



GUIDELINES

for the approval of Masters courses for student payments

DSS 1586.05.15



OVERVIEW

Prior to 1 January 2008, students could not qualify for Youth Allowance or Austudy for courses above a Graduate Diploma level qualification. However, to increase higher level skills amongst the population to meet the changing demands of the economy, qualifying study for these student payments was extended to Masters by coursework programmes from 1 January 2008.

The qualification criteria for student payments under the *Social Security Act 1991* include the requirement that a student must be enrolled in an approved course of study at an approved institution.

To qualify as an approved course for student payments purposes, a Masters course must be approved by the Minister for Social Services and listed in the *Student Assistance (Education Institutions and Courses) Determination 2009* (the Determination) under subsections 3(1) and 5D(1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*.

Each year, the Department of Social Services (DSS) invites higher education providers to submit applications for Masters by coursework programmes to be considered for approval for student payment purposes. DSS coordinates the approval process, assesses the applications and provides a consolidated list of recommended Masters courses to the Minister for consideration and approval.

These Guidelines provide advice to higher education providers on the process for seeking approval for Masters by coursework programmes for student payment purposes.

The list of currently approved courses is available at:
www.comlaw.gov.au/series/F2009L04345.

Contact us

For more information regarding the Masters by coursework approval process, please email DSS at: mastersapps@dss.gov.au.

Criteria for the approval of Masters courses

Approval criteria

Masters courses may be approved for student payment purposes where the course is the minimum requirement, the fastest pathway or the only pathway for entry level to a profession.

For this purpose, a profession is defined as an occupation requiring specialised theoretical and practical knowledge gained through an academic tertiary qualification. This qualification is essential for employment in a profession where the following is required:

- accreditation by a recognised professional body; and/or
- admission to a profession; and/or
- registration with a state/territory governing body.

Minimum requirement for entry to a profession

A Masters course may be approved where the course is the minimum qualification required for practice in a profession, or where professional organisations have set a Masters qualification as the entry requirement for professional accreditation. The course must be accredited by the relevant accreditation/registration authority for that profession.

Fastest pathway

A Masters course may be approved where it is the fastest pathway offered by a higher education provider for a student to gain an entry level qualification for professional practice.

If a higher education provider offers a Masters degree and a Graduate Diploma of the same duration and for entry to the same profession, the Masters course may be approved as the fastest pathway to professional entry.

Where professional entry level qualifications are offered at both the Graduate Diploma and Masters level, and the Graduate Diploma course is shorter in duration, only the Graduate Diploma level course will be approved for student payments. Accredited Graduate Diplomas are approved for student payment purposes and do not need to be submitted to the Minister for approval.

A course considered desirable for professional development, but not required for an entry level position will not meet the 'fastest pathway' criterion.

Only pathway

A Masters course may be approved where it is the only pathway to professional entry offered by the higher education provider.

Courses that will not qualify

Masters courses cannot be approved for student payment purposes where a shorter pathway is available for entry level qualification to professional practice. For example, where an entry level qualification can be achieved both through a one-year Graduate Diploma or a two-year Masters, the Masters course would not be approved.

Research degrees and Doctorate courses are not considered “tertiary courses” for student payment purposes and cannot be approved.

Application process

An application for the approval of a Masters course must be submitted by completing the [application form](#) available at: www.dss.gov.au/masters.

An application form must be completed for each Masters course submitted for approval; however, there is no limit to the number of applications a higher education provider may submit.

The application must provide evidence that the nominated Masters course meets the criteria set out in the Guidelines. Where relevant, evidence of professional accreditation must be included.

The Vice-Chancellor or a person duly authorised by the higher education provider must verify that the information submitted in the course application form meets the criteria set out in these Guidelines.

Where a higher education provider has campuses in different states/territories, approval may be granted on application on a state/territory basis, in particular where requirements for professional entry vary across states/territories.

Electronic copies of applications should be emailed to mastersapps@dss.gov.au.

DSS will send an acknowledgement email to the higher education provider, confirming receipt of the application/s.

If the higher education provider is unable to email their application/s, the application/s should be posted or faxed to:

Mail: Masters Applications
Family and Student Payments Policy Branch
Department of Social Services
PO Box 7576
Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Fax: (02) 6293 3135

It is important that higher education providers submit new Masters courses or those requiring reassessment as part of the assessment round conducted prior to the academic year that the new or revised course will commence. This should be done even where the higher education provider is awaiting academic and/or professional accreditation for the course.

If an approved Masters course substantially changes or its accreditation expires, the course must be re-submitted to ensure it meets the criteria for approval for student payments.

Any name change of a previously approved Masters course must be submitted for inclusion in the Determination.

Assessment process

DSS will assess the applications and prepare recommendations of Masters courses for the Minister's consideration and approval.

If an application appears to be incomplete, DSS will seek further information from the higher education provider. The higher education provider will have a **maximum of five working days** to respond to a request from DSS for further information.

The Minister will determine which Masters courses are eligible for student payments and amend the Determination made under subsection 3(1) and 5D(1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*.

DSS will formally advise higher education providers of the outcome of their Masters course application/s.

Where a Masters course is not approved, the higher education provider may write to the Minister to seek reconsideration of the decision.

The amended Determination will be registered on the [Federal Register of Legislative Instruments](#) and subsequently will be available at: www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/F2009L04345.

DSS will inform the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) of the release of the amended Determination.

Approved courses

Previously approved courses

Ongoing Masters courses previously approved by the Minister do not require annual re-approval. Once a course is approved for student payments, it remains on the Determination until the higher education provider formally advises DSS that the course has been discontinued or that it no longer meets the eligibility criteria as the course content has substantially changed or its accreditation has expired.

Course name/code changes

Higher education providers must notify DSS of any name or code change for a previously approved Masters course by completing and submitting the [Masters by coursework change of course name/course code form](#) available at www.dss.gov.au/masters. This is particularly important as approval is granted for the course and provider name listed in the Determination. If the institution or course name does not match that listed in the Determination, students will not be eligible to receive student payments for that course.

Course name changes require amendments to the Determination approved by the Minister, therefore these changes are generally only made as part of an annual process.

Course codes are used by the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) when assessing a student's application for student payments. Incorrect course codes can delay approval of a student's application for student payments.

Course codes changes can be processed at any time throughout the year.

Removing obsolete courses from the Determination

If a Masters course is no longer offered and has no students enrolled, the higher education provider must notify DSS that the course should be removed from the approved list in the Determination by completing and submitting the [Request for Masters course removal form](#) available at www.dss.gov.au/masters. It is important that any courses being phased out remain on the approved list in the Determination until existing students have completed the course.

Courses will be removed from the Determination during the annual process.

Process flow - approval of Masters by coursework programmes for student payments

