Welcoming Universities

An initiative of Welcoming Australia

Welcoming Universities Accreditation Guide

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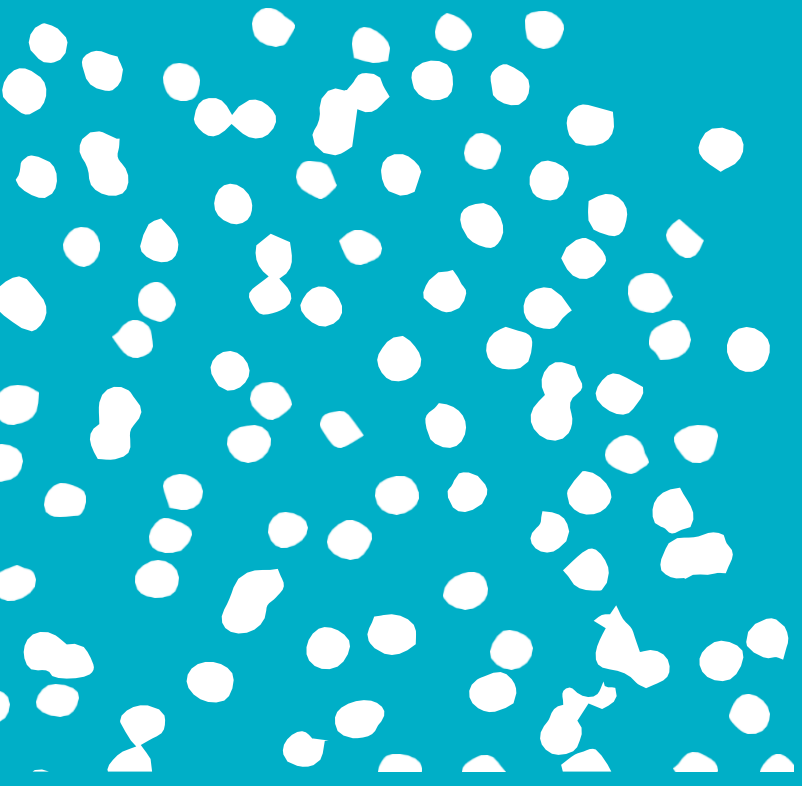

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About Accreditation

The Welcoming Universities Accreditation Program recognises universities that demonstrate a commitment to creating environments where all students, staff and visitors experience welcome, inclusion and belonging.

Accreditation is assessed against the Welcoming Universities Standard, which outlines indicators of leading practice across four domains:

- Leadership
- Social and Cultural Inclusion
- Teaching, Learning and Research
- Places and Spaces

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Welcoming Universities Standard and the accompanying Assessment Workbook. Together, these documents outline the accreditation requirements, the indicators against which applications are assessed, and the evidence universities are expected to provide in support of their application.

The accreditation process is designed to recognise existing institutional strengths while supporting continued improvement.

Drawing on Welcoming Australia's experience administering accreditation programs across councils and workplaces, the process is intended to be robust, evidence-based and practical. Universities are encouraged to draw upon existing plans, policies, reports, websites, evaluations and communications materials wherever possible rather than generating new reporting solely for accreditation purposes.

The assessment process seeks sufficient evidence to demonstrate implementation while recognising the substantial reporting obligations already faced across the higher education sector.

Accreditation Levels

The Welcoming Universities Accreditation Framework recognises that universities are at different stages of their journey towards becoming more welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe institutions.

Accreditation is assessed against the indicators contained within the Standard and the accompanying assessment workbook. The workbook forms the primary assessment tool and should be used alongside these guidelines and the evidence report template.

Universities may apply for one of three accreditation levels.

Established Welcoming University

Established Accreditation recognises universities that have demonstrated commitment across the core domains of the Welcoming Universities Standard.

Applicants are required to demonstrate that they meet all 20 **mandatory criteria and indicators** shaded in the assessment workbook. These indicators represent the foundational expectations of a Welcoming University and provide evidence that welcoming principles are embedded across the institution. The criteria include:

- Leadership (1.11 to 1.15)
- Social and Cultural Inclusion (2.11 to 2.15)
- Teaching, Learning and Research (3.11 to 3.13)
- Places and Spaces (4.11 to 4.17)

Applicants must provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate achievement of each mandatory criteria.

Evidence Expectations

Evidence should demonstrate:

- institutional commitment
- policies and governance arrangements
- implementation of key initiatives
- examples of welcoming and inclusive practice
- engagement with diverse communities

Advanced Welcoming University

Advanced Accreditation recognises universities that have moved beyond foundational commitments and can demonstrate broader implementation of the Standard across institutional systems, programs and practices.

Applicants must:

- satisfy all **mandatory criteria and indicators**; and
- demonstrate achievement against a minimum of **27 indicators**

At this level, assessment places greater emphasis on the depth, consistency and reach of implementation across the institution.

Evidence Expectations

Applications should demonstrate:

- institution-wide implementation
- evidence of sustained activity
- leadership and governance support
- engagement with diverse communities
- examples of outcomes and organisational learning
- integration into university systems and culture

Additional Assessment Activities

At Advanced Accreditation, in addition to reviewing the written submission and supporting evidence, the assessment process includes two facilitated focus groups designed to provide additional context and insight into how the Standard is being implemented in practice.

Cultural/Diversity Advisory Group Focus Group

A focus group with members of the university's cultural, diversity, equity or inclusion advisory group (or equivalent body) and/or students and staff who have direct experience of the initiatives, services, policies or practices under assessment. The purpose of the session is to gain a deeper understanding of how welcoming and inclusion commitments are experienced in practice, identify areas of strength, explore opportunities for improvement, and consider any emerging issues or concerns.

Accreditation Submission Working Group Focus Group

A focus group with staff involved in preparing the accreditation submission to discuss implementation in practice, reflect on initiatives that are working well, and identify challenges, lessons learned and areas for future development.

These discussions are intended to complement the documentary evidence provided and support a more holistic understanding of institutional practice.

Excelling Welcoming University

Excelling Accreditation is currently being refined in consultation with the Welcoming Universities advisory committee.

The intention is for this accreditation level to recognise universities that demonstrate sector-leading practice in creating welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe environments.

Applicants will be required to:

- satisfy all **mandatory criteria and indicators**;
- demonstrate achievement against a minimum of **41 indicators**; and
- provide additional evidence demonstrating impact and organisational learning.

Additional assessment processes currently under development include:

- evaluation and outcomes data
- evidence of continuous improvement
- peer review assessment
- sector leadership and contribution
- evidence of institutional impact over time

As with Advanced Accreditation, assessment will include both documentary evidence and structured stakeholder focus groups. These conversations provide an opportunity to validate evidence, understand implementation in context, and identify examples of impact, organisational learning and continuous improvement that may not be fully captured through written documentation alone.

Further guidance on Excelling Accreditation will be released as the framework is finalised.

Application Components

Applications comprise three complementary components.

1. Accreditation Report

The Accreditation Report provides narrative context explaining how the university meets the Standard.

The report should briefly:

- explain key initiatives
- describe governance and leadership arrangements
- provide contextual information where required
- identify strengths and future priorities
- direct assessors to supporting evidence

The report is not intended to duplicate information contained within documentary evidence.

2. Evidence Portfolio

Applicants should provide supporting evidence demonstrating how indicators are met.

Evidence may include:

- strategic plans
- annual reports

- policies
- procedures
- websites
- communications materials
- training resources
- committee documentation
- evaluation reports
- program information
- student and staff resources

Universities are encouraged to use existing institutional documentation wherever possible.

3. Assessment Workbook

The accompanying assessment workbook should be completed and submitted as part of the application.

The workbook functions as an evidence register and self-assessment tool.

For each indicator applicants should:

- provide a brief description of relevant practice;
- identify supporting evidence;
- include links or references to attached documentation; and
- provide any additional explanatory notes where required.

The workbook assists assessors to systematically review evidence against The Standard and identify where requirements have been met.

Assessment Philosophy

The Welcoming Universities Accreditation Framework adopts an evidence-led approach that focuses on demonstrated practice rather than compliance reporting.

Drawing on Welcoming Australia's experience delivering accreditation frameworks across councils and workplaces, the framework seeks to balance rigour with practicality. Universities operate within increasingly complex reporting environments and already contribute to a range of regulatory, quality, equity and strategic reporting requirements.

Accordingly, the accreditation process has been intentionally designed to:

- recognise and assess work already being undertaken;
- minimise duplication of existing reporting requirements;
- encourage participation from institutions at different stages of their welcoming journey;
- maintain a credible and evidence-based assessment process; and
- support continuous improvement over time.

Rather than requiring extensive self-assessment reports, the framework places primary emphasis on documentary evidence and demonstrated implementation. Universities are encouraged to draw upon existing plans, policies, evaluations, communications materials and institutional data wherever possible.

This approach ensures that accreditation remains rigorous and meaningful while remaining proportionate to the operating realities of Australian universities.