Part 4 – Academic Standards and Quality

*Item 15  Graduate Coursework AQF and Review Compliance

Purpose

To seek agreement on a proposed process for Graduate Coursework AQF and Graduate Coursework Review compliance by 1 January 2015.

Recommendation

That the Committee endorse the proposed process (as detailed in paper 825/2013) for achieving compliance with both the AQF and the Graduate Coursework Review recommendations by 1 January 2015.

ACTION REQUIRED

For discussion ☒  For decision ☒  For information ☐  College response ☐

Graduate Coursework AQF and Review Compliance (825/2013)

In 2013, the Graduate Coursework Working Party (GCWP) proposed a series of revisions to graduate coursework for implementation in 2015 (444b/2013). These revisions were considered and endorsed by the University Education Committee and the Academic Board (Response 688a/2013), and will need to be implemented alongside AQF compliance revisions which share the same target date of 1 January 2015. This paper is intended to scope how the implementation measures may be aligned and successfully achieved, and what benefits may be realised by the University in doing so.

There are currently 154 active Master programs (and 268 active Master plans) in graduate coursework. 25 of the programs currently do not require review for AQF compliance as they have either been reviewed or established as new programs since the introduction of the AQF Implementation Plan. However, all 154 active programs and 268 active plans will require review for alignment with the outcomes of the Graduate Coursework Review, and associated amendment. This is in addition to the 95 Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma programs that would also require amendment or disestablishment.

Figure 1 –Master programs where an AQF Compliance Review has been undertaken
The revisions required to ensure alignment with the AQF and GCWP Review will often involve changes to the nomenclature of programs, or their duration, in addition to incorporation of research/capstone/project studies. Revision to both nomenclature and duration involve disestablishing the former offering and accrediting a new offering, to ensure that students currently in the programs have the opportunity to complete the named program which they were originally offered within the duration in which it was offered.

Through the typical accreditation process, moving towards both AQF and GCWP compliance by 1 January 2015 then entails a minimum of 300 forms coming through University Education Committee and Academic Board (more than 100 each of reviews, disestablishments, and new plans) in less than 12 months. This would be alongside the regular proposal and amendment work and accreditation that these Committees undertake. This figure is not sustainable, does not enable an appropriate depth of consideration of these proposals, and is not a productive use of Committee members’ time.

Alongside the exceptional amount of work that would be required, the University allows rolling offers for up to 18 months in advance. This means that applications have now opened for Semester 1, 2015. These applications include applications for admission to up to 124 non-AQF compliant Master programs. This is contrary to the assurances previously given to TEQSA that the University would not make available non-AQF compliant programs beyond 1 January 2015. The University currently has 134 applications for admission to a graduate coursework program in 2015; of these 106 offers have already been made.

The international recruitment cycle for 2015 will kick off in early 2014. Ideally, any revisions to offerings should be finalised by early April 2014 to maximise the potential of the University to realise the planned 1.5% growth in numbers. The current deadlines proposed in the AQF implementation plan – where some programs will not be reviewed until August 2014 – will limit this opportunity. These late deadlines will also involve significant administrative overheads in terms of cancelled offers, communications with students, and the required manual updates of data and issuance of replacement offers.

Given the issues identified above, and the overall alignment between AQF and GCWP outcomes, it is sensible that a streamlined process be introduced. This will ease the movement towards both AQF and GCWP Review compliance, whilst minimising the exposure of the University to risk. This involves aligning proposals with disestablishments where they are compliant with both AQF and GCWP Review requirements.

Process

Applications for admission for 2015 cease for all graduate coursework programs (except for a small number of special or already compliant offerings) until such a time that the program has been through the accreditation steps required below. This will ensure that:

1. Students are not made offers, and do not accept offers, to programs that will not be available or significantly changed from 2015 and thus risk the institution incurring Provider default under the ESOS Act; and
2. Students do not receive offers to non-AQF compliant programs with a commencement date after 1 January 2015. This would be contrary to the assurances previously given to TEQSA and presents a risk to the University should such an offer be issued.

Colleges will have the following options available to them (at plan level):

1. The offering will be replaced with a new offering
2. The offering is already compliant with all of the recommendations of the GCWP Review
3. The offering will seek exemption from one or more of the GCWP Review recommendations
4. The plan will be disestablished and not replaced.

Exemptions will not be granted from the AQF without extensive consultation and approval by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). This process will not be streamlined nor outlined here.

1. The offering will be replaced with a new offering

Colleges will be required to provide key details of the new offering in a streamlined approval process designed to simplify both the introduction of the new Award and disestablishment of any number of component Awards that are being rolled into the new Award. Details required on the streamlined form would be:

Award name
Type (i.e. ‘Broad Field’ Award, ‘Narrow Field’ Award, ‘Broad Field’ Award with an ‘Augmentation’)
Responsible College(s)
Learning Outcomes
Admission requirements using predefined text/template
List of Cognate Disciplines
Online/On-campus classification
Compulsory Work Based Component details (if any)
Requirements: Course lists and unit requirements, hurdle requirement (if any), progression requirement (if any)
Award(s) and Specialisations being replaced:
   Name
   Plan Code
   Type (dropdown)
      . Graduate Certificate
      . Graduate Diploma
      . Masters Degree
      . Masters Degree Specialisation

   Indicate if there are:
      Applicants without offers
      Applicants with packaged conditional offers
      Applicants with full offers
      Applicants who have accepted full offers

Total EFTSL in all Award(s) and Specialisations being replaced as at 1 September 2013

Master degrees within this streamlined process will be set at 96 units. Any Awards that differ from the standards exemplified in the AQF Implementation Plan will not be eligible for streamlining.

2. The offering is already compliant with all of the recommendations of the GCWP

Colleges will be required to submit a review for the program in accordance with the AQF Implementation Plan, if not already undertaken, by 2 October 2013 for consideration at Academic Board meeting 6/2013 in order to avoid delays in student applications and offers.

3. The offering will seek exemption from one or more of the GCWP recommendations
Colleges will be required to submit their standard review for the program in accordance with the AQF Implementation Plan, including an additional memo with explicit reference to the recommendations of the Graduate Coursework Working Party and which exemption/s are being sought.

If an AQF review has already been undertaken for a non-GCWP compliant program a justification will be required to be submitted in the form of a memo.

Exemptions will be required to be submitted with significant justification including, for example, reference to international standards, professional requirements, and/or an explanation of why the standard model is not suited to a particular graduate student market. Justifications must be made with reference to factual evidence and/or research from multiple sources. Anecdotal data or observations will not be sufficient for a proposal to be approved. Justifications presented without sufficient reference to appropriate evidence will not be tabled to the relevant accrediting committee.

4. The plan will not be replaced and will be disestablished

In this instance a College will need to submit a document with 4 required fields to disestablish the plan.

To enable work on revisions, consideration of any amendments to undergraduate programs should be put on hold and not considered until May 2014 UEC at the earliest. This would allow the November 2013 through to April 2014 UEC’s program accreditation focus to be primarily on graduate coursework. Given that revisions to programs are all effective only from 1 January each year, and that the deadline for revisions to programs for 2014 has now passed, placing a hold on revisions to undergraduate programs will have little to no negative impact as all undergraduate revisions, will be effective from 1 January 2015 regardless of when they are considered.

The only exceptions in the undergraduate space would be for new program proposals and disestablishments.

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Attachment
Appendix A: Project Scope
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Project goals

1. Replace the University’s current Graduate Coursework offerings with new offerings which are consistent with both the AQF and Graduate Coursework Working Party Review recommendations by 2015.
2. Do not disrupt the student market and ensure a smooth transition to admissions in the new programs.
3. Streamline the disestablishment process for outgoing offerings.
4. Streamline the establishment and accreditation process for incoming offerings.

Broad scope

1. Refinement consistent with the Graduate Coursework Working Party Review recommendations (where necessary), including policy development.
2. Implementation of HRSA changes to support implementations Graduate Coursework Working Party recommendations.
3. Disestablishment of current graduate coursework offerings:
   a. Implementation of a streamlined process for disestablishment;
   b. Implementation of a standard communication strategy for existing applicants, including:
      i. Applicants without offers;
      ii. Applicants with packaged conditional offers;
      iii. Applicants with full offers;
      iv. Applicants who have accepted full offers.
4. Establishment and accreditation of new graduate coursework offerings:
   a. Implementation of a streamlined process for creation and accreditation of replacement offerings which are consistent with the AQF and GCWP Review recommendations, including:
      i. Pipelining of development and approval in stages to meet critical deadlines;
      ii. Mass configuration of new Degrees, Academic Programs, Academic Plans and Academic Sub-Plans in HRSA.

Out of scope

1. Implementation of a communication strategy for:
   a. Prospective applicants/students;
   b. Current students;
   c. Other external stakeholders (e.g. agents, third-party providers, external accreditation authorities).
2. Implementation of a streamlined process for creation and accreditation of:
   a. New offerings which are not replacing one or more existing offerings;
   b. Replacement offerings which are not consistent with the AQF and/or GCWP recommendations, including special exceptions sought under those recommendations;
   c. Double-Masters programs;
   d. Joint awards with other institutions.

Broad approach

Refine the following aspects of the Graduate Coursework Working Party Review recommendations:

- Broad structures and credit arrangements (R1) – in progress
- Nomenclature (R4) – in progress
• Building blocks (R3, R11, R12), including hurdle requirements (R8) – in progress
• Admission standards template (R5, R6)
• Framework/definition for AQF Level 9 research component requirements (R9) – in progress

Constraints
• College Resources.
• Division of Student Administration resources.
• Meeting calendar for UEC and Academic Board.

Risks
• Failing to meet compliance deadlines.
• Offers of admission to non-compliant programs.

Opportunities
• Minimise program based workload for CECs, UEC, and AB.
• Realise the full potential of the recommendations of the Graduate coursework working party in a timely manner though minimising the barriers and maximising the opportunities.
• Avoid confusion from each College attempting to incorporate the required changes in an operationally different manner, which may lead to a substantial number of plans not being available for application by students until late in 2014, or offers to non-compliant programs going out for commencement in 2015.
• Expand the new undergraduate curriculum architecture and plan coding standard to cover graduate course for consistency, and to further enable development of double Masters degrees.
• Standardise and improve the Australian Higher Education Graduations Statements for graduate coursework offerings.
• Improve the Field of Education classification of graduate coursework offerings.

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