Course and Unit Accreditation Policy

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

Purpose

(1) This Policy governs the accreditation of Southern Cross University Courses, Units and non-award Units, from conception, introduction, modification and review through to removal. It seeks to:

a. assure and enhance the quality, integrity and relevance of the academic courses of the University;
b. ensure courses are of high academic standards;
c. ensure courses meet the needs of industry and standards prescribed by the professions and professional bodies; and
d. ensure consistency in course and unit accreditation and reaccreditation through robust quality assurance processes and their outcomes.

Scope

(2) This Policy applies to all:

a. award courses (undergraduate and postgraduate coursework courses) and non-award courses; and
b. award and non-award units.

Section 2 - Definitions

(3) The Definitions (Academic) Policy applies to this Policy in addition to the listed terms below.

(4) Accreditation means a determination made by the Council of the Southern Cross University, or by the Academic Board under delegation from the Council, that the academic integrity of a course has been demonstrated, that the course can be offered by the University, and that successful completion of the course is appropriate for the award of a University qualification.

(5) Management Information System (MIS) means the Southern Cross University Management Information System (MIS) which warehouses key University data and provides reports and information for institutional performance monitoring and reporting.

(6) iQILT (internal Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching) is Southern Cross University's internal quality review process for units.

(7) Unit and Course Management System (UCMS) means the University's online IT system for managing course and unit approval processes in accordance with the University's policy. Associated administrative functions accommodate the development of unit information for students, management of marketing information and a 'dashboard' for the management of UCMS-related information in the Student Management system.

Section 3 - Policy Statement

(8) As a self-accrediting education provider, the University accredits courses which:

a. align with the University's strategic plan, Rules, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines;
b. are consistent with the Higher Education Standards of:
    i. appropriate course design;
    ii. provisioning of adequate course resources and information;
    iii. appropriate admission criteria;
    iv. high quality teaching and learning appropriate to the nature, level and delivery of the course;
    v. effective assessment and achievable student learning outcomes;
    vi. other specifications related to courses;
c. comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF);
d. comply with the Education Services for Overseas Students Act and Regulations where offered to international onshore students; and
e. are developed using the University's Unit and Course Management System (UCMS) in accordance with the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table.

(9) Courses (and their constituent units) may be accredited at AQF levels 5 to 10 (Diploma to Doctorate) or as non-AQF awards, for a maximum of 7 years, unless a shorter duration meets external professional accreditation requirements.

(10) A course would not normally be reviewed again in under three years.

Monitoring and Review Principles

The University will undertake a systematic and tiered process of review to ensure that the quality and standards of its units and courses are maintained and enhanced over time. The review processes are:

a. referenced against national standards; and
b. informed by student feedback and performance data, which is acted upon to improve future unit and teaching outcomes.

Units

(11) At the end of every teaching period, the quality assurance process for units comprises:

a. Individual Unit Feedback reports derived from the University's Unit Feedback Survey, which also includes feedback on unit teaching and unit teaching staff;
b. Individual unit performance reporting including unit success, student withdrawal and grade outcomes;
c. Unit Feedback Summaries of all units' performance in a designated School, College, campus location or Educational Partnership; and
d. An iQILT Unit Performance Review process for monitoring quality in all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework units, as set out in Part B.

Courses

(12) The quality assurance process for courses comprises:

a. An Annual Course Report for all courses and locations, including those courses which are delivered through Third Party Arrangements;

b. An 'on-demand' Course Review as approved by the:
    i. Academic Board at any time; or
    ii. The Vice Chancellor on recommendation from the Academic Portfolio Group, following consultation with the relevant Head of School/College; or Chair, Academic Board, following consultation with the relevant Head of School/College;
c. A scheduled Course Accreditation Review conducted at intervals of no more than seven (7) years for all courses.

(13) The schedule of Course Accreditation Reviews will be determined by the Chair, Academic Board annually after consultation with the Vice Chancellor, and circulated to the Office of Planning, Quality and Review, all School/College Boards and Academic Board, noting:

a. courses subject to professional accreditation will follow the review schedule of the relevant external accreditation body unless it exceeds seven (7) years;
b. the review of a degree within a double degree will take place when that single degree is reviewed in the School responsible for the single degree;
c. combined degrees are reviewed by the School that has responsibility for managing the course; and
d. nested awards are normally reviewed at the same time as the parent award.

(14) The Chair, Academic Board in consultation with the Vice Chancellor may exempt any Course from a review, except a review instigated by the Vice Chancellor or Academic Board.

Course Removal

(15) The removal of Courses and Units from the University's offerings must incorporate appropriate transitional arrangements for affected students.

(16) The decision to remove a Course will be made well in advance of actual Course cessation in the context of the University's strategic plan and priorities, School/College operational plans, staffing profile and resourcing, and academic plans.

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - New Courses and Units, Amending Courses and Units

Design Principles

(17) New course proposals must align with the University's strategic plan and priorities, School/College operational plans, staffing profile, available resources and academic plans.

(18) Courses and units will be developed and amended via the UCMS, based on sound pedagogy.

(19) Courses and units will be developed, reviewed and amended with reference to relevant Rules, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines including the following:

a. Advanced Standing and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy;
b. Assessment Policy;
c. Course Structures and Levels of Learning Policy;
d. Community Engaged Learning Policy;
e. Course and Unit Nomenclature Policy;
f. Flexible Learning Policy;

g. Graduate Attributes Policy;
h. Honours Courses Development and Administration Policy;
i. Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Policy;
j. Multi-Badged Degree Policy;
k. Rules Relating to Awards Rule 2;
l. Rules Relating to Awards Rule 3;
m. Rules Relating to Awards Rule 5;
n. Social Media Policy; and
o. Work Integrated Learning Guidelines.

Timing and Administration

(20) Course and unit proposals will normally be presented for review/approval in accordance with the Course Development Planning Timeline.

(21) All new course and unit proposals and amendments must be progressed via the UCMS in order to be considered for final approval by an authority of the University. The UCMS imposes standardised and mandatory documentation requirements, work flow and approval processes for course and unit accreditation matters.

(22) All New Course Proposals and Course Amendments must use the Admission and Course Requirements Standardised Wording (Schedule A) as the basis for completing the Course Requirements and Entry Requirements sections of UCMS. If Schedule A does not adequately describe the course structure or entry arrangements of the course in question, staff should seek guidance from the Chair, Accreditation Committee prior to submission to Accreditation Committee.

(23) Vice Chancellor endorsement should be obtained before development of a Course Concept Proposal is commenced within the UCMS.

(24) A Course Concept Proposal will be completed within the UCMS in accordance with the UCMS Course Concept Guidelines, Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table and Course Development Planning Timeline.

(25) Where a Course Concept Proposal is approved in accordance with the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table:

a. it may be marketed for domestic students and made available for application subject to approval by the Vice Chancellor; and
b. a New Course Accreditation Proposal will then be developed and progressed towards approval in accordance with the New Course UCMS Guidelines and Course Development Planning Timeline.

(26) A new course may only be delivered when both:

a. the Vice Chancellor has confirmed that the course aligns with the University's strategic plan and priorities, and is economically viable; and
b. Council (or the Academic Board as delegated) has approved the New Course Accreditation Proposal and thereby accredited the course.

Course and Unit Amendments

(27) Staff and School/College Boards seeking to amend a course will initiate the desired change via the UCMS. Amendment review and approval work-flows are embedded in the UCMS in accordance with the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table.

(28) Where a School/College seeks to substantially amend a major component of an existing course, the process for a New Course Approval should be followed. This includes one or a combination of the following:

a. change in the representation of the course of study, such as the title;
b. change in the type of qualification or AQF level;
c. significant change in learning outcomes;
d. significant change to entry requirements;
e. significant change in course design/delivery;
f. change in research and research training status of a course; and/or
g. significant changes to units, majors or course structure.

(29) School/College Boards can seek early guidance from Accreditation Committee as to whether a course amendment should be treated as a New Course Approval.

(30) Schools/Colleges are responsible for identifying consequential changes that result from a Course or Unit Amendment, Course or Unit Removal, or a New Course Proposal.

(31) For minor consequential changes, if:

a. the Course Coordinator and School/College Chair of the affected course agree that the change is minor;
b. the minor consequential change is presented concurrently with the initial course amendment; and
c. the initial Course/Unit Amendment or Removal is approved as per the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table,

then Student Administration Services will implement the minor consequential\change without any additional documentation or approval.

(32) For major consequential changes, a course or unit amendment should be submitted as per clause (27).

(33) Accreditation Committee will determine the definition of minor and major consequential changes, from time to time, and communicate these definitions to all School Boards for implementation.

Part B - Unit Monitoring and Review - iQILT Process

(34) The iQILT Unit Review applies to all coursework (undergraduate and postgraduate) units of AQF level 7 or above.

(35) Through a metrics-based system of monitoring at the end of each teaching period, the iQILT Unit Review process provides an accountability cycle where action is taken on student feedback received.

(36) Two key metrics are adopted for reporting on unit performance:

a. Unit Success rate is defined as the percentage of students attempting the unit that received a passing grade.
b. Unit Satisfaction rate is defined as the percentage of Unit Feedback Survey respondents marking 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' to the question "Overall, I am satisfied with this unit."

(37) The University's iQILT unit reporting thresholds are set out in Schedule B.

(38) Following the publication of final grades for each teaching session, the Office of Planning, Quality and Review provides unit feedback and performance reports including iQILT metrics to Unit Assessors and Heads of School/College.

(39) Where the iQILT metrics indicate a unit status of "Action Required" or a unit has received a unit status of "Monitor" over two consecutive deliveries, the Unit Assessor prepares a Unit Report and submits to the Head of

School, or delegated process.

(40) Where no formal action is required based on iQILT metrics, the Unit Assessor does not need to complete a Unit Report, but will update the unit in preparation for its next delivery based on feedback and performance reports as required.

(41) The Head of School/College reviews the Unit Reports and submits these or a summary to the School/College Board.

(42) The School/College considers the Unit Reports and identifies and recommends remedial actions, if required. The Head of School/College and Chair, School/College Board, are jointly responsible for the implementation of recommendations.

(43) Following discussion of the Unit Reports at the School/College Board, the Director, Teaching and Learning prepares the iQILT Unit Quality Report Summary and submits to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

(44) The Academic Standards and Quality Committee considers each School's iQILT Unit Quality Report Summaries and makes any unit development or curriculum recommendations, if required.

(45) The Chair, Academic Standards and Quality Committee, informs Academic Board of any unit development or curriculum recommendations.

(46) The Chair, Academic Board reports any significant unit or curriculum recommendations to University Council.

(47) The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) advises, and where appropriate, makes recommendations to, the Vice Chancellor and Executive Members regarding any resourcing requirements relating to curriculum development and reform.

Part C - Course Monitoring

Annual Course Report

(48) By 30 April of the year after a course was offered, the Course Coordinator for each course will complete a Course Report using the approved template in which they respond to data in the Course Performance Report (produced from the MIS) and to issues raised in the Unit Reports for the year of the report.

(49) Where courses are delivered through Third Party Arrangements, the Course Report must consider the comparability of standards and student experience at the Third Party locations.

(50) When compiling and considering the Course Report, the Course Coordinator must keep in mind any linkages with other Schools regarding double degrees and combined degrees.

(51) The Course Coordinator will distribute the completed Course Report to the Head of School/College and the School/College Board by 30 April of the year after a course was offered.

(52) On receipt of the Course Report, the School/College Board will:

a. consider the Course Report at its next scheduled meeting and resolve whether to take any necessary actions regarding the course; and
b. forward the Course Report along with any comments or recommendations to the Academic Board Administrator for noting and/or consideration by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

Part D - Course Review

Instigation of Review

On-Demand Course Review

(53) On an annual basis, the University's Academic Portfolio Group (APG) will assess the performance of University courses using a set of parameters agreed by the APG. Based on this assessment and following consultation with the relevant Head(s) of School, the APG will recommend courses in need of review to the Vice Chancellor.

(54) The Vice Chancellor will assess the APG's recommendations and determine which, if any, courses will be reviewed. The Vice Chancellor may instruct the Chair, Academic Board to instigate reviews accordingly.

(55) Acting outside the APG recommendations, for any course:

a. the Vice Chancellor may initiate an On-Demand Course Review following consultation with the Chair, Academic Board; or
b. the Chair, Academic Board may recommend an 'on-demand' Course Review be approved and initiated by the Vice Chancellor.

Scheduled Course Accreditation Review

(56) A scheduled Course Accreditation Review will be instigated by the Chair, Academic Board in accordance with the clause (13) schedule.

External Accreditation Review

(57) In the case where courses are accredited by External agencies such as Professional bodies, the external accreditation review will be aligned to the Scheduled review and may, in circumstances approved by the Chair, Academic Board, take the place of and be regarded as a scheduled review.

Course Accreditation Review Process

Terms of Reference

(58) The Terms of Reference and time for completion for the Course Accreditation Review will be determined by the Chair, Academic Board in consultation with the Vice Chancellor and relevant Head of School.

Determining who will conduct the review

(59) A course review in a School will be conducted by one or more external experts.

(60) Subject to clause (59), the relevant Head of School/College will propose the names of three external experts to the Chair, Academic Board, together with brief CVs or relevant website links for those people proposed to conduct the review.

(61) After consultation with the Vice Chancellor, the Chair, Academic Board may select reviewers from the list of proposed external experts, or may reject all names and ask the relevant Head of School/College to provide a further list. The Chair will advise the next meeting of Academic Board of their decision.

(62) In most cases, only one external expert will be selected, however, multiple external experts may be selected by the Chair, Academic Board where the suite of courses under review is complex or cuts across a number of discipline areas. In such cases, the relevant Head of School/College may be required to nominate more than three external experts under clause (60).

Course Review Submission

(63) In the sixth year since a course was accredited or subsequently reviewed by the University:

a. the Course Coordinator will develop a Course Summary Report detailing the findings of the previous annual Course Reports; and
b. the relevant Head of School/College in consultation with School Board will produce a Course Review Submission in accordance with the Course Review Submission Guidelines. The Course Summary Report will form part of the Course Review Submission.

(64) When the Head of School/College is compiling the Course Review Submission they must consult with other relevant Schools to ensure that all the issues relevant to double degrees and combined degrees are reviewed.

Provision of the Course Review Submission

(65) At least four (4) weeks prior to the arrival of the reviewer, the relevant Chair of School/College Board, through the Secretary of the Course Accreditation Review (the Secretary), will provide the external expert and the Office of Planning, Quality and Review with a copy of the Course Review Submission. At the same time the Secretary will provide all other additional materials available to the Expert.

(66) The Expert will discuss with the Secretary any interviews and additional material required. The Head of School/College, through the Secretary, will ensure all reasonable requests for information made by the Expert are met and organised in advance of the review.

(67) The External Expert will:

a. consider the Course Review Submission, additional reference material and submissions received;
b. meet with or interview relevant people (normally including the Head of School/College and Chair of School Board); and
c. explore any other matters of interest within the Terms of Reference for the review.

(68) The Expert will normally undertake the review across a two day period.

Report of the Review: Timing and Dissemination

(69) The external expert will produce a Report of the Course Accreditation Review (the Report) which:

a. addresses the Terms of Reference;
b. includes any commendations, affirmations and recommendations for change; and
c. provides a justified recommendation regarding accreditation and the period of accreditation up to a maximum of seven years.

(70) The Report will be finalised within four (4) weeks of the review and will be sent by the external expert to the Secretary. Upon receipt the Secretary will distribute the Report to the:

a. Chair, Academic Board;
b. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic); and
c. Vice Chancellor.

Implementing the Review Outcomes

(71) The Chair, Academic Board will consult with the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and

provide a response to the recommendations of the Report to:

a. the Head of the relevant School/College;
b. the Academic Board for action under clause (72); and
c. the Vice Chancellor for noting.

(72) Following a Course Accreditation Review, Academic Board may:

a. approve that the course remain accredited;
b. advise University Council that a course should not remain accredited and be removed from the offerings of the University; or
c. determine that other action be taken.

(73) Within 12 weeks of receipt of the responses of the Academic Board, the Head of School/College in consultation with the School Board and Vice Chancellor will develop a five year Implementation Plan to address the recommendations of the Report and the responses of the Chair, Academic Board and Academic Board.

(74) One year after receipt of the Report of the Review recommendations, the Head of School/College through the School Board will provide an update on the course delivery (or removal) and curriculum aspects (only) of the Implementation Plan to Academic Board.

(75) For the avoidance of doubt, a course will remain accredited until it is formally disaccredited or removed by University Council(or delegate as applicable - refer Delegations Rule and Rules for the Academic Board and its Committees).

Part E - Course Removal

(76) The removal of a course from the offerings of the University will be initiated and processed through the UCMS.

(77) Final approval to withdraw undergraduate courses is required at least 12 months ahead of the relevant admission period to facilitate the removal of the course from marketing materials such as the QTAC and UAC Guides. The Course Removal Submission must therefore be instigated well in advance of this 12 month prior-approval timeframe.

(78) The decision to initiate a course removal should be made in the context of the University's strategic plan and priorities, School/College operational plans, staffing profile and resourcing, academic plans, and where applicable, a Course Accreditation Review. The implications of a course removal, including the impact on other courses, transitional arrangements for students, and the redeployment of resources also need to be considered through the UCMS.

(79) Reasons the University may consider discontinuing and removing a course are:

a. the Academic Board recommends a course be disaccredited following a Course Accreditation Review;
b. the course has had no active enrolment for 12 months;
c. the course no longer has a strategic fit with the University's plans and priorities;
d. the course is not financially viable;
e. the course has a pattern of low course performance, including low:
    i. student satisfaction;
    ii. applications (or substantially declining applications); or
    iii. enrolments (or substantially declining enrolments); and
f. poor student performance, including characteristics such as high attrition and low GPA.

(80) Except in the case of clause (72)b, a course removal is initiated by the Head of School/College, or the Vice Chancellor.

(81) Where the course removal proposal is initiated by a Head of School/College:

a. the School/College Board will be responsible for recommending the removal of a course; and
b. the Vice Chancellor must be informed of the proposed removal of the course prior to the School Board considering the proposal to ascertain that this action does not adversely affect the strategic directions or current Academic Plan of the University and that it complies with Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) requirements.

(82) Where the course removal proposal is initiated by the Vice Chancellor, the submission will go directly to Accreditation Committee for noting and further progression in accordance with the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table and the UCMS.

(83) Final approval to remove a course from the offerings of the University will be in accordance with the Course and Unit Approval Authorities Table and the Delegations Rule.

Transitional Arrangements

(84) Where the University discontinues a course offering, it will implement effective course transition plans for all students enrolled in the course of study to ensure that these students are not disadvantaged.

(85) The University will provide assistance to affected students and enable them to variously:

a. complete equivalent units at another institution; or
b. transfer to another course; or
c. take an early exit option (if appropriate); or
d. in exceptional circumstances, complete their course at another institution.

(86) Subject to clause (88), the default period for transitioning students out of a removed course is:

a. the full-time duration of study for the final cohort of students admitted where an equivalent course for students to transition into can be identified; or
b. the part-time duration of study for the final cohort of students admitted where no equivalent course can be identified.

(87) Where such courses are offered through Third Party Arrangements the transitional arrangements may be extended for up to 12 months to address in country accreditation or to meet ESOS marketing requirements.

(88) The relevant Head of School/College will ensure that students affected by the decision to disestablish a course are notified of their options and transitional arrangements that will be put in place.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	4th December 2019
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