Australian
Physiotherapy
Council

ACCREDITATION STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

The Australian Physiotherapy Council Accreditation Process seeks to provide assurance to the community, the physiotherapy profession and the Physiotherapy Board of Australia that graduates of entry-level physiotherapy programs in Australia are suitable to be registered to practice physiotherapy in Australia.

The Australian Physiotherapy Council has developed a quality framework for the accreditation process. The framework is based upon a set of four broad Accreditation Requirements that are each described in terms of a number of elements and criteria that in total forms the Accreditation Standard. The criteria must be demonstrated by the evidence about different aspects of the university, the program, the staff, the students and the graduates of physiotherapy. The focus of the Australian Physiotherapy Council accreditation process is on evidence that a university has in place the academic staff, clinical education staff and facilities, financial provisions, physical resources and a research environment required to demonstrate quality in physiotherapy graduate outcomes, teaching and learning outcomes and research outcomes. The university must also have in place processes to measure and analyse these outcomes, and to respond to the analysis in the form of a quality improvement cycle.

The Program Specific Accreditation Panel evaluates the evidence provided by a university to consider whether the program and the university offering it meet the criteria. The examples of evidence are only intended as a guide to universities regarding the type of documents that it might choose to submit. The task of the Program Specific Accreditation Panel is not simply to "tick off" the indicators, but to complete a holistic evaluation of each element based on the evidence in relation to the relevant accreditation criteria. A university must provide evidence to demonstrate that it has met each criterion. There must be sufficient evidence to enable the Program Specific Accreditation Panel to complete a holistic evaluation against the criteria using the indicators as the descriptors of expected content of the evidence.

Whilst the focus of the Accreditation Requirements is on quality systems and outcomes, the accreditation criteria describe inputs, processes, content and outputs related to fundamental aspects of the teaching and learning environment, the operating environment and the academic program. The accreditation process recognises the diverse and unique character and strengths of individual programs and universities and the criteria indicators are not intended to be absolutely prescriptive. If the university is unable to provide evidence of the inputs, processes, content and outputs that are identified as the indicators for any criterion, a statement must be provided with supporting evidence to explain how the university still meets the relevant criterion. In this way, the accreditation process encompasses innovation in program development and delivery.

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Requirement 1 – Program attributes

Element 1.1: Program and Degree Nomenclature

The Australian Physiotherapy Council recognises that new program titles may be expected to emerge and does not wish to be prescriptive about titles. At the same time, the Australian Physiotherapy Council does not wish to encourage excessive variation in titles and reserves the right to query a title that does not emphasise the profession of physiotherapy.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the title of the program and the title of the degree emphasise the profession of physiotherapy.

Element 1.2: Duration of programs

The Australian Physiotherapy Council recognises that new and innovative approaches to delivery and structure of entry level physiotherapy education programs will emerge. It is important that the Accreditation Requirements are such that the quality of physiotherapy graduates is achieved and maintained without stifling these innovative approaches. The Australian Physiotherapy Council recognises that student engagement in learning over a minimum period is necessary to achieve the graduate outcomes required for accreditation as described in the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy. The duration of a graduate entry physiotherapy education program depends on its specified prerequisite areas of study[1].

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the program is of sufficient duration to provide adequate opportunity for the personal and professional development required for entry the professional practice of physiotherapy as defined by the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy.

Element 1.3: Entry-level Doctoral Programs

The Australian Physiotherapy Council recognises that decisions regarding whether or not an entry level physiotherapy program meets the requirements for a particular academic award are made by university appointed bodies typically with the decision being ratified by the University Council or Senate. There is an expectation from universities and the physiotherapy profession that the Australian Physiotherapy Council will have in place additional requirements to distinguish entry level physiotherapy education programs that lead to an academic award at doctoral level from baccalaureate and masters level programs. It is reasonable for the physiotherapy profession to expect graduates of a doctoral level qualification to have a higher level of profession-specific clinical and/or research knowledge and skills than graduates of a baccalaureate qualification.

Criterion:

[1] If the university's specified prerequisite areas do not include the sciences fundamental to physiotherapy including the biomedical sciences of cell biology, anatomy, physiology (including comprehensive exercise physiology), pathology, the physical sciences including biomechanics, and the behavioural sciences including psychology, sociology and public health, these areas must be included in the program.

A university offering an entry-level physiotherapy education program leading to a doctoral degree must provide evidence that:

- The academic level of the program has been approved by the university appointed body and the decision has been ratified by the University Council or Senate.
- Learning outcomes are related to education in the professional practice of physiotherapy and in physiotherapy research.
- Course requirements include development of a research proposal to a stage that could be submitted for ethics approval. The university may require a research project to be completed following ethics approval.

- Where there is a research proposal/project, it must
  - have relevance to the practice of physiotherapy;
  - be original to the extent normally required at doctoral level;
  - be structured so that students develop under supervision all of the steps involved in the research proposal/project including the formulation of the research question(s), the design of the study including the selection of appropriate methodology; and
  - be supervised either solely or jointly, but in all cases at least one supervisor must be an academic member of staff from the Physiotherapy Academic Unit offering the program, and at least one supervisor should hold a professional or research doctoral qualification in an area of physiotherapy.
- Course requirements include demonstration of profession specific clinical knowledge and skills at a higher level than graduates of a baccalaureate level physiotherapy degree.

Requirement 2 – Quality Systems

In order to achieve and maintain the quality of physiotherapy graduates required to meet the needs of the community and the profession, a physiotherapy education program and the university offering it must have established and applied quality mechanisms. Quality mechanisms are evidenced by the systems and processes that are in place to monitor, evaluate the quality and standards related to the physiotherapy education program and, where indicated, make changes to address the outcomes of evaluation.

Element 2.1: Program outcomes

Criterion

The philosophy and learning outcomes of the program are clearly stated and are consistent with the professional practice of physiotherapy and the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy.

Element 2.2: Graduate outcomes

Most Australian universities offering entry-level physiotherapy education have clearly defined graduate attributes that must be developed in conjunction with profession specific knowledge, skills and attributes. Graduate attributes may include:

- a comprehensive and well founded knowledge of the profession
- capacity for independent critical thought, rational inquiry and self directed learning
- cultural competence and ethical and social responsibility based on understanding and appreciation of social and cultural diversity and respect for individual human rights and dignity
- cognitive, analytical and problem solving skills.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence through the collection and evaluation of longitudinal assessment data that graduates of the program demonstrate the specific attributes defined in the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy in conjunction with the graduate attributes defined by the university.

Element 2.3: Benchmarking

Physiotherapy programs should engage in some form of comparative analysis, including systematic benchmarking, to compare graduate outcomes against national performance measures.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence of comparative analysis of the program including systematic benchmarking and an evaluative commentary.

Element 2.4: Research environment and outcomes

Physiotherapy practice is informed by physiotherapy specific research and relevant biomedical and psychosocial research and published literature. In this way physiotherapists in Australia engage in evidence-based practice. Physiotherapy programs must be based in universities that have clearly stated research goals and frameworks and resources that support physiotherapy research. Universities that are in the planning stages must provide evidence that they are in a position to support the infrastructure required for physiotherapy research.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the program is conducted in an academic unit that fosters and explicitly supports research and scholarship in physiotherapy.

Requirement 3 – Academic program

Element 3.1: Pedagogy

Entry level physiotherapy programs must be based on teaching and learning strategies that facilitate attainment of graduate attributes that encompass the specific attributes defined in the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy and the generic attributes defined by the university.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the program is based on a philosophical pedagogy that facilitates attainment of graduate attributes through the progressive development and integration

of knowledge, clinical skills and independent thinking, ethical and value analysis, communication skills, clinical reasoning and decision-making.

Element 3.2: Curriculum

Curriculum design and content is fundamental to the development and continuous improvement of entry-level physiotherapy education programs. The Australian Physiotherapy Council Accreditation Requirements do not include a prescriptive curriculum. Each university will design a curriculum within a particular educational philosophy and pedagogical framework. The curriculum must be designed in sufficient depth and breadth to prepare graduates who are safe and effective entry-level physiotherapists and have met the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the curriculum addresses the Australian Standards of Physiotherapy and that there are appropriate processes in place to develop and improve the curriculum.

Element 3.3: Assessment

Assessment is a powerful driver of learner behaviour and achievement. Therefore it is important that assessment approaches are designed and used to reflect and facilitate achievement of learning outcomes. A range of methods of assessment is desirable and those used must reflect the outcomes being evaluated. Consideration must be given to assessment that is practicable, comprehensive and equitable.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the academic and clinical staff utilise a range of appropriate assessment methods to report whether students know and understand theoretical material and are competent and safe to function in the clinical setting according to the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy.

Element 3.4: Research/Evidence based Practice

The practice of physiotherapy in Australia uses an evidence-based, clinical reasoning process.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that graduates of the program can apply an evidence-based approach to their own practice.

Element 3.5: Clinical Education Model

The physiotherapy program must include a sustainable clinical education program covering the required range and depth of clinical placements for all students in all key areas of physiotherapy, across all ages and from acute to community contexts.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the program includes a clinical education model that has sufficient breadth, depth and comprehensive coverage to ensure that the learning outcomes of the program are met.

Element 3.6: Clinical education placements

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the clinical education program includes clinical education placements that provide opportunities to develop competence in the key areas of physiotherapy[2], exposure to a range of settings (acute, rehabilitation and community) and to clients of all ages. In the early stages of planning for a new program in physiotherapy, universities must ensure that adequate clinical placement experience[3] is available for the students who will enter the proposed program.

Requirement 4 - Resources and Infrastructure Elements

The university must provide evidence that it has the necessary and appropriate level of staffing and other resources and facilities to provide an entry-level physiotherapy program.

Element 4.1: Academic and research leadership

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that it has the necessary and appropriate level of academic and research leadership to provide an entry-level physiotherapy program in an environment that fosters research and scholarship. Universities that are in the planning stages must provide evidence that they are in a position to appoint academic and research leaders and that a full professorial appointment in physiotherapy will be advertised within the first year of offering the program.

Element 4.2: Academic staffing

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that it has appointed academic staff at a level that enables provision of an entry-level physiotherapy program that satisfies all of the Accreditation Requirements. Universities that are in the planning stages must provide evidence that they are in a position to appoint academic staff with appropriate postgraduate qualifications and experience in each of the key areas of physiotherapy practice to assist in the development and delivery of the program.

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[2] Key areas of physiotherapy refer to musculoskeletal physiotherapy, neurological physiotherapy, cardiorespiratory physiotherapy and electrophysical agents across all ages and from acute to community contexts.

[3] Adequacy will be evidenced by a depth and breadth of experience that is consistent with the Australian Standards for Physiotherapy.

Element 4.3: Clinical educators

Clinical education and clinical supervision are inter-related but not synonymous. Clinical education includes all experiences that contribute to a student's clinical learning. Whether or not clinical learning occurs during a supervised clinical placement may depend on the quality of clinical supervision and the placement. In the early stages of planning for a new program in physiotherapy, universities must establish a plan to ensure there will be a sufficient number of clinical educators who are, or who will be, appropriately trained and supported in their clinical education role.

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that students within, and those who will enter, the program have access to adequately and experienced clinical educators to provide a comprehensive clinical education experience.

Element 4.3: General staffing

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the level of general staff and services is adequate to meet the needs of the students and the academic staff including adequate access to secretarial, administrative, technical, laboratory and computing support.[4]

Element 4.5: Physical resources

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the physical resources reflect contemporary teaching and learning both on campus and at off-campus clinical education sites.

Element 4.6: Funding

Criterion

The university must provide evidence of a program-funding model that enables provision of an entry level physiotherapy program that satisfies all of the Accreditation Requirements.

Element 4.7: Organisational structure

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that the structure of the university is appropriate for the delivery of an entry-level program in physiotherapy.

Element 4.8: Policies

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that it has in place appropriate policies for program development, approval, delivery, assessment, evaluation and review to ensure that standards of education are maintained.

[4] Adequacy will be evidenced by staff feedback and student feedback.

Element 4.9: Procedures

Criterion:

The university must provide evidence that it has in place appropriate procedures for program development, approval, delivery, assessment, evaluation and review to ensure that standards of education are maintained.