



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Guidelines for the approval of Masters courses for student payments

DSS 1586.05.15



Since 1 January 2008 eligible students may qualify for student payments such as Youth Allowance and Austudy for approved Masters by coursework programs.

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 (No. 2)* (the Determination) under subsections 3(1) and 5D(1) of the *Student Assistance Act 1973*.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) coordinates the formal approval process, issuing invitations to higher education providers to submit courses for consideration, assessing the applications and providing 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 programs for student payment purposes.

The list of currently approved courses is available at:
www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00859

Contact us

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

Criteria for approval

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

For this purpose, a profession is defined as an occupation requiring specialised theoretical and practical knowledge gained through an academic tertiary qualification. The qualification must be 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.

Courses that do not meet at least one of the criteria cannot be approved for student payments.

Minimum educational requirement for entry to a profession

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

Where professional entry-level qualifications are offered at both the Graduate Diploma and Master level, and the Graduate Diploma course is shorter in duration, the Master level course cannot be approved as the fastest pathway. If, however, the Masters degree and the Graduate Diploma are of the same duration, the Masters course may be approved as the (equal) fastest pathway to professional entry. (Note: Accredited Graduate Diplomas are approved for student payment purposes and do not need to be submitted to the Minister for approval).

If enrolment in a Masters course is only open to holders of an undergraduate degree in the same field, the course will not meet the fastest pathway criterion as it does not provide a pathway to professional entry for students with an unrelated degree and it cannot be approved.

Only pathway

A Masters course may be approved where it is the **minimum educational requirement** and the **only pathway** to professional entry offered by the higher education provider. If the higher education provider offers any other courses, such as a Bachelor degree or Graduate Diploma, in the same field, the course will not meet the criterion and cannot be approved.

Application process

An application for the approval of a Masters course must be submitted at the invitation of DSS by completing the application form available online at: www.dss.gov.au/masters. Evidence that the qualification is required for entry-level employment must be provided in order for the course to be assessed.

Submissions MUST include all relevant supporting documents such as evidence of accreditation or current entry-level Australia job advertisements.

Applications that are not accompanied by relevant supporting documents cannot be assessed and will be returned to the higher education provider.

Late applications cannot be accepted and will be returned to the higher education provider.

Completed applications and supporting documents should be emailed to mastersapps@dss.gov.au.

Courses that do not qualify for approval

A Master level course considered desirable for professional development but that exceeds the minimum educational requirement for an entry-level position does not meet the criteria and cannot be approved.

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

Resubmitted courses

If a course has been submitted in a previous assessment round and was not approved, the course should **not** be resubmitted unless there has been a change of circumstances and the course now meets the criteria.

Assessment process

DSS reviews and assesses the applications against the criteria. If an application is incomplete (eg: the submission is unsigned or relevant supporting documents have not been submitted) DSS will contact the higher education provider and request the missing information. The higher education provider then has **five working days** to provide the requested information. If the missing information is not provided within this timeframe, the application cannot be assessed and will be returned to the higher education provider.

DSS submits a summary of the assessment and a list of recommended courses to the Minister for Social Services. The Minister will determine which Masters courses are eligible for student payments and amend the Determination to include these courses. The amended Determination is then registered on the Federal Register of Legislation and DSS will formally advise higher education providers of the outcome of their Masters course submission.

Where a Masters course has not been approved, the higher education provider may write to the Minister to seek reconsideration of the decision. The higher education provider will be required to demonstrate that the course meets the approval criteria.

Previously approved courses

Once a course has been 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. If an approved Masters course requires re-assessment, an application form should be completed and submitted as part of a formal assessment process.

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. It should be noted that approval is granted for the course and provider name specifically listed in the Determination. If the provider or course name does not exactly match that listed in the Determination, students will be unable to receive student payments for that course.

Course name changes require amendment to the Determination approved by the Minister therefore these changes can only be processed as part of a formal assessment process.

Course codes are used by the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) when assessing a student's application for student payments. Incorrect course codes may delay approval of a student's application for student payments. As course codes are not listed on the Determination, changes may be processed at any time throughout the year by emailing a completed form to mastersapps@dss.gov.au.

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.

Obsolete courses will be removed from the Determination as part of a formal assessment process.

Courses being phased out MUST remain on the approved list in the Determination until all existing students have completed the course.