

# The Victoria University Course architecture

## Summary

as at February 2015

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# 1 The VU course architecture

Victoria University’s course architecture provides a systematic method for colleges to design higher education courses that enable the university to balance student choice and academic rigour with efficient and sustainable delivery.

The course architecture consists of three key aspects that are outlined in the following sections:

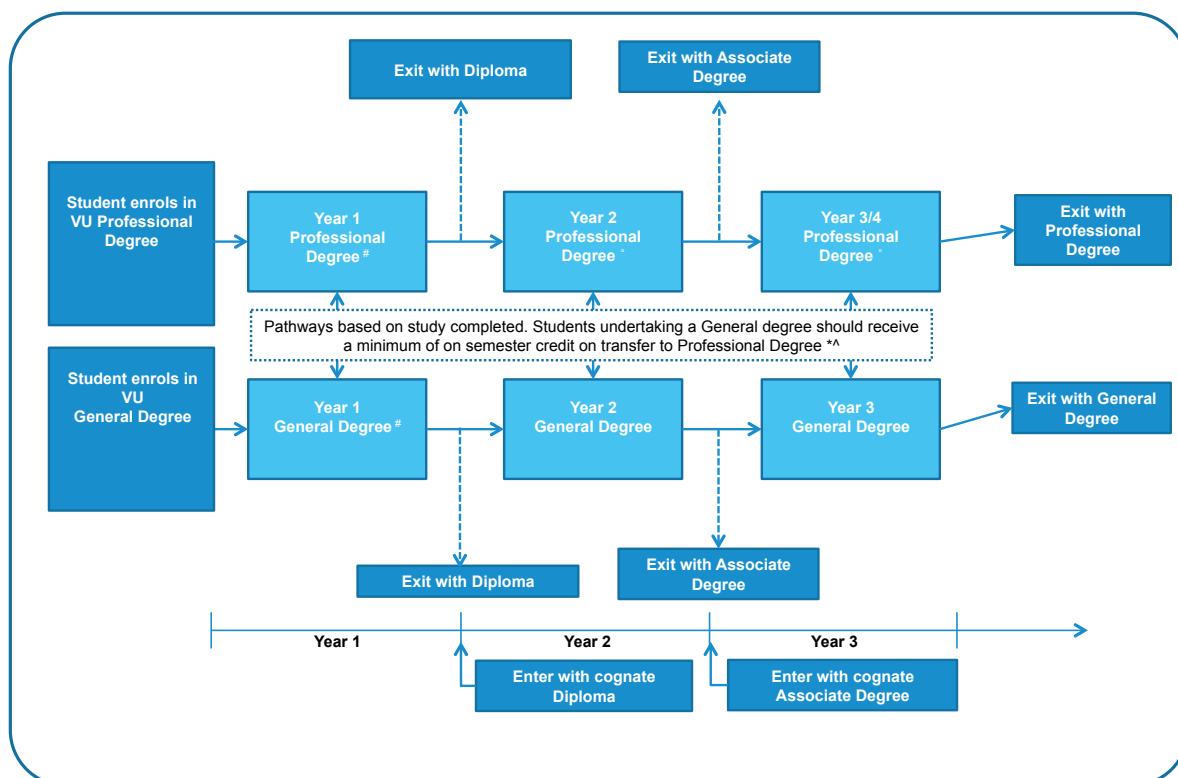
1. A modular approach that packages units into consistent building blocks for study
2. Distinctive qualifications and courses that provide a compelling offer to students
3. Principles that ensure courses are of sufficient quality and delivered sustainably

A critical function of the course architecture is to support completion of study by students with varying educational needs and capabilities. This support is essential to VU’s ability to realise its mission. The course architecture supports completion by enabling flexibility as students refine their educational and career aspirations during their undergraduate studies (Figure 1).

The course architecture guides student choices to modules of defined unit sets that provide a coherent body of knowledge.

Students begin their undergraduate journey in one of three course types offered by colleges: **General Degrees** (Section 3), **Professional Degrees** (Section 4), **Sub-Degree courses** (Section 5) and **Double Degrees** (Section 6). Multiple pathways between qualifications provide students with the flexibility to switch between courses if their needs change. Utilising the Sub-Degree structures, colleges may provide Diplomas or Associate Degrees (Section 4) as exit awards should students decide they do not wish to or are not able to complete their degree.

Figure 1 - Well-structured courses enable flexible pathways



\*Students can change at semester breaks

^Students can only change to Professional Degree with a Distinction average or above in requisite units in first year. Students entering the second year of the Professional Degree may be expected to complete up to four first year professional core units.

## 2 Modules

VU courses offer students access to a wide body of knowledge as evidenced by the range of units delivered by the university. Students often value variety, but complex course structures can also be daunting. Open structures with long lists of elective choice can also impact student capacity to navigate course offerings and options, and to achieve course level learning outcomes.

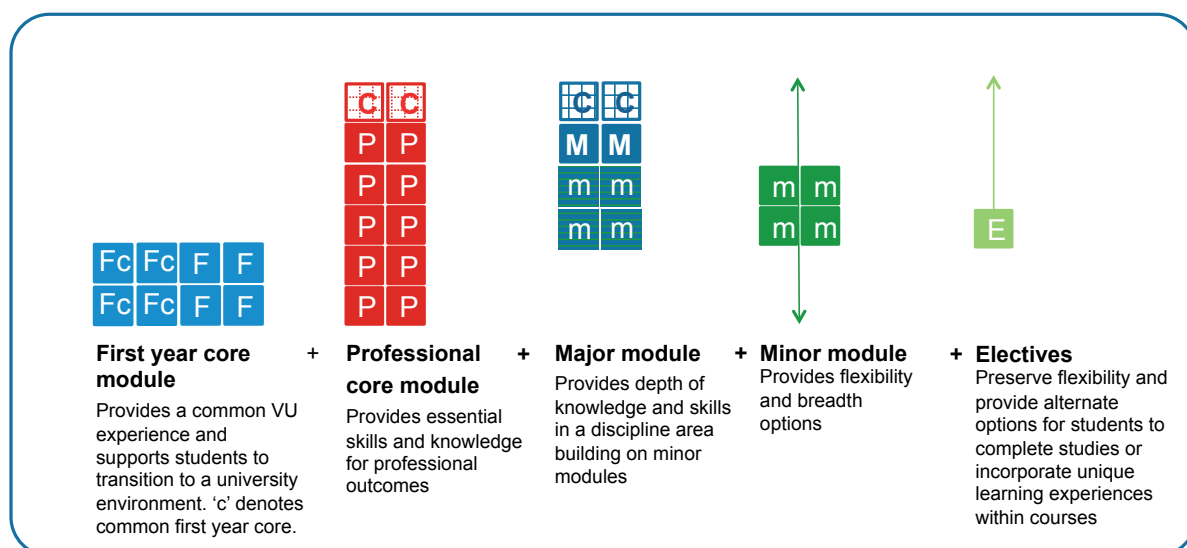
The modular approach of the course architecture supports students to more easily identify the subject matter they value most and ensure learning outcomes are effectively embedded within a student’s course of study.

The use of modules as the fundamental building block of courses provides students with clarity by locating modules within a logical structure. The relationships between modules (e.g. completion of minor as a prerequisite to majors) provide the basis for ensuring that units build on prior knowledge and a ‘checkpoint’ to assess the capability of students.

Four types of modules (first year core, professional core, major and minor) enable students to develop core skills for their career of choice as well as options to pursue greater depth or breadth of subjects. Colleges may also offer a limited number of electives to students (Section 2).

Figure 2 presents a schematic overview of the module types.

Figure 2 - Overview of module types



Each type of module, and the design rules to be applied in their development, is presented in detail below.

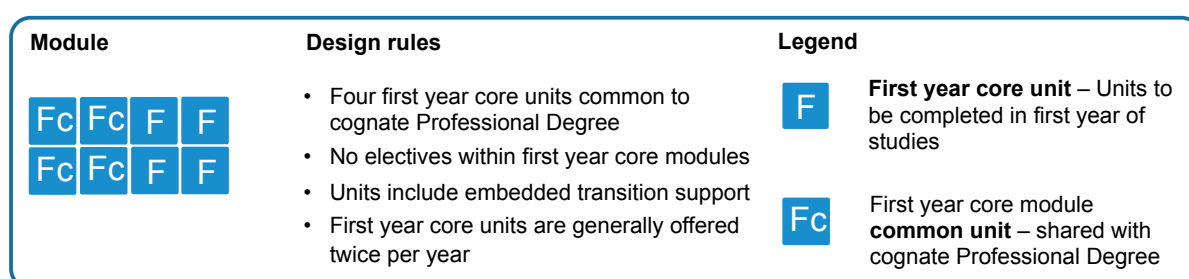
## 2.1 First year core modules

First year core modules provide the required grounding for students commencing a course. They provide for the development of critical capabilities and course specific content (Figure 3). First year core modules fulfil two objectives:

1. **Prepare students for further study** through targeted curriculum to support students' transition to a university environment. Curriculum combines relevant content with structured support.
2. **Facilitate pathways to professional courses** through a shared core of at least 48 credit points (equivalent to 4 units) that is relevant, and may be credited to, relevant Professional Degrees (see Section 4).

First year core modules are designed to provide an introductory course sequence whilst opening options for later studies. General Degrees have a first year core of eight units, while Professional Degrees have a first year core of four units, shared with the relevant General Degree.

Figure 3 – First year core module

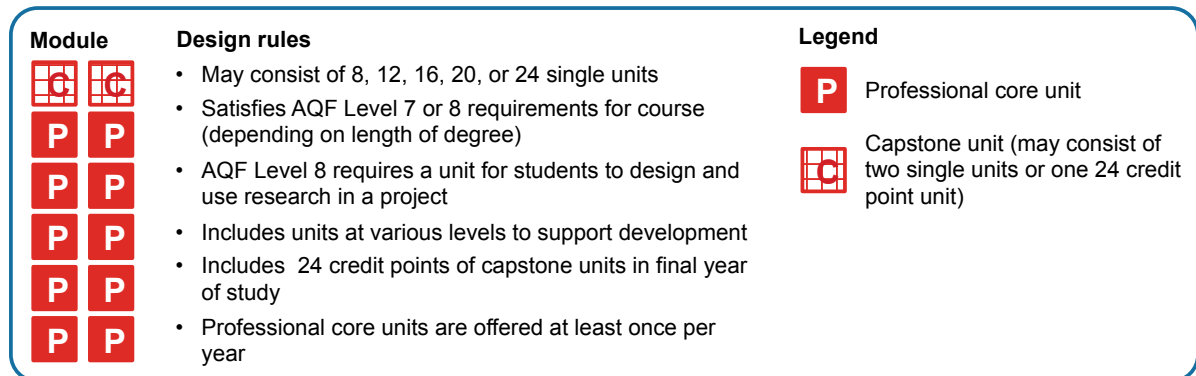


## 2.2 Professional core modules

Professional core modules are only available in Professional Degrees. They progress from the first year core and span the remainder of the degree. They may consist of 96, 144, 192, 240, or 288 credit points (equivalent to 8, 12, 16, 20, or 24 units) in total, depending on accreditation/registration/practice requirements in the relevant profession and the length of the degree.

Professional core modules must include a capstone experience of at least 24 credit points in the final year of study. This may comprise a sequence of two units of 12 credit points, the first of which is preparatory. Alternatively, it may comprise a single 24 credit point unit in the final semester of study. Capstones may be shared across professional cores or majors to provide interdisciplinary options or as a result of curriculum design that allows for students to integrate their entire degree experience. Electives are not normally available in professional core modules excepting as noted under 'electives' in Section 2.5.

Figure 4 – Professional core module



## 2.3 Major modules

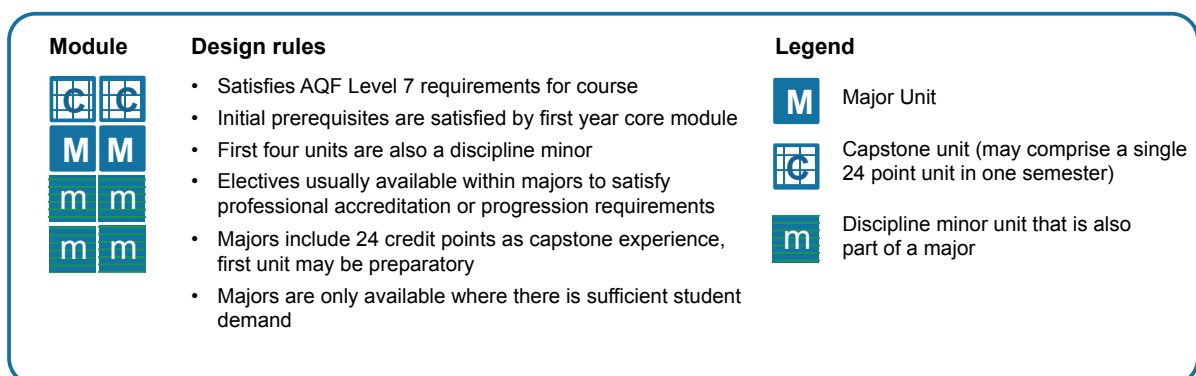
Major modules (Figure 5) consist of 96 credit points (eight single units) of study that provide students with a depth of knowledge in a particular discipline. They may only be commenced after first year.

Students may undertake up to two majors in a General Degree and one in a Professional Degree. Requirements for the first four units of a major may be fulfilled by completion of a linked discipline minor.

Major modules should include a capstone experience of at least 24 credit points in the final year of study. This may comprise a sequence of two units of 12 credit points, the first of which may be a preparatory unit. Alternatively, it may comprise a single 24 credit point unit in the final semester of study.

Capstones may be shared across professional cores or majors to provide interdisciplinary options or as a result of curriculum design that allows for students to integrate their entire degree experience.

Figure 5 - Major module



## 2.4 Minor modules

Minors comprise 48 credit points (four units) designed to support breadth of study for students. Minors provide structure to elective choice by providing a coherent set of units for students to choose in order to identify areas of interest or develop and demonstrate broader knowledge and capabilities. The architecture includes two types of minors: Discipline and Breadth.

Each type of minor module is described in further detail below.

### 2.4.1 Discipline minors provide the basis for a major




Discipline minors provide students with an introduction to a field of study. Discipline minors may also form the first four units of one or more majors, providing students in General Degrees with an opportunity to undertake a minor within their field before committing to a major.

Discipline minors can be shared by multiple majors. This provides opportunities for colleges to provide progression options for students following completion of a minor. Electives are not usually present in discipline minors, except where, for professional accreditation or identified student progression reasons, there is a need to provide alternate study plan options for students (Section 2.5).

### 2.4.2 Breadth minors provide further expansion of study

Breadth minors provide an option for students who wish to broaden their body of knowledge across a range of discipline areas or to undertake interdisciplinary studies. Breadth minors may be offered across disciplines and colleges. Electives may be used in breadth minors to ensure that students completing a cognate major or professional degree are able to fulfil credit requirements, to incorporate cross-college study options, or to provide international or work-based learning opportunities (Section 2.5).

Figure 6 - Minor module

Module	Design rules	Legend
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be designed around a coherent conceptual framework and set of learning outcomes</li> <li>• Initial prerequisites should be satisfied by foundation modules</li> <li>• Breadth minors make use of existing units and cannot contribute to a major</li> <li>• An elective unit may be used to allow for unique experiences such as study tours and placements, or to allow progression through degree</li> </ul>	 Minor Unit  Minor Unit that contributes to a major

## 2.5 Notes on electives and alternate study plans

Electives are 12 credit points (equivalent of one unit) of study. As noted in the module descriptions, Colleges may provide for limited elective choice under some scenarios. These are:

- Units are repeated across more than one module requiring students to undertake additional units to fulfil course requirements.
- Accrediting bodies require elective studies for breadth but do not allow sufficient electives for students to complete a minor.
- To offer students unique options within a breadth minor (for example, an international or work-based learning experience).

As a general principle, electives should not be 'floating'. All units should be attached to an existing module but may be undertaken by students not undertaking the full module.

Under exceptional circumstances, Course Coordinators may devise an alternate study plan for a student. This should be recorded and approved as per university guidelines. All alternate study plans



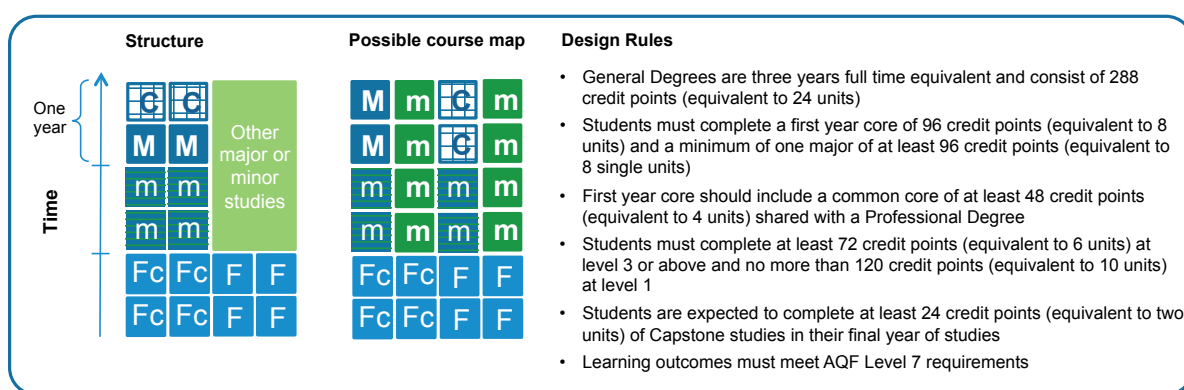
must enable students to achieve the degree learning outcomes and, where applicable, meet all professional requirements.

### 3 General Degrees

General degrees are broad-access qualifications designed for non-traditional and less academically-prepared students, as well as those wishing to have a broad and flexible educational experience.

General Degrees enable students to enhance their foundational capabilities prior to focusing on a specific discipline area. They consist of 288 credit points (equivalent to 24 single units) in total. All students must complete a first year core module (96 credit points, 8 units) and a major module (96 credit points, 8 units). Students then have the option of taking two minor studies or a second major totalling 96 credit points (equivalent to eight single units) of study.

Figure 7 - Structure and rules for General Degrees



#### 3.1.1 Naming conventions for General Degrees

University policy and professional accreditation requirements for the naming of degrees should be utilised. However, the naming of a General Degree should represent the broad field of study rather than the discipline or professional outcome.

Degree with a major: Bachelor of [field of study] ([name of major])

Example: Bachelor of Arts (History)

Degree with two majors: Bachelor of [field of study] ([name of major/name of major])

Example: Bachelor of Business (Marketing/Finance)

Degree names should reflect the substantive compulsory content of a degree and the major area of study undertaken by a student. Minor studies should not be referenced in the name.

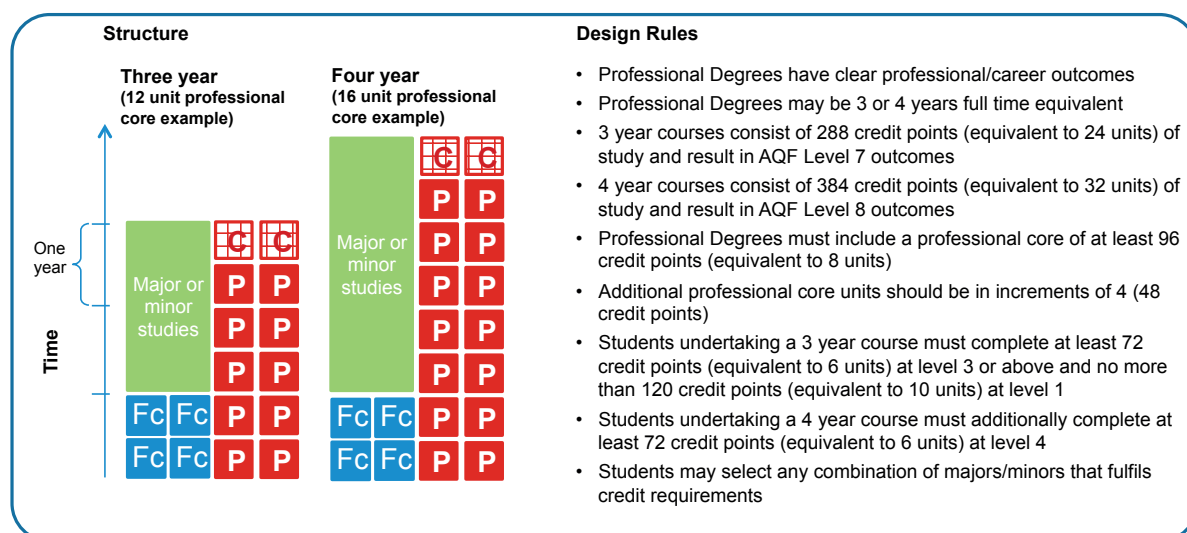
## 4 Professional Degrees

Professional Degrees provide VU students with clear professional outcomes and are more linear than General Degrees. Professional Degrees may be three or four year courses full time equivalent (288 credit points or 384 credit points respectively). Professional Degrees consist of a first year core (48 credit points, 4 units), a professional core (at least 96 credit points, 8 units) and optional majors or minors.

Professional Degrees of four years duration (FTE) that do not include an honours component should have outcomes equivalent to AQF Level 7. Degrees of four years duration inclusive of honours should have outcomes at AQF Level 8. This includes a requirement for the design and implementation of a research project (which may also be the capstone unit/s).

Figure 8 presents an overview of the course structure and rules for Professional Degrees.

Figure 8 - Structure and rules for Professional Degrees



### 4.1.1 Naming conventions for Professional Degrees

University policy and professional accreditation requirements for the naming of degrees should be utilised. Degree names should directly reflect discipline/professional outcomes from the substantive compulsory content of a degree, and ideally will reflect the dominant career outcome. Typically, majors and minors are not included in the title for Professional Degrees. The following general pattern is preferred:

Bachelor of [discipline/profession]

Examples: Bachelor of Nursing; Bachelor of Financial Management; Bachelor of Social Work

## 5 Sub-Degrees and pathways

Nested Sub-Degree qualifications provide students with additional entry and exit points. Students who do not wish to enrol in a degree course may choose to undertake a Higher Education Diploma (Diploma) or Associate Degree course with the potential to pathway at a later point in time. Sub-Degree courses should enable students to receive full credit for studies undertaken at a Sub-Degree level when entering a cognate course.

A distinct set of course learning outcomes at the appropriate AQF level must be provided for any nested qualifications. These learning outcomes should reflect similar skills and concepts to, and are likely to indicate partial achievement of, those in the degree.

### 5.1 Sub-Degree exit only qualifications

Exit only qualifications (students cannot enrol directly) will be available to students in all courses at the conclusion of first and second year. This is common practice across the sector and allows students to conclude their studies for personal reasons, or change discipline areas, while still gaining formal recognition for their work in the form of a qualification.

At conclusion of the first year of a three year degree (96 credit points), students may exit with a Higher Education Diploma. At the conclusion of the second year (192 credit point completion), students may exit with an Associate Degree. Overall course design should ensure that the relevant AQF levels (5 and 6) are achieved at each exit point.

Students entering with advanced standing and wishing to exit with a Sub-Degree qualification must satisfy normal University rules regarding conferral of awards based on proportion of study.

Professional Accreditation requirements may also be taken into account when setting requirements for completion of units prior to conferral of a Sub-Degree award.

### 5.2 Sub-degree entry qualifications (nested)

Nested Sub-Degree qualifications (comprising the first year of a degree) may be made available where sufficient market is established. Nested Associate Degrees will comprise the first year of a degree and another 96 credit points made up of either two minors or a major (in general degrees) or the eight units of the professional core (in a professional degree). As such, nested Sub-Degrees provide direct pathways to the relevant degree/s.

As noted in 5.1 above, some variations in length may be needed to accommodate expected volume of learning for professional accreditation purposes. However, it is expected that the appropriate AQF Level (5 & 6) learning outcomes and volume of learning will be applied.

Sub-Degree entry qualifications may commence as an exit award only, and later be transferred to active enrolment.

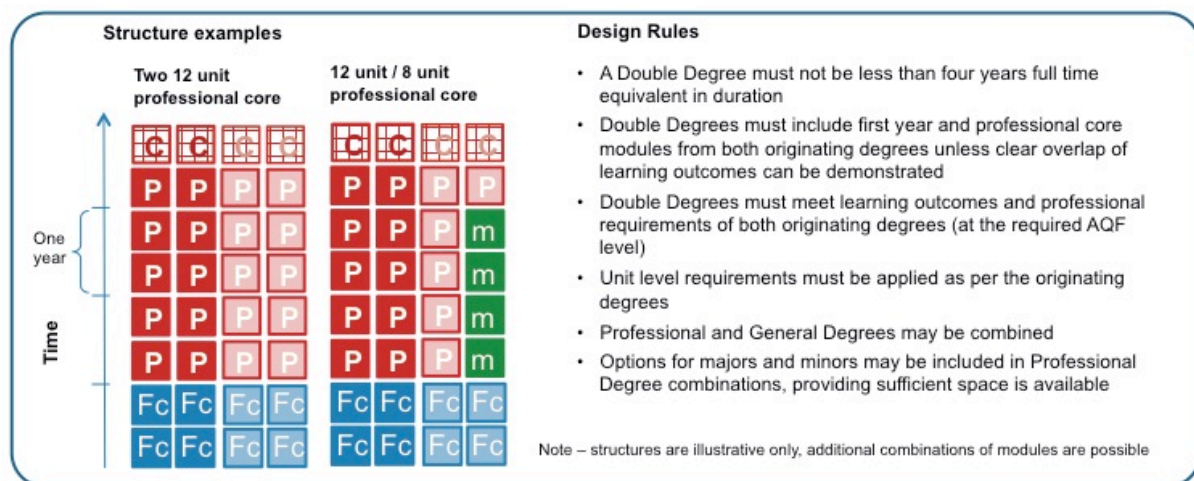
## 6 Double degrees

Double Degrees may be completed in two years less time than two individual degrees. For a four year Double Degree, this is possible where combinations of the two professional core modules do not exceed 288 credit points (24 units).

Double Degrees will mostly likely be comprised of two professional degrees, although combinations of General and Professional Degrees are possible. Regardless of overall design, Double Degrees must fulfil the learning outcomes of each of the individual degrees, and include all of existing professional core modules (except where clear overlap can be demonstrated for a four unit component).

Where space allows, students may also be offered minor modules.

Figure 9 - Basic options for double degrees



## Appendix A Glossary

Term	Definition
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework. More information can be found at <a href="http://www.aqf.edu.au/">http://www.aqf.edu.au/</a>
Associate Degree	An AQF Level 6 qualification with learning outcomes that demonstrate capacity to apply underpinning technical and theoretical knowledge in a range of contexts with some depth and independence, to undertake paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning.
Capstone	A unit or experience that provides opportunities for a student to integrate and apply the knowledge gained throughout their undergraduate degree. More information can be found at <a href="http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au">www.capstonecurriculum.com.au</a>
Cognate	Within the same or a closely related discipline.
Core	A unit is core if it is compulsory to a course or component thereof.
Course	A program of instruction that leads to the award of a degree, diploma or other qualification.
Diploma	An AQF Level 5 qualification with learning outcomes that demonstrate capacity to apply integrated technical and theoretical concepts in a broad range of contexts, to undertake advanced skilled or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning.
Elective	A subject that is not compulsory to a course or a module.
Exit award	An award that may be granted to students who are exiting a degree and have completed a specified amount of course requirements.
Module	A group of units that is defined as a unit set.
Pathways	Formal articulation arrangements between courses that also provide students with advanced standing in the destination course.
Professional core module	This is a coherent grouping of units in a particular academic field of study of more than 96 points fulfil the core knowledge base required of a profession (8 units).
Sub-Degree	An AQF Level 5 – 6 qualification.
Unit	An individually assessable component of a course, designated by a unique unit code.