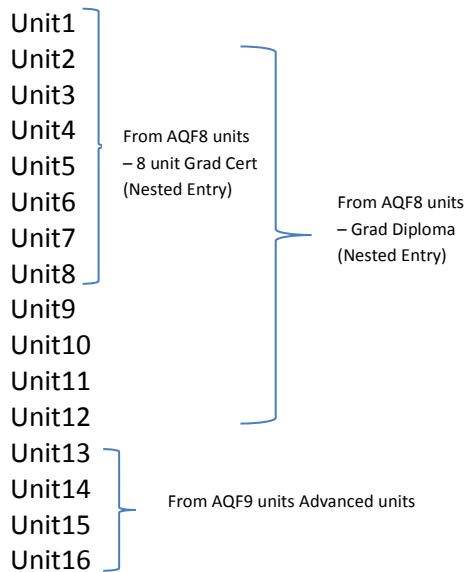


Masters coursework (2.0 years) – AQF 9

Masters coursework normally

- is 2.0 years (16 units) to match 2.0 years volume of learning
- has an entry requirement of AQF 7 (different discipline)
- may contain up to four units from AQF 7 intermediate or advanced
- will have up to 4 units at AQF 8 foundation level
- will incorporate units at AQF 8 advanced or AQF 9 foundation level
- will have a minimum of 4 units at AQF 9 advanced level

Masters Coursework (2.0 Years)



Masters (extended)

(under consideration)

Relevant Definitions

For the purpose of this Discussion Paper refer to the [Academic Board's Definitions Policy](#).