



ENGINEERS  
AUSTRALIA

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# Accreditation Management System

## Accreditation Principles – COVID-19

AMS-POL-02

Version 1.0

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<b>Accreditation Principles – COVID-19</b>	Date: 08 May 2020
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# ACCREDITATION PRINCIPLES – COVID-19

## 1. Purpose of this Document

Engineers Australia’s accreditation process evaluates complete courses or programs of study leading to the award of engineering qualifications offered by Australian educational institutions. It provides confidence to the profession and community that graduates of accredited engineering programs have adequate knowledge of both the theory and the practice of engineering. Accredited programs are those programs which are adjudged as preparing their graduates adequately for entry to the practice. The key principle of ensuring that the quality of graduate outcomes is maintained is central to the COVID-19 environment.

The purpose of this document is to articulate the approach being taken by the Engineers Australia Accreditation Board when considering how changes required to accredited programs during the COVID-19 pandemic are managed. It is guided by the Engineers Australia Accreditation Principles ([AMS-POL-01](#)), which underpin accreditation, and the recently released Joint Statement of Intent and Principles for the Higher Education Sector COVID-19 Response developed by the Australian Council of Professions and peak Higher Education representative bodies (Joint Statement).

It is recognised that the impact of COVID-19 on educational programs continues to unfold and further updates to this document are expected. The contents of this document are applicable to entry to professional practice programs in all occupational categories and encompasses vocational education and training (VET) programs and higher education (HE) programs.

The document is prepared for all stakeholders in program accreditation, including, but not limited to, education providers, professionals, students, employers and members of the public. It is effective for a period of twelve months. The Accreditation Board may extend this period. After this period any ongoing changes will be incorporated within the Accreditation Management System.

## 2. Reference Documents

The following reference documents and resources are applicable.

- a) Australian Council of Professions (ACoP), Universities Australia (UA), the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA), the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and the Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA): Joint Statement of Intent and Principles for the Higher Education Sector COVID-19 Response
- b) <https://www.asqa.gov.au/news-events/news/joint-asqa-and-teqsa-statement-regarding-regulatory-flexibility>
- c) <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/online-learning-good-practice>

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d) [Engineers Australia Accreditation Management System](#)

### 3. Outcomes based accreditation

The Engineers Australia Accreditation Management System is outcomes based. Accreditation criteria are defined in a way that gives the education provider freedom to design and execute programs to meet an outcomes-oriented graduate attributes standard. In the accreditation process, the Education Provider must account for all aspects of the curriculum and its execution, to enable graduates to attain the specified program outcomes, and for continuous improvement of the program.

Outcomes-based accreditation, developed for the modern education environment, inherently assumes a reasonable level of maturity throughout the entire community of education providers. In Australia, this community is dominated by publicly funded providers that operate largely in accordance with accepted norms and practices. Outcomes-based accreditation is inherently a risk-based approach, and therefore does not ignore variations from accepted norms and practices that may be indicators of risk. Where such variations are identified the underlying rationale for risk taking should be explored to determine whether the risk can be acceptably mitigated. COVID-19 is one such risk, and therefore steps are required to ensure that changes are documented, monitored and evaluated within a quality management framework.

### 4. Accreditation Criteria

The revised 2019 Accreditation Management System has streamlined accreditation criteria and provides additional guidance as to how the criteria could be met. The criteria have been briefly reviewed in light of COVID-19 and are deemed to be still relevant. Being outcomes based, the emphasis across all three criteria categories (Academic Program, Operating Environment and Quality Systems) relate to whether:

- a) the program is structured to deliver graduates with capabilities aligned with the Engineers Australia Stage 1 competencies
- b) the program produces graduates with the intended capabilities
- c) quality assurance processes are such that the programs will continue to deliver graduates with the intended capabilities.

As the focus of accreditation is on the capabilities of graduates, when COVID-19 related changes are made to the delivery of a program, it is expected that greater consideration needs to be given to the demonstration of final year student outcomes. This recognises that there are additional opportunities for changes in earlier years to be evaluated and, where necessary, appropriate scaffolding or amendments introduced to enable the successful progression through a program.

Consistent with the Joint Statement, it is expected that COVID-19 changes:

- a) are considered, with an emphasis on retaining program outcomes
- b) adopt, where possible, accepted or best practice

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- c) are reviewed/approved through appropriate mechanisms
- d) are evaluated for effectiveness, with any need for further amendments/scaffolding identified.

It is expected that the above are documented with examples of assessment and student work retained. Some Education Providers have modified grading schemes and/or extended the period within which students can demonstrate the achievement of outcomes. In cases that have been seen, the objective has been to reduce academic disadvantage due to COVID-19, while still ensuring outcomes are achieved. Such approaches are consistent with the principles of outcomes based accreditation.

The above is considered complementary to advice and support developed by TEQSA, including:

- a) <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/articles/impacts-covid-19-industry-professional-accreditation>
- b) <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/latest-news/publications/online-delivery-key-considerations-providers>
- c) <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/online-learning-good-practice>

## 5. Engagement with Professional Practice (EPP)

A significant, and likely ongoing, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the reduced capacity for placements within an engineering environment. Opportunity for placements is largely dependent on individual industries and organisations, and this is complicated at present by international students studying remotely. The accreditation criteria for Engagement with Professional Practice (EPP) is often misquoted as 'requiring' a 12-week *placement* to fulfil accreditation requirements. While placements are one option, they are not the only option.

Accreditation criteria require Education Providers to outline how the graduate capabilities related to professional practice are developed throughout the education program. EPP can be delivered through: (i), the taught courses distributed throughout the program; and (ii), through the provision of experiences that reflect aspects of professional practice. Education Providers vary in how they meet this requirement, and the impact of COVID-19 on how an individual student satisfies this requirement may also vary.

The Accreditation Criteria AP<sub>4</sub> and CP<sub>4</sub> described in the User Guides for Higher Education ([AMS-MAN-10](#)) and VET ([AMS-MAN-20](#)) are similar, and provide a brief but useful rationale that can be used as broad guidance. AMS-MAN-10 Section 3.4 states:

*“The guiding objective for engagement with professional practice (EPP) in engineering education is to initiate the development of sound professional work practices and methods that underpin reliable professional judgement and decision-making, and to embed these work practices and methods so that they continue beyond the education program. Student engineers need in addition to knowledge, formative experiences of how engineering professionals:*

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- a) *Think, work and continually learn*
- b) *Develop professional judgment*
- c) *Make decisions while conforming with the EA Code of Ethics*
- d) *Earn the trust of all stakeholders in those decisions*

*Professional practice experiences need to be delivered in environments (which may be simulated, virtual, industry, or a mix of these) that provide experiential learning. These environments are materially different from the usual education environment."*

The User Guides also provide examples of activities which may contribute to an individual's Engagement with Professional Practice.

COVID-19 may require alternatives and/or adaptations by the provider as to how individual students can meet their program requirements. What is feasible and appropriate for each student will depend on several factors including their engagement to date, opportunities provided within their program, and their intended graduation timeframe. Where alternatives for individuals (or a program) are made, it is expected that the rationale and assessment is recorded by the provider and consistently applied. Below are some ideas for consideration in developing such alternatives. They are not intended to be prescriptive.

For individuals, a process similar to the below could be implemented:

- 1- Evaluation of EPP completed, including:
  - a. the quantum of EPP already obtained – is it sufficient to provide a meaningful basis for development of professional judgement?
  - b. the nature of the EPP – has it allowed the application of academic learning within an environment that requires experience-based judgement?
  - c. assessment of their EPP – does their reflection/portfolio meet the objectives of EPP and if no, what are the gaps?
- 2- Identification of additional activities:
  - a. additional EPP – what other EPP activities could build on that already obtained?
  - b. combination of activities – how can different experiences and activities be combined for effectiveness?
  - c. assessments – are there opportunities for additional assessment tasks which would allow students to further identify EPP from within the curriculum or to compare and contrast different experiences (engineering and non-engineering)?
- 3- Assessment, including:
  - a. changes – what changes to the assessment requirements are required to reflect an increased number of experiences?
  - b. are there any changes required to internal processes which review the satisfactory completion of EPP requirements?

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As an example, the following scenario may be appropriate. After completing 8 weeks of a 12-week placement student-x had their placement truncated due to COVID-19. Student-x documented their experience and after assessment it was considered that the final 4 weeks would have allowed further exploration of alternative materials for the design they had been involved with. To close out the experience, student-x is requested to still explore the materials as a self-directed activity. This additional self-directed activity is added to their portfolio (or equivalent) and assessed.

The User Guides provide a range of suitable examples for EPP. Some more recent ideas, resources and links are provided below:

- Additional engagement for EA student members with EA networking, online resources and webinars – <http://frontier.engineersaustralia.org.au/frontier-member-content/> and <http://frontier.engineersaustralia.org.au/careerwebinars/>
- Q&A industry sessions and/or online guest presentations (EA can assist to organise these)
- Reviewing Work Integrated Learning (WIL) ideas through the ACEN. ACEN have a number of resources and surveys on placements – <http://acen.edu.au/covid-19-information/>
- Utilising virtual placements (engineering, and non-engineering) – e.g. <https://www.insidesherpa.com/>
- Participation in hackathons or similar – e.g. <https://www.createdigital.org.au/students-help-engineer-solutions-to-covid-19-challenges/>
- Use learnings from recent Virtual WIL projects – e.g. [https://ltr.edu.au/resources/ID15-4951\\_Male\\_Final\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](https://ltr.edu.au/resources/ID15-4951_Male_Final_Report_2019.pdf)

The changes suggested above may be practical options to complement or supplement EPP for students nearing completion of their programs. They may not be practical for students who are yet to complete any EPP and are nearing graduation. Engineers Australia is continuing to receive and advertise placements during this time on their Frontier Jobs Board – <http://frontier.engineersaustralia.org.au/jobs/>.

## 6. Monitoring of changes to programs

### 6.1 During COVID-19 impacted teaching periods

Australian education providers are typically mature, with their quality assurance systems previously considered during accreditation visits. The Accreditation Board will look favourably on changes that are guided by the Joint Statement principles, including appropriate recording and evaluation of changes to demonstrate that program outcomes are achieved. In the interim, changes which have been guided by the Joint Statement do not need to be reported to the Accreditation Centre before they are implemented, unless the intended accredited program

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outcomes cannot be delivered.

To manage the risk associated with COVID-19 changes, to provide confidence to the profession, and to be transparent to our international partners, the Accreditation Board is likely to request a brief written update on COVID-19 related program changes. This would be after the first teaching period impacted by COVID-19, so as to allow time for the effectiveness of the changes to be evaluated. This section will be updated with further details when available.

Consistent with the Joint Statement, examples of student work and assessment during 2020 should be retained.

## 6.2 Changes proposed to continue post COVID-19

Where changes are proposed to be retained, resulting in a step change to ongoing accredited programs, the Accreditation Centre should be notified in writing. This may represent a program amendment and further consideration for accreditation may be required (refer Section 7.3 of [AMS-MAN-11](#)). Examples of student work in 2020 should be retained to enable full consideration of the changes.

## 7. Visit scheduling and publication of Accreditation status

### 7.1 Visit scheduling

Onsite evaluation visits due to be held prior to 30 June 2020 have been rescheduled in consultation with the relevant Education Provider. Providers with submission dates prior to June 2020 for accreditation activities are also being contacted to enable their time pressures to be accommodated. Discussions will continue with Education Providers scheduled for a review in the second half of 2020. Where practical and appropriate, online review activities will continue.

Typically, the accreditation term covers the first cohort in the year after a General Review is scheduled, and this will continue. For example, an accredited program scheduled for its five-year general review in 2020 has its current accreditation status recognised for students starting at the beginning of 2021. In addition, Section 3.2 of [AMS-MAN-11](#) Procedures Manual provides for the accreditation to be extended by 12 months.

*"Should EA be unable to schedule a General Review to re-evaluate established accredited programs within a five-year period, or should a school be unable to undertake a scheduled review for good reason, their existing accreditation status will normally be extended for one further calendar year."* [Section 3.2, AMS-MAN-11 Procedures Manual]

For the COVID-19 period, the Accreditation Board will delegate the authority to the National Manager, Accreditation to extend the accreditation status by one calendar year, where appropriate. These changes will be noted at the next Accreditation Board meeting.



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Scheduled accreditation visits to transition a program between provisional accreditation and full accreditation, or that seek provisional accreditation for a new program, will continue where practical and/or will be rescheduled by mutual agreement.

## **7.2 Publication of Accreditation Status**

The accreditation status of programs is published on the EA website and is updated after each Accreditation Board meeting. The listing includes the assigned accreditation start date, being the earliest year of commencement for which students will be deemed to have graduated from an accredited program. The listing only provides an accreditation end date for programs no longer offered.

The term of accreditation for current programs is not published. However, it can be implied by the published date of the next General Review. To lessen uncertainty for students and external stakeholders, the date of the next General Review will be updated to 2021, where a 2020 General Review is rescheduled to 2021.

## **8. International recognition**

Engineers Australia will continue to work with signatories to the IEA International Accords to minimize impacts from COVID-19. This section will be updated once further information from the Accords is available.

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## Context of this Document in the AMS

This document, AMS-POL-02 Accreditation Principles – COVID-19, is located within the hierarchy of the Accreditation Management System as depicted in the table below. It is complementary to AMS-POL-01 to provide guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<b>PRINCIPLES</b>	<i>Statement of accreditation principles (policy)</i>	
	<b>AMS-POL-01</b>	<b>Accreditation Principles</b>
<i>This document</i>	<b>AMS-POL-02</b>	<b>Accreditation Principles – COVID-19</b>

<b>STANDARDS</b>	<i>Standards against which compliance is evaluated</i>	
	<b>EA Stage 1</b>	<b>Competency Standards (at Engineers Australia website)</b>
	<b>AMS-STD-10</b>	<b>Accreditation Standard – Higher Education</b>
	<b>AMS-STD-20</b>	<b>Accreditation Standard – VET Competency Programs</b>

<b>MANUALS</b>	<i>Instructions for accreditation</i>	
	<b>AMS-MAN-10</b>	<b>Accreditation Criteria User Guide – Higher Education</b>
	<b>AMS-MAN-11</b>	<b>Procedures Manual – Higher Education</b>
	<b>AMS-MAN-20</b>	<b>Accreditation Criteria User Guide – VET</b>
	<b>AMS-MAN-21</b>	<b>Procedures Manual – VET</b>

## Revision History of this Document

Date	Version	Description	Approved
08 May 2020	1.0	Initial release	Chair, Accreditation Board