Programme Design Policy

Document Area	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement
Document Function/ Owner	Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar
Author	Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Team qaet@atu.ie
Required Approval	Academic Council

Issued Document Location

Internal Staff Portal / Hub	Yes (default repository)
Internal Student Portal / Hub	No
ATU Website	Yes
Issue Date	16 April 2025
Effective Date	11 April 2025

Table of Contents

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to articulate the principles underpinning the University's approach to the design of taught programmes and the framework that taught programmes must adhere to, to ensure that programmes are developed in a consistent and effective manner and lead to awards of a high quality.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the design of all taught programmes, including collaborative and joint programmes, leading to awards at Level 6 to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Separate policies will be in place for research programmes leading to awards at Level 9 and Level 10 on the NFQ. All new taught programmes must be designed in adherence with the policy. All changes made to programmes, arising from on-going review, or planned periodic review must comply with this policy.

Additional policies that apply to the quality assurance of taught programmes at ATU are listed in Section 5.

3. External Reference Documents

- ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) Users' Guide (EHEA, 2015)
- A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005)
- Outline National Framework of Qualifications – Determinations made by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), 2003)
- Policies and criteria for the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (NQAI, 2003)
- Joint-sectoral protocol between Designated Awarding Bodies and Quality and Qualifications Ireland for the inclusion of qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications – July 2022 (QQI, 2022)
- Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training (NQAI, 2006)
- National Access Plan - A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education (Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2022)
- 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development - ESD to 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2022)
- GreenComp: the European Sustainability Competence Framework (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022)

4. Policy

4.1 Principles

The ethos of Quality Assurance of Programmes at ATU is underpinned by four principles as illustrated in Figure 1. These principles underpin both the *AQAE004 Programme Design Policy* and the *AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy.*

Figure 1. Principles underpinning Programme Design

4.1.1   Academic Excellence

Programmes will be designed by teams with strong academic backgrounds, relevant research experience, and a demonstrated commitment to teaching and learning. These programmes will provide students with a broad and deep understanding of their field of study, as well as opportunities for hands-on learning through practical application of concepts. Programme will be designed in consultation with relevant stakeholders from industry, professions and the community ensuring that the knowledge, skills, and competencies can respond to the rapidly changing world.

4.1.2   Student-centred Experience and Values

We are committed to providing a value-adding student experience through a high-quality teaching and learning underpinned by active learning strategies in an inclusive learning

environment. The student experience will be further enhanced through the provision of a range of academic and non-academic support services. Programme design should foster a culture of lifelong learning that promotes academic achievement, as well as personal and professional growth, and satisfaction.

4.1.3   Stakeholder Engagement

We value the contributions that key stakeholders – including faculty, students, alumni, industry professionals, employers, and members of the wider community – can make to our programmes. Stakeholder engagement is an opportunity to gather valuable insights and feedback that can help shape the design of a programme or award. Stakeholder engagement is a key mechanism for improving programme quality and relevance, thus enhancing student outcomes. Additionally, it is a valuable mechanism for fostering community engagement, and for enhancing accountability, transparency, and trust.

4.1.4   Sustainability, Agility and Responsiveness

We will foster collaboration and ongoing communication with industry partners to help ensure our programmes are aligned with current and future industry needs. Our academic quality assurance and enhancement framework provides the mechanism to ensure that changes to programmes can be incorporated quickly, when necessary. We will formally review our programmes periodically to assess their relevance, effectiveness, alignment with societal needs, and the changing needs and expectations of students. We recognise the key role the University has in helping students recognise the environmental, social, and economic challenges of the future, and accordingly, we are committed to incorporating principles of sustainability into our programmes.

4.2 Legal Framework

This section describes the legislative framework that governs the quality assurance of awards and programmes at ATU.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland and is the custodian of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Its functions are set out in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012).

ATU derives, from law, the authority to make awards. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance Education and Training Amendment Act (2019) applies in this regard. ATU endorses the Joint-sectoral protocol between Designated Awarding Bodies and Quality and Qualifications Ireland for the inclusion of qualifications within the National Framework of Qualifications – July 2022 to fulfil its requirements under the Act to formally include awards made by ATU within the NFQ.

4.3 Qualification Frameworks

This section describes the core qualification frameworks that are fundamental to the structure of programmes at ATU.

4.3.1 European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a common European reference framework. The core of the EQF is its eight levels defined in terms of learning outcomes which express what individuals know, understand, and can do at the end of a learning process. The EQF enables transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications and makes it possible to compare qualifications from different countries and institutions. Countries thus develop national qualification frameworks in support of the implementation of the EQF.

4.3.2 National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

All awards made by ATU are included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The Irish NFQ was established in 2003 as a framework for the development, recognition, and award of qualifications in the State. The system is based on levels of knowledge, skill or competence and aims to promote greater transparency and trust in qualifications. Because the NFQ has been formally aligned with the EQF, all awards made by ATU are internationally transferable.

The NFQ has 10 levels designed to promote and allow progression of learners through the ladder of levels in the framework. Various award types exist at each level, as illustrated in Figure 2.
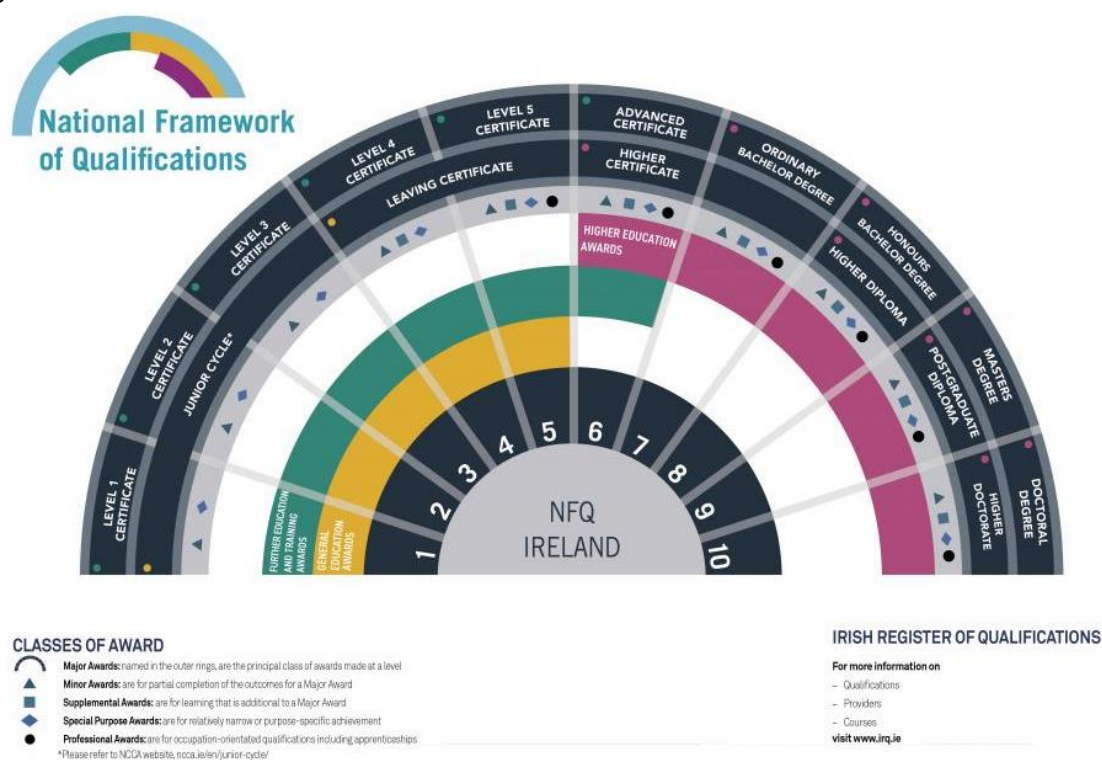

Figure 2. National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), QQI 2021.

ATU makes awards at Levels 6 through 10 on the NFQ. These awards are made in respect of taught programmes at Level 6 to Level 9 and in respect of research programmes at Levels 9 and 10. In making awards, ATU ensures that learners have acquired the standard of knowledge, skill and competence associated with the NFQ level of an award. Awards developed by ATU are thus consistent with award standards established by QQI, and subsequently adopted by ATU.

4.4 Definitions

4.4.1   Programme

ATU provides programmes of study, the successful completion of which leads to a university award. Programmes are comprised of one or more modules which are typically organised into pathways for completion over the duration of the programme.

The programme is defined by the constituent module(s), and the defined pathways, or combination and sequence of modules, to achieve the programme learning outcomes.

4.4.2   Award

An award is an academic qualification conferred in recognition of the successful completion of a programme. All awards conferred by ATU are recognised on the NFQ.

4.4.3   Module

A module is a discrete unit of study. At ATU, all modules account for a minimum of 5 ECTS credits, or whole multiples thereof.

A module is typically designed to be combined with other modules into one or more larger programme(s) and can be shared by different programmes.

4.4.4   Pathway

A pathway is a defined combination and sequence of modules that meet the requirements of the programme learning outcomes. In defining a pathway, the specific requirements of a module for that programme, must be set out in the Approved Programme Schedule. Modules may be mandatory or elective and sequencing of modules may be prescribed in terms of pre-requisite and / or co-requisite modules.

4.4.5   Approved Programme Schedule

The Approved Programme Schedule (APS) defines the set of prescribed module(s) (together with associated credits, contact hours, pathways, types of assessment and any special regulations) that make up a full programme of study. When students register for a programme, the APS defines the module(s) that a student must successfully complete to fulfil the programmes learning outcomes'. The award conferred by the University is determined by reference to the APS on which the student is registered.

4.4.6   Stage

A stage entails a prescribed number of ECTS credits to be completed by a student. Programmes are organised into one or more stages delineated by academic year or calendar year.

4.4.7   Ab-Initio

An ab-initio programme is a Bachelor degree (Level 7) and Honours Bachelor degree (Level 8) that embeds the ladder of progression, typically "from the beginning" (ab-initio).

4.4.8   Add-on

An add-on programme is designed to provide students with an opportunity to continue on the ladder to a programme at a higher level on the NFQ, having completed a programme Level 6 or Level 7 of the NFQ, which is not embedded in a programme leading to higher award.

4.5 Awards

4.5.1   Award types

There are four types of awards: Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose Awards. These are defined as follows:

Major Awards are the main type of awards made at each level of the NFQ and constitute a significant volume of learning. These awards are identified on the outer rings of the NFQ fan, shown in Figure 2 (page 8).

A Minor award provides recognition for achievement of a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination required for a major award. The module or combination of modules is a subset of a linked major award.

Special Purpose Awards have a distinct identity which reflects their clearly defined but relatively narrow purpose. They constitute a smaller volume of learning than a major award. The module or combination of modules is not included within a major award.

Supplemental awards are for learning that is additional to a previous major or special purpose award. In general, these are at the same level as the awards to which they are additional.

Figure 3 distinguishes between these types of awards.
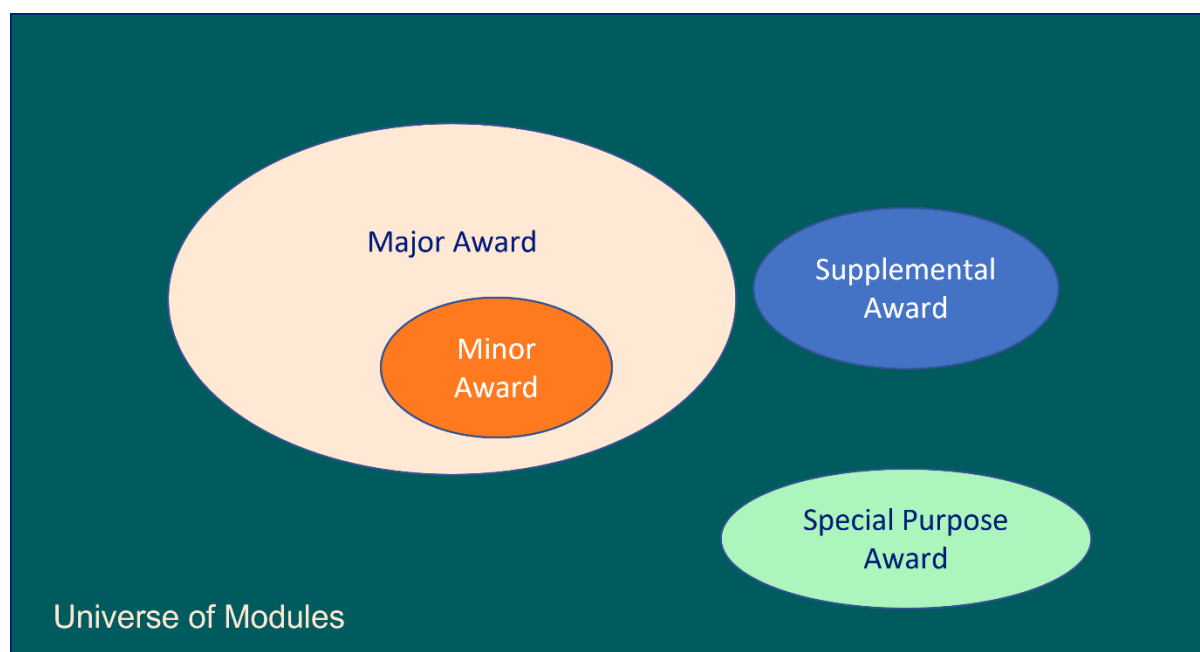
Figure 3. Distinguishing between Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose Awards.

4.5.2 Embedded Award

An embedded award is a programme pathway designed for, and incorporated within, a major award. It is a major award in its own right and may be offered directly to students or as an exit award only.

The design of embedded awards should be considered during the design of the highest major award. Table 1 indicates the awards that should be embedded:

Major Award	Embedded Award(s)
Bachelor (Ordinary)	Higher Certificate
Bachelor (Honours)	Bachelor (Ordinary) and/or Higher Certificate
Masters (Taught) Degree	Postgraduate Diploma and/or Postgraduate Certificate

Table 1. Embedded awards

4.5.3 Exit Award

A student who does not complete the requirements of the programme for which they are, or were registered, but who has gained the credits and achieved the learning outcomes specified for an embedded award can apply to exit with the embedded award or a minor award.

4.5.4 Award-Credit Framework

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) emanated from the Bologna process in 2005 and is a credit system designed to facilitate the movement of students between different countries.

ECTS, or credits, are based on the learning achievements and workload of a learning opportunity. Therefore, a student can transfer their credits from one university to another.

Credits can then be accumulated to contribute to an award. ECTS also makes it possible to merge different types of learning, such as university and work-based learning, within the same programme of study or in a lifelong learning perspective. ECTS credits represent the workload and defined learning outcomes of a given programme. The workload is determined based on an average of 20-25 hours of effort per credit for a typical student. Typically, 60 ECTS represents the workload of a full-time student for one academic year, and these credits are divided among components of learning.

Taught programmes at ATU are designed and structured into components known as modules. These modules are allocated credits, consistent with the ECTS and are accompanied by a module descriptor indicating learning outcomes and associated workload, indicative content, and assessment criteria. The Approved Programme Schedule (APS) indicates the suite of modules and thus the allocation of credits for a given programme of learning.

Modules at ATU must be designed in multiples of 5 ECTS and must indicate the level on the NFQ at which the learning outcomes are associated.

Programmes must meet credit requirements for the particular award type and class at each level of the NFQ. This is given in Table 2 below.

Award type	Award class	NFQ Level	ECTS
Major Award	Higher Certificate	6	120
	Bachelor (Ordinary)	7	180
	Bachelor (Honours)	8	180/240
	Higher Diploma	8	60
	Postgraduate Diploma	9	60
	Masters (Taught) Degree	9	75, 90, 120
Minor and Special Purpose awards*	Certificate	6	5-60
	Certificate	7-8	<60
	Diploma	7-8	≥ 60
	Postgraduate Certificate	9	20-55

Table 2. Credits requirements in respect of award type, class, and level. * The term micro-credentials is an umbrella marketing term used to refer to minor, special purpose and supplemental awards, up to a maximum 30 ECTS.

Major awards must have at least 60 credits at the level associated with the award class. Award classification is normally based on the Grade Point Average (GPA) of the modules in the final stage of a programme and thus all modules at the final stage must be at the level of, or above the award class.

If the award classification is not based on the final stage only this must be clearly articulated in the APS. The modules contributing to the calculation of a GPA for the purposes of classification must all be at the level of the award, unless otherwise provided for.

The Bachelor (Honours) award class may be designed with a minimum of 180 ECTS but the threshold of 240 ECTS is more typical in ATU. In both cases at least 60 ECTS must be at Level 8 to meet the meet the requirements of the award class.

Embedded awards must also meet the requirements of 60 ECTS at, or above the level of the award class on the NFQ.

Special purpose awards must have all credits at the level indicated for the award.

4.5.5   Award Titles

The ATU list of approved award titles is listed in Table 3 for taught programmes in respect of Major awards. The approved abbreviation for each title is also indicated.

NFQ Level	Approved Award Title	Abbreviated Title
Level 6	Higher Certificate in Arts	HC in Arts
	Higher Certificate in Business	HC in Business
	Higher Certificate in Engineering	HC in Engineering
	Higher Certificate in Science	HC in Science
Level 7	Bachelor of Arts	BA
	Bachelor of Business	BBus
	Bachelor of Education	Bed
	Bachelor of Engineering	BEng
	Bachelor of Science	BSc
	Bachelor of Music	BMus
Level 8	Bachelor of Architecture (Honours)	BArch (Hons)
	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	BA (Hons)
	Bachelor of Business (Honours)	BBus (Hons)
	Bachelor of Commerce (Honours)	BComm (Hons)
	Bachelor of Design (Honours)	BDes (Hons)
	Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours)	BFA (Hons)
	Bachelor of Education (Honours)	BEd (Hons)
	Bachelor of Engineering (Honours)	BEng (Hons)
	Bachelor of Music (Honours)	BMus (Hons)
	Bachelor of Science (Honours)	BSc (Hons)
	Bachelor of Social Science (Honours)	BSocSc (Hons)
	Higher Diploma in Arts	HDip in Arts
	Higher Diploma in Business	HDip in Business
	Higher Diploma in Engineering	HDip in Engineering
	Higher Diploma in Science	HDip in Science
	Higher Diploma in Education	HDip in Education

NFQ Level	Approved Award Title	Abbreviated Title
	Honours Bachelor of Laws, Legum Baccalaureus	LLB
	Professional Diploma in Education	PDip
Level 9	Master of Architecture	MArch
	Master of Agricultural Science	MAgrSc
	Master of Arts	MA
	Master of Business	MBus
	Master of Design	MDes
	Master of Education	MEd
	Master of Engineering	MEng
	Master of Engineering Science	MEngSc
	Master of Fine Arts	MFA
	Master of Health Science	MHSc
	Master of Laws, Legum Magister	LL.M
	Master of Pharmacy	MPharm
	Master of Science	MSc
	Master of Social Science	MSocSc
	Postgraduate Diploma in Arts	PGDip in Arts
	Postgraduate Diploma in Business	PGDip in Business
	Postgraduate Diploma in Education	PGDip in Education
	Postgraduate Diploma in Engineering	PGDip in Engineering
	Postgraduate Diploma in Science	PGDip in Science
	Professional Master of Education	PME
	Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery	BVMS

Table 3. Approved award titles and abbreviations by NFQ Level (Major Awards).

A new award title may be proposed for a major award. The proposal of a new award title must be formally approved by the Academic Council. *AQAE045 Procedure for the Proposal of a New Award Title* details the process to be followed.

4.5.6   Award Standards

We determine the award standard for each of our awards. The award standard is the knowledge, skill, and competence to be acquired by a student before an award is made. The standard required for a specific programme is articulated in the programme learning outcomes for that programme and an award is only conferred if the programme learning outcomes have been achieved.

We ensure that all awards we make are aligned to the NFQ and conform to the levels set out in the NFQ Grid Level Descriptors (STAN001). These are the default award standards i.e. they apply unless a more specific award standard has been approved by ATU.

Table 4 provides approved discipline-specific award standards. The standards are available on the *AQAE SharePoint*.

Document No	Award Standard
STAN001	Generic Award Standards
STAN002	Architecture
STAN003	Architectural Technology
STAN004	Art and Design
STAN005	Business
STAN006	Computing
STAN007	Early Childhood Education & Care
STAN008	Engineering
STAN009	Law
STAN010	Nursing and Midwifery
STAN011	Science
STAN012	Social Care Work
STAN013	Pharmacy
STAN014	Professional Masters Education
STAN015	Counselling and Psychotherapy
STAN016	Veterinary Medicine and Surgery

Table 4. Approved award standards

Where a programme requires regulatory body approval the requirements of the regulatory body are adopted in the design of the programme. For example, the *Teaching Council Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education* should be adopted for programmes accredited by the *Teaching Council*.

In designing a programme, the programme learning outcomes must align with an appropriate award standard. Where an appropriate discipline specific award standard is not available, the NFQ Grid Level Descriptor must be used. An award standard may also be proposed for a discipline.

Where a new award standard is proposed it must be formally approved by the Academic Council. *AQAE044 Procedure for the Proposal of a New Award Standard* details the process to be followed.

The award title must also be consistent with the chosen award standard. The rationale for the choice of award standard and award title must be justifiable by the Programme Development Team (PDT).

In developing the rationale, the following points must be considered:

- the award title must be consistent with the level of the award and the award standard (see Appendix 1 for guidance),
- the award title and award standard have regard for the primary discipline or disciplines (for multidisciplinary programmes),
- the award standard must be consistent with the programme learning outcomes,

- the programme seeks PSRB accreditation and the programmes learning outcomes align with the requirements of the PSRB,
- the award title must be consistent with the expectations of employers, potential students, PSRBs, where appropriate, and
- the award title is consistent with similar and/or competitor programmes in other HEIs.

4.5.7   Programme title nomenclature

The title of a programme is formed from the award title only or the award title and discipline(s) or subject (s) of study, following the format:

Award Title in Discipline(s).

For example, a mechanical engineering programme which leads to a degree at Level 8 may have the title BEng (Honours) in Mechanical Engineering.

Where there is a disciplinary specialism (stream) to the programme this may be indicated by including the named specialism in brackets e.g., MSc in Computing in Cybersecurity (Information Security Management).

Multidisciplinary programmes are encouraged by the University. However, titles should not combine more than three disciplines and the word "and" and "with" should be used to indicate the relative credit weightings of the disciplines.

Where disciplines have approximately equal weight they are joined by "and" as follows:

Award Title in Discipline X and Discipline Y

or,

Award Title in Discipline X, Discipline Y

and Discipline Z.

For example, a postgraduate programme in the disciplines of equality, diversity and inclusion which leads to an award at Level 9 may have the title Postgraduate Diploma in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. The use of the ampersand symbol (&) in the title is not permitted.

Where the programme has a primary discipline area, that is the majority of credits are in that discipline, and a secondary discipline, the named disciplines are joined by "with" in the programme title as follows:

Award Title in Discipline X with Discipline Y

This applies where the secondary discipline represents approximately one quarter to one third of the credits of the programme.

For example, a marketing programme which leads to a degree at Level 7, 180 ECTS total with modules in French, allocated 45-60 ECTS, may have the title BBus in Marketing with French.

Common entry programmes, designed to allow students to choose their preferred pathway after completing a specified number of stages (typically a common first stage), must include the term "Common Entry" in brackets at the end of the programme title. For example, a Level 8 programme in the discipline of Design which provides a common entry may have the title BA (Hons) in Design (Common Entry).

The name of each embedded award must be considered in its own right and reflect the discipline(s) and learning outcomes of the programme itself. It does not have to be the same as the programme from which it is derived.

The programme title may include the term "add-on" in brackets at the end of the programme title, but it must not be included in the award title. For example, a one-year add-on programme at Level 8 may have the title BA (Hons) Creative Design (add-on).

The term "Ab-initio" should not be part of the programme title.

4.6 Programme Structure

4.6.1   Stage-based programme structure

ATU operates a stage-based programme structure which is underpinned by the following:

- Programmes are organised into one or more stages.
- Normally, students will complete all the credits in one stage before progressing to the next stage.
- The Stage is divided into semesters. A semester has a total of 15 weeks to include module delivery, revision, and assessment.
- Modules may be semesterised or year long.
- Student workload must be balanced across the stage.
- The contact hours should decrease as students' progress through the stages of a programme.
- The proportion of time allocated to independent learning should be higher for programmes at higher levels of the NFQ.
- Pre-requisites must not be defined within a stage.

This programme structure is designed to be flexible and accommodate sharing of modules across departments, faculties, and campuses. Faculties may develop additional models for

programme design across their programmes which is fair, open, transparent, and consistent. Such models must comply with the requirements of this policy.

The number of stages and allocation of credits to a stage is defined in the APS. The programme must be delivered and assessed according to the APS and changes to the APS are subject to quality assurance processes before implementation in accordance with *AQAE017 Programme and Module Revision Policy*.

In general,

- For undergraduate taught programmes leading to a major award, a stage is defined as an academic year and the associated workload is 60 ECTS.
- For postgraduate taught programmes leading to a major award, a stage may be defined as an academic year (60 ECTS) or a calendar year. The maximum workload associated with a calendar year is 90 ECTS.
- Programmes leading to special purpose, supplemental and minor awards may have one or more stages. The stage may be defined as a semester, academic year or calendar year depending on the number of credits.

4.7 Programme design

This section outlines the key elements of programme design relating to the Teaching and Learning Centre's seven step approach to programme design, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. ATU Seven Steps for Programme Design.

Resources and support on implementing the 7 Step approach can be found on the ATU *Teaching and Learning Centre SharePoint*.

4.7.1   Outcomes-based approach to programme design

Programme design must be based on an outcomes-based approach.

Programme learning outcomes (PLOs) define what a student is expected to know, to understand or to be able to do upon successful completion of a programme.

A programme leading to major award should have 8 to 12 PLOs defined.

A programme leading to a minor, special purpose or supplemental award should have fewer PLOs defined and does not require a PLO in each of the award standard strands.

Each module must be defined in terms of module learning outcomes (MLOs). MLOs articulate what the learner can demonstrate upon successful completion of a module.

MLOs must align with the PLOs to achieve the overall aim of the programme.

4.7.2   Pathways

In defining a pathway, the specific requirements of a module for that programme, must be set out in the APS.

Modules may be defined in the APS as mandatory or elective.

A mandatory module has learning outcomes that must be demonstrated to achieve the PLOs. Such modules must be passed by the student to complete the requirements of the programme.

An elective module has learning outcomes that contribute to the programme learning outcomes. Where elective modules are offered, the student has the choice of which elective module(s) to select. This may be subject to resource considerations.

The APS may indicate necessary dependencies between modules by specifying pre-requisites and co-requisites however PDTs should be cognisant of not creating unnecessary barriers to entry or progression.

Students must have passed or obtained exemption through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the modules listed as pre-requisite before the module can be attempted.

Co-requisite modules must be taken in parallel.

4.7.3   Programme Specification

A *Programme Specification* must be created for each programme, including each programme leading to an embedded award.

The *Programme Specification* document specifies the particulars of a programme under the following headings:

1. Introduction
2. Overview of University
3. Introduction to Faculty, School, and Department
4. Rationale for the Programme
5. Demand for this Programme
6. Programme Design and Management
7. Resources Available for Programme Delivery
8. Access, Transfer and Progression
9. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
10. Programme Learning Outcomes and Mapping
11. Schedules
12. Module Descriptors
13. Appendices

Academic Module Manager (AMM), the document management system for programmes and modules must be used to record the Programme Specification. The following procedures detail and give guidance on how programme proposals, programme specifications and module descriptors are developed in AMM:

- *AQAE028 Procedure for Writing New Programme Proposals*
- *AQAE029 Procedure for Writing New Programme Specifications*
- *AQAE030 Procedure for Writing Module Descriptors.*

4.7.4   Entry to a Programme

All criteria that must be met by prospective students to be admitted to the programme must be clearly detailed in the programme specification document and must be consistent with the *AQAE037 Access, Transfer and Progression Policy*.

4.7.5   Programme Delivery

There are two aspects to defining the delivery mode of a programme. The programme specification must indicate whether:

1. The programme is designed for full-time or part-time participation.
2. The delivery of module content is in-person, online or blended.

Programme participation:

In general, if a programme meets the following criteria, it is classified as full-time:

- has a workload of 60 ECTS per academic year,
- may be timetabled Monday-Friday,

- requires on-campus participation,
- has a duration of at least one full academic year, and
- leads to an award.

Programmes that do not meet these criteria are classified as part-time.

Module delivery:

Online modules do not require in-person attendance as delivery is fully online. Blended modules have a mix of online and in-person delivery.

4.7.6   Collaborative and joint awards

The design of programmes with collaborative partners, including the design of joint awards must be informed by both this policy and *AQAE038 Collaborative Provision of Programmes Policy.*

A collaborative programme must, as far as is practicable, align with this policy (AQAE004). The University acknowledges the potential for unique aspects of collaborative programmes, such as varying module credit sizes, by applying a flexible approach to validation.

Dual Degrees have specific programme design requirements.

- A dual degree involves two complimentary but distinct programmes of study at two separate institutions, typically undertaken sequentially and leading to separate awards at the same level of the NFQ.
- Partner institutions must have the authority to make both their own awards at the level of the award and to make joint awards at the level of the award.
- The student must successfully complete their studies in both institutions in order to be conferred with both awards (refer to *AQAE038 Collaborative Provision of Programmes Policy*).
- The duration of the programme must be longer than a corresponding single award at that level but is usually shorter than completing two programmes separately.
- There must be two distinct sets of programme learning outcomes. Some PLOs may be common. The dual degree should be designed such that PLOs for each award are appropriate to the standard of the award level.
- Each institution must deliver a substantial proportion of the programme, typically an equal part, and must deliver a significant proportion at the level of the award.

4.8 Curriculum Requirements

The first consideration in the design of the curriculum is the ethos and design of the curriculum to produce graduates that are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competences of the discipline (see Section 4.5.4 Award standards).

4.8.1   Professional, statutory, and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements

Where a programme requires or aims to achieve PSRB accreditation, the requirements of the PSRB should be used to inform the design of the programme.

4.8.2   Transition to Higher Education

Full time undergraduate programmes leading to major awards should be designed to support students in the transition to higher education through comprehensive induction into both their programme of study and the university environment.

The first stage of such programmes should provide students with the knowledge and skills required to engage in higher education.

Programmes aimed at those returning to education, part-time students and mature learners should also consider how students can be appropriately supported as they embark upon higher education.

4.8.3   Curriculum requirements for programmes leading to Major Awards

The following sections outline requirements for the design of programmes leading to Major Awards.

5.8.2.1 Capstone/Research Project

A capstone or research project should be included in all taught programmes leading to the degree of Bachelor (Honours) and Masters. A capstone/research project is defined as a project that requires a significant level of independent research by the student and provides them with an opportunity to compound and integrate the knowledge, skills and competencies developed across a suite of modules undertaken in the programme. It should result in the production of a significant piece of individual work by the student. This is typically produced as a dissertation, thesis or portfolio but may take other forms depending on the discipline.

The capstone/research project is typically allocated one or more modules at the final stage but may form part of a module. The credits allocated to a capstone/research project module must reflect the workload associated with the research and the work produced.

5.8.2.2 Work placement or work-based project

All programmes leading to undergraduate major awards at Level 8 should incorporate a work placement or work-based project, which may be the capstone project.

5.8.2.3 Internationalisation of the curriculum

The programme design should provide students with an international dimension to their studies. Specific module learning outcomes which require students to develop global

perspectives in the context of their discipline, and where relevant, support language and cultural education, should be considered.

PDTs should also consider engaging in other opportunities to enhance internationalisation of the programme such as educational partnerships, students exchanges and faculty exchanges, both physical and virtual.

A semester or stage can be replaced with study abroad e.g., Erasmus, if agreed by the Programme Board, providing a learning agreement is in place. In this instance student results will be recorded against mapped modules or a 30 or 60 ECTS 'Study Abroad' module as appropriate.

4.8.4   ATU Curriculum Framework

The ATU Curriculum Framework promotes consideration of six themes in curriculum design and teaching activities. Addressing themes of Sustainability, Universal Design for Learning, Digital Transformation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Academic Integrity and Employability must be considered in the design of all taught programmes leading to major awards.

The ATU Teaching and Learning Centre provides resources and supports to assist PDTs in addressing these themes.

The six themes are expanded on below:

Sustainability

The PDT should aim to create learning opportunities for students to build knowledge of sustainability and capacity for active citizenship. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) should be embedded in programmes to ensure students acquire knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions to promote, advance and take action for sustainable development. This should be aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and GreenComp: the European Sustainability Competence Framework. Consideration should be given in the curriculum to key competencies for sustainability including design thinking, critical thinking and problem solving skills to better understand the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental factors.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

ATU has subscribed to ALTITUDE, the National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education. The PDT should consider how programmes can be designed to enable as many students as possible to undertake their programme of study by building programmes that nurture learner variability, choice, and flexibility, where reasonably possible.

Digital Transformation

The PDT should aim to design programmes that facilitate students digital competence, enabling students to creatively, responsibly and ethically utilise digital technologies for communication, collaboration, and problem solving.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The PDT should aim to provide an inclusive curriculum aligned to the EDIT Charter and ensure that the curriculum is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all students, giving consideration to content and teaching materials, teaching and assessment methods.

Academic Integrity

The University is committed to enhancing and promoting a culture of academic integrity among all staff and students through curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Assessment integrity is essential to the promotion and maintenance of academic integrity. The University recognises the need to provide ongoing instruction on academic integrity practice across all programmes, and to embed academic integrity in curriculum and assessment design and practice.

Employability

The PDT should define the attributes required by graduates and embed employability, transferrable skills and/or applied learning opportunities into the curriculum. The curriculum and assessment should be informed by enterprise and stakeholders, where possible.

4.9 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy

The programme specification document should describe the TLA Strategy for the proposed programme. The programme design team should endeavour to employ a TLA strategy that provides a supportive and engaging learning environment that enables students to achieve their full potential, while promoting academic excellence and, where possible, innovation in teaching. The TLA strategy should demonstrate the appropriateness of the pedagogical approaches and mode of delivery used to deliver the programme for the achievement of the programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes.

Additionally, the programme TLA strategy should outline the methods and criteria for assessing student learning, including the use of formative and summative assessments, and feedback mechanisms. The PDT should review the scheduling and workload associated with assessment at each stage of a programme to ensure a fair and balanced approach to assessment.

TLA strategy should be informed by the principles of UDL to facilitate the needs of diverse student cohorts.

4.10 Modules

Module descriptors are used to specify the particulars of a module and must comply with the Module Descriptor template (see *AQAE030 Procedure for Writing Module Descriptors)*.

4.10.1 Module name

The name of a module should be carefully considered. The name should be succinct while indicating to stakeholders the subject or content of a module.

Numbering should only be used where there are successive modules in each stage of a programme.

Care should be taken to avoid duplication of module titles or module titles with marginal difference to another within a faculty. For example, Math 1 versus Mathematics 1.

4.10.2 Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs)

To ensure consistency between modules, the following should be adhered to when writing modules:

- A 5-credit module should have between 3 and 5 learning outcomes, and
- A 10-credit module should have between 5 and 8 learning outcomes.

Modules allocated 15 or more ECTS should have a proportional number of learning outcomes to those above, to a maximum of 10 learning outcomes.

4.10.3 Workload

The workload for a module is indicated by the credits (ECTS) allocated to the module. The workload is an estimation of the time invested by a typical student to successfully achieve the MLOs. The workload for a module is reflective of the credits allocated to the module. It must account for all teaching, learning, and assessment activities, including preparation for assessments.

The workload associated with 5 credits (ECTS) is typically 100 -125 hours.

Module descriptors must indicate the contact time and the time to be allocated to independent learning. Contact time refers to the time allocated to teaching and assessment activities facilitated by academic staff. Independent learning is completed by the student independent of academic staff and includes preparation and study for assessments.

The proportion of time allocated to independent learning should increase as students' progress through each stage of a programme.

4.10.4 Assessment

Students must demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes through assessment. Assessment must be designed in accordance with the principles set out in the *AQAE056 Assessment and Feedback Policy*. The examination regulations and standards for student assessment are articulated in *AQAE005 Marks and Standards Policy* and must be adhered to in the design of a programme.

The Assessment Strategy for a module must align with the overall Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy for the programme. Careful consideration should be given to a programme-level approach to assessment, including the timing of coursework assessments which must be indicated in order to prepare an assessment plan for a programme.

The following must be adhered to when designing assessment:

- A single module code and title should be used when the same learning outcomes and the same final examination component is shared across programmes. Coursework Assessment (CA) may be written in a way that allows for assessments to be tailored or adapted to multiple programmes.
- The maximum duration of a final examination component for a 5 ECTS module is 2 hours.
- The maximum duration of a final examination component for a module of more than 5 ECTS is three hours.
- Modules should be designed using learning outcomes and assessment methodologies that minimise or negate the need for special regulations such as 'Must Pass' and 'Minimum Threshold' components. If special regulations are required they must be justified (for example, requirements of PSRBs).
- Special Regulations must be stipulated on the APS where they apply,
- Each assessment component should be designed to assess at least two learning outcomes to minimise the overall number of assessments, and
- Programmes should design shared assessment to minimise the overall number of assessments.

4.11 Responsibilities

4.11.1 Academic Council

Academic Council has a statutory responsibility to control the academic affairs of our university, including the curriculum and instruction and education provided by ATU.

Accordingly, the Academic Council has the following specific roles:

- approval of this policy and all other relevant policies,
- approval of proposals for new award titles, new award standards, and exceptions from policy,

- approval of all new programmes, and
- approval of changes to programmes and modules.

4.11.2 Office of the Vice President (VP) for Academic Affairs & Registrar

The Office of the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar is responsible for the quality assurance of all academic programmes.

In support of this policy the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar, through the Quality Office, must

- maintain *Academic Module Manager (AMM)*, the document management system for programmes and modules, and the Student Record System (SRS),
- oversee and support faculties in the implementation of the policy requirements, and
- undertake a review of this policy as required.

4.11.3 Programme Development Teams

The PDT are responsible for designing programmes of learning in adherence with this policy and must develop and validate all new taught programmes in adherence with all relevant policies.

For joint programmes, the PDT must work with partners to design a programme that meets the requirements of all partners.

4.11.4 ATU Teaching and Learning Centre

The Teaching and Learning Centre

- promote best practices in teaching, learning and assessment,
- offer support and guidance to all staff on teaching, learning and assessment, and
- provide resources and support for students, for example academic integrity training.

5. Documents Related to this Policy

5.1 Policies

AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy

AQAE005 Marks and Standards Policy

AQAE017 Programme and Module Revision Policy

AQAE022 Academic Integrity Policy

AQAE037 Access, Transfer and Progression Policy

AQAE038 Collaborative Provision of Programmes Policy

AQAE056 Assessment and Feedback Policy

5.2 Procedures

AQAE028 Procedure for Writing New Programme Proposals

AQAE029 Procedure for Writing New Programme Specifications

AQAE030 Procedure for Writing Module Descriptors

AQAE044 Procedure for Proposal of a New Award Standard

AQAE045 Procedure for the Proposal of a New Award Title

6. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Policy Approved by Academic Council	14/06/2023
001	Revision to add Master of Pharmacy as Award title, update list of award standards, table 3& A1 and update cross references to AQAE documents and section 5. Approved Academic Council	25/10/2024
002	Revision to clarify the use of the term of micro-credentials as an umbrella term and to allow for programmes constituted from a single module, minimum 5 ECTS. Inclusion of Figure 4 – Seven Steps to Programme design in Section 4.7. Inclusion of programme design requirements for Dual Degrees in Section 4.7.6 Revision of Section 4.8 to aid readability and provide clarification, incorporate Curriculum Framework, address study abroad such as Erasmus. Revision of Section 4.9.4 to reference from the Assessment and Feedback Policy.	11/04/2025

| | Inclusion of role of Teaching and Learning Centre (4.11.4)

Update to cross-references to AQAE documents throughout and list in Section 5.

Bachelor of Veterinary and Surgery – addition of Award title and award standard, and update list of award standards, table 3& A1.

Minor changes to language to improve clarity and readability throughout | |

Appendix 1 Award Standards and Titles

Table A1 below gives some guidance on the award titles that align with each award standard:

Award Standard	Award titles
Architecture	Bachelor of Architecture (Honours)
	Master of Architecture
Architectural Technology	Higher Certificate in Science
	Bachelor of Science
	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Science
	Master of Science
	Postgraduate Diploma in Science
Art and Design	Higher Certificate in Arts
	Bachelor of Arts
	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
	Bachelor of Design (Honours)
	Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours)
	Master of Arts
	Master of Design
	Master of Fine Art (Honours)
Business	Higher Certificate in Business
	Bachelor of Business
	Bachelor of Business (Honours)
	Bachelor of Commerce (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Business
	Master of Business
	Postgraduate Diploma in Business
Computing	Higher Certificate in Science
	Bachelor of Science
	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Science
	Master of Science
	Postgraduate Diploma in Science
Early Childhood Education & Care	Higher Certificate in Arts
	Bachelor of Arts
	Bachelor of Education
	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
	Bachelor of Education (Honours)
	Master of Arts
	Master of Education
Engineering	Higher Certificate in Engineering
	Bachelor of Engineering
	Bachelor of Engineering (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Engineering
	Master of Engineering

	Master of Engineering Science
	Postgraduate Diploma in Engineering
Law (LL.B and LL.M)	Honours Bachelor of Laws, Legum Baccalaureus
	Master of Laws, Legum Magister
Nursing and Midwifery	Higher Certificate in Science
	Bachelor of Science
	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Science
	Master of Science
	Master of Health Science
	Postgraduate Diploma in Science
Pharmacy	Master of Pharmacy
Science	Higher Certificate in Science
	Bachelor of Science
	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
	Higher Diploma in Science
	Master of Agricultural Science
	Master of Science
	Master of Social Science
	Postgraduate Diploma in Science
Social Care Work	Higher Certificate in Arts
	Bachelor of Arts
	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
	Master of Arts
Veterinary Medicine and Surgery	Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery

Table A1. Award standards and aligned award titles.