

Credit Transfer for Open/Online Graduate Programs: Annex 5 Australia

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3.5 Australia

The population of Australia is just under 24 million, so about 2/3 that of Canada. Like Canada, Australia is divided into political entities, the states, with rather similar populations to various of the Canadian provinces. For example, Queensland has a population rather similar in size (4.9 million) to British Columbia.

University sector

Australia has a unified University sector, typically described as having 40 public universities, two international universities and Bond, a private not-for-profit university in Queensland.¹ These are all self-accrediting. However, this is not the end of the story. The National Register of Higher Education Providers,² which handles overseas accreditation of all higher education providers, lists one self-accrediting *Australian University of Specialisation* – the University of Divinity³ – and 11 self-accrediting *Higher Education Providers other than universities*. In

¹ See for example <https://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/global/australian-education/universities-and-higher-education/list-of-australian-universities>

² <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register>

³ <https://www.divinity.edu.au>

addition, it lists 113 higher education providers accredited by the national government or one of the Australian states. Some of these 113 offer graduate programmes: for example MIECAT⁴ in Melbourne offers a Master's and a Professional Doctorate in Therapeutic Arts Practice.⁵ There are clear similarities to the complex ecosystem of higher education providers in England.

Fees

Undergraduate fees vary according to course but average out at around AU\$10,000. For international students these rise to at least AU\$15,000 and for a Master's degree AU\$20,000.

The Australian dollar is roughly equal in value to the Canadian dollar⁶ so for the rest of this section we shall just use \$ for both currencies.

FEE-HELP⁷ is a loan scheme that helps national students to pay all or part of their tuition fees. It cannot be used for additional study costs such as accommodation or text books.

The Australian Qualifications Framework

This is similar to the New Zealand framework (see Section 3.4) with a Master's degree at level 9 (whereas it is level 7 of ISCED). In Australia, level 7 is the bachelor degree and level 8 the bachelor with honours.⁸

Typically an honours degree takes four years to complete, as in Canada; but Australia (as does Scotland and New Zealand) still has the general bachelor degree (the one called "ordinary degree" in the UK).

Credits

The Australian credit system seems unique in its quantum of credit. A 3-year bachelor (ordinary) degree takes 144 credits, making each year worth 48 credits. A master's degree takes 96 credits, in other words two undergraduate years, according to the document *Academic Credits in Australian Universities – Things to Know before Applying*.⁹ The same document notes that "Credit transfer is available in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs".

⁴ <https://miecat.edu.au>

⁵ http://www.tegsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/decision/PRV12136%20Re-accreditation%2029%20Jan%202015_1.pdf

⁶ Statement valid on 20 September 2017.

⁷ <http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/studyassist/help-paying-my-fees/fee-help/pages/fee-help->

⁸ <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-qualifications> – see also <http://www.studying-in-australia.org/undergraduate-studies/>

⁹ <http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/1115/academic-credits-in-australian-universities-things-to-know-before-applying.html>

Master's degrees

The *Australian Qualifications Framework* states that there are three main forms of master's degree. In more detail:¹⁰

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Research)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for research and scholarship and as a pathway for further learning.

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Coursework)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for professional practice or scholarship and as a pathway for further learning.

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Extended)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for professional practice and as a pathway for further learning.

The volume of learning of the first two types is officially estimated as 1 – 2 years and of the third as 3 – 4 years (following a level 7 – ordinary – degree).¹¹

Structure of a master's degree

The Implementation Handbook has useful summary of master's degrees.¹²

Entry to the Masters Degree is based on evidence of a capacity to undertake higher degree studies in the proposed field. *There is a wide range of entry pathways*, varying according to the program methodology and the discipline involved. Predominantly research-based programs normally have a research prerequisite whereas predominantly coursework-based programs may be accessed more broadly.

Typical programs and entry pathways include:

- the typical coursework Masters Degree program comprising coursework, project work and research in varying combinations, may be entered from a Bachelor Degree, a Bachelor Honours Degree or a Graduate Diploma. Coursework Masters Degrees are often structured in a three to four-semester nested arrangement with the Graduate Certificate (one semester), Graduate Diploma (a further semester), and Masters Degree (a further two semesters);
- the typical research Masters Degree program comprising at least two-thirds research with a substantial, often externally assessed thesis outcome, entered from a Bachelor Honours Degree or Masters preliminary year, a research-based Graduate Diploma or equivalent research experience;
- a professional coursework Masters Degree program, which may involve a work based project, specifically designed for entry on the basis of a relevant

¹⁰ <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-qualifications>

¹¹ <https://www.aqf.edu.au/faqs> – “What are the changes to the Masters Degree specification?”

¹² <https://www.aqf.edu.au/sites/aqf/files/aqf-implementation-handbook-fourth-edition-2007.pdf> page 70

qualification and professional experience or *extensive relevant professional experience*.

Online learning

The “sandstones” (the Australian equivalent of UK Russell Group universities) like Sydney and Melbourne use largely traditional teaching methods. Others, such as the University of Technology Sydney, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Charles Sturt University, are more progressive in their use of technology. Perhaps the most innovative of all is Deakin University in Victoria, where they are trying out a wide range of models in the creative blend of campus, online, MOOC and all other mixes to suit different student needs.

Many Universities are developing “flipped classroom” campuses,¹³ with the University of Technology Sydney at the forefront, having spent \$1.2billion on a new campus build without creating any conventional lecture spaces.¹⁴

Exclusively online learning is less strong, with Swinburne University of Technology being perhaps the most creative, having outsourced their entire online operation to a third party corporate which has developed it impressively.¹⁵

Open Universities Australia,¹⁶ previously known as the Open Learning Agency of Australia, is an effective consortium, offering study units and courses with 12 leading Australian universities.

Among the other leading players in online learning are: Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University, University of New England, Curtin University, Deakin University, University of Southern Queensland, University of Tasmania and Edith Cowan University – all have at least 90 online programmes, several have over 200 and one (USQ) has over 300.¹⁷

Online Master’s

According to the Distance Learning Portal,¹⁸ Australia offers 780 blended or online master’s with 584 fully online, so there are plenty to choose examples from. (There are even 9 fully online doctoral programmes!)

¹³ see e.g. <http://www.uq.edu.au/teach/flipped-classroom/what-is-fc.html>

¹⁴ http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hepi_Rebooting-learning-for-the-digital-age-Report-93-20_01_17Web.pdf page 38

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swinburne_Online

¹⁶ <https://www.open.edu.au>

¹⁷ <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/countries/202/australia.html#tab:institutes>

¹⁸ <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/search/#q=ci-202|lv-master|mh-online&start=0&length=10&order=relevance&direction=desc>

3.5.1 Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University¹⁹ is an Australian multi-campus public university located in four different states (New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and the Australian Capital Territory).²⁰

Unlike in some Australian institutions, a standard year of full-time study at CSU is 64 points (not 48 points). This is said to be “equivalent to 60 ECTS credit points” (i.e. 120 UK points).²¹

CSU has an active distance learning programme with over 200 offerings of which 80 are master’s programmes.²² Two of these are discussed below.

Master of Human Resource Management

The Master of Human Resources Management²³ is designed for human resources (HR) practitioners wishing to accelerate their career progression through tertiary qualifications. It is accredited by the accredited by the Australian Human Resources Institute.

Entry, credit transfer and PLAR

This takes account of various kinds of prior experience:²⁴

Credit for prior learning and credit for current competencies will be granted to eligible applicants.

Students who have completed CSU’s Graduate Certificate in Human Resource Management or the Graduate Diploma of Human Resource Management will receive full credit for the subjects studied.

Applicants who have successfully completed the Australian Human Resource Institute Professional Diploma in Human Resources or the AHRI Practising Certification will receive four subjects’ credit into the Master of Human Resource Management program.

Candidates may receive transfer credit for up to 50% of the course for prior study if they can demonstrate that such study was completed at a recognised higher education institution within the last 10 years at postgraduate level.

Interestingly there is no clear description of the overall academic structure or the credit values for each module.

Master of Professional Accounting

The Master of Professional Accounting is designed for students wanting to make a career change into accounting. It is part of a package of four programmes:

- Master of Professional Accounting (12 subjects)

¹⁹ <http://www.csu.edu.au>

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Sturt_University

²¹ <http://futurestudents.csu.edu.au/apply/rpl>

²² <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/csu-online>

²³ <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/master-hr-management>

²⁴ <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/master-hr-management>

- Master of Professional Accounting (16 subjects)
- Graduate Diploma of Accounting
- Graduate Certificate in Professional Accounting

The last two appear to be scaffolding towards the Master's. There are professional entry routes into these.

Master of Professional Accounting (16 subjects) – benefits and entry

This version is designed for students looking for a change in career, and opens the way to many vocational choices in areas of financial management, public practice, commerce and industry, government and semi-government organisations, and accounting education. It meets the academic requirements for accreditation with CPA (Certified Practising Accountant) Australia and the Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand.

In terms of entry:²⁵

Students may receive up to 50% (eight 8-point subjects) worth of credit into the extended MPA program for related prior studies. *Credit will not be awarded for work experience.*

Applicants who have completed either the Graduate Certificate in Professional Accounting or the Graduate Diploma of Accounting will be awarded credit for those subjects upon admission to the Master of Professional Accounting (16 subjects).

Credit for prior learning and credit for current competencies will be granted to eligible applicants.

Master of Professional Accounting (12 subjects) – benefits and entry

This is designed to build upon previous *non-accounting undergraduate studies*, work experience or an undergraduate accounting degree from an overseas university not recognised by the Australian Accounting professional bodies. It existing qualifications with a professional accounting qualification designed to meet the academic requirements of the Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand and CPA Australia.

In terms of entry:²⁶

Students may receive up to 50% (six 8 point subjects) worth of credit into the MPA program for related prior studies. Credit will not be awarded for work experience.

Applicants who have completed either the Graduate Certificate in Professional Accounting or the Graduate Diploma of Accounting will be awarded credit for those subjects upon admission to the Master of Professional Accounting.

PLAR (Recognition of Prior Learning)

There is a university-wide page on this topic.²⁷ However, it seems to say nothing about graduate programmes.

²⁵ <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/master-of-professional-accounting>

²⁶ <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/master-of-professional-accounting-overview>

²⁷ <http://futurestudents.csu.edu.au/apply/rpl>

3.5.2 RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)

Out of the many Australian universities we could have chosen for our second case study, we have chosen RMIT. This was in part because it has good links with the international distance learning community: in particular its Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor were both previously at the Open University UK.

One of Australia's original tertiary institutions, RMIT University enjoys an international reputation for excellence in professional and vocational education, applied research, and engagement with the needs of industry and the community. It is a "world leader in Art and Design; Architecture; Education; Engineering; Development; Computer Science and Information Systems; Business and Management; and Communication and Media Studies".²⁸

In the November 2015 strategic plan, **Ready for Life and Work**, Goal 1, *A transformative student experience*, has as Priority 5, *A digitally enabled experience*.²⁹

The RMIT Online master's programmes include:³⁰

- Master of Commerce
- Master of Engineering (Management)
- Master of Human Resource Management
- Master of Human Resource Management
- Master of Supply Chain and Logistics Management

All the Master's except Engineering have Graduate Certificate exit points and in addition there is a Graduate Certificate (and Graduate Diploma) in Project Management.

Features of all the programmes include:³¹

- 6 intakes per year
- 6 study periods per year
- 7-week study periods
- tailored study pathways.

Recognition of Prior Learning is also featured.

Online Master of Commerce

This³² is described as "two years intensive part-time".

In this programme students study one compulsory capstone course (Business Research Design) and 11 other courses selected from 16 modules across four topic areas: human resources, marketing, supply chain/logistics and project management.

²⁸ <https://www.rmit.edu.au/about>

²⁹ <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/876tl55i1af1.pdf> page 15

³⁰ <https://studyonline.rmit.edu.au/study-online>

³¹ <https://studyonline.rmit.edu.au/study-online> again

³² <https://studyonline.rmit.edu.au/online-programs/master-of-commerce>

Perhaps because of the “intensive” aspect, the entry requirements do not explicitly suggest much freedom over input qualifications except partially on subject aspects:

Australian Bachelor degree or equivalent, or higher level qualification, in business (or a related discipline);

or

RMIT Graduate Certificate in Commerce.

Applicants with a *degree in a non-business or related discipline* need to apply [first?] for the Graduate Certificate in Commerce to complete the Masters degree in 2 years intensive part-time mode.

Recognition of prior learning

Having said that, there is comprehensive material on Recognition of Prior Learning.³³ This proposes routes forward for students wishing credit for previous formal learning, non-formal learning or informal learning, as well as accreditation from a professional body. Since RMIT is a dual-outcome institution (with both university and vocational programmes) the procedures seem all-embracing, with for university-level programmes a comprehensive form. However, interestingly, the route forward for *accreditation from professional body* is via a *Recognition of Current Competency* procedure carried about by the *department* which owns the programme, not by the University. Yet there do not appear to be “default” RCC routes forward given on the web site for specific programmes such as the one above.

In particular it is interesting that there is no material on RPL for qualifications from entities such as the Australian Institute of Management.³⁴ But to delve into this aspect would take us too far into detail.

Another intriguing wrinkle concerns vocational programmes:

Note: formal learning that is more than 10 years old and has been deemed non-equivalent can be used in support of an RPL application for a *vocational education program*.

This is an interesting comment: timeliness not being relevant to vocational qualifications.

³³ <https://www.rmit.edu.au/students/student-essentials/enrolment/apply-for-credit>

³⁴ See <https://www.aim.com.au> – and note that AIM has a Business School delivering MBAs by flexible learning and a reciprocal relationship with the Chartered Institute of Management (CMI) in UK (<https://www.aim.com.au/news/australias-first-chartered-managers>)