Australian College
of Theology

FACULTY QUALIFICATION POLICY

Policy Document Owner	*Academic Quality Officer,* Stephen Sarkoezy
Contact	ssarkoezy@actheology.edu.au; (02) 8937 5320
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Superseded documents	*Academic Qualifications and Equivalency of Professional Experience to Academic Qualifications*
Related documents	*Moderation Portal* *Academic Staff Approval Requests Processing Rules*
Related HE Standards	3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4
Student Lifecycle Stage/s	NA

1. **PURPOSE**

   To ensure that the Australian College of Theology (ACT) complies with the TEQSA requirements that academic staff are qualified at one or more Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) level/s higher than the course of study being taught (N+1) or have equivalent professional experience.

2. **DEFINITIONS**

   AB is the *Academic Board* of the **ACT**.

   Academic Board (AB) is the Academic Board of the **ACT**.

   Academic Quality Committee (AQC) is the committee of the **ACT** which oversees the quality assurance of academic coursework activities across the **ACT**.

   academic staff refers to the teaching staff at **Affiliated Colleges** engaged in teaching and/or research.

   ACT is the Australian College of Theology Limited.

   ACT award is a qualification conferred by the **ACT** which is certified by a **testamur**.

   ACT Office is the office of the **ACT**.

   Affiliated College is an institution approved to offer an accredited higher education award of the **ACT**.

   AQC see **Academic Quality Committee**

   AQF is the Australian Qualifications Framework. Every accredited course in the Australian higher education sector must comply with the requirements of the AQF.

AQF level is an indication of the relative complexity and/or depth of achievement and the autonomy required to demonstrate that achievement. It is used to describe courses of study by the *Australian Qualifications Framework* **(AQF)**.

award see **ACT award**

Confessional scholarship refers to academic publications (books, book chapters and journal articles subject to typical refereeing processes), that are about how the Christian faith is understood and applied to the churches, Christian organisations and other ACT stakeholders. It is faith-based "integration" and "application," adapting the second and third Boyer (1990) categories to the ACT's context and is a subset of **Scholarship**. It does not include popular writing, blogs, etc.

course see **course of study**

course of study is a course of units that lead to an **award** given by the **ACT**.

coursework is work done by a student within a **unit** of study to a set curriculum and assessment schedule.

department is a section of the **ACT** with oversight over certain **unit field/s**.

ERA stands for Excellence in Research for Australia, Australia's national research evaluation framework administered by the Australian Research Council (**ARC**).

Field of Education (FoE) is a classification of courses, specialisations and units of study, with the same or similar vocational emphasis or principal subject matter of the course, specialisation and unit of study.

field of study is an academic discipline or area of knowledge that is taught and researched within higher education.

guest lecturer is a person who delivers a lecture or lectures in a component of a unit in which they possess advanced knowledge or have extensive experience. A guest lecturer typically delivers one to three lectures in a unit and does not take overall responsibility for the content or delivery of a unit.

Marker is a qualified person appointed to mark assessments by an affiliated college.

Ministry and Practice (M&P) units are units from the EM, PC and DM fields.

Moderation Portal is an online platform designed to improve efficiency and effectiveness as well as reduce the administrative burden for affiliated Colleges, Moderators, and the ACT Office. It manages the creation and approval of UQAFs, the moderation of scripts as well as the approval process of Academic Staff.

nested courses are a set of consecutive courses that lead to qualifications at different *Australian Qualifications Framework* (AQF) levels. Courses at lower AQF levels are 'nested' within courses at higher AQF levels. In an opt-in design, students are enrolled in a lower level course and may progress to higher-level course(s). In an opt-out design, students are

enrolled in a higher-level course and may exit at one or more earlier points with a lower-level award.

Paradigm is the Paradigm EMS (Education Management System), a web-based student management system available to the ACT Office and all Affiliated Colleges, used to maintain the ACT student records.

Principal is the Principal or equivalent officer of an **Affiliated College**.

Research, using the ERA definition, is defined as the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative. Research (as the discovery of new knowledge) is typically understood as Boyer's (1990) first category of "discovery."

student records are records kept by the **ACT** and its **Affiliated Colleges** about each student and include enrolment, attendance, assessment and other information pertaining to their study.

study period normally means the period January – June or July – December in which a student may be enrolled for study in an **ACT course**. For many students and Affiliated Colleges the period of study is normally a **semester,** which would be embedded in a study period. This more generic term is used so that intensives taught outside semester boundaries but contributing to student load for reporting each half-year are embraced by the study period.

teacher directed learning (TDL) is the delivery of planned learning experiences involving guidance through learning activities, resources, and opportunities for interaction with teachers/tutors and other students.

TEQSA is the *Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency*.

testamur is the official certification document that confirms that a qualification has been awarded to an individual.

Tutor is a person who teaches up to and including 25% of a unit and may assist in other teaching tasks.

unit is a block of study in a particular **unit field**.

unit coordinator is the academic responsible for a **unit** in an **Affiliated College**.

unit field is an area of study offered by **Affiliated Colleges**.

Unit of Study Evaluation Survey (USES) is a survey undertaken on a set schedule which evaluates certain **units** of the ACT**.**

UQAF is the Unit Quality Assurance Form of the **ACT**.

3. **SCOPE**

This policy applies to ACT academic staff who:

- are teaching students enrolled in coursework units or courses of the ACT, employed by Affiliated Colleges of the ACT; and

- are teaching at least 25% of the unit content; or

- have the primary responsibility for facilitating and assessing student attainment of the unit learning outcomes.

4. **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Australian College of Theology upholds the AQF N+1 standard and expects all academic staff employed across its Affiliated Colleges to hold a relevant academic qualification at N+1 or possess professional experience deemed by the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) to be equivalent to a relevant academic qualification at N+1.

5. **PRINCIPLES**

Satisfying the N+1 standard

5.1   Academic staff will normally have the requisite level of qualification (N+1, where N equals the AQF level of the course being taught) without the need to rely on professional experience to demonstrate equivalence.

5.2   Academic staff must be qualified with at least a bachelor degree relevant to the field of study in order to meet the broader content and skills requirements of the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (e.g. 3.2.2, 3.2.3a, 3.2.3 b). Thus, where the N+1 standard may otherwise require less than a bachelor degree, the minimum requirement remains a relevant bachelor degree.

5.3   Some units include learning outcomes related to fields of study outside of the ACT's Field of Education (FoE; 091703 - Religious Studies). In such cases, where an academic holds an N+1 qualification (or has professional equivalency to N+1) in a field outside of ACT's FoE, they should also hold a qualification at AQF level 7 or above in Religious Studies, including study of at least twelve months full-time equivalent. Alternatively, the academic may have scholarly experience, such as refereed academic/scholarly publishing that integrates their field of expertise and Christian theological thinking, which may be deemed equivalent to this minimum qualification in ACT's FoE.

Satisfying equivalency criteria

5.4   It is recognised that some fields of study require a combination of experience and qualifications to achieve compliance with Section 3.2 of the *Higher Education Standards Framework*. This is especially so in emerging units of the Department of Ministry and Practice and where qualification standards are evolving.

5.5   It is also recognised that some academic staff, particularly junior staff and tutors, possess professional experience and academic qualifications which, while they do not satisfy the N+1 standard, make them promising academic staff. For such staff, an

assessment of equivalency must be done before approval can be granted. They must have relevant academic qualifications to at least the same level as that being taught (N). Equivalency of their professional experience to academic qualifications can be established by achieving at least 100 points from the criteria listed in Appendix 1.

5.6   Professional experience must be relevant to the field of study and, where applicable, current.

Exceptions

Approval in nested courses

5.7   Where a course is being delivered according to an opt-out nested design, academic staff without the requisite course level approval may be approved to teach units within the course at a lower AQF level under the following requirements:

5.7.1   They possess a relevant qualification at an AQF level above that of the unit or can demonstrate equivalency to that level under this policy,

5.7.2   Their teaching is guided and overseen by a designated academic who is approved to teach at the AQF level of the course,

5.7.3   Guidance and oversight in this context must include observation, guidance, and monitoring as set out in the table below,

Observation	• Observation of at least one teacher directed learning session per semester for the first two semesters/study periods of the academic's teaching in any unit field. • Additional observation will occur where a need to improve teaching practice is identified either through observation or the monitoring set out below.
Guidance	• Meeting with the academic to facilitate reflection on the observed delivery and to provide feedback that informs teaching practice. • Review the UQAF and Unit Outline and provide constructive feedback before they are issued to moderator or the students.
Monitoring	• Review marks and grades awarded for assessment tasks and address any concerns. Review student feedback in the Unit of Study Evaluation Survey (USES) on the academic's performance. If the units delivered would not normally be surveyed in the USES by the ACT, the college is responsible to administer the USES or an equivalent survey for the units for at least two semesters/study periods.

5.7.4   The academic providing oversight will keep a record of notes that concisely describe the observation, guidance, and monitoring set out in the table above and any outcomes of the process. Such records will be provided to the AB or ACT Office upon request.

Guest lecturers

5.8   Guest lecturers will be exempt from the requirement to hold a qualification to at least one AQF level higher than the course of study being taught but must be able to bring a level of knowledge and expertise which will add value to the teaching of the relevant discipline area. A guest lecturer typically delivers one to three lectures in a unit and does not take overall responsibility for the content or delivery of a unit.

Tutors or Markers

5.9   Academic staff, tutors or markers who will teach less than 25% of the content of a unit or mark assessments must possess an academic qualification at least equivalent to the AQF level of the unit. Such staff must work under the supervision of an approved academic or unit coordinator to teach at the AQF level of the course being delivered.

5.10   No less than 75% of the unit content is to be taught by academic staff approved at N+1 or with equivalency to that level.

Emergencies

5.11   In emergencies, such as the prolonged illness, accident, or misadventure of the designated and approved academic staff member, a case can be made by a principal for replacing the staff member with one or more staff who satisfy the criteria for guest lecturers above.

Other exceptions

5.12   In exceptional circumstances, academic staff who do not meet the requirements of this policy may be approved. Requests for such approvals must be sent to the Chair of the Academic Board (AB). The request must briefly state the case for an exceptional appointment and describe an explicit and time-limited professional development plan, or other strategies to be put in place such as mentoring or team teaching, to enable the individual to successfully make the transition to academic teaching.

5.13   The ACT recognises four years of degree-level theology or ministry as a qualification allowing approval to teach courses up to AQF level 7.

5.14   The area of biblical languages (LA units) is recognised as a specialised course component and as such academic staff that do not fully meet the requirements of this policy for qualifications and experience may teach under the guidance and supervision of a staff member that does meet the requirements. In such situations, approval requires the proposed academic to have completed a three-year academic qualification or higher that has included relevant language study and study of texts in the original language at least equivalent to the language and exegesis requirements of the ACT's MDiv degree in the relevant language.

5.15   Academics that teach units incorporating Academic Writing, will be approved by the Director of Research. These units may not require an academic to have a theological award but to have suitable qualifications and experience relevant to the unit taught.

Approving academic staff

5.16   The AB delegates to the AQC responsibility for approving all academic staff prior to their delivering units in ACT coursework courses.

5.17   All academic staff proposed by Affiliated Colleges to teach in units of ACT undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate courses must be approved before commencing their teaching duties.

5.18   Before an offer is made to any person to teach in an ACT course, the employing Affiliated College must receive certified copies of tertiary qualifications and a curriculum vitae (CV). The qualifications of any distinguished overseas or national scholar employed as a guest lecturer may be verified by the evidence presented on the website of the scholar's institution or by a record of their publications.

5.18   If a proposed lecturer is an ACT graduate, verification can also be obtained from Paradigm (for all graduates after 1985) or from the complete archive of student records held by the ACT Office (for all graduates prior to 1985).

5.19   For academic staff with qualifications from overseas institutions, the ACT Office will confirm the accreditation status and equivalency to AQF awards using the Department of Education, Skills and Employment Qualification Recognition Services.

5.20   The AQC will identify the unit field(s) and the highest course level for which a staff member is approved to teach on receipt of an approval request from the Moderation Portal demonstrating that the proposed academic possesses an academic qualification in the discipline at N+1 or professional equivalency to support teaching at the requested level.

5.21   Academic staff approved with an equivalency assessment will need to be mentored if they are in the first two years of lecturing or are new to lecturing at the approved level. In some cases, the AQC may make an approval under equivalency criteria on the condition that specified professional development activities be undertaken by the proposed academic.

5.22   The Executive Officer (EO) of the AQC will maintain a record of academic staff approvals and make this accessible to external unit field moderators to enable them to verify that the proposed lecturer(s) of a unit on the UQAF are approved for the unit field and course level. The EO of the AQC will report approvals to the AB.

5.23   Appeals against decisions of the AQC are to be directed to the Chair of the AB.

5.24   Approval of staff based on equivalency assessments will be reviewed by the AQC on an annual basis to ensure the currency of equivalency.

6.   RELATED LEGISLATION

Australian Qualifications Framework (Second Edition, January 2013)

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act (2011)

Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015

7. REFERENCES

Guidance Note: Determining Equivalence of Professional Experience and Academic Qualifications

Guidance Note: Nested Courses of Study

8. VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Changes made
1	Dean	11 September 2015	11 September 2015	New Policy
2	Academic Board	5 December 2016	5 December 2016	Small changes of wording
3	Academic Board	27 October 2017	27 October 2017	Brought into line with policy template and recommendations of AQC incorporated.
4	Academic Board	9 August 2019	1 January 2020 (Note: Change to approval based on course level in effect from 2021 for current staff)	Approval specified to course AQF level rather than unit. Wording aligned with revised ACT unit naming convention, clarification of scope of N+1 requirement, mentored according to ACT guidelines removed as an equivalency criterion. Adjustment of equivalency points.
5	Academic Board	18 October 2019	18 October 2019	Minimum requirement for a Bachelor award introduced. Requirements established for exceptional approval to teach lower levels of nested courses.
6	Academic Board	12 March 2021	12 March 2021	Added minimum qualification requirement for units with ULOs outside ACT's FoE. Added requirement to verify qualifications from overseas institutions.
7	Academic Board	8 March 2024	8 March 2024	Academic approval of Academic Writing units. Update Tutors section to include markers. Research, ERS, confessional Scholarship and Markers definition added. Inclusion of the Moderation Portal to manage academic approvals. Remove reference to HERDC and replace with ERA and confessional Scholarship

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APPENDIX 1: ACT Equivalency Criteria

Equivalency Criterion	Points
Years of Professional Experience	
EITHER has performed professionally in roles relevant to the course content at a senior level OR has teaching in any field of the discipline at an equivalent level	30 (3-5 years) 45 (6-10 years) 60 (11-20 years) 70 (>20 years)
Research and Scholarship	
Currently research active according to ACT policy	150
Research Publications (ERA 3,4,5) points over the past 5 years[i]	30 per point
Research Publications (ERA 3,4,5) over the last 6-10 years[i]	15 per point
Confessional Scholarship over the past 5 years (refer definitions)	20 per point
Confessional Scholarship over the last 6-10 years (refer definitions)	10 per point
Papers read at international or national conferences[ii]	5 for each
Academic Qualifications	
Possesses a research masters degree with at least a 30,000 word thesis in the discipline/unit field	50
Has a 15,000-word project/thesis in a relevant topic in a completed award at AQF level 8 or 9 (if not already counted as the highest relevant qualification)	20
PhD in another discipline	20
Possesses a relevant interdisciplinary award at N+1 (if not already counted)	50
Enrolled in an AQF level 10 course in the same or related field	20 (year 1 FTE) 50 (year 2 FTE) 80 (year 3 FTE)
Has a postgraduate award in education (if not already counted)	15 (Certificate) 30 (Diploma) 45 (Masters) 60 (Doctoral)
Enrolled in a postgraduate course in education (if not already counted)	10 (Certificate)

	20 (Diploma)
	30 (Masters)
	45 (Doctoral)
Recognition of Excellence in Learning and Teaching	
A record over the last 3-5 years of (i) exceptionally positive internal college or ACT reviews of teaching by students, e.g., at least 75% of overall satisfaction responses in the Strongly Agree and Agree, and (ii) positive reports on learning and teaching by external moderators or external reviewers	20
Professional Practice and Professional Memberships	
Membership of ACT board or committee or equivalent	15
Consistent attendance at ACT departmental meetings	10
Leadership or management of research acknowledged by peers	100
Leadership in development of professional standards relevant to the discipline, unit field, or unit[iii]	50
Performance in a role that demands high order judgement and provision of expert advice relevant to the discipline, unit field, or unit[iv]	50
Management of significant projects in the field	50
Testimonials, awards or other recognition that acknowledges leadership or expertise in the field[v]	50

[i] Only four types of publications earn equivalency points. These are books authored and published by commercial publishers, chapters in books published by commercial publishers, journal articles in peer-reviewed journals, and conference papers published in the conference proceedings. Books count for 5 points. All other eligible publications count for 1 point. Edited books, book reviews, and articles in journals which are not peer-reviewed are not deemed Research Publications.

[ii] SBL and ETS are examples of international conferences. The annual ANZATS Conference is an example of a national conference.

[iii] Possible evidence might include the development of policy and guidelines for government, community, and welfare agencies, schools and church denominations.

[iv] Roles that demand high order experience might include acting as a principal of a college, academic dean, or dean of students or equivalent.

[v] Examples might be fellowship of a relevant Learned Society such as the SNTS.