



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NOTRE DAME**  
A U S T R A L I A

## GUIDELINES:

### HIGHER EDUCATION COURSE REVIEW AND RE-ACCREDITATION

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**Purpose:** Sets out the University's processes for reviewing and re-accrediting higher education coursework qualifications.

**Location of Guidelines:** The Guidelines are maintained on the National Drive.

**Responsible Executive:** PVC, Academic

**Responsible Office:** Office of Quality Management and Academic Development (QMAD)

**Contact Officer:** Director, QMAD

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**Related Documents:** Policy: Higher Education Course Approval, Amendment, Monitoring, Review, Reaccreditation and Discontinuation  
Procedure: Higher Education Course Approval, Amendment and Discontinuation  
Procedure: Higher Education Course Monitoring, Review and Re-accreditation

**Authority** Approved by Academic Council, 22 June 2015

**CONTENTS**

1. Purpose .....	3
2. Objectives .....	3
3. Scope.....	3
4. Scheduling course reviews .....	3
4.1 Five year schedule .....	3
4.2 Variations to the timing of a course review .....	4
5. Planning for course reviews .....	4
5.1 Planning.....	4
5.2 Scope .....	4
5.3 Terms of Reference .....	5
5.4 Review processes .....	6
5.5 Selection of external reviewers.....	6
5.6 Approval of course review arrangements.....	7
5.7 Budget and administrative arrangements .....	7
6. Conducting a course review .....	8
6.1 The self-review stage.....	8
6.2 The external review stage – comprehensive review processes.....	9
6.3 The external review stage – compressed review processes .....	9
6.4 Reporting review outcomes .....	10
6.5 Response to review outcomes .....	10
7. Monitoring progress and conclusion of the review process .....	11
8. Course Re-accreditation .....	11
Attachment 1: Course review and re-accreditation process steps and recommended timeline.....	13
Attachment 2: Guidelines for external reviewers.....	14

## 1. PURPOSE

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- 1.1 These Guidelines have been developed to support the *Procedure: Higher Education Course Monitoring, Review and Re-accreditation* with a focus on the processes for reviewing and re-accrediting higher education coursework qualifications.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

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- 2.1 All higher education courses are periodically subject to a process of external review that provides a robust and systematic approach to the assurance of academic standards, quality and the ongoing relevance of courses.
- 2.2 Course reviews are scheduled according to a five year cycle that takes into account any professional accreditation requirements and outcomes. The schedule is updated and approved by the Vice Chancellor on recommendation of the Academic Council each year.
- 2.3 The outcomes of course review include validation that each course meets requirements of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards within the *Higher Education Standards Framework*.

## 3. SCOPE

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- 3.1 These guidelines apply to the review and re-accreditation of all higher education coursework qualifications and non-award courses.

## 4. SCHEDULING COURSE REVIEWS

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### 4.1 Five year schedule

- 4.1.1 Courses are reviewed on a five-yearly cycle according to a schedule that is based on the current accreditation period for each course. Normally a course will be reviewed in the year it is due for re-accreditation.
- 4.1.2 The Dean may request that the scheduled year for a course review be changed to accommodate specific circumstances. The need for such a change is formally identified at least six months in advance of the scheduled review, normally as part of the Annual Course Monitoring process.

For example, a course review may be brought forward to: (a) address significant risks identified as part of annual monitoring (such as concerns with the course quality, academic outcomes, graduate employment, declining enrolments etc.); or (b) to respond to internal or external factors affecting the course (such as changing goals, priorities, standards or practices, workforce or statutory requirements, increased competition, etc.) or (c) to assist in preparing for an external accreditation process.

Alternatively, a request for a course review to be deferred may be made, for example, to: (a) align the process with professional accreditation/registration activities; or (b) to allow more time for significant changes recently made to take effect prior to review.

- 4.1.3 Variations to the timing of a course review must be approved the PVC, Academic and reported to Academic Council.

## 4.2 Exemptions

- 4.2.1 Where there is evidence of recent robust external accreditation or review processes that cover the University's requirements for course review against the Provider Course Accreditation Standards; or where the course is considered very low risk based on outcomes of course monitoring; the Dean may submit a proposal for the course to be re-accredited without further review.

In these circumstances the request is submitted to the PVC, Academic using *Form C4: Proposal for Course Re-Accreditation* and accompanied by details of professional accreditation requirements; evidence of processes and outcomes of academic review and/or benchmarking activities; as well as Annual Course Reports for the previous four years (or as many years as are available).

Consideration of a request for re-accreditation without further review will take into account (i) how well the requirements and review processes for professional accreditation align with the University's procedures, as well as (ii) existing evidence for the quality of the course in the outcomes of course monitoring and prior outcomes of professional accreditation.

Academic Council will consider the request for exemption and may make a recommendation to the Vice Chancellor that the course not be subject to a course review process.

- 4.2.2 Where the processes for professional accreditation provide incomplete coverage of the University's requirements for course review, a focused course review covering selected sections of the self-review template may be required before the course can be re-accredited. For further information refer to 5.4 below.

## 5. PLANNING FOR COURSE REVIEWS BY SCHOOLS/CENTRES

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### 5.1 Planning

- 5.1.1 Planning for a course review typically commences as part of annual course monitoring in the year prior to the scheduled review. The Annual Course Report for that year will identify any relevant factors to be taken into consideration by the Dean/s or Director/s when determining the proposed the arrangements for course review, which includes the timing, scope, terms of reference, external reviewer/s and the review process.
- 5.1.2 Approval for the arrangements for course review (see 5.6) should be in place six months prior to the review date.

### 5.2 Scope

- 5.2.1 The scope of a course review includes all delivery locations so that equivalence of learning outcomes and student experiences can be considered. Where a course or group of courses is offered on more than one Campus, the planning and implementation of the course review must be completed through collaboration by all administering schools to cover all course delivery locations

- 5.2.2 Courses sharing characteristics such as the same or equivalent discipline or overlap, part of nested award arrangements, double degrees, or combined degrees are reviewed concurrently where possible. However, each course is subject to individual assessment through the review process.

### 5.3 Terms of Reference

- 5.3.1 The Terms of Reference for course reviews align with the *Course Accreditation Standards* in the *Higher Education Standards Framework*, take into account any professional accreditation requirements and outcomes, and include a focus on any areas of identified risk. They should be contextualised within the University's Objects and generally will encompass all sections within the *Self-review Report Template for Course Review*. These include course level outcomes; student experience; the current standing of the course, including its performance over time compared to other similar courses; articulation and pathways; relevance and quality of curriculum; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; identified strengths and areas for improvement; and future directions for the course including recommendation about re-accreditation.

Example Terms of Reference (which should be modified as necessary to focus on particular areas of risk/concern) are:

In the context of the University's Objects to:

- (a) provide university education within a context of Catholic faith and values; and
  - (b) the provision of an excellent standard of
    - i. teaching, scholarship and research;
    - ii. training for the professions; and
    - iii. pastoral care of its students
1. To confirm the extent to which the course, including its design, teaching and learning delivery, learning outcomes, curriculum and assessment tasks meet relevant provisions of the *Higher Education Standards Framework*
  2. To consider the course structure and course performance outcomes in the context of other similar courses across the sector and national and international disciplinary standards
  3. To validate identified strengths of the course
  4. To identify opportunities for improvement to the course to further enhance student learning outcomes and experiences
  5. To recommend future directions for the course, including whether the course should be re-accredited for a further five year period by the University
- 5.3.2 In the case of courses with a major research component, including Doctor of Philosophy, Professional Doctoral degrees, Masters Degree (Research); and Masters of Philosophy; the PVC, Research will determine areas of focus for the self-review report.
- 5.3.3 The Terms of Reference are developed by the Dean. For courses with a major research component, these are developed by the Research Directors. Terms of Reference are endorsed by the PVC, Academic and approved by Academic Council upon recommendation by UCAC.

## 5.4 Review processes

5.4.1 There are two possible review processes to be followed:

5.4.1.1 a **comprehensive process** involving:

- completion of the full *Self-review Report Template for Course Review*;
- validation of the self-review by a panel of up to four external reviewers and chaired by a senior academic external to the University;
- a site visit including interviews with a range of staff and students and inspection of physical resources including library and other facilities.

This is the process to be followed for courses not subject to professional accreditation or other similar external review processes; or for those identified as higher risk through course monitoring processes.

5.4.1.2 a **compressed process** involving:

- completion of the *Self-review Report Template for Course Review* – either all sections or selected sections;
- validation of the self-review by one or two external reviewers without the need for a site visit and interviews.

This process is most suited for (a) courses that have been subject to some professional accreditation or external review processes, but where there has been incomplete coverage of the requirements contained in the University's self-review template (that is based on provisions of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards); or (b) where a course has been identified as low risk through course monitoring processes; or (c) where a more focused external review (on particular aspects of the course) may assist in preparation for future professional accreditation activities.

## 5.5 Selection of external reviewers

5.5.1 External reviewers provide appropriate external expertise that inform and complement the Schools' course quality assurance activities and Academic Council's decisions for the re-accreditation of courses.

5.5.2 The PVC Academic (or delegate) approves the review panel membership / external reviewers upon the recommendation of the Dean of School. Reviewers are selected to include a combination of the following:

- Expertise in the relevant academic discipline/s and leadership experience in course design, delivery and quality assurance relevant to the course/s being reviewed.
- Knowledge and experience in meeting the requirements for professional accreditation of the course and/or any processes by which graduates will achieve professional recognition.
- Industry and/or workplace knowledge and experience that is relevant to the employment of graduates of the course.

- Knowledge and experience of the contexts for learning and teaching at Notre Dame as a Catholic University.

5.5.3 The suggested membership for the review panel for a comprehensive review includes:

- A senior academic from another University with relevant academic discipline expertise and leadership experience (Chair)
- A senior academic external to the University as a representative of a professional organisation or society;
- A representative from a relevant industry or employer group external to the University;
- A senior Notre Dame staff member, not a member of the School and with no direct involvement in the design, delivery and assessment of the course.

5.5.4 For a compressed course review process (see 4.5.1.2 above) one or two external reviewers are selected on the basis of discipline experience and expertise that is appropriate to the Terms of Reference for the review process.

## 5.6 Approval of course review arrangements

5.6.1 Formal approval for the arrangements for a course review, which include the timing, scope, terms of reference, external reviewer/s and the review process, is requested by memorandum **using the template provided**. Initial endorsement from the PVC, Academic (or delegate) is required prior to consideration and approval by UCAC and Academic Council.

Endorsement by the PVC Academic (or delegate) is contingent on ensuring that the timing is suitable; the proposed scope and Terms of Reference are appropriate and known areas of risk have been included; and that the proposed review process is appropriate to the Terms of Reference, scope and course/s.

## 5.7 Budget and administrative arrangements

5.7.1 The School/Centre has overall responsibility for administration and coordination of review process, including: ensuring approval is in place prior to the review; scheduling review activities; financial arrangements, and external reviewer arrangements.

Where the review involves a site visit the School is also responsible for planning and administration of all aspects of the review panel visit (e.g. provision of supporting documentation, external reviewer travel arrangements, arrangements for interview groups and sessions, executive/secretarial support for the panel, catering etc.)

5.7.2 QMAD can be contacted for advice on different aspects of administration and coordination of course reviews.

5.7.3 For a comprehensive review process, an amount of up to \$5,500 will be available to conduct each scheduled course review process. This amount should cover:

- Honorariums for external panel members (up to \$800 each)
- Honorarium for the Panel Chair (up to \$1200)
- Travel and accommodation expenses incurred by panel member/s

- Videoconferencing/teleconferencing
  - Catering expenses for site visits
  - Printing and stationery allowance
  - Additional Secretarial support that may be required
- 5.7.4 For a compressed review process, an amount of up to \$2,500 will be available to conduct each scheduled course review process. This amount should cover:
- Honorariums for external reviewers (up to \$1,000 each)
  - Videoconferencing/teleconferencing
  - Printing and stationery allowance
  - Additional Secretarial support that may be required.
- 5.7.5 These amounts can be increased at the discretion of the PVC Academic.

## **6. CONDUCTING A COURSE REVIEW**

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### **6.1 The self-review stage**

- 6.1.1 The self-review stage is undertaken with the involvement of academic staff with responsibilities for course design and delivery, as determined by the Dean, as well as input from the School Advisory Committee or similar discipline based external committee and/or relevant external input (for example for courses with a major research component).
- 6.1.2 The self-review addresses the scope and Terms of Reference as approved at the planning stage and is documented using the *Self-review Report Template for Course Review*.  
Evidence for the self-review report is drawn from current course materials; annual trend data provided by University Statistics and Reporting; as well as the outcomes of previous annual course reports, any professional accreditation outcomes, benchmarking processes, and assessment of performance against national and, where possible, international comparative data.  
Further guidance about evidence and other requirements for completing the self-review is included in the template.
- 6.1.3 The completed self-review document is endorsed by the College/School Teaching and Learning Committee (or equivalent) on the basis that the Terms of Reference, including any known areas of risk, have been appropriately addressed. For courses with a major research component, endorsement is also provided by the Research Degrees and Scholarships Committee.
- 6.1.4 The completed self-review with all supporting course documentation, unit outlines, curriculum materials, annual course reports and other necessary contextual information about the course, such as professional accreditation activities are provided to the external reviewers at least two weeks prior to any site visit and a copy is also provided to the PVC, Academic (or delegate).  
Guidelines for external reviewers are provided at **Attachment 2**.



## 6.2 The external review stage – comprehensive review processes

6.2.1 The external review stage involves the validation of the School's self-assessment of the course/s under review, involving a site visit involving a panel of up to four external reviewers.

6.2.2 The review panel should receive the self-review and supporting documents no later than two weeks prior to the date scheduled for the review. The panel Chair may request that further information be provided, either prior to the visit or at the time of the visit.

The self-review report and any other relevant materials are also provided to stakeholders in advance of meeting the panel.

6.2.3 The schedule for a review panel visit is determined by the Dean in consultation with the Chair of the review panel. The schedule should include opportunities for interview and consultation with academic leaders, teaching staff, current students and, where possible, graduates. The schedule should also include opportunity for the panel to view physical resources and facilities, such as specialised teaching equipment, laboratories, library resources etc.

A suggested schedule for a site visit is:

9.00am – 10.00am	Initial meeting of the Review Panel
10.00am – 11.00am	Meet with Dean/s and other senior academics
11.00am – 11.15am	Morning tea
11.15am – 12.00pm	Meet with teaching staff involved in the course/s
12.00 pm – 12.15 pm	Panel break
12.15pm – 1.00 pm	Meet with current students/graduates (over lunch)
1.00 pm – 1.45 pm	Panel break and finish lunch
1.45 pm – 2.30 pm	Visit physical resources including library and other facilities
2.30 pm – 3.30pm	Further discussions with staff (if required)
3.30pm – 4.00pm	Review Panel members meet in private
4.15pm – 4.45pm	Discuss recommendations with Dean and other senior academics

6.2.4 In most circumstances the site visit will be completed in one day. More time may be required for reviews involving multiple locations or sites of delivery.

6.2.5 On the day of the site visit (or earlier at the discretion of the Panel Chair) the review panel will hold an initial meeting to discuss any issues apparent in the self-review and agree on areas of focus for the interviews. The Chair may also wish to discuss the schedule for the site visit and matters of procedure with the review panel.

## 6.3 The external review stage – compressed review processes

6.3.1 For reviews not involving a site visit, the focus of the review is validation of the self-review report based on evidence provided through supporting documentation. The external reviewer/s may request further course documentation or other information from the Dean/s if required.

#### 6.4 Reporting review outcomes

6.4.1 Irrespective of the review process followed, the external reviewer/s provide commentary at the end of each section of the self-review document and complete a final External Review Report at the conclusion of the review process (Attachment 2 of the *Self-review Report Template for Course Review*).

The External Reviewer/s Report includes a summary of the findings, observations and recommendations for improvement. It also includes a recommendation as to whether or not the course should be re-accredited by the University for a further five years. Recommendations are prioritised as High, Medium or Low using the following categories as a guide:

<b>High</b>	Recommendation of primary importance which in the view of the review panel should be addressed as soon as possible to strengthen the course performance outcomes, and/or avoid risks to Notre Dame's reputation and regulatory compliance and/or to take advantage of major and time critical opportunity(ies).
<b>Medium</b>	Recommendation of less significance, and which does not require an immediate response, but which should be addressed in the short-medium term to improve course quality and performance outcomes and/or alignment with regulatory provisions.
<b>Low</b>	Recommendation for improvement addresses an opportunity to further enhance the course's performance and should be addressed when possible in the context of other competing priorities.

6.4.2 The final report is based on the consensus of all external reviewers and the reviewer/s may request to meet with the Dean to discuss their preliminary conclusions.

6.4.3 The final report is signed by all reviewers prior to the Chair or reviewer sending it to the relevant Dean/s. For a comprehensive review process this would normally occur no later than two weeks after completion of the site visit. For a compressed process, a report would normally be expected within three weeks of sending the completed documentation to the reviewer/s.

#### 6.5 Response to review outcomes

6.5.1 The School considers the External Reviewer/s Report and the Dean provides a formal response that includes the proposed actions to address each recommendation prioritised as high or medium.

In cases where a review involves more than one school, both Deans work together to develop a formal response.

For courses with a major research component, the Research Director/s prepare the formal response to review recommendations.

- 6.5.2 Where the external reviewer/s recommend a course be reaccredited by the University for a further five years, the School's response to the review is provided as part of the *Proposal for Course Re-accreditation* (Form C4)

The *Proposal for Course Re-accreditation* along with the Self-review report and the External Reviewer report is sent to the PVC, Academic (or delegate) for endorsement no later than three months following receipt of the final review report. This timeframe should be shorter wherever possible.

If the PVC, Academic (or delegate) is satisfied the proposed actions address the review recommendations the *Proposal for Course Re-accreditation* is forwarded to UCAC (or RDSC for courses with a major research component) for consideration and Academic Council for approval. Refer to Section 7 below for details.

- 6.5.3 Where the External Review report does not recommend re-accreditation of the course, the Dean prepares a separate formal response which is forwarded with the self-review report and the completed External Reviewer Report to the PVC, Academic for consideration.

The PVC, Academic considers the documentation and makes a recommendation to Academic Council about the future of the course. Academic Council's recommendations are then referred to the Vice Chancellor. If it is considered that the course not be re-accredited, the process for course discontinuance should be followed.

## 7. MONITORING PROGRESS AND CONCLUSION OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 7.1.1 The School monitors actions required to address the review recommendations and provides an update on progress in the annual course report for the course/s concerned.

When the Dean considers that all required actions arising from the review have been addressed, the course review outcomes are summarised **using the template provided** and sent to the PVC, Academic (or delegate).

- 7.1.2 When the PVC, Academic (or delegate) is satisfied all recommendations have been appropriately addressed, the summary of outcomes and advice that the review process has concluded are provided to Academic Council for noting.

## 8. COURSE RE-ACCREDITATION

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- 8.1.1 The documents required by UCAC for course re-accreditation are:

- *Form C4: Proposal for Course Re-Accreditation*, which includes the School response to review recommendations;
- the External Reviewer Report; (unless the course has been approved for a re-accreditation application to be submitted without the need for a course review – refer section 4.2.1.
- Professional accreditation outcomes/report (as applicable)
- Evidence of endorsement of the documentation by the PVC Academic; and

- Annual Course Reports for the previous four years (or as many years as are available).

For courses with a major research component, these documents are considered by the Research Degrees and Scholarships Committee prior to submission to UCAC.

- 8.1.2 UCAC makes recommendations about re-accreditation to Academic Council, based on whether or not it considers that the course will continue to meet requirements of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards within the *Higher Education Standards Framework* and any professional accreditation or professional recognition requirements. The extent to which the course continues to further the University's Objects and meet identified community and employer needs will also be taken into account.

Where the recommendation is that a course be re-accredited by the University for a further five years UCAC may attach specific conditions to the re-accreditation, which may be based on issues identified in the School response.

Academic Council considers the recommendation of UCAC and may either:

- Approve re-accreditation of the course;
- Approve re-accreditation of the course subject to certain conditions being met;  
or
- Determine that the course should not be re-accredited. In such cases, a recommendation is made to the Vice Chancellor and the process for course discontinuation should be followed.

## ATTACHMENT 1: COURSE REVIEW AND RE-ACCREDITATION PROCESS STEPS AND RECOMMENDED TIMELINE



## ATTACHMENT 2: GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

The purpose of the Course Review is to seek external validation of the findings and assertions of the self-review conducted by the School/Centre by people with discipline and sector expertise in order to provide assurance that course (or courses) under review meet provisions of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards<sup>1</sup> and align to relevant national and international discipline standards.

The roles of participants and stakeholders are important in achieving this outcome and in ensuring that the process is fair, transparent, comprehensive and collaborative.

### Roles and expectations

External reviewers are asked to:

- Reference their assessment to the University's Objects and philosophy
- Consider the credibility and quality of the self-review, analysis and course documentation provided
- Appraise how the School judges its course against national and international benchmarks and practices
- Judge the extent to which provisions of the Provider Course Accreditation Standards are being met
- Make recommendations about areas for improvement to the course/s that will further enhance student learning outcomes, the student experience, and graduate outcomes
- Highlight any areas of strength (commendations)
- Make recommendations about the future directions for the course/s, including whether five year re-accreditation should be granted by the University

In conducting the review, it is expected that external reviewers will:

- Read and familiarise themselves with the self-review report and supporting documentation
- Ensure that the review is conducted in accordance with the University's review guidelines
- Request clarification of the information provided, or further documentation, necessary to make valid findings
- Ensure confidentiality of any personal or commercially sensitive review material
- Contribute expert educational and professional knowledge to the review process
- Support other reviewers and the Panel Chair in decision-making
- Contribute to draft review reports in a timely fashion
- Provide feedback on the review process, including suggestions for improvement

At the conclusion of the review process, all documentation generated by the review (eg submissions, drafts of the review report, notes taken during the review, electronic files including discs) should be returned to the Executive Secretary, for confidential disposal. Alternatively, formal confirmation in writing should be provided to the Executive Secretary that this material has been disposed of.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2013C00169/Html/Text#\\_Toc330548945](http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2013C00169/Html/Text#_Toc330548945)

## Site Visits

Generally, it is expected that site visits be conducted over one day, although a further day may be required. It is expected that the review panel will meet with relevant stakeholders of the course/s, including staff, students and (where possible) graduates and prospective employers in order to assist with validation of the self-review report and supporting information. Inspection of physical resources such as specialised teaching facilities, equipment, laboratories and library resources will be included in the site visit schedule where necessary.

Scheduled, private meetings of the Review Panel are also factored into the Site Visit Schedule to enable time for reflecting and summarising findings to date and for agreeing the focus of future interview sessions.

An 'open session' is a period in the schedule set aside for any staff member or student associated with the course to make an appointment to meet the Review Panel. This opportunity is advertised by the School in advance of the visit and each person is allocated a short time with the Review Panel. Those taking advantage of this may be asked to write a short submission on the matters they wish to raise with the Review Panel, which can be left with the Panel at the end of the appointment.

At the conclusion of the site visit, an exit meeting is scheduled in order for the Panel Chair to provide an oral summary of findings to relevant Dean/s, College Chair (as applicable) and the PVC Academic (or delegate).

## Review Report

A suggested template for the review report is attached to the self-review report. The self-review report template has eight main sections against which the external reviewer is asked to comment.

- Section A: Course Overview
- Section B: Course Outcomes and Evaluation
- Section C: Course Design, Learning Outcomes and Curriculum
- Section D: Assessment and Moderation
- Section E: Staff Profile
- Section F: Teaching and Learning Approaches and Resources
- Section G: Admission, Articulation and Pathways
- Section H: Research Management and Supervision (as applicable)