



Making your qualifications count

STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION IN THE SENIOR SECONDARY SECTOR

Tasmanian Qualifications Authority for and on behalf of
the Crown in the right of the State of Tasmania

Published by the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority

5th Floor Kirksway House

2 Kirksway Place, Battery Point

PO Box 147 Sandy Bay

Tasmania 7006

Telephone (03) 6233 6364

Email: reception@tqa.tas.gov.au

Web: www.tqa.tas.gov.au

Version 1



Standards for certification, assessment and accreditation in the senior secondary sector

Introduction

Standards are specifications of acceptable levels of performance (either of individuals or organisations) and/or products/services. Organisations adopt quality standards as a way to protect clients, increase client satisfaction and build public confidence in the quality and integrity of what they do.

This set of standards covers the activities of certification, assessment and course accreditation (and related management systems and client service) in the senior secondary sector of education.

The standards focus on the organisation's performance in delivering its products and services. They describe good practice levels of performance and so can be used to both measure existing performance and drive continuous improvement. Processes and practices will vary from one organisation to another. An audit (internal or external) against the standards should assess the *extent* to which an organisation meets them rather than focus on yes/no compliance. The quality standards have been set to provide the certifying, assessing and accrediting body with useful information if it does not meet them. That is, the standards are not set as levels that would be expected to be met in all cases and the fact of a result falling outside the expected range will not, in itself, be taken as an indication of failure by the organisation. Instead, where standards are not met the organisation can explore the reasons for this (which may include circumstances outside its control), and will develop implications for future actions.

The intent of these standards is to find the middle ground between a level of generality that is not able to be measured and a level of specificity that is unnecessarily restrictive and dictates practice or process. The standards will be reviewed within five years of their adoption.

The primary audiences for these standards are the governing councils of certification, assessment and accreditation bodies; the staff of the bodies; clients of the bodies; other such bodies across the country.

Within the education sector, the term 'standards' is also used widely in relation to levels of student knowledge and skills required to achieve various qualifications or results (in subjects or courses) or to the level of knowledge and skills actually demonstrated. These are standards for individual achievement – how it is measured and what is achieved. In this document, the term 'standards' does not refer to either of these meanings – these are quality standards for the products and services of certification and assessment authorities.



Standards for certification, assessment and accreditation in the senior secondary sector

Scope of the standards

Certification is the end-product of accreditation and assessment processes in the senior secondary sector. Sufficiently reliable and valid assessment results are a key aspect of ensuring long-term confidence in the integrity and credibility of certificates. Accreditation activities contribute by identifying worthwhile learning and levels of achievement. Client service maintains productive relationships with stakeholders who are the recipients and the users of certificates. Management systems ensure that processes supporting the issuing of certificates are efficient and sustainable.

Each of the sets of standards for certification, assessment and accreditation activities will only apply to organisations that perform that function. The management and client service standards apply across all the functions that an organisation performs.

1: Certification

Purpose

The certification set of standards is concerned with the integrity, credibility and value of certificates for the individual, the user and society. Certification, and its supporting processes, has social as well as individual consequences. This includes what knowledge is valued, in practice and in theory, and thus 'backwash' effects on the curriculum; and messages about which pathways are valued, encouraged and supported. This has consequent effects on students' choices.

Certification requires clear levels of student achievement (usually also called standards – 'performance standards') and clear evidence that the levels have been met by students to whom certificates are issued.

Standards

- 1.1 Certificates are issued by a body that is a legally constituted authority sufficiently separate from government, school authorities and community groups to arbitrate the many competing and conflicting interests in senior certification.
- 1.2 The certification body issues certificates that specify accurately the achievements of holders.
- 1.3 Certificates are backed by levels of quality control/assurance matched to the importance to students and users of the results recorded on the certificates and made clear to the user of the certificate.



- 1.4 Results recorded on certificates are (unless specifically identified otherwise) comparable from person to person, from year to year and from provider to provider.
- 1.5 The certification body issues certificates of a suitably high standard of presentation and production quality as a formal documentary record with copies available indefinitely.
- 1.6 The certification body awards certificates to all persons whose demonstrated achievement entitles them to receive this award and does not issue a certificate to a person who has not demonstrated the required achievement.
- 1.7 Recipients and users of certificates value them as credible, portable and useful records of the holders' achievements.
- 1.8 Recipients' results as first released on certificates are correct.
- 1.9 The certification body manages the impact of certification policies and practices on teaching and learning so as to contribute to student participation and achievement.

2: Assessment

Purpose

The assessment set of standards is concerned with ensuring that the results of assessment that are recorded on certificates have the levels of fairness, reliability, validity (in various senses) and basis in evidence of achievement required by the way these are presented on the certificate and the reasonable expectations of learners, users of the results and the community.

Standards

- 2.1 The levels of knowledge, skills and understanding required for various qualifications or certified results are clearly specified in terms of demonstrated achievement; are broadly aligned with community expectations; and are understood by students undertaking assessment and by assessors.
- 2.2 Assessment methods provide a valid and authentic measure of the required knowledge, skills and understanding, giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to meet the full range of requirements.
 - 2.2.1 Each assessment item assesses on face value what it purports to assess, using clear, unambiguous criteria.



- 2.2.2 Each assessment instrument is used under clear, definite and specified conditions that are substantially the same for all and do not present an inappropriate barrier to equal participation by all.
- 2.2.3 Each set of assessment instruments used to determine results provides a range and balance of background contexts, types of instruments and modes of response.
- 2.2.4 The assessing body ensures that assessment is based on relevant and authentic evidence that accurately reflects the knowledge and skills of students and is not distorted by malpractice of any kind including cheatings and plagiarism.
- 2.2.5 Marking produces scores/codes that are soundly based on judgments of the evidence of the student's work and are accurately recorded.
- 2.2.6 Assessment methods produce results with appropriate levels of validity.
- 2.3 Students with special needs are assessed in a manner that removes barriers to the equal opportunity to participate, is fair to all students and ensures the validity of results.
- 2.4 The assessing body releases data sets about students' results that are correct and contribute to an understanding of student participation and achievement.
- 2.5 Individual student assessment results are provided to students and others who have a legitimate interest in them in a timely, secure and confidential manner.
- 2.6 The assessing body manages the impact of assessment practices on teaching and learning so as to contribute to student participation and achievement.

3: Course Accreditation

Purpose

This set of standards is concerned with the approval of high quality courses that individually and together meet the needs of individuals and of the public. It deals with the endorsement of clear, coherent, and workable course documents that provide explicit standards for education and training providers to implement. It takes into account strategic objectives of the education system and resource requirements in delivering courses.



Standards

- 3.1 The accrediting body's accreditation criteria are publicly available; take account of community expectations for high quality courses; support student participation and achievement; and require course documents to be effective and useful to practitioners.
- 3.2 Accreditation decisions are transparent, accountable and justifiable in terms of the application of the criteria to the evidence available; protect the interests of students and other stakeholders and contribute to students' ability to receive the senior secondary qualification.
- 3.3 The accrediting body monitors and checks that accredited courses are delivered in accordance with course specifications.
- 3.4 The accrediting body ensures that the range, diversity and number of courses accredited represent a reasonable balance of the competing demands of diversity, flexibility, simplicity, efficiency and the meaningfulness of certificates to users.

4: Management Systems

Purpose

The set of management standards is concerned with efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Products and services need to be delivered consistently over time with the efficient use of resources.

Standards

- 4.1 The organisation's governance model is clear, matched to its function and accountabilities, and in practice provides the right level of control.
- 4.2 The organisation's decision-making processes are transparent and accountable.
- 4.3 The organisation has a documented and reviewed quality system that incorporates an evidence-based continuous improvement process.
- 4.4 The organisation maintains accurate and secure records and makes them readily available to those who have a legitimate interest in them.



5: Client Service

Purpose

The client service standards are concerned with understanding the range of clients and their needs and the steps taken to check the degree to which products and services do in fact meet those needs.

Standards

- 5.1 The organisation's products and services take account of relevant and sufficient information collected and analysed about client needs, expectations and satisfaction.
- 5.2 The services provided to clients meet the standards stated in the organisation's publicly available client service statement which identifies the best possible standards for the allocated resource levels.
- 5.3 The organisation provides clients and other stakeholders with accurate and comprehensive information that is accessible, available to a range of audiences and aimed at helping users make informed choices.
- 5.4 Relevant organisational processes include opportunities for stakeholders to have in-put.
- 5.5 The organisation's decisions about complaints, appeals and reviews (of decisions) are not unreasonable and meet the requirements of due process and natural justice.



Terminology

(Other users of these standards may wish to substitute the words in **bold** with the corresponding terms they currently use)

In senior secondary assessment and certification in Australia, **statutory authorities certify** students' **achievement** by issuing one or more formal **certificates** as official documents of record that are to be taken as evidence that the stated achievement has been demonstrated by a student.

The stated achievement may be that of satisfying the requirements for a particular **senior secondary qualification** – what the AQF calls a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education – or of a **result** in a **course of study**. A student may follow a course of study delivered by a **provider** or in some cases through self-directed study. The **course document** sets guidelines and rules for the **knowledge and skills** that must or may be included in a course of study and that a student must demonstrate to receive a particular result. It may set **standards** defining different **levels** of knowledge and skills.

A course document may be designed to set a single course of study intended to last for a certain period of time or other notion of **size**, or it may be designed to set a course of study that can be taken as one or more **units**, with rules for their selection, combination and sequence. A course document will also define the level of **complexity** (or demand) at which the course is aimed.

The statutory authority gives official status to a course document (and hence any courses that meet the requirements of the document) through an **accreditation** process.

To **certify** achievement in a course of study requires **reliable** and **valid assessment of students'** command of the knowledge and skills defined and required by the course document. This assessment occurs through gathering evidence with **a set of assessment instruments**. Assessment instruments include such devices as supervised examinations, assignments, projects, practicals, orals, aurals, observational schedules and portfolios. Assessment occurs under various **conditions** – supervision, notice, access to resources, times, dates, handing-in procedures and acceptance of late submissions. Each assessment instrument comprises one or more **assessment items**. An assessment item requires a response from students in one or more of a variety of **modes** such as multiple choice, short answer, paragraph, extended written response, oral, graphical, diagrammatic and so on. As well as the knowledge and skills that are the direct focus, assessment items draw on **assumed knowledge** and often make use of **background material** contextualising the task presented. The more a complex task is contextualised in its everyday applications the more it can provide and opportunity for **authentic** assessment. **Cues** and the **layout** of assessment items provide guides to students about the requirements of the task set by the item. Assessment items are devised by **item writers** and selected and combined into assessment instruments by **test designers**.



A student who completes an assessment instrument receives one or more codes showing the match of performance on the instrument with the requirements of the instrument. These codes may be in the form of scores, marks or grades.

When the evidence from the set of assessment instruments has been gathered and collated there is some process of **decision-making** to determine the result by matching this evidence directly or indirectly through scores, marks and grades, against the requirements of the standards set by the course of study.

Certification happens when the authority issues a **certificate**. A certificate is a document of record and the term 'certificate' may or may not appear on it. A certificate may record a single qualification, with results in individual courses shown on the same or a separate document. A certificate may record several qualifications.

References

ACACA: *Principles for the Integrity, Quality and Long-term Credibility of Certificates of Achievement*, 1999

ACACA: *Guidelines for Assessment Quality and Equity*, 1995

ACACA data release and presentation guidelines

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education: *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, 1986

New Zealand Qualifications Authority: *Statement of Intent 2007 - 2010*

Scottish Qualifications Authority: *The Development of a National System of Vocational Qualifications*, 2006

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: *The Statutory Regulation of External Qualifications*, 2004

Commonwealth of Australia: *AQTF 2007 Standards for State and Territory Registering Bodies*, June 2007

Standards Australia: *AS/NZS ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System Requirements*

Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia: *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*

Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia: *Assessment and Moderation Policy*

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA): *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*