



Draft Manual for Accreditation of University Programs

Summary of 2nd-Round Responses and Recommendations for Revision

The 2nd Draft Manual for Accreditation of University Programs was distributed to State Divisions of the Institution, Surveyors Boards, and universities in March 2002. It incorporated amendments approved at the September 2001 Council Meeting in Brisbane together with some additional minor amendments incorporated following discussions at the ASMLA and Heads of University Schools meetings in Brisbane. Stakeholders were asked to return comments by May 1st.

Responses were received from:

- Reciprocating Surveyors Board of Australia and New Zealand
- University of Southern Queensland
- Queensland Division of the ISA
- The University of Melbourne
- Queensland University of Technology
- University of Tasmania
- University of NSW
- Victorian Division of the ISA (received August 2002)

The responses indicated continuing support for establishment of ISA accreditation procedures and general approval of the amendments made to the first draft. However the responses also indicated either continuing concerns or conflicting views between stakeholders on a number of issues. Those issues and some associated recommendations were taken to the May 2002 ISA Council meeting. Council approved the recommendations, and authorised the ISA Executive to adopt the Manual for Accreditation of University Programmes following incorporation of the Council decisions and such other minor amendments that were required to further simplify and rationalise the accreditation procedure. The ISA Executive adopted the final draft at its 21st August 2002 meeting.

This document summarises the amendments incorporated into the August 2002 version of the Manual.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES TAKEN TO MAY 2002 COUNCIL MEETING

1. Accreditation of 3-year degrees

The Accreditation Procedures allow for the possibility that ISA will accredit programmes other than 4-year undergraduate degrees. At least one university has continuing concern at the possibility of a 3-year undergraduate programme being accredited. In summary, the concerns are that:

- i. Accreditation of 3-year degrees will affect notions of equivalence with comparable professional associations because of the IEAust insistence on a 4-year degree.
- ii. Potential inequity between programmes because of the potential for both a 3-year programme and a 4-year programme to lead to graduate membership.

Council discussed its previous decision not to limit accreditation to only 4-year undergraduate programmes but to recognise that an articulation path to corporate membership may be required for graduates of an accredited 3-year degree. There was no suggestion or proposal to review that decision. It must be reiterated that accreditation leads to *graduate* membership of ISA and that the policy and the accreditation procedures recognise the possibility that ISA may apply additional post-graduation criteria to a graduate from a 3-year degree.

2. The links between the accreditation criteria and the National Competency Standards.

The stakeholder responses indicated differing views on the role of the National Competency Standards. The ISA(Q'Land) explicitly and the RSBANZ indirectly supported the link between the accreditation criteria and the ISA National Competency Standards. In contrast, one university (QUT) reiterated its concern about this link (and echoed earlier concerns expressed by several universities).

It is noted in the preface to the ISA National Competency Standards that the Standards should not dictate curriculum to the universities, but rather “provide persons involved with the design and implementation of undergraduate and post graduate education programs in surveying with current information on the scope, breadth and complexity of the profession’s activities.”

However, it is also stated that the competency standards for Stage 1 are equivalent to those required for attaining the grade of Graduate Member of the ISA and that a candidate for this grade of membership would normally require an approved Bachelor Degree and must be competent to carry out a wide range of surveying activities under the guidance of experienced professional surveyors.

The Manual for Accreditation of University Programmes needs to find a balance between the need to ensure that graduates are properly prepared to participate in the workforce in compliance with the characteristics and standards indicated by the National Competency Standards, and a recognition that the National Competency Standards are not meant to define a university curriculum.

The Manual currently states that: “The program should ensure that graduates meet or exceed the specific competency based criteria provided in Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards”. It was recommended that this be revised to read: “The

program should aim to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills to meet or exceed the competency based criteria provided in Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards”. This wording better recognises the preparatory role of the university education. (Carried)

Similarly, the Manual currently states, “The school must demonstrate that graduates meet these criteria [ie, Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards], or indicate those criteria that are not met. It was recommended that this be revised to read: “The school must demonstrate how the competency standards are used to inform curriculum design and indicate any substantial elements of competency that are not addressed by the curriculum.” (Carried)

3. The cost of accreditation

Several responses also indicated continuing concern about the cost of the accreditation process, both to the universities and to the ISA. The following recommendation (from University of Melbourne) was brought to Council for discussion:

1. For the first round of accreditations, established programs which have long standing acceptance by eg, Boards of Surveyors for a substantial period of time should be accredited under a “grandfather” clause, or following submission of eg, an annual report, copy of current accreditations (eg, IEAust, Surveyors Board), together with details of the degrees.

Several responses also noted the already high commitment that schools have to internal university quality assurance processes and, in some cases, the accreditation requirements of other associations (such as IEAust.). Council was asked to consider the following recommendation:

2. That the Manual be amended to relax the current 5 year accreditation cycle with an option for Universities to seek re-accreditation at any time between 3 and 7 years, to coincide with other University of professional association reviews. In most cases, this ought to allow universities to minimise the cost of the ISA accreditation.

(Both recommendations carried.)

4. Completion and Implementation

In order to facilitate completion and implementation, the following recommendations were adopted:

1. That the draft Manual for Accreditation of University Programmes:
 - i. be revised to incorporate recommendations adopted by Council at the May 2002 Council meeting.
 - ii. be revised to further simplify the accreditation process with a view to minimising the cost and resource implications for the universities.
2. That, following revision, the ISA Executive be authorised to adopt the revised Manual for Accreditation of University Programmes and progress its implementation.

The details of the changes endorsed by ISA Council, additional notes regarding feedback from stakeholders, and other minor amendments are documented below.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES INCORPORATED INTO THE JULY 2002 VERSION OF THE MANUAL

1. FOLLOWING THE MAY 2002 RECOMMENDATIONS OF ISA COUNCIL.

Program Structure and Content (page 11)

Replace: The program should ensure that graduates meet or exceed the specific competency based criteria provided in Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards

with: The program should aim to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills to meet or exceed the competency based criteria provided in Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards.

Replace: The school must demonstrate that graduates meet these criteria [ie, Sections 1.1 to 1.11 of the ISA Competency Standards], or indicate those criteria that are not met

with: The school must demonstrate how the competency standards are used to inform curriculum design and indicate any substantial elements of competency that are not addressed by the curriculum.

Accreditation Procedures

Transition arrangements added: For the first round of accreditations, established programs which have long standing acceptance by ISA may apply to be accredited under a "grandfather" clause. In this case, the School will be asked to provide:

- A list of the programmes for which accreditation is being sought under this clause and a short description of each programme (1-page maximum).
- A list of all other programmes offered by the School, for which accreditation is not being sought under this clause.
- A copy of the School's annual report.
- A copy of any current accreditation reports (eg, State Surveyors Board or RSBANZ accreditation report, IEAust accreditation report, international accreditation reports), and confirmation of the length of time that the programme has been accredited by that organisation.

The accreditation cycle

Replace: So far as possible, accreditation is scheduled so that all programs offered by a particular university or school are reviewed concurrently at intervals of five years. This is referred to as a general review of all programs offered by the school. Programs which meet all criteria are accredited or re-accredited for the five-year period. A program which achieves full accreditation in the interval between general reviews is included in the next general review.

Accreditation is normally accorded on a full calendar-year basis. Should ISA be unable to schedule procedures to re-accredit within a five-year period, or should a school be unable to meet a schedule through genuine misadventure, existing accreditation will normally be extended for one further calendar year. Where a program is scheduled for closure, accreditation can normally be extended from year to year for a limited time.

With: So far as possible, accreditation is scheduled so that all programs offered by a particular university or school are reviewed concurrently. This is referred to as a general review. General reviews will normally at intervals of five years; however universities may seek re-accreditation at any time between 4 and 7 years in order that ISA re-accreditation can coincide with other university or professional association reviews.

Programs which meet all criteria are accredited or re-accredited for the five-year period. A program which achieves full accreditation in the interval between reviews is included in the next review. Where a program is scheduled for closure, accreditation can normally be extended from year to year for a limited time. Accreditation is normally accorded on a full calendar-year basis.

Should ISA be unable to schedule procedures to re-accredit at a previously agreed time, or should a school be unable to meet a schedule through genuine misadventure, existing accreditation will normally be extended for one further calendar year.

2. ADDITIONAL RESPONSES TO FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND OTHER MINOR CHANGES

Clarification of earlier feedback regarding a simpler accreditation process

One university clarified an earlier recommendation to simplify the accreditation process. A previous interpretation of the University of Otago response suggested that accreditation by the relevant Surveyors Board should be a prerequisite for ISA accreditation. This was not the intent of their submission. The University of Otago suggested that automatic exemption from the process be given to any programme that:

- a. Was 4-years in duration,
- b. Was fully accredited by the relevant Survey Board,
- c. Could demonstrate that it had a systematic internal quality review process, and
- d. Had a Board of Studies that met at least annually and was comprised of representatives from industry and the university.

Response: It appears likely that the RSBANZ will be recommending ISA accreditation as a foundation for their own accreditation purposes, with a limited set of additional (cadastral) requirements to be verified in order for an ISA accredited program to receive Surveyors Board accreditation. This is a barrier to adopting a pathway to ISA accreditation that depends upon Surveyors Board accreditation.

Selection of appropriate reporting statistics

The Manual refers to standard Australian reporting statistics (such as student cut off scores), which may not be appropriate for overseas universities. The following footnote has been added to the section “Principal Elements of the ISA Accreditation Process”: The Manual refers to standard Australian reporting statistics (such as student cut-off scores). Overseas universities are expected to submit equivalent data, or indicate if that data is not relevant or available to them

The requirement for at least 12 weeks practical experience

ISA (Queensland) reiterated its opposition to any reduction in the requirement for 12 weeks practical [professional] experience. The advice received from several universities is that such requirements cannot be enforced and so a practical experience requirement has not been included.

The guidelines to program content

One university (NSW) indicated concern that the current guidelines to program content are based on percentages rather than actual hours. This leads to significant differences in minimum hours when content from eg, a 3-year degree is compared to content from a 4-year degree.

The manual currently states:

A program will typically include the following elements, the percentages denoting proportions of the total learning experience:

- mathematics, physics, information technology and other underpinning sciences. This element should not be less than 20% of the total program content.

- surveying and spatial information science principles and skills, including practical experience and projects, appropriate to the discipline of study. This element should not be less than 40% of total program content.
- broadening studies such as environmental studies, political science, geography, etc.
- professional practice (including management and communication skills and professional ethics).

These criteria are meant as a broad guide only, and a starting point for discussions of program content. For example, for some courses, the surveying component may concentrate on land development planning, while for other courses the content may concentrate on spatial measurement. Substantial departure from these representative proportions must be justified as consistent with the program objectives and in particular, with attainment of the generic attributes.

The intention of this section is only to provide a guide to the *relative* proportions of the various elements and to allow a school to argue in favour of any substantial departures. A statement of actual hours may be too prescriptive, considering not only the case of 3-year degrees but also the potential for double degrees or programs that articulate from a technical qualification to have a curriculum that is substantially different from that of a normal undergraduate 4-year degree.

However, recognising that the percentages do lead to some ambiguity, the following amendment has been made to the second paragraph: In the first instance, the percentages should be treated as representative of the total program content in a 4-year degree.

Links to International and Reciprocal Recognition

One university (QUT) reiterated the importance of considering links to international and reciprocal recognition and recommended that “ISA negotiate with like-minded professional bodies, both national and international, to establish a list of accredited courses acceptable to each body and the associated benefits provided by each body.”

This recommendation will be pursued by ISA, and the following paragraph has been added to the policy section of the manual: ISA will pursue opportunities for mutual recognition of ISA accredited programs by other national and international organisations.

ISA Reporting Responsibilities

One university (Melbourne) recommended additional reporting responsibilities for the ISA be incorporated into the manual, specifically:

- Under Section 5 Accreditation Procedures – Scheduling of Process, that the ISA commit to schedule an accreditation visit within three months of a university submitting their request for accreditation. If the accreditation process has not commenced within three-months, then the university making the application should be deemed to be accredited.
- The manual should include a requirement for the ISA to make a detailed report on an annual basis of the accreditation process including a detailed summary of the material included in Tables 1-4. (This is to provide the universities with benchmark data for their other internal and external reporting obligations.)

The following two sections have been added to the manual:

- The ISA will commence the accreditation process within three months of a university submitting their request for accreditation. If the accreditation process has not been completed within 12 months of the initial request because of delays attributable to ISA,

then the university will be granted provisional accreditation for the current and following calendar year.

- The ISA will publish an annual report of the accreditation process including a summary of the material contained in Tables 1-4. The published data may be limited to Australian universities and may be in the form of eg, a rolling 5-year average.

ISA(Vic) queried the requirement for Schools to "Indicate any competencies that the curriculum does not seek to impart." (p20) and noted the uncertainty of such an open ended question.

The rationale for including this question is twofold:

- Firstly, it allows a School to identify items from the competency standards that it believes are not essential considerations in an undergraduate program.
- Secondly, it provides Schools with an opportunity to acknowledge items from the competency standards that are not fully addressed in the program, but which the School intends to address.

The outcome is meant to be an open discussion of the alignment of a program with the competency standards. The manual has been amended to make this intention clear, and the section now reads: Indicate any substantial elements of the competency requirements for the *General Range Statement for Stage 1* of the NCPS (1996:35-49) that are not addressed by the curriculum, and indicate whether these are elements that the school does not consider essential, or whether they are elements that the school intends to introduce.

3. ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION AND SIMPLIFICATION

The policy section of the manual (Section 2) defines the link between the accreditation process and the National Competency Standards. The wording of this section has been altered to remove the term "generic attributes", which has acquired a different meaning in university teaching and learning and to clarify the relationship between the manual and the Competency Standards. The section formerly read:

THE ATTRIBUTES OF A GRADUATE

Generic Attributes

The generic attributes of a graduate are described by the *General Range Statement for Stage 1* of the ISA Competency Standards. That is:

- They will be capable of participating in professional work under the supervision of experienced professional colleagues and of demonstrating expertise and professionalism within one or more functional areas set out under the ISA definition of a surveyor.
- They will have developed sound technical skills during their tertiary education and will be capable of demonstrating their ability to apply these technical skills in the workplace.

SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

Specific competency based criteria are provided in the *Sections 1.1 to 1.11* of the ISA Competency Standards.

Specialist Attributes

Programs that offer a specialist stream and which provide a degree with nomenclature that describes that specialisation are required to document those attributes for the purposes of accreditation.

The revised wording is:

LINKS TO THE NATIONAL COMPETENCY STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL SURVEYORS

Entry level as a professional surveyor and entitlement to graduate membership of the ISA corresponds with the National Competency Standards for Professional Surveyors (NCSPS) competency requirements for Stage 1: Professional Surveyor (NCSPS 1996:31).

General Range Statement for Stage 1

The *General Range Statement for Stage 1* of the ISA Competency Standards is given in the NCSPS (1996:35). In essence, Stage 1 surveyors:

- will be capable of participating in professional work under the supervision of experienced professional colleagues and of demonstrating expertise and professionalism within one or more functional areas set out under the ISA definition of a surveyor.
- will have developed sound technical skills during their tertiary education and will be capable of demonstrating their ability to apply these technical skills in the workplace.

SPECIFIC COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

Specific competency requirements for Stage 1 are described in NCSPS (1996:31) and competency elements, criteria and range statements are provided in *Sections 1.1 to 1.11* (NCSPS 1996: 36-49).

Specialist Attributes

Programs that offer a specialist stream and which provide a degree with nomenclature that describes that specialisation are required to document those attributes for the purposes of accreditation.

Data Collection

The data collection requirements for Tables 1 and 2 have been reduced from the current and previous two years, to only the current and previous year.

Minor and Consequential Changes

- The previous Section 3 (Principle Elements of the Accreditation Process) has been collapsed into Section 2 (the Policy section).
- The items in the University Documentation section and Accreditation Report section have been restructured to closely match the items in the Accreditation Criteria Section.
- Some inconsistent use of the terms Award and Degree has been corrected.
- A significant number of additional minor and consequential changes have been made, to reduce the university reporting workload and to reflect the changes described above.

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