

Diploma Guideline

1. Purpose

To assist employers; employees; professional associations; unions; Training Package, course and curriculum developers; accrediting bodies; and the wider public, including students, parents, and education and training bodies, to understand factors determining the level of the qualification. Also, to assist developers of Training Packages and courses of training to assign appropriate AQF qualifications within a Training Package, or to a course to be submitted for accreditation.

2. Context

These Guidelines replace the RATE Descriptions, which have previously been used to provide guidance on qualification levels. The Diploma qualification is authorised differently in the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector. However, providers from either sector may offer a Diploma within a Training Package, and this entails meeting the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

The Guideline for the Diploma qualification issued in the **vocational education and training sector** has been revised to take into account developments under the National Skills Framework – the introduction of Training Packages and the implementation of the Australian Quality Training Framework 2007 (AQTF 2007). Training Packages use competency standards to describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace. These competency standards are packaged into units of competency. Units of competency are components of AQF qualifications. It is a requirement of the AQTF 2007 that competency standards from relevant Training Packages be used where they exist.

Qualifications developed outside Training Packages must not duplicate qualifications contained in Training Packages. Registered Training Organisations and/or State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies will need to be satisfied that any qualification proposed outside a Training Package cannot be achieved by the customisation and flexibility offered within a Training Package or by the issuance of a Training Package qualification together with one or more Statements of Attainment.

The National Quality Council, the body responsible for the endorsement of Training Packages, also has responsibility for the endorsement of national competency standards that are not part of Training Packages. These Guidelines apply equally to qualifications based on these competency standards.

In the vocational education and training sector there are a number of useful reference documents, which are listed in the Appendix.

3. Learning Outcomes

3.1 Authority

In the **vocational education and training sector**, qualifications are based on nationally endorsed competency standards where they exist or on competency standards developed by relevant industry, enterprise, community or professional groups. The qualifications certify achievement of learning outcomes generally identified as sets of competencies for levels of workplace performance reflected in the characteristics and distinguishing features of each qualification. The focus in the vocational education and training sector is on the capacity to assess directly the performance criteria in the competencies specified within the Training Package or accredited course.

Authorisation of alignment of competency standards to AQF qualifications occurs as follows:

- National Industry Skills Councils and other recognised bodies including relevant enterprises, through the process of developing Training Packages, determine the relevant qualification for each set of national competency standards in their respective Training Packages. This determination is subject to endorsement by the National Quality Council.
- State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies, or Registered Training Organisations with delegated authority to self-manage accreditation, through the course accreditation process determine the relevant qualifications for any combined sets of national competency standards for which there is a training need, derived either from more than one Training Package and/or other endorsed sets of competency standards. The title of the new qualification must be clearly distinct from those in the related Training Packages.
- Where there is no relevant Training Package, State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies, through the course accreditation process, determine the relevant qualification for other sets of competency standards developed by relevant industry, enterprise, community or professional bodies to meet an identified training need.

In the **higher education sector**, objectives and academic requirements of courses are set by higher education institutions having regard for requirements set by peer review and the requirements of relevant professional bodies and employer groups. They may establish course advisory committees comprising a range of interested parties including practitioners, employers, community representatives and academic staff from other institutions to facilitate ongoing review of content and relevance. Universities and other self-accrediting institutions are authorised to accredit their own courses. Non self-accrediting institutions must have their courses approved by government accreditation authorities through processes which ensure that the courses are comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field at an Australian university.

3.2 Characteristics

Characteristics of competencies or learning outcomes include:

- the self-directed application of knowledge and skills, with substantial depth in some areas where judgement is required in planning and selecting appropriate equipment, services and techniques for self and others;
- breadth, depth and complexity covering planning and initiation of alternative approaches to skills or knowledge applications across a broad range of technical and/or management requirements, evaluation and coordination; and
- applications involve participation in development of strategic initiatives, as well as personal responsibility and autonomy in performing complex technical operations or organising others. It may include participation in teams including teams concerned with planning and evaluation functions. Group or team coordination may be involved.

The degree of emphasis on breadth as against depth of knowledge and skills may vary between qualifications granted at this level.

3.3 Distinguishing Features

Where additional information is required to assist in determining the qualification level, the following chart could be used to help determine the most compatible match.

It is emphasised that the chart is not intended to be used as a checklist which all Diploma qualifications must include, or to replace the authority statement above.

Table 9:
Distinguishing
Features: Certificate
IV, Diploma and
Advanced Diploma

Certificate IV	Diploma	Advanced Diploma
<p>Do the Competencies enable an individual with this qualification to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of <i>a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts</i></p> <p>apply solutions to a <i>defined range of unpredictable problems</i></p> <p><i>identify, analyse and evaluate information from a variety of sources</i></p> <p><i>identify and apply skill and knowledge areas to a wide variety of contexts with depth in some areas</i></p> <p>take responsibility for own outputs in relation to <i>specified quality standards</i></p> <p>take <i>limited responsibility</i> for the <i>quantity and quality</i> of the output of others</p>	<p>Do the Competencies enable an individual with this qualification to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of a broad knowledge base incorporating theoretical concepts, <i>with substantial depth in some areas</i></p> <p><i>analyse and plan</i> approaches to <i>technical problems or management requirements</i></p> <p>evaluate information using it to <i>forecast for planning or research</i> purposes</p> <p><i>transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of situations</i></p> <p>take responsibility for own outputs in relation to <i>broad quantity and quality</i></p> <p>take limited responsibility for the <i>achievement of group outcomes</i></p>	<p>Do the Competencies enable an individual with this qualification to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of <i>specialised knowledge</i> with depth in some areas</p> <p><i>analyse, diagnose, design and execute judgements</i> across a broad range of technical or management functions</p> <p>generate ideas through the <i>analysis of information and concepts</i> at an abstract level</p> <p>demonstrate a command of <i>wide-ranging, highly specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills</i></p> <p>demonstrate <i>accountability</i> for personal outputs within broad parameters</p> <p>demonstrate <i>accountability</i> for personal and group outcomes within broad parameters</p>

Note: In Table 9 italicised words emphasise distinguishing features of the competencies between qualifications. In order to assist determining the relevant qualification, the most compatible set of features should be selected. Not all features will necessarily apply.

4. Responsibility for Assessment

Qualifications issued in the **vocational education and training sector** certify the achievement of competency.

Assessment is the responsibility of Registered Training Organisations. These bodies must comply with AQTF 2007 *Essential Standards for Registration* including the Conditions of Registration.

In the **higher education sector**, the university or other recognised higher education institution is responsible for the assessment of individuals and the issuance of the qualification. It is ultimately responsible for the quality of assessment regardless of who actually does the assessing, the point of delivery or the assessment method used. It is also responsible for ensuring the quality of the assessment strategies, ie that they are flexible, valid, reliable and provide for the recognition of prior learning.

5. Pathways to the Qualification

5.1 Access to the qualification in the **vocational education and training sector** could be through:

- a training program meeting the requirements of an endorsed Training Package or a training program meeting the requirements of an accredited course(s) delivered by a Registered Training Organisation;

or

- a combination of a training program meeting the requirements of an endorsed Training Package or a training program meeting the requirements of an accredited course delivered by a Registered Training Organisation, plus recognition of prior learning including credit transfer and/or experience;

or

- the recognition of prior learning that provides evidence of the achievement of the competencies or learning outcomes for the qualification.

5.2 Time taken to gain the qualification will vary according to the pathway taken and factors related to the particular industry or work area. Nominal duration statements may appear in training programs which may be part of the non-endorsed Learning Strategies component of a Training Package. Nominal duration statements are also to be included in accreditation submissions for planning purposes but will not be used to determine the level of a qualification. A Diploma could be part of a program which includes both a Diploma and an Advanced Diploma. An individual may complete the requirements for a Diploma only or may go on to gain an Advanced Diploma. (*IH* 2002, p 40)

5.3 Access to the qualification in the **higher education sector** follows:

- satisfactory completion of the requirements set by a university or other recognised higher education institution; and
- recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer.

5.4 Examples of possible pathways include:

- Work-Based Training and Assessment
- Institution-Based Education and Training and Assessment
- Part Institution-Based Education and Training and Assessment/Part Work-Based Training and Assessment
- Recognition of Prior Learning
- Recognition of Prior Learning combined with Further Training as required
- Accumulation of a Variety of Short Courses/Training Programs

NOTE:

- In the **higher education sector**, an example of Institution-Based Education and Training could involve full-time study at a university or other recognised higher education institution. This could be expected to involve the equivalent of two years of full-time study after the completion of a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education.
- These examples suggest only some of a wide range of possible pathways. They are not intended to be prescriptive, nor are they limited to this particular qualification.

6. Authority to Issue the Qualification

In the **vocational education and training sector**, each State/Territory has legislative responsibility for authorising the issuance of the qualification. This responsibility is carried out by Registered Training Organisations or in some instances by a body authorised under statute. RTOs agree to AQTF 2007 Conditions of Registration within the *Essential Standards for Registration* regarding the certification and issuing of qualifications and Statements of Attainment.

In the **higher education sector**, universities are empowered by governments to issue qualifications. Additionally, States and Territories have established processes to facilitate the accreditation of courses and issuance of qualifications by other recognised higher education institutions.

7. Certification Issued

A qualification is:

formal certification, issued by a relevant approved body, in recognition that a person has achieved learning outcomes or competencies relevant to identified individual, professional, industry or community needs.

In the **vocational education and training sector**, individuals issued with the qualification, ie Diploma, will also receive documentation that identifies the units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages).

In the **vocational education and training sector**, individuals who complete only some of the requirements for the qualification will receive a Statement of Attainment.

The Statement of Attainment will include, either on the Statement itself or as an attachment, the whole units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages).

The issuing body will be responsible for providing and maintaining records in relation to the above. See AQTF 2007 *Essential Standards for Registration* including the Conditions of Registration.

Advanced Diploma Guideline

1. Purpose

To assist employers; employees; professional associations; unions; Training Package, course and curriculum developers; accrediting bodies; and the wider public, including students, parents, and education and training bodies, to understand factors determining the level of the qualification. Also, to assist developers of Training Packages and courses of training to assign appropriate AQF qualifications within a Training Package, or to a course to be submitted for accreditation.

2. Context

These Guidelines replace the RATE Descriptions, which have previously been used to provide guidance on qualification levels. Advanced Diploma qualifications are authorised differently in the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector. However, providers from either sector may offer an Advanced Diploma within a Training Package, and this entails meeting the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

The Guideline for the Advanced Diploma qualification issued in the **vocational education and training sector** has been revised to take into account developments under the National Skills Framework – the introduction of Training Packages and the implementation of the Australian Quality Training Framework 2007 (AQTF 2007). Training Packages use competency standards to describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace. These competency standards are packaged into units of competency. Units of competency are components of AQF qualifications. It is a requirement of the AQTF 2007 that competency standards from relevant Training Packages be used where they exist.

Qualifications developed outside Training Packages must not duplicate qualifications contained in Training Packages. Registered Training Organisations and/or State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies will need to be satisfied that any qualification proposed outside a Training Package cannot be achieved by the customisation and flexibility offered within a Training Package or by the issuance of a Training Package qualification together with one or more Statements of Attainment.

The National Quality Council, the body responsible for the endorsement of Training Packages, also has responsibility for the endorsement of national competency standards that are not part of Training Packages. These Guidelines apply equally to qualifications based on these competency standards.

In the vocational education and training sector there are a number of useful reference documents, which are listed in the Appendix.

3. Learning Outcomes

3.1 Authority

In the **vocational education and training sector**, qualifications are based on nationally endorsed competency standards where they exist or on competency standards developed by relevant industry, enterprise, community or professional groups. The qualifications certify achievement of learning outcomes generally identified as sets of competencies for levels of workplace performance reflected in the characteristics and distinguishing features of each qualification. The focus in the vocational education and training sector is on the capacity to assess directly the performance criteria in the competencies specified within the Training Package or accredited course.

Authorisation of alignment of competency standards to AQF qualifications occurs as follows:

- National Industry Skills Councils and other recognised bodies including relevant enterprises, through the process of developing Training Packages, determine the relevant qualification for each set of national competency standards in their respective Training Packages. This determination is subject to endorsement by the National Quality Council.
- State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies, or Registered Training Organisations with delegated authority to self-manage accreditation, through the course accreditation process determine the relevant qualification for any combined sets of national competency standards for which there is a training need, derived either from more than one Training Package and/or other endorsed sets of competency standards. The title of the new qualification must be clearly distinct from those in the related Training Packages.
- Where there is no relevant Training Package, State/Territory Course Accrediting Bodies, through the course accreditation process, determine the relevant qualification for other sets of competency standards developed by relevant industry, enterprise, community or professional bodies to meet an identified training need.

In the **higher education sector**, objectives and academic requirements of courses are set by higher education institutions having regard for requirements set by peer review and the requirements of relevant professional bodies and employer groups. They may establish course advisory committees comprising a range of interested parties including practitioners, employers, community representatives and academic staff from other institutions to facilitate ongoing review of content and relevance. Universities and other self-accrediting institutions are authorised to accredit their own courses. Non self-accrediting institutions must have their courses approved by government accreditation authorities through processes which ensure that the courses are comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field at an Australian university.

3.2 Characteristics

Characteristics of competencies or learning outcomes include:

- the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts in relation to either varied or highly specific functions. Contribution to the development of a broad plan, budget or strategy is involved and accountability and responsibility for self and others in achieving the outcomes is involved;
- breadth, depth and complexity involving analysis, diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation across a broad range of technical and/or management functions including development of new criteria or applications or knowledge or procedures; and
- applications involve significant judgement in planning, design, technical or leadership/guidance functions related to products, services, operations or procedures.

The degree of emphasis on breadth as against depth of knowledge and skills may vary between qualifications granted at this level.

3.3 Distinguishing Features

Where additional information is required to assist in determining the qualification level the following chart could be used to help determine the most compatible match.

It is emphasised that the chart is not intended to be used as a checklist which all Advanced Diploma qualifications must include, or to replace the authority statement above.

Table 10:
Distinguishing
Features: Diploma
and Advanced
Diploma

Diploma	Advanced Diploma
<p>Do the Competencies or Learning Outcomes enable an individual with this qualification to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of a broad knowledge base incorporating theoretical concepts, with substantial depth in some areas</p> <p>analyse and plan approaches to technical problems or management requirements</p> <p>evaluate information using it to forecast for planning or research purposes</p> <p><i>transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of situations</i></p> <p>take responsibility for own outputs in relation to broad quantity parameters</p> <p>take limited responsibility for the achievement of group outcomes</p>	<p>Do the Competencies or Learning Outcomes enable an individual with this qualification to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of specialised knowledge with depth in some areas</p> <p><i>analyse, diagnose, design and execute judgements</i> across a broad range of technical or management functions</p> <p>generate ideas through the <i>analysis of information and concepts at an abstract level</i></p> <p>demonstrate a command of <i>wide-ranging, highly specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills</i></p> <p>demonstrate <i>accountability for personal outputs within broad parameters</i></p> <p>demonstrate accountability for group outcomes within broad parameters</p>

Note: In Table 10 italicised words emphasise distinguishing features of the competencies between qualifications. In order to assist determining the relevant qualification, the most compatible set of features should be selected. Not all features will necessarily apply.

4. Responsibility for Assessment

Qualifications issued in the **vocational education and training sector** certify the achievement of competency.

Assessment is the responsibility of Registered Training Organisations. These bodies must comply with AQTF 2007 *Essential Standards for Registration* including the Conditions of Registration.

In the **higher education sector**, the university or other recognised higher education institution is responsible for the assessment of individuals and the issuance of the qualification. It is ultimately responsible for the quality of assessment regardless of who actually does the assessing, the point of delivery or the assessment method used.

5. Pathways to the Qualification

5.1 **Access** to the qualification in the **vocational education and training sector** could be through:

- a training program meeting the requirements of an endorsed Training Package or a training program meeting the requirements of an accredited course(s) delivered by a Registered Training Organisation;

or

- a combination of a training program meeting the requirements of an endorsed Training Package or a training program meeting the requirements of an accredited course delivered by a Registered Training Organisation, plus recognition of prior learning including credit transfer and/or experience;

or

- the recognition of prior learning that provides evidence of the achievement of the competencies or learning outcomes for the qualification.

5.2 **Time** taken to gain the qualification will vary according to the pathway taken and factors related to the particular industry or work area. Nominal duration statements may appear in training programs which may be part of the non-endorsed Learning Strategies component of a Training Package. Nominal duration statements are also to be included in accreditation submissions for planning purposes but will not be used to determine the level of a qualification. An Advanced Diploma could be part of a program which includes a Diploma and an Advanced Diploma. An individual may complete the requirements for a Diploma only or may go on to gain an Advanced Diploma. (*IH* 2002, p 46)

5.3 **Access** to the qualification in the **higher education sector** follows:

- satisfactory completion of the requirements set by a university or other recognised higher education institution; and
- recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer.

5.4 **Examples** of possible pathways include:

- Work-Based Training and Assessment
- Institution-Based Education and Training and Assessment
- Part Institution-Based Education and Training and Assessment/Part Work-Based Training and Assessment
- Recognition of Prior Learning
- Recognition of Prior Learning combined with Further Training as required
- Accumulation of a Variety of Short Courses/Training Programs

- NOTE:**
- In the **higher education sector**, an example of Institution-Based Education and Training could involve full-time study at a university or other recognised higher education institution. This could be expected to involve the equivalent of three years of full-time study after the completion of a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education.
 - These examples suggest only some of a wide range of possible pathways. They are not intended to be prescriptive, nor are they limited to this particular qualification.

6. Authority to Issue the Qualification

In the **vocational education and training sector**, each State/Territory has legislative responsibility for authorising the issuance of the qualification. This responsibility is carried out by Registered Training Organisations or in some instances by a body authorised under statute. RTOs agree to AQTF 2007 Conditions of Registration within the *Essential Standards for Registration* regarding the certification and issuing of qualifications and Statements of Attainment.

In the **higher education sector**, universities are empowered by governments to issue qualifications. Additionally, some States and Territories have established processes to facilitate the accreditation of courses and issuance of qualifications by other recognised higher education institutions.

7. Certification Issued

A qualification is:

formal certification, issued by a relevant approved body, in recognition that a person has achieved learning outcomes or competencies relevant to identified individual, professional, industry or community needs.

In the **vocational education and training sector**, individuals issued with the qualification, ie Advanced Diploma, will also receive documentation that identifies the units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages).

In the **vocational education and training sector**, individuals who complete only some of the requirements for the qualification will receive a Statement of Attainment.

The Statement of Attainment will include, either on the Statement itself or as an attachment, the whole units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages).

The issuing body will be responsible for providing and maintaining records in relation to the above. See AQTF 2007 *Essential Standards for Registration* including the Conditions of Registration.

Associate Degree Guideline

1. Purpose

To assist employers, professional associations, curriculum developers, accrediting bodies and the wider public, including students, parents, and education and training bodies, to understand factors determining the level of the qualification.

2. Context

These Guidelines are intended to support the inclusion in the Australian Qualifications Framework of the new award of Associate Degree, as endorsed by MCEETYA in July 2003.

3. Learning Outcomes

3.1 Authority

Objectives and academic requirements of courses are set by higher education institutions having regard for requirements set by peer review and the requirements of relevant professional bodies and employer groups. They may establish course advisory committees comprising a range of interested parties including practitioners, employers, community representatives and academic staff from a number of institutions to facilitate ongoing review of content and relevance. Universities and other self-accrediting institutions are authorised to accredit their own courses. Non self-accrediting institutions must have their courses approved by government accreditation authorities through processes which ensure that the courses are comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field at an Australian university.

3.2 Characteristics

Characteristics of learning outcomes include:

- acquisition of the foundational underpinnings of one or more disciplines, including understanding and interpretation of key concepts and theories and how they are evolving within the relevant scientific, technical, social and cultural contexts;
- development of the academic skills and attributes necessary to access, comprehend and evaluate information from a range of sources;
- development of generic employment-related skills relevant to a range of employment contexts; and
- a capacity for self-directed and lifelong learning.

A course leading to the Associate Degree is generally but not exclusively articulated with relevant Bachelor Degree programs. A course leading to an Associate Degree will vary in breadth and depth according to whether it is a single or multidisciplinary program but will be taken to sufficient depth to provide a basis for full articulation with relevant Bachelor Degree programs.

An Associate Degree qualification provides a broad-based point of entry to employment, in particular in a range of associate professional occupations, and an introduction to the foundations of a discipline or

across several disciplines.

4. Responsibility for Assessment

Responsibility for assessment lies with the institution that issues the Associate Degree.

5. Pathways to, through and from the Qualification

Candidates on entry typically hold the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education or its equivalent, including mature age or other special provisions for entry or bridging or foundation programs, or an appropriate vocational education and training qualification including Certificate III or IV. Entry to an Associate Degree would not normally presume significant work experience or employment prior to or concurrent with study.

The Associate Degree is a qualification of two years duration post-Year 12. An Associate Degree program may be developed around a single discipline or may be multidisciplinary in scope, and integrate generic employment-related skills as appropriate to its particular orientation. Specialist vocational preparation to meet the practitioner requirements of the professional associations or industry would be expected to occur through subsequent completion of a professional Bachelor Degree or a vocational Advanced Diploma.

There are a number of different pathways from an Associate Degree into other qualifications.

The primary pathway is through a fully articulated arrangement into a Bachelor Degree program in a directly related area of study, with a maximum of two years advanced standing, with specified credit. There is also scope for an articulated arrangement with a Bachelor Degree in an adjacent or different discipline, with correspondingly less credit where appropriate. An articulated pathway to an Advanced Diploma* is another alternative, subject to requirements for employment or work experience. With additional relevant employment experience to satisfy 'graduate equivalence', an Associate Degree pathway into a Graduate Certificate is a further option.

6. Authority to Issue the Qualification

Universities are empowered by governments to issue qualifications. Additionally, States and Territories have established processes to facilitate the accreditation of courses and issuance of qualifications by other recognised higher education institutions.

7. Certification Issued

A qualification is:

formal certification, issued by a relevant approved body, in recognition that a person has achieved learning outcomes relevant to identified individual, professional, industry or community needs.

The issuing body will be responsible for providing and maintaining records in relation to the above.

* For example, a generalist Associate Degree program may be structured to articulate with an Advanced Diploma program delivering specialist industry competencies, to enhance employment opportunities or credit into a specialist Bachelor Degree. The reverse pathway is also encouraged, where a program delivering an Advanced Diploma is articulated with a generalist Associate Degree program to enhance credit into a Bachelor Degree or broaden employment opportunities.