Courses Lifecycle - Award Course Design (HE) Procedure

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Procedure provides the basis for Victoria University (VU) to comply with the requirement of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth) (HESF) Standard 3.1 in the design of all Higher Education (HE) Award course offerings.

(2) The Procedure provides direction for the overall design of HE Award courses, including prescribing course structure, duration and credit point expectations.

Section 2 - Scope

(3) This Procedure covers course design rules and principles for all Higher Education (HE) Award courses.

(4) This Procedure does not cover:

a. Vocational Education and Training (VET) Award courses; or
b. Non-Award courses.

Section 3 - Definitions

(5) Accredited Unit

(6) AQF Qualification

(7) Award

(8) Award Course

(9) Breadth Minors

(10) Collaborative Awards

(11) Course Architecture

(12) Course Design

(13) Discipline

(14) Discipline Minor

(15) Double Degree

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(16) Double Qualification

(17) Exit Award

(18) General Degrees

(19) Major

(20) Minor

(21) Nested Award

(22) Pass Degree

(23) Professional Degrees

(24) Specialisation (HE)

(25) Unit

(26) Testamur

Section 4 - Policy Statement

(27) Refer to Courses Lifecycle Policy.

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - Principles of Course Design

(28) Award course design must be compliant with the requirements of the HESF. In particular:

a. The course design must be adequately and publicly stated, to support meaningful course comparison and informed student choice.
b. The specification of the design of the course should allow a peer to form a view on the standing and quality of the course.
c. The content and learning activities of the course must be of a sufficiently advanced level and otherwise appropriate to higher education, and be consistent with the field of education and the level of qualification involved.

(29) Award courses must be designed so that each of the component units meaningfully contributes to the acquisition of course-level learning outcomes.

(30) Teaching approaches and learning activities employed in units must be designed to contribute to students achieving the course-level outcomes and Graduate Capabilities.

(31) Award Courses must:

a. be transparent and readily intelligible to students and staff;
b. provide high quality course offerings across the range of disciplines taught by the University;
c. enhance portability of credit transfer across the University itself and of VU's awards across the Australian university sector;

d. contribute to a rational suite of course offerings;
e. not contain Non-Award units;
f. not contain a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate units; and
g. not contain VET accredited units.

Part B - Award Course Types

Diploma

(32) Diplomas must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 5 requirements for Diploma.
b. Have 96 credit points.
c. They cannot have majors/minors.
d. Entry options may exist; generally these are exit options from Bachelor programs.

Associate Degree

(33) Associate Degrees must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 6 requirements for Associate Degree.
b. Have 192 credit points.
c. They cannot have majors but may include a completed minor or minors.
d. Entry options may exist; generally these are exit options from Bachelor programs.

Bachelor

(34) Bachelor Award courses at VU are designed in accordance with Course Architecture.

(35) The course architecture consists of three key aspects:

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

(36) Bachelor degrees must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 7 requirements for Bachelor.
b. Have 288 or 384 credit points.
c. Be designed according to Course Architecture principles:
    i. Bachelors can be designed as General or Professional degrees.
    ii. Bachelors have a common first year.
    iii. No electives.
    iv. Include exit courses at Diploma level (except where professional accreditation does not allow for this.

Design of General Degrees (288 credit points)

(37) General Bachelor degrees must:

a. Contain a common first year and a minimum of one major plus a combination of either a second major, or

minors (discipline or breadth).

b. Complete at least 72 credit points at level 3 or above.
c. Complete no more than 120 credit points at level 1.
d. Include 24 credit points of Capstone studies in their final year of studies.

Design of Professional degrees (288 or 384 credit points)

(38) Professional degrees must:

a. Contain 48 credit points of college core units at first year plus a professional core of at least 96 credit points, depending on accreditation/registration/practice requirements in the relevant profession and length of the degree.
b. Have clear professional/career outcomes.
c. Include 24 credit points of Capstone studies in their final year of studies.

First-Year Core Module

(39) 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 96 credit points, while Professional Degrees have a first-year core of 48 credit points, shared with a General Degree.

(40) There must be 48 credit points of study common to the General Degree and same or similar discipline Professional Degrees.

Professional Core Module

(41) Professional core modules are only available in Professional Degrees. They progress from the first-year core and span the remainder of the degree.

(42) They may consist of 96, 144, 192, 240, or 288 credit points in total, depending on accreditation/registration/practice requirements in the relevant profession and the length of the degree.

(43) The design rules for professional core modules are as follows:

a. They must satisfy AQF Level 7 or 8 requirements for course.
b. AQF Level 8 requires a unit for students to design and use research in a project.

Bachelor Honours

(44) Bachelor Honours must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 8 requirements for Bachelor Honours.
b. Include a research component.

NB: Honours is an AQF qualification and is no longer given on meritorious outcomes.

Bachelor Honours Degree (Standalone) must:

(45) Have 96 credit points.

(46) Entry from Pass Degree in same or similar discipline.

Bachelor Honours Degree (Embedded) must:

(47) Have 384 credit points.

(48) Entry:

a. May be direct entry from the commencement of study.
b. May be via transfer from Pass Degree (according to certain conditions).
c. Designed according to Course Architecture principles (as noted above).

Graduate Certificate

(49) Graduate Certificates must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 8 requirements for Graduate Certificate.
b. Have 48 credit points.
c. Entry options may exist; generally these are exit options from Graduate Diploma or Master courses.
d. Can be nested in Graduate Diploma and Master.

Graduate Diploma

(50) Graduate Diplomas must:

a. Satisfy AQF Level 8 requirements for Graduate Diploma.
b. Have 96 credit points.
c. Allow entry options and exit options from Master courses.
d. Can be nested in Master.

Master

(51) Master Degrees:

a. Must satisfy AQF Level 9 requirements for Master.
b. Can be developed as coursework or a Higher Degree by Research (HDR).
c. Can include exit and nested qualifications.

(52) VU offers 1, 1.5 and 2-year Master programs. No extended Master programs are offered.

Master (1 year) (96 credit points)

(53) 1-year Master courses:

a. Require AQF Level 8 qualification in the same or similar discipline for entry.

Master (1.5-year) (144 credit points)

(54) 1.5-year Master courses:

a. Require AQF Level 7 Pass Degree in the same or similar discipline for entry.
b. Can only have Graduate Certificate as nested and exit qualifications.

Master (2-year) (192 credit points)

(55) 2-year Master courses:

a. Can have nested and exit Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificates.

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Doctoral

(56) Doctoral Degrees may be Doctor of Philosophy or Professional Doctorates.

(57) Professional Doctorates:

a. Must satisfy AQF level 10 requirements for Doctor.
b. Has 288 credit points.
c. May include Master, Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate as nested and exit qualifications.

(58) Doctorate of Philosophy:

a. Must satisfy AQF level 10 requirements for Doctor.
b. Has 384 credit points.
c. May include Master, Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate as nested/exit qualifications.

Part C - Award Course Components and Arrangements

Majors

(59) Majors must:

a. Have 96 credit points.
b. Be designed around a coherent conceptual framework.
c. Only commence after first year.
d. Any initial prerequisites must be satisfied by first year common core.
e. Include 24 credit points as Capstone studies.
f. Must not substantially duplicate the content and outcomes of another major.

(60) The first 48 credit points of a major also constitute a discipline minor.

Minors

(61) Minors must:

a. Have 48 credit points.
b. Be designed around a coherent conceptual framework.
c. Only commence after first year.
d. Any initial prerequisites must be satisfied by first year common core.

(62) There are 2 types of minors – Discipline Minors and Breadth Minors.

HE Specialisations

(63) A HE Specialisation must:

a. Only be included in a postgraduate degree.
b. Have 48 credit points.
c. Be designed around a coherent conceptual framework.

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Units

(64) Units are approved as part of a formal accreditation process within an award course.

(65) Units are based on 12 credit points or multiple thereof with maximum credit points per unit being 48.

(66) A 12-credit point unit corresponds to a student effort of 120 hours per unit (12 x 10) which includes scheduled classes, prescribed activities and/or independent work per week over one standard teaching period.

(67) Zero credit points units may be permitted under special circumstances.

Double Degrees

(68) Principles of double degree course design:

a. The degrees must be at the same AQF level.
b. The degrees are studied concurrently.
c. Two testamurs are issued on successful completion.
d. Both Award courses must be active.
e. As part of the course development, there will be cross accreditation of units, which will reduce the credit point requirements (and therefore course duration).

Double Qualifications

(69) Principles of double qualification course design:

a. The qualification will be at different AQF levels.
b. The degrees are studied sequentially.
c. Two testamurs issued on successful completion.
d. Both award courses must be active.
e. The design of the course provides progression from first degree to second, with entry to the postgraduate component reliant on successful completion of the undergraduate.

Part D - Course Management and Governance

(70) All HE coursework courses are assigned a managing College, which has principal rights and responsibilities for the curriculum content, and design and quality assurance of the award course.

(71) All HE Award courses and components will be coded according to the Coding Protocols as noted in guidelines.

(72) Majors, minors and HE specialisations advertised as available when a cohort of students commences must remain available for the standard duration of the course.

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Award Course" - A structured combination of approved units and/or supervised research into which students are admitted and are issued with an Award at the completion of their studies.

"Unit" - A discrete entity of study within a discipline area and the fundamental component of a course.

"Double Degree" - Comprises two individually approved Victoria University Awards at the same Australian Qualifications Framework level, taken concurrently, and resulting in the conferral of two Awards.

"Double Qualification" - A combination of two degrees at different Australian Qualifications Framework levels undertaken sequentially, where the full requirements of each Award must be met.

"Major" - A major consists of 96 credit points of study within an undergraduate course that provides students with a depth of knowledge in a particular discipline. Majors may only be commenced after first year.

"Accredited Unit" - A unit that is approved as part of a formal accreditation process within an award course. This is also referred to as a Unit of Competency for VET Awards.

"AQF Qualification" - Referred to as an Award Course at Victoria University (VU) and is one of the following: Doctor, Master, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate, Bachelor (Honours), Bachelor, Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma, Diploma, Certificate IV, Certificate III, Certificate II or Certificate I.

"Award" - An academic award of the University, approved by the Vice Chancellor.

"Breadth Minors" - Breadth minors provide students with the opportunity to broaden their knowledge across a range of discipline areas or undertake interdisciplinary studies. Breadth minors make use of existing units and cannot contribute to a major.

"Collaborative Awards" - An umbrella term for awards/courses that are developed in collaboration between Victoria University (VU) awards/courses or those of a partner. They include double degrees, dual degrees, combined degrees, joint degrees and double qualifications.

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"Course Architecture" - 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. Course architecture is currently used only for undergraduate courses.

"Course Design" - The content, duration and sequencing of the elements (units) of a course of study. This structural definition is broadened by the HESF to include various other design characteristics including entry requirements and pathways, the nature of the content, the expected learning outcomes, their sequence of attainment and assessment, and professional accreditation if required.

"Discipline" - An area of study which has a history and tradition of teaching at both introductory and advanced levels.

"Discipline Minor" - 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.

"Exit Award" - An award that may be available to students unable to fulfill the requirements of the course in which they are enrolled but who have completed the requirements of a lower level qualification.

"General Degrees" - 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.

"Minor" - A minor consists of 48 credit points of study that may either be a discipline minor or a breadth minor.

"Nested Award" - A purposely designed Award course that enables explicit articulation between courses from one or more Australian Qualifications Framework qualification types. These courses must be available for students to both enter and exit.

"Pass Degree" - A Bachelor degree without an Honours component.

"Professional Degrees" - Degrees which provide students with clear professional outcomes and are more linear than General Degrees.

"Testamur" - The official certification document that confirms that an award has been conferred.

"Specialisation (HE)" - A HE specialisation consists of 48 credit points of study within a postgraduate degree.

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