Conscientious Objection Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') puts students at the heart of our decisions and fosters a culture of inclusion and belonging.

(2) The University recognises that some students may have deeply held conscientious beliefs that conflict with learning activities and assessment tasks.

(3) The University seeks to accommodate reasonable requests for modification and alternative activities where these are consistent with learning outcomes and inherent requirements.

Section 2 - Purpose

(4) This procedure explains how students notify teaching staff of conscientious objections and how the University will manage these notifications.

(5) This procedure outlines how teaching staff proactively inform students about learning activities and assessment tasks which might give rise to conscientious objections.

Section 3 - Scope

(6) This procedure applies to all Higher Education coursework and Vocational Education and Training students.

a. This procedure does not apply to Higher Degree by Research candidates.

(7) This procedure applies to all staff teaching Higher Education coursework and Vocational Education and Training units.

Section 4 - Procedure

(8) Course Coordinators and Unit Coordinators will provide information about learning activities and assessments in course and unit publications, including unit outlines, so that students can identify potential conscientious objections.

(9) Where a course or unit involves learning activities or assessments with animals, the course and unit information must outline this use.

(10) Students must review published course and unit requirements to identify any activities or assessments that might raise conscientious objections.

(11) Students should consider alternative enrolment options when they conscientiously object to any of the learning activities or assessments in a unit.

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Registering conscientious objections

(12) If a student identifies that they conscientiously object to any learning activities or assessments, they must email the Unit Coordinator an explanation of their conscientious objection as soon as possible, ideally before the end of week two of the teaching period, and no later than the Census Date.

(13) Students cannot raise conscientious objections after a learning activity or assessment. If a student is concerned with what occurred during a learning activity or assessment, they should lodge a complaint in accordance with the Complaints Policy - Students.

a. If the student has a complaint about the learning activity or assessment's use of an animal, the student must complain in accordance with the Animal Ethics Committee Complaints, Grievances, and Non-compliance Procedures.

Considering requests for alternative learning activities and assessments

(14) Unit Coordinators will treat student conscientious objections with respect, even if they do not agree with the basis of the objection.

(15) Unit Coordinators will consider each request for modification or alternative learning activities or assessments individually and with regard to the particular objection and circumstances of each case.

(16) Unit Coordinators may seek clarification or additional information around the nature of a student's conscientious objection. This may include whether the student would be satisfied with modifications to the original learning activity or assessment, rather than an alternative learning activity or assessment being arranged.

(17) If a student cannot articulate the basis of their conscientious objections, the Unit Coordinator may refer them to counselling or other support services for assistance.

(18) Unit Coordinators may seek advice from their Course Coordinator, discipline head, or Pro Vice-Chancellor if they need assistance judging whether an objection is based on conscientious grounds or planning a modified or alternative learning activity or assessment.

(19) The Unit Coordinator will consider the student's conscientious objection and within five working days decide:

a. to grant an alternative learning activity or assessment;
b. to modify the original learning activity or assessment; or
c. that no modification or alternative can be accommodated.

(20) Any alternative learning activity or assessment must:

a. be of comparable length and difficulty to the original;
b. achieve learning outcomes consistent with the original;
c. not impose an unreasonable burden on the Unit Coordinator; and
d. meet the inherent requirements.

(21) The Unit Coordinator may decide not to grant a modification or alternative learning activity or assessment because:

a. it would undermine the learning outcomes or inherent requirements of the learning activity, assessment, or unit;
b. it would impose an unreasonable burden on the Unit Coordinator;

c. it would be inconsistent with the law, University governance documents, professional accreditation standards, or contractual requirements; or
d. the student's objection is not based on conscientious grounds.

(22) The Unit Coordinator will advise and explain their decision in writing, via return email, to the student.

(23) If a student's conscientious objection cannot be accommodated, and they choose to remain enrolled, they must complete the original learning activity or assessment.

Reviews

(24) If a student believes insufficient consideration has been given to their conscientious objection or that their request has been unreasonably refused, they may request a review of the decision by the Provost by emailing educationstrategy@cdu.edu.au.

(25) Students seeking a review must email the Provost within three calendar days of receiving the decision of their Unit Coordinator.

(26) Students requesting a review must forward their original request, the Unit Coordinator's decision, and a justification for their request.

a. The justification must explain where the student believes insufficient consideration or unreasonable refusal has occurred.

(27) The Provost will review the decision and:

a. uphold the original decision; or
b. ask the Unit Coordinator to organise a modified or alternative learning activity or assessment.

(28) The Provost will advise the student and Unit Coordinator of their decision, in writing via email, within 5 working days.

(29) The decision of the Provost is final. If a student who was not granted an alternative learning activity or assessment task is unwilling to complete the original learning activity or assessment task, they should explore alternative enrolment options.

Record of decisions

(30) Unit Coordinators must provide records of all student conscientious objections and the outcome of requests for modified or alternative activities to the Provost by the Grade Release date of each teaching period.

(31) The Provost will maintain a record of student requests, decisions, and appeals. This record does not oblige Unit Coordinators to make the same decision for future requests, as the circumstances might be different, but it can be referenced. The record may also be used to inform future unit design.

Section 5 - Non-Compliance

(32) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct - Employees or the Code of Conduct - Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(33) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees and Complaints Policy - Students.

(34) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	20th February 2024
Review Date	20th February 2027
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	15th February 2024
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Louise King Provost
Implementation Officer	Louise King Provost
Enquiries Contact	Louise King Provost Teaching and Learning Connect

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Census Date" - The last date for students to withdraw from enrolled units without academic or financial penalty, apply for a leave of absence, or change their citizenship status or contribution payment option.

"Course" - A formally approved and accredited program of learning that leads to an award qualification or non-award study.

"Course Coordinator" - An academic staff member who is responsible for the academic management of a course.

"Inherent Requirements" - The abilities, knowledge, and standards of conduct and performance that are essential for a student to achieve the learning outcomes of a course or unit. These may include compulsory standards set by professional registration, or accreditation bodies.

"Learning outcomes" - Defined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TESQA) as the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning.

"Unit" - Defined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency as a separate unit of study and a combination of subjects make up a course of study. Same definition as subject.

"Conscientious objection" - An enduring, genuinely held belief that something is morally or ethically wrong. A conscientious objection is not influenced by considerations of personal advantage or disadvantage.

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