



## Supporting Partner Update

July 2013



The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board is now completing its second year of operation. Originally established for the sole purpose of accrediting OHS professional education programs the Accreditation Board has taken on a much broader role in OHS professional education and OHS capability than envisaged at its commencement. **Supporting Partners** are vital to the work of the Accreditation Board.

This **Supporting Partner Update** has been prepared to not only tell you about the activities to which you have been providing support but as one of the reasons for your organisation becoming a **Supporting Partner** is that you value quality OHS professional education this update provides information on the current status and issues in OHS education and OHS capability. The Update covers:

- As status report on accreditation of university level OHS programs
- Issues around quality and sustainability of OHS education
  - The practitioner and professional roles
  - Issues in OHS VET education
  - Capability and supply of OHS educators in universities and the implications of small centres of OHS education
- Recognition and awards with which the Accreditation Board is involved
- The OHS Capability Development Package (a must for employers and recruiters)
- OHS capability and the Australian WHS Strategy (and how **Supporting Partners** can be further recognised)
- The OHS Body of Knowledge, and
- International activities where the Accreditation Board is engaged.

The Update also gives a sneak peek at the activities on the strategic and operational plan for 2013-14 and how **Supporting Partners** can be more involved if they wish.



## The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board



The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board was created in 2011 as an outcome of the OHS Body of Knowledge project. Apart from a small subsidy from the Safety Institute of Australia the Accreditation Board is self funding through accreditation fees, some limited consulting related to OHS education, and **Supporting Partners**. Thus **Supporting Partners** have been, and will continue to be, essential for the Accreditation Board to be influential in this broader arena.



While **Supporting Partners** receive the e-news and other publications of the Accreditation Board this *Supporting Partner Update* has been developed specifically to inform our **Supporting Partners** of our activities and developments.



The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board is active in three main areas:

- Recognising university-level programs that meet the accreditation criteria
- Advocating for a sustainable environment for OHS education, and
- Custodian of the OHS Body of Knowledge.



These activities are particularly important in the light of the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 *Healthy, safe and productive working lives*, which includes the strategic outcome that those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have appropriate capabilities.

## Accreditation of university level OHS education programs

There are currently 15 universities offering a total of 29 OHS professional education programs:

- 5 Bachelor programs (1 being processed for accreditation)
- 13 Graduate Diploma programs (4 accredited, 2 being processed, 3 not in a situation to consider accreditation)<sup>1</sup>
- 11 Masters programs (3 accredited, 1 being processed, 1 not in a situation to consider accreditation).

A total of 7 programs have been accredited from RMIT University, Latrobe University, Monash University and Edith Cowan University. Programs from three other universities are currently being assessed.

<sup>1</sup> Nine of the Graduate Diploma programs are nested in masters programs.





Changes to the Australian Qualification Framework have required all universities to review their programs. In some cases this has delayed the applications for accreditation but as the Accreditation Board has been able to align our criteria and process with the structural changes in the Higher Education sector all universities that have gone through the accreditation have found it a constructive and supportive process.



Universities with accredited programs are able to display the Accredited Program logo on their web site and related publications. A register of OHS professional education programs is also available on the Accreditation Board website which is becoming a first port of call for potential students.



## Advocating for a sustainable environment for OHS education

It quickly became clear that the Accreditation Board had to engage more broadly to influence factors that potentially threatened the availability and quality of OHS professional education.

### *Practitioners and professionals*



Australia is different to many other countries in that there has not previously been a clear distinction between the roles of VET qualified OHS practitioners and university educated OHS professionals. This has created some confusion over roles and impacted on the perception of the professionalism of the role. The practitioner and professional are two distinct roles and both are to be valued. The Accreditation Board is engaging with OHS professionals, OHS practitioners, employers, regulators and policy makers to clarify the roles.



### *OHS VET education*

OHS practitioner qualifications are offered by the VET sector at Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced diploma levels. While many of these programs are of good quality there is concern about some providers especially those offering short course programs. These quality concerns are not restricted to OHS qualifications but apply more broadly across the VET sector and were identified in a recent review and COAG paper issued by the National Skills Standards Council. The quality of OHS VET qualifications is important to the OHS profession as:

- A Diploma in OHS is seen as a pathway into some university-level OHS programs





- A national professional certification program is being implemented for OHS professionals and practitioners with certification at the practitioner level based on the Diploma of OHS
- Many OHS practitioners work as solo practitioners and so do not have mentoring and job support from experienced OHS practitioners and professionals.



The Accreditation Board has prepared a position statement on the duration of VET OHS qualifications as a guide to potential students, employers and recruiters. We have also provided a response to the NSSC/COAG consultation paper on regulation of the VET sector; we have engaged with the Australian Skills Quality Agency and Innovation and Business Skills Australia (the skills council responsible for OHS qualifications) on addressing the quality issues.



### *Capability and supply of OHS educators and small centres of OHS education*

As commented earlier, there are 15 universities providing OHS professional education programs. The teaching units frequently only comprise 2-3 people with some programs relying on one staff member supported by sessional lecturers. University criteria for appointment include a PhD for even base level lecturing positions and not only are there few people with OHS related PhDs in Australia creating a limited supply of people meeting university requirements but the significant pay differential between academia and industry makes an academic role unattractive.



The Accreditation Board is looking to promote a collaborative model for the delivery of OHS professional education to create centres of excellence in OHS knowledge and teaching to ensure the expertise to deliver quality OHS education. Unfortunately there is resistance to collaborative models of program delivery by the university hierarchy.



Another aspect of capability of OHS educators derives from their background in educational theory and methods as they apply to OHS. While it may be occurring in other areas of professional education there has been little or no engagement in pedagogical discussion as it relates to OHS education, particularly the development of theoretical knowledge and critical thinking as part of capability. As with all education, OHS has seen a move to online and distance modes of delivery with some programs having no face to face component. This move has not been associated with research and discussion on how to develop and assess required OHS professional skills and attributes in such an environment.



The Accreditation Board sees it has a vital role in promoting such discussion. When the OHS education conference originally scheduled for February 2013



was cancelled due to university restrictions on education the Board moved into planning a webinar program. A webinar program is being planned for 2013-14 with the only limitations being resources.



### ***Recognition of OHS professional education***

OHS education tends to have a low profile in universities which can impact on allocation of resources and even viability of the program. The universities that have gone through accreditation have all reported an increase in profile and recognition of the OHS teaching unit within the university.



Awards are also part of the Accreditation Board recognition program. The Accreditation Board joined with the Safety Institute of Australia to provide the annual OHS Education Awards at the bachelor, graduate diploma/masters and PhD levels. An OHS educator award is also being considered for 2014.



### ***OHS Capability***

While all of the activities of the Accreditation Board are directed toward OHS capability there have been two exciting developments in this area: the Australian WHS strategy and the compilation of the *Developing OHS Capability Package*.

### ***OHS Capability and the Australian WHS Strategy***



The registrar of the Accreditation Board was engaged by Safe Work Australia to work with agency staff to develop an issues, gaps and opportunities paper for the WHS strategic outcomes on capability. This paper was the basis for developing the agency action plan for 2013-15 for capability.

### ***Developing OHS Capability Package***

Managers may meet their due diligence requirements in some respects by proper reliance on advice from and the activities of others however they must be able to demonstrate the reasonableness of relying on that advice. There are no mandatory requirements to practice OHS and, until recently, no benchmarks for assessing the competence of those in the OHS function. Thus managers have to consider what constitutes 'credible' and 'appropriate' advice.



The *Developing OHS Capability Package* has been compiled by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board to assist employers to evaluate their OHS capability and where appropriate support development of capability in their organisation. The materials in this package have been developed from capability statements and learning outcomes developed through workshops with OHS educators and professionals, other activities undertaken by the Accreditation Board together with input by one of our Supporting Partners *Safesearch*.







The information and tools in the *Developing OHS Capability Package* include:

1. Introduction and guidance for use
2. Developing OHS capability – Background – Employers' presentation
3. OHS Professional Capability Statements
4. OHS Body of Knowledge
5. OHS Body of Knowledge Learning Outcomes
6. OHS Capability Gap Analysis and Professional Development Plan
7. Sample position profiles
8. OHS Qualification Pathways
9. OHS Accredited Program Register
10. Guidance on international equivalence of OHS qualifications
11. Certified OHS Professionals



A further addition to the package is being developed on engaging consultants. We are also about to put together some *utube* presentations to promote the package and give examples of how the materials may be used.

The value of this approach was recently recognised by the Australian Qualification Framework Council. The registrar was invited to speak at an industry forum on the *Developing OHS Capability Package* as a case study on how the qualification framework could be applied to defining the requirements of a profession.

## OHS Body of Knowledge

The OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals was developed as part of the OHS Body of Knowledge project funded by WorkSafe Victoria. It has attracted acclaim both in Australia and internationally. It describes the theoretical knowledge which should underpin OHS practice. It provides the basis for accreditation of university level OHS education programs, professional certification and continuing professional development for OHS professionals. The OHS Body of Knowledge is available free of charge for individual professional, non commercial use at [www.ohsbok.org.au](http://www.ohsbok.org.au). A license is required for its use for commercial purposes.

The copyright of the OHS Body of Knowledge is held by the Safety Institute of Australia with the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board having a custodian role responsible for currency and further development. Originally published in 2012 the Accreditation Board has developed a seven year review and update schedule.



We are very excited that the contribution of the OHS Body of Knowledge to capability has been recognised by Safe Work Australia. SWA is supporting the development of four additional chapters addressing the topics of work health and safety jurisprudence, organisational culture, risk and decision making and user centred and safe design.

The development of the new chapters will be managed by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board with technical input and writing of the chapters managed through Topic Specific Technical Panels. Paul Cutrone from **Sparke Helmore**, a **Supporting Partner**, is one of the members on the Jurisprudence in WHS technical panel.



## International engagement

With international recognition of the OHS Body of Knowledge and the work the Accreditation Board has undertaken around OHS capability the Registrar has been invited and sponsored to present at the Global Leaders OHS Week in Bangkok and the National Education Symposium conducted by the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals. She is also part of an international network developing a framework for the OHS profession. The **Supporting Partners** have been promoted at each of these forums.



## The view ahead to 2014

The next year will be a busy one for the Accreditation Board. As our core activity we will continue to work with universities, both those with accredited programs and those yet to be accredited. We are looking to run a series of webinars for educators on educational theory and practice as it applies to OHS.

With the support of Safe Work Australia we will be managing the development and writing of four new chapters of the OHS Body of Knowledge.

The culmination of this work will be the release and ongoing enhancement of the *Developing OHS Capability Package*. This will include a Capability Workshop and a range of promotion activities to engage employers, recruiters, regulators, OHS professionals and others.



## Would you like to be more involved?

The financial and in kind support by Supporting Partners is essential for the operation of the Accreditation Board. The prime reason for being a Supporting Partner is that you see OHS education as being important in ensuring a supply of effective OHS professionals. We would like to see more engagement with our





Supporting Partners for a two way benefit. What sort of engagement or further interaction would you be interested in as a Supporting Partner?

For one of our partners we presented an in-house update on OHS education and professional developments nationally and internationally and the potential impact on recruitment.

One of our partners was instrumental in developing the concept of the Capability Package by asking us to provide advice for a corporate restructure of the OHS function.

We have a number of activities planned such as an OHS educators' award and a research award which are pending waiting suitable sponsorship. The webinar program also offers opportunity for **Supporting Partner** to be involved in a variety of ways.

The Developing OHS Capability Package will be subject to ongoing review and enhancement. We are seeking exemplar employers that to work with the materials and provide feedback on how they might assist individual organisations in developing their capability.

We are planning a Capability Workshop for our current and potential **Supporting Partners**. This workshop is scheduled for later in the year and will be jointly presented with Safe Work Australia.

The implementation of the *Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 Healthy, safe and productive working lives* provides an exciting new opportunity for recognition of the contribution of Supporting Partners. Safe Work Australia is inviting organisations to make *Statements of Commitment* to the strategy which are then promoted on the Safe Work Australia web site. The Accreditation Board will provide the details for individual Supporting Partners to make a statement of commitment to the capability component of the Australian Strategy.

For information on any of these activities or to discuss OHS education, OHS capability or being a **Supporting Partner** contact the Registrar.

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