Strategic Plan 2016-17 (with a view to 2020)

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1   Context

The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board was established in 2011 as an outcome of the OHS Body of Knowledge project funded by WorkSafe Victoria. The Accreditation Board is created under the By Laws of the Safety Institute of Australia with independence in decision-making and setting standards. The scope and constraints underpinning this relationship are established by the delegations by the SIA to the Accreditation Board.

The Accreditation Board has broad representation from OHS professionals, OHS academics, OHS professional bodies including the Safety Institute of Australia (SIA), Australian Institute of Occupational Hygiene (AIOH), Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA), Australian New Zealand Society for Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM) and the Australian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM). It also has representation from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), employers and regulators. The Board also benefits from the membership of an education academic.

For the first 3-4 years of its operation the Board operated as a mainly autonomous body with a subsidy from the SIA. This changed in the last year to a more integrated model where the SIA provides financial and other support and the Board continues to hold independence in setting standards and decision-making on accreditation.

The core function of the Board is accreditation of university-level OHS professional education. During the first four years of operation the Board found it necessary to take on a broader role of advocacy for OHS education and to not only engage with universities but government policy makers, industry as well as OHS professionals. The Board also has responsibilities for the OHS Body of Knowledge (OHS BoK). In 2012 WorkSafe Victoria assigned the copyright of the OHS BoK to the SIA on the condition that it was promoted, maintained and further developed. This responsibility was delegated to the Accreditation Board as a major stakeholder in the OHS BoK and the expertise of the Accreditation Board membership and networks supported further development.

The Accreditation Board is a key contributor to the SIA Strategic plan under the Focus Area of *Capability* which has the objectives to:
  1.1 Make a positive contribution to influencing the quality of health and safety education and training, including the accreditation of Higher Education.
  1.3 Provide an up-to-date body of knowledge for the profession on which Higher Education and continuing professional development is based.

A review of the operating and funding models conducted in 2015-16 resulted in a more focused scope of activities which is reflected in this strategic and operational plan.

Premises underpinning the strategic plan include:
 • The core focus of the Accreditation Board is accreditation of university-level OHS education
 • Accreditation and the OHS BoK are separate activities, managed as individual projects. As the OHS BoK forms a key part of the accreditation criteria the Accreditation Board is a joint stakeholder in the OHS BoK with the Accreditation Board having a monitoring role focusing on quality, relevance and currency

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- While, as far as possible, the Accreditation Board and related activities should be self-funding, the SIA commits to subsidising accreditation as a legitimate function of a professional body
- Membership of the Accreditation Board is an honorary non-executive position with the Board activities managed by the Registrar employed in part-time role and the SIA undertaking the financial reporting.

2   Purpose, vision, mission and values

The direction and activities of the Accreditation Board are governed by the following purpose, vision, mission and values.

Purpose: To contribute to occupational health and safety by facilitating the education of graduates equipped with the knowledge and skills to enter the workplace as effective entry-level OHS professionals. The core activity of the Board is through accreditation to recognise those programs that meet standards established by the Board.

Vision: OHS professional education is based on strong scientific and technical concepts, evidenced-informed, delivered by suitably competent persons and so recognised by the profession, government, industry and the community.

Mission: To ensure that OHS professional education is based on educational design and review processes, and delivery of learning appropriate to develop graduates equipped with the knowledge and skills to enter the workplace as an entry-level generalist OHS professional.

Values: The work of the Accreditation Board and external and internal relationships are guided by the values of:

- **Respect**: The accreditation process is intended to be constructive and to respect the expertise and academic autonomy of institutions providing OHS professional education. As a corollary, the institutions are expected to be open and transparent in providing all appropriate information to the accreditation process on request.
- **Flexibility**: The accreditation process recognises that each institution and each program is unique and this is to be valued. Thus, the criteria for accreditation are outcome-based allowing institutions the maximum flexibility in achieving the required standards.
- **Alignment:** The accreditation process will, as far as is possible, be aligned with the Higher Education Standards Framework, the Joint Statement of Principles for Professional Accreditation signed by Professions Australia and Universities Australia and internal university review schedules.
- **Transparency:** The accreditation process will be open to external scrutiny; conducted in a consultative and consensus-building collegiate fashion, transparent and fair, and balance academic priorities with those of the OHS profession.
- **Evidenced-based:** Accreditation policy, criteria and process will be underpinned by evidence-based educational theory and contemporary OHS knowledge and practice.

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3 Environmental scan

3.1 Operating environment

3.1.1 Economic climate

For many years, the resources industry has been a key driver for OHS employment. The uncertainty impacting on this and some other industries has the potential to impact on OHS employment. However, while the actual drivers are unclear, a recent remuneration survey (safesearch) showed an increasing demand for university level OHS qualifications for OHS roles with Masters qualifications being consistently required for higher level positions.

3.1.2 Changing nature of work

The workplace and what constitutes a workplace, the technology associated with work and the organisation of work are all changing at a rapid pace as are the methods of sharing information and engaging. Such changes not only impact on the types of jobs, they also affect the nature of relationships in the work environment and the business models. OHS Professionals must understand the dynamics of the change and how their role needs to change in tune with the changes to work and technology.

3.1.3 The Australian WHS Strategy and Safe Work Australia

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022, with the vision of a *Healthy, safe and productive working lives* includes the strategic outcome that those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have the appropriate capabilities. The activities of the Accreditation Board align with this strategic outcome.

3.1.4 Education

Higher Education Sector

The Higher Education sector comprises 39 public universities, 14 of which provide OHS professional education programs. While universities are self-accrediting in that they can develop, approve and provide qualifications without reference to outside bodies there are professional education accreditation bodies for most professions. Thus, the work of the Accreditation Board aligns OHS with other professions in this area.

During 2016 and into 2017, universities are working to ensure they comply with the new Threshold Standards. The OHS accreditation criteria for 2017 onwards align with the new Threshold Standards. Activity by OHS teaching units to meet accreditation criteria will also demonstrate that they are meeting the Threshold Standards at the teaching unit level.

The Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) is the national regulator of the higher education sector and, with the implementation of the new Threshold Standards will be increasing their monitoring of universities they perceive to be 'at risk'. TEQSA is also seeking greater engagement with professional accreditation bodies through MOUs.

Professions Australia and Universities Australia have signed an agreed set of principles for professional accreditation with a joint working party currently developing a set of guidelines. The OHS accreditation process is aligned with the agreed principles and has provided input to the draft guidelines.

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The Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham has tasked the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) to look at professional accreditation as part of its remit to provide advice on a wide range of quality-related issues in the education sector. The Department of Education and Training has commissioned a study on behalf of HESP that will look at reducing red tape in professional accreditation processes, streamlining accreditation requirements and a greater consistency in approach. The outcomes of the study may have ramifications for OHS accreditation in the longer term.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)
The quality of VET work health and safety qualification is important as these qualifications are often a route of entry to university-level OHS qualifications. However, the quality of training in the VET sector generally, and for WHS qualifications continues to be an issue. The Australian Government has undertaken a major review of the VET sector which has resulted in a re-structure of the support and process for developing qualifications and competencies. While these changes are positive, there are still some challenges for the work health and safety qualifications.

Under the new structure for the VET Sector the qualifications and competencies are overseen by Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) supported by Service Support Organisations (SSOs). The VET WHS qualifications sit within the Business Services Training Package and are overseen by that IRC. Currently there is one OHS/WHS representative on the Business Services IRC. However, with the review of the composition of IRCs it is unlikely that this representation will continue. The SIA has lobbied for a WHS IRC but the outcome is, as yet, unknown.

3.1.5   The OHS profession

A profession wide certification process for Generalist OHS Professionals has been implemented by the Safety Institute of Australia. Certification is the third outcome of the OHS Body of Knowledge project and brings OHS in line with other professions such as accountancy, engineering and dietetics. Accredited professional qualifications are a key requirement for certification.

At the international level, the International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organizations (INSHPO) has released the Global Framework for OHS Practice which defines the role, knowledge and skills for OHS practitioners and OHS professionals. While the OHS accreditation criteria are consistent with this framework, there is potential to create further alignment once the Framework has been exposed to critical review in Australia.

Discussions and varied views within the profession on theoretical underpinning of OHS practice demonstrate a need for a clear evidence base to inform OHS practice. Critical thinking and use of the evidence-base should be a feature of OHS education.

3.2   SWOT analysis

Weaknesses	Strengths
Reliance on registrar as an individual for expertise, support and operational functions.	Board membership comprises a broad range of representation, contacts and influence together with high level of expertise in relevant areas.

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Transition to new registrar may result in a loss of corporate memory, knowledge and relevant skills.	Members of the Board, and OHS educators are enthusiastic and committed to quality OHS education. Low cost structure for the Board and Board activities. Collaborative approach to accreditation has resulted in enhanced OHS professional education. Transition to new registrar may bring in new skills.
Threats	**Opportunities**
Economic volatility and decline in some industries may impact on numbers of enrolments. Apparent decline in enrolments may create a threat to some programs. Limited supply and aging profile of current OHS educators combined with university recruitment requirements may impact on availability of suitably qualified and experienced OHS educators. The nature of the relationship between the SIA and Accreditation Board is strongly influenced by the management of the day.	The relationship with the SIA is positive and constructive and a key factor in the ongoing viability of the Accreditation Board. Inclusion of strategic target on Work Health and Safety capabilities in National WHS Strategy (*Those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have the appropriate capabilities, i.e. knowledge, experience and skills*) provides a reference point for accreditation activities. Recognition of the OHS Body of Knowledge has created an awareness of the need for a professional approach to OHS and OHS education. Implementation of professional certification is creating an awareness/demand for accredited OHS programs. International activities around OHS professional roles, capabilities and professional education takes the discussion on OHS program accreditation beyond the local environment. There is an increasing awareness among employers, OHS professionals and regulators of the need for university level OHS qualifications.

Actions to address weaknesses and threats

	Proposed actions
Weaknesses	
Reliance on registrar as an individual for expertise, support and operational functions. Transition to new registrar may result in a loss of corporate memory, knowledge and relevant skills.	Selection and management of transition to new registrar.
Threats	
Economic volatility and decline in some industries may impact on numbers of enrolments. Apparent decline in enrolments may create a threat to some programs. Limited supply and aging profile of current OHS educators combined with university recruitment requirements may impact on availability of suitably qualified and experienced OHS educators.	Strengthen data collection and recording to increase confidence in reliability of student census data. Engage with the SIA to jointly undertake activities to promote the value of suitably qualified OHS professionals and so accredited OHS professional education.

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The nature of the relationship between the SIA and Accreditation Board is strongly influenced by the management of the day.	Engage with the SIA in the current review of the SIA By Laws to ensure that the SIA-Accreditation Board relationship is appropriately defined, independence in standard setting and decision making on accreditation-related matters is protected and the appropriate delegations defined.

4   Strategic overview

4.1   Five-year vision (2020)

- Accredited OHS professional qualifications are sought by aspiring professionals and valued by practising OHS professionals and employers.
- All Australian OHS professional education programs are accredited.
- Higher Education providers value OHS professional education accreditation and the accredited status of their programs.
- The Safety Institute of Australia, as represented by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board, is recognised by the Australian Government as an assessing authority for OHS qualifications for the purpose of migration.

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4.2 Core operational elements

There are six core operational elements for the Board.

	Operational element	Objective	Process	Outcomes
1	Conduct individual accreditations	To recognise OHS professional education programs that meet the established criteria.	Implement 2017 criteria and process. Clarify alignment of criteria and process with Global Framework for Practice. Conduct accreditation assessments in a timely manner, according to procedure.	Accreditation process is seen as valid, fair and reliable and valued by universities, professionals and employers.
2	Conduct annual reviews	To monitor status of accredited programs during accreditation period.	Identify priorities for annual review and inform universities in the year prior. Conduct annual reviews according to procedure and schedule. Collate accreditation and annual review outcomes on an annual basis	Annual reviews provide reliable information on status of program and identify risk factors.
3	Administer accreditation process	To effectively and efficiently manage and coordinate accreditation overall. To benchmark criteria and process with relevant standards.	Maintain register of accredited programs. Update details of programs posted on web site at least annually as per procedure. Maintain Board website. Conduct briefings and liaise as required with universities to create awareness of accreditation and support universities in the application process. Comparative analysis of criteria and process with relevant national and international benchmarks.	Accreditation criteria reflect OHS professional and education standards and align with the HESF. Web site provides up to date information on accreditation and related topics and is seen as a valued source of information by potential students, educators and others. Administration of accreditation reflects underpinning principles. Accreditation Board processes and criteria compare positively with benchmark standards.
4	Administer the Accreditation Board	To effectively and efficiently manage and administer the Board.	Maintain documentation. Establish secretary support for Board functions. Prepare and monitor operational plans. Liaise with SIA as required for effective operation of the Board. Report as required to the Accreditation Board and the SIA.	The Accreditation Board is appropriately structured and the operating model is one that supports effective and efficient achievement of goals and objectives. The Accreditation Board is effectively managed by an appropriately qualified person(s).

	Operational element	Objective	Process	Outcomes
5	Influence the OHS Body of Knowledge	To ensure that the priorities for new chapters and the review schedule for existing chapters takes account of priority topics for OHS education. To monitor and provide feedback so that the quality and evidence-base in individual chapters reflects current OHS research and leading edge thinking and so provides a suitable standard for OHS education. To engage with SIA to advocate for development of appropriate resources to accompany the OHS BoK chapters to support quality OHS education.	List OHS BoK as an agenda item for Accreditation Board meetings at least annually Liaise with OHS BoK manager: • Regarding matters related to priority topics and content of individual chapters • So that, where appropriate, members of the Accreditation Board are included in workshops conducted as part of OHS BoK activities and also in peer review processes.	The OHS BoK chapter list provides an appropriate framework for mapping OHS program content as part of accreditation OHS BoK chapter content is of a suitable standard to provide a base reference for OHS education and ongoing professional development. The Bok web site includes a section that provides resources that extend the chapter content and support practical application of the chapter topic.
6	Provide information, develop influence and advocate for OHS professional accreditation and education	In association with SIA, promote the value of accredited OHS professional education to professionals, industry and the community. To promote the Accreditation Board image and presence and to be a source of information for OHS educators and researchers, regulators, potential students, SIA members, Supporting Partners, industry groups, employers and other interested parties. Liaise with and influence the SIA on research policy and the	Maintain contacts within universities and OHS educators. Provide newsletters, information updates and media releases as appropriate. Maintain an appropriate social media presence. Develop and maintain influential networks nationally and internationally. Give conference presentations as appropriate. Establish an MOU with TEQSA. Liaise with the SIA National Office and the SIA Board of Management regarding Accreditation Board representation in SIA strategic discussions. Advocate for an OHS educators' forum for discussion on OHS education-related issues and an opportunity to engage with leading edge thinking in OHS and education.	Accreditation is sought-after by universities. Accredited qualifications are valued by potential students, OHS professionals, employers and regulators. The Accreditation Board is recognised as the premier source of expertise on OHS education. OHS educators are recognised and valued members of the university community.

	Operational element	Objective	Process	Outcomes
		impact of research on OHS education. Advocate for recognition and support for OHS educators Create international recognition for the Accreditation Board and engage in international discourse on OHS education and accreditation.	In association with the SIA, recognise excellence in OHS education.	

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