

## THE PATHWAYS PASS

The pathways project report concluded that:

The development and promotion of distinct, purpose designed Diploma to Degree Pathways Qualifications is required to entrench directed pathways for students from VET to higher education. (Conclusion 7)

VET to higher education is the most common pathway because qualifications usually build on previous study at a lower level. However Diploma to Degree Pathways Qualifications while branded to reflect this more common flow of students can facilitate the movement of students from higher education to VET (often referred to as reverse articulation).

The pathways project identified that many VET and higher education institutions have in place formal agreements that enable a student with a VET qualification to articulate into higher education qualifications with varying amounts of credit. What is not clear is how widely these arrangements are known to individual students. As a result, the pathways project also reached the conclusion that:

A national register of credit arrangements is required to assist students with making informed decisions. (Conclusion 9)

To ensure that students who have successfully completed an AQF qualification receive commensurate and consistent amounts of credit from a receiving VET or higher education institution, a simple strategy is required that both supports students in seeking credit and assists the receiving institution with accepting the student's initial qualification as the basis for entry and giving credit for prior study.

It is proposed that a Pathways Pass becomes part of the documentation that is issued to a student on the completion of a pathway qualification. The Pathways Pass would provide information about the student's eligibility for entry to, and any credit towards, a further qualification.

### ***What is a Pathways Pass?***

The Pathways Pass would be a formal document that would operate like a 'voucher'. It would be issued to a student on graduation. The Pathways Pass would specify the qualifications and institutional options that are available for further study, confirm the student's eligibility for entry to qualifications and the amount of credit in each of the options for which the student may be entitled. The Pathways Pass would be the individualised component of the national register of credit agreements.

From a student's perspective, the Pathways Pass would be presented to a receiving institution providing information that the student has both the capacity to engage in learning at a higher level (by virtue of the successful completion of another AQF qualification) and already has learning content that can be transferred to further study at the receiving institution (ie credit).

### ***What are the benefits of the Pathways Pass?***

To be effective, the Pathways Pass must provide a benefit to both the student and the institution in which they wish to enrol. For the student the benefit is a guaranteed pathway into receiving

institutions with recognition of their prior qualification and a guaranteed level of credit as appropriate. For the receiving institution the benefit is a student who has already demonstrated success in tertiary study, increased completion rates and shortened time taken for these students to complete a qualification.

The Pathways Pass would be of particular value to VET students from the equity target groups. It would provide tangible proof of the credit to which they may be entitled and would give the necessary confidence boost and impetus for them to engage in higher levels of learning.

The Pathways Pass would be simple and low cost for institutions and Government to implement. It would be of high value for all students.

Promotion of the concept of the Pathways Pass would provide an excellent marketing strategy for any formal Diploma to Degree Pathways Qualifications campaign aimed at providing directed pathways for students from VET to higher education – ‘Complete your Diploma qualification and receive a Pathways Pass that tells you what your learning pathways may be and how much credit you may receive’.

### ***How would the Pathways Pass operate?***

The revised AQF will require all AQF qualifications to include documented pathways between qualifications. The pathways will be negotiated at the time the qualification is developed and accredited and will be included in the qualification documentation.

Specifically, the Diploma to Degree Pathways Qualifications, which would be jointly developed by VET and higher education, would include guaranteed entry to a Bachelor Degree on completion of a Diploma in a related field of study.

The Pathways Pass would be issued by VET institutions offering pathways qualifications and by higher education institutions where formal agreements have been made regarding reverse articulation into VET qualifications.

The Pathways Pass would be unique to each student. It would identify the student, the completed qualification, the institution at which it was completed, the eligible pathway qualifications and the receiving institutions which offer them and the amount of agreed credit for each of the pathway qualifications. For example, the Pathways Pass would state that:

- ‘This Pathways Pass provides you with entry to the following qualifications (list) at the following institutions (list of institutions offering the qualifications).’
- ‘This Pathways Pass entitles you to the following amounts of credit if you choose to enrol in the following qualifications in these institutions (list of qualification and institutions).’
- ‘This Pathways Pass may entitle you to entry into qualifications in an unrelated field of study at these institutions (list institutions). You will need to check with the course coordinators at the institutions to find out how much credit you will be entitled to in your particular choice of qualification.’

Each Pathways Pass would have a ‘use by’ date as qualifications and agreements may change.

The AQF website would store templates that could be used by institutions to generate individual Pathways Passes.

### ***How could the Pathways Pass be funded?***

As the Pathways Pass would be an individualised document provided to students on graduation based on information already documented in qualifications and on a national register of credit arrangements, the Pathways Pass should be produced at marginal cost within current institutional funding arrangements.

The Pathways Pass could be used as a mechanism to enable higher education institutions to meet the Government's targets for low-SES background students. To encourage the enrolment of students from VET who fall into the target groups, the Pathways Pass could be funded as part of Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

Funding to higher education institutions for holders of a Pathways Pass from a low-SES background could include:

1. incentive funding to cover a full EFTSL in the first year of enrolment for each student regardless of the amount of study undertaken as a result of credit being given
2. learning support for students who may require support in the transition from the VET to higher education learning environment
3. additional funding for students who may be disadvantaged in some jurisdictions by studying a lower level qualification than one they have previously been awarded.

Extending the HEPPP guidelines to include low-SES students holding a Pathways Pass who enrol in higher education would allow for funding of 1 and 2 above. The Pathways Pass could be identified as one of the objectives of the partnership activities to increase the aspirations of low SES-background students identified under guideline 1.70 Component B – Partnership Objectives which would allow for funding through this section of the Higher Education Support Act Guidelines.

Students who may be disadvantaged by receiving credit that may take them below the threshold study load (75%) for Youth Allowance or Austudy payments could be paid the full Youth Allowance or Austudy payment each year regardless of the amount of study undertaken as a result of credit being given.

This could be funded by extending the Austudy concessional rates to include students in receipt of credit under a Pathways Pass. The Austudy guidelines allow for student entitlement to the full allowance if their workload is reduced to 66% under certain circumstances. The Pathways Pass could be included as one of these criteria.

### ***Conclusion***

The Pathways Pass is an easy to implement and cost effective strategy that would benefit both individual students and institutions. Possession of a tailored, individualised document that specifies the credit available to the student on graduation would provide students with confidence that an application for entry and credit would be a simple process, easy for them to navigate and likely to be successful. Increased confidence by students that their pathways will be smooth would increase the number of applications for entry to higher education from students with a VET qualification. This aspect is particularly important for students from low-SES backgrounds.

The Pathways Pass provides a strategy to enable institutions to meet the Commonwealth government's targets for increased numbers of low-SES background students enrolled in higher education and to increase the proportion of the population aged 25-34 years with a qualification at Bachelor Degree or above.