# POLICY WRITING INSTRUCTIONS

## CONTENTS

## 1   PURPOSE

1.1   These instructions will assist staff to write or edit University policy documents so they are clear and concise, use language suitable to policy writing, and follow the University's approved format and corporate style.

1.2   These instructions do not replace the Policy Document Development and Review Procedure, which sets out the minimum requirements and processes for developing, reviewing, approving and publishing policy documents.

1.3   These instructions focus on policy writing in particular; they aim to complement rather than duplicate or replace the University's Writing Style Guideline or the University's Use of Inclusive Language Guideline.

## 2   SCOPE

2.1   These instructions aim to assist all staff involved in developing, reviewing, editing and publishing policy documents.

## 3   POLICY WRITING

### Choosing the right template

3.1   If a policy covers, or is intended to cover, related subject matter in a procedure, use the Policy and Procedure Template (e.g. Awards Policy and Procedure). Combining a policy and the related procedure/s is the University's preference, as it offers easy access to the policy matter as a whole. As a single point of reference, it encourages a comprehensive approach when read and reviewed.

3.2   Use the Policy Template as a standalone policy if there is no related procedure, or if separating a policy and related procedure will improve readability, e.g. multiple related procedures, or the issues are complex and the scope refers to multiple groups. Separating a parent policy from its related procedure/s is the exception.

### Aligning legislation and policy documents

3.3    Policy must align with relevant legislative, regulatory or organisational requirements such as a strategic priority or goal, or operational necessity. Policies refer to legislation and government policies, but do not duplicate their content.

3.4    Procedures, committee terms of reference and instructions (such as forms and templates) related to policies must also align. Any changes in one document must also be made to related documents.

## Choosing the right language

3.5    University staff and students come from diverse backgrounds and rely on policy documents for essential information, so it's important to write clearly, concisely and simply. To help you achieve this, write with the reader in mind and follow these tips:

- use short, easy-to-read sentences in plain English to express each principle, action, or idea
- use language that is positive and inclusive, e.g. gender-neutral ('their' not 'he' or 'she'), gender-inclusive (e.g. chair not chairman)
- use active voice rather than passive voice
- use terminology consistently (i.e. consistent across the document and with the University glossary)
- use words that are clear about what is mandatory (e.g. must, will) and what is discretionary (e.g. may)
- use commonly understood language rather than jargon, which requires specialist knowledge
- remove redundant words (e.g. 'now' instead of 'at this point in time'; 'to' instead of 'in order to')
- explain in full what acronyms mean when using them, and
- use generic contact details (e.g. policy@cqu.edu.au) rather than specific details that date quickly.

3.6    Refer to CQUniversity's Use of Inclusive Language Guideline for examples of inclusive writing.

3.7    Refer to CQUniversity's Writing Style Guideline to help you write consistently using the University's corporate writing style.

## Writing in active voice

3.8    Writing in active voice gives the reader a sense of action, identifies who or what is taking action, is more direct and often requires fewer words than writing in passive voice. Some examples are below.

| Active voice | Passive voice |
|---|---|
| The student must submit an application. | An application must be submitted by the student. |
| The Exams Officer retains student exam records. | Records of a student's exams are to be retained. |
| Staff are responsible for implementing this policy. | Implementing this policy is the responsibly of staff. |
| Y must consider X. | Due consideration needs to be given to X by Y |

## Referring to legislation

3.9    When first mentioned in the document, the full title of legislation is in italics (*Financial Accountability Act 2009*), but not when used subsequently and shortened, e.g. 'the Financial Accountability Act' or 'the Act.

3.10   Subordinate legislation, such as standards and regulations, and government or other policies are not italicised, e.g. Financial and Performance Management Standard 2009.

## Using hyperlinks

3.11   Hyperlinks are helpful for finding information quickly, but their tendency to break is frustrating, especially when a message says 'page not found' and there is no redirection information given. Internal links (links to

other sections in the same document) don't work or can break when the document is modified and links aren't checked to ensure they are 'active'.

3.12 To minimise these problems when using hyperlinks, apply these rules.

| CQUniversity policy documents | Name the document and link to the IMPortal homepage, not to the specific document |
|---|---|
| CQUniversity webpages | Describe the information or name the document and link to the relevant webpage, not to specific documents |
| External organisation webpages | Describe the information or name the document and link to the organisation's homepage |
| Legislative documents | Name the document and link to the Australian or State legislation website homepage, whichever is relevant |
| Other sections in the same document | Check all links are working before saving the final document |

## Naming the document

3.13 When choosing a title consider the reader and how they can find the information. Where possible, use the main identifying word as the first word in the title. Keep titles short and simple. Choose words that best reflect the main or overarching subject matter and those that readers will understand or can find in the University glossary.

3.14 The type of document is included at the end of the title only. For example, 'Use of Inclusive Language Guideline', not 'Guideline for Use of Inclusive Language'.

## Finding information fast

3.15 The contents table, hyperlinks (internal and external) and numbered paragraphs/lists help readers to find the information they need; they are helpful especially in lengthy documents. Ordering topics logically and choosing headings and subheadings that best describe each topic in a few words will help readers to find what they need quickly.

3.16 When using numbered statements/paragraphs, keep it simple. Limit numbering to three levels:

- first level (i.e.1, 2, 3)
- second level (i.e. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)
- third level (i.e. 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3) (only use third level numbering if absolutely necessary).

## Using bulleted lists and other punctuation

3.17 Refer to CQUniversity's Writing Style Guideline for details about punctuation, including bulleted lists.

## 4 RELATED DOCUMENTS AND REFERENCES

### CQUniversity documents

Policy Document Development and Review Procedure

Use of Inclusive Language Guideline

Writing Style Guideline

### References for writing and editing

Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, rev. Snooks & Co., John Wiley & Sons, Milton, Qld.

Kaplan, B 2003, *Editing made easy*, Penguin Books Australia, Camberwell, Vic.

Petelin, R & Durham, M 2003, *The professional writing guide: Writing well and knowing why*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

# 5 FEEDBACK

5.1 Any additions or feedback about how to improve this document would be welcome. Please email your feedback to policy@cqu.edu.au.

# 6 APPROVAL AND REVIEW DETAILS

| Approval and Review | Details |
|---|---|
| Approval Authority | Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience and Governance) |
| Advisory Committee to Approval Authority | Not applicable |
| Administrator | Director, Governance |
| Next Review Date | |

| Approval and Amendment History | Details |
|---|---|
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| Notes | Nil |

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CQUniversity acknowledges its reference to the University of Melbourne's 'Guidelines for Drafting Policy and Procedure' (June 2013) in developing this instruction.