



Commitment Statement (1)

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-22: Healthy, safe and productive working lives

**Strategic outcome: Those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have
the appropriate capabilities**

The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board shares the vision promoted in the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 of *Healthy, safe and productive working lives*. Through their activities the Accreditation Board will contribute at a national level to the strategic outcome that those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have appropriate capabilities. The Accreditation Board is committed to the target outcome that:

***New graduate OHS professionals will have the required knowledge and skills to enter
the workforce as effective entry level OHS professionals***

1 Problem/issue

Universities in Australia are self accrediting. Thus, once the university identifies that they wish to provide a particular program the program developers go through a development and approval process defined and managed by the university. While there is no external approval required for specific programs the quality processes employed by universities are oversights by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA). The need for specialist review of professional programs is recognised by many professions that conduct external professional accreditation of programs developed by self accrediting universities. The role of professional accreditation processes are recognised by TEQSA.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is not a regulated profession and there are no educational or experience requirements for employment as an OHS advisor/coordinator/ manager/consultant. Also, there is substantial variation in OHS education provided by universities; this may reflect the specialties of host schools, e.g. health, sciences or engineering, or the interests of key educators within particular programs. The increasing emphasis on distance/online modes of delivery presents further challenges for OHS education in developing graduates equipped as effective entry level OHS professionals.

2 Influence and action

2.1 Accreditation of OHS professional education

The purpose of the Australian OHS Education is to contribute to work 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. To achieve this the Accreditation Board sees its mission as ensuring that OHS



professional education is based on educational design and review processes, and delivery of learning appropriate to develop graduates equipped with the required knowledge and skills.

The core activity of the Accreditation Board is to work with universities; examine and evaluate the program including resourcing, learning and teaching strategies and materials, assessment practices and review processes; provide feedback; and monitor the program annually. Thus accreditation not only recognises those programs that meet the standards but act as a positive influence on the development of quality education for current and aspiring OHS professionals.

2.2 Guidance on selection of OHS professional education programs

A register of OHS programs provided by Australian Universities is posted on the Accreditation Board web site. The web site also includes guidance for potential students and for employers supporting the development of their OHS advisors on selecting the level and provider for OHS professional study. The web site also offers an email contact for those wanting to ask specific questions about selecting an OHS qualification with further telephone contact with the registrar in some cases.

3 Evaluation of effectiveness and impact of activities

The Accreditation Board will develop and implement an evaluation protocol to assess the effectiveness and impact of these activities.

As part of its annual reporting, the Accreditation Board will provide a report on accredited programs and total number of student and graduates.

The provision of guidance for selection of OHS qualifications will be assessed through monitoring 'hits' on the relevant pages of the web site, email queries via the web site and the response and number of telephone calls responded regarding selection of OHS education programs.

4 Reporting

A summary report detailing accreditation outcomes, student and graduate numbers and provision of advice on selection OHS qualifications will be included in the Accreditation Board Annual Report with a copy provided to Safe Work Australia.



Commitment Statement (2)

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University level OHS teaching units have access to qualified OHS educators sufficient in number and scope of knowledge, skills and experience to address the required scope of teaching and learning as well as OHS expertise.

1 Problem/issue

Threats to the supply of suitably qualified university based OHS educators were formally identified by Quinlan in 1995¹ and more recently by Toft et al.,² (2010). Anecdotal information, including responses to employment vacancies suggests that there has been little improvement and possibly a further deterioration. The key issues are supply of suitably qualified and experienced people and resultant high use of session staff, pay differential between academia and industry, age profile of OHS academics and teaching staff, conditions of work and succession planning. The small teaching units spread across a number of universities exacerbates the issue of ensuring input to the teaching and learning by quality, qualified OHS educators with sufficient personnel to address the required scope of speciality expertise.

2 Influence and action

2.1 Accreditation criteria

The core activity of the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board is to recognise those university level OHS professional education programs that meet the criteria established by the Board. A number of the accreditation criteria address capability of OHS educators. To achieve accreditation for the program the university is required to provide evidence demonstrating compliance with the requirements.

¹ Quinlan, M. (Ed.). (1995). *Tertiary education in occupational health and safety in Australia and New Zealand* Sydney.

² Toft, Y., Capra, M., Kift, R., Moodie-Bain, D., Pryor, P., Eddington, I., et al. (2010). *Safeguarding Australians: Mapping the strengths and challenges toward sustainable improvement in OHS education and practice. Final Report, Part 1.* Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.



Accreditation criteria relating to capability of OHS educators

2.5	Academic staff	Academic staff in sufficient number and capability to ensure the quality and viability of the program.
4.3	Academic staff	Staff receive induction and professional development to enable them to be an integral part of the education process
4.4		Where sessional staff are employed for a series of lectures or for a unit there is evidence of them being supported to contribute as an integral part of the educational process.
4.6	Academic and educational culture	Teaching staff have experience in the OHS field and/or are supported in obtaining/maintaining industry contact and experience.
4.7		Teaching staff are encouraged and supported in undertaking professional development.
4.8		Teaching staff are encouraged and supported in undertaking research and are expected to maintain scholarship in the field.

2.2 Support currency and further development of educational theory and OHS knowledge of OHS educators

Webinars and workshops for OHS educators are a key component of the strategic plan for the Accreditation Board. These webinars cover developments in the OHS Body of Knowledge as well as providing a discussion forum on educational theory as it relates to the teaching and learning in OHS professional education.

3 Evaluation of effectiveness and impact of activities

The Accreditation Board will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of these activities on the capability of those providing OHS professional education in the Higher Education/ university sector. This evaluation will include an annual report comprised of conduct of relevant activities against the operational plan and a status report derived from information obtained as part of the accreditation process. A more detailed evaluation will be conducted via surveys conducted in 2013-14 (baseline), 2017-18 and 2021-22.

4 Reporting

A report detailing activities supporting capability of those providing OHS education in the Higher Education/university sector and the evaluation of the impact of these activities will be included in the Accreditation Board Annual Report with a copy provided to Safe Work Australia.



Commitment Statement (3)

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***The OHS Body of Knowledge describes the theoretical knowledge to underpin OHS
professional advice.***

1 Problem/issue

Capability is “the applied theoretical knowledge that underpins practice in occupations and professions and also the industry specific knowledge and skills that transcend particular workplaces and the tacit knowledge of the workplace”³. Thus OHS advice should be underpinned by theoretical knowledge together with industry specific knowledge and skills. The OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals first published in 2012 provides a basis for this theoretical knowledge base. However the OHS Body of Knowledge requires ongoing development and review not only to address identified gaps and ensure currency but to accommodate reinterpretation and evolution as people engage with it, apply it and extend it by conducting research.

2 Influence and action

2.1 Development and maintenance of the OHS Body of Knowledge

While the Safety Institute of Australia holds the copyright for the OHS Body of Knowledge the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board is custodian of the OHS Body of Knowledge responsible for ongoing development and maintenance. The Accreditation Board has developed a 7 year review and development schedule for the OHS Body of Knowledge.

Through the Safety Institute of Australia the Accreditation Board has also entered into a funding agreement with Safe Work Australia to develop four additional chapters of the OHS Body of Knowledge:

³ Wheelahan, L., & Moodie, G. (2011). Rethinking skills in Vocational Education and Training [Electronic Version], from http://www.bvet.nsw.gov.au/pdf/rethinking_skills.pdf



Principles of WHS law; Organisational culture; OHS Risk and decision making; and User centred and safe design. Other topics for new chapters are being considered.

2.2 *Dissemination of the OHS Body of Knowledge*

The OHS Body of Knowledge is freely available via the www.ohsbok.org.au web site to individuals for their personal non commercial professional use. The website is maintained by the Accreditation Board. Hard copy and electronic copies are available for sale together with licenses for commercial use. Any funds derived from sale of the OHS Body of Knowledge supports the further development.

The Accreditation Board supports the dissemination of the OHS Body of Knowledge by working with the Safety Institute of Australia and other bodies to conduct workshops and webinars on topics related to the OHS Body of Knowledge.

3 **Evaluation of effectiveness and impact of activities**

The Accreditation Board will evaluate the impact of the activities related to the OHS Body of Knowledge in the following ways:

- Achievement against review schedule
- Completion of milestones in funding agreement for development of additional chapters
- Launch of updated www.ohsbok.org.au web site
- Monitoring of the 'hits' and downloads on the web site
- Workshops and webinars on OHS Body of Knowledge topics conducted by the Accreditation Board or where the Accreditation Board assists in developing the program.

4 **Reporting**

A summary report will be included in the Accreditation Board Annual Report with a copy provided to Safe Work Australia.



Commitment Statement (4)

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Managers and organisations have guidance on how to meet their due diligence requirements in ensuring access to appropriate and credible advice.

1 Problem/issue

OHS is legally and practically a management responsibility. In defining the role of an ‘officer’ the Australian Work Health and Safety Act (s27) requires the officer to exercise *due diligence* by taking *reasonable steps* to ensure compliance with OHS obligations. In describing what may constitute reasonable steps, Safe Work Australia advises that officers may meet their due diligence requirement in some respects by “proper reliance on advice from and the activities of others ...” while cautioning that:

To the extent to which an officer will seek to rely on others, the officer must be able to demonstrate the reasonableness of that reliance, which may be demonstrated through the receipt of credible information and advice from appropriate people.⁴

Thus managers and senior officers of an organisation should have access to credible advice from appropriate people. However there are no mandatory requirements to practice OHS and until recently, no benchmark for assessing the competence of those in the OHS function. Thus managers have to consider what constitutes ‘credible’ and ‘appropriate’ which requires consideration of qualifications and experience and the context to which the advice applies. There are a number of ways in which this advice can be sourced.

2 Influence and action

The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board has compiled the *Developing OHS capability package* to assist employers to evaluate their OHS capability requirements and identify strategies for addressing

⁴ SWA (Safe Work Australia). (2011). Interpretive guideline - Model Work Health and Safety Act: The Health and Safety Duty of an Officer Under Section 27, p.5. Canberra: Safe Work Australia.



any gaps and provides advice and resources to support the implementation of the strategies to address organisational OHS capability. The documents included in the package include:

- Introduction and guidance for use
- Developing OHS capability – Background – Employers’ presentation
- OHS Professional Capability Statements
- OHS Body of Knowledge
- OHS Body of Knowledge Learning Outcomes
- OHS Capability Gap Analysis and Professional Development Plan
- Sample position profiles
- OHS Qualification Pathways
- OHS Accredited Program Register
- Guidance on international equivalence of OHS qualifications
- Certified OHS Professionals
- Guidelines for engaging consultants (to be developed).

The documents and resources are freely available to organisations via the Accreditation Board web site. The Accreditation Board is also planning workshops and other strategies to promote the use of the Capability package.

3 Evaluation of effectiveness and impact of activities

The Accreditation Board will evaluate the impact of the activities related to the *Developing OHS capability* package in the following ways:

- Response by those who use the package
- Monitoring of the ‘hits’ and downloads on the web site
- Response to workshops and webinars on the use of the Capability package. .

4 Reporting

A summary report will be included in the Accreditation Board Annual Report with a copy provided to Safe Work Australia.