

## Quality Assurance Statements updated November 2007

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## The AQF and Quality Assurance Processes in Australian Education and Training

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was developed under instruction from the [Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs \(MCEETYA\)](#) and is a key national policy instrument to protect the quality of Australian education and training wherever it is delivered. The AQF comprises:

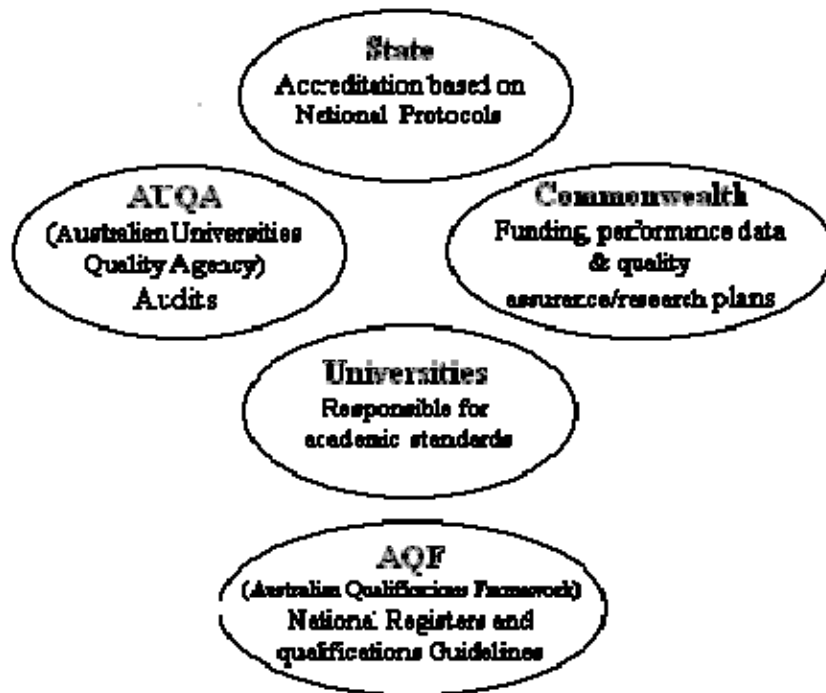
- agreed national guidelines for each of the current national qualifications issued in the schools, vocational education and training and higher education sectors;
- principles for articulation and credit transfer;
- registers of authorities empowered by governments to accredit qualifications and to issue qualifications; and
- protocols for issuing qualifications and a structure for monitoring implementation of the AQF and advising Ministers, including recommending any changes.

The AQF Council has a policy role rather than an operational function in implementation of the AQF; similarly, the extensive quality assurance processes which underpin AQF qualifications are the responsibility of each of the sectors.

The following summary of external quality assurance mechanisms in each of three sectors: schools, vocational education and training (TAFEs and private providers) and higher education (mainly universities) reflects the tri-sectoral model on which the AQF is largely based.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework



The *Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework* has been developed and supported by Australian State, Territory and Commonwealth governments and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. It is comprised of interlinking university and government quality assurance processes and instruments of national policy, described in further detail below.

The term 'university' is protected by legislation in Australia. Universities are established, usually by State or Territory legislation, following a detailed assessment of their academic and financial credentials.

Universities are 'self-accrediting'; that is, they are authorised to accredit their own courses and are responsible for their academic standards. They must have appropriate quality assurance processes in place, including peer assessment processes, external examination of higher degrees and the involvement of professional bodies in the accreditation of particular courses. Reflecting particular historical circumstances, there are also a small number of self-accrediting higher education institutions which are not universities.

Universities are listed on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Register. Listing on the Register indicates that [MCEETYA](#) vouches for the quality of the institution. State and Territory government accreditation authorities also accredit higher education courses delivered by approved non self-accrediting institutions, and these are also listed on the Register.

In addition, all courses for international students must be approved by the relevant State or Territory accreditation authority, and registered on the [Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students \(CRICOS\)](#). For further information refer to the [Education Services for Overseas Students section](#)

A further dimension to quality assurance is introduced with the advent of the 'internet university'. Degree programs can now be accessed in Australia from the global market, which may include well known institutions such as Harvard or Oxford but also institutions without wide public recognition, which may purport to offer degrees recognised in Australia. Prospective students who wish to check the status of these degrees, including whether they are recognised through State and Territory processes as AQF qualifications, should check with the relevant State or Territory accreditation agency or the [AQF Council](#).

## National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes

These [national protocols](#) codify the above arrangements into a set of protocols to ensure consistent standards across Australia in such matters as the recognition of new universities, the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia, the operation of Australian institutions delivering Australian higher education awards offshore; and the accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non self-accrediting providers. The National Protocols include:

- i. Criteria and processes for recognition of universities;
- ii. Overseas higher education institutions seeking to operate in Australia;
- iii. The accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non—self-accrediting providers;
- iv. Delivery arrangements involving other organisations; and
- v. Endorsement of courses for overseas students.

Revised National Protocols, which will come into effect in 2008, will provide pathways for non self-accrediting providers with a strong track record of reaccreditation of courses to seek authority to accredit their own courses. They will also permit a greater variety of universities including university colleges working toward full university status and subject specialist universities.

## Quality assurance processes followed by universities

Universities in Australia are public or private autonomous bodies, which accredit their own courses. These institutions typically have in place a system of formal, cyclical reviews involving external assessors for the development/evaluation of programmes and organisational units. Other monitoring processes involve gathering external feedback through periodic surveys. For some institutions, participation in Australian and/or international higher education networks and the benchmarking projects undertaken by these networks is a significant part of their quality management process.

There are a number of other dimensions to quality assurance processes involving universities, in particular:

- instruments such as the Australian Graduate Survey, encompassing the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), and student evaluation surveys;
- the role of professional bodies and associations in accrediting professional courses such as health and medicine, law, accounting, engineering and architecture;
- the sector-wide indicators published from time to time in *The characteristics and performance of higher education institutions*;
- the use of external examiners for higher degrees by research and some honours degrees; and
- the encouragement of innovation and good teaching through the specific initiatives such as the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund and the establishment of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

Universities are accountable to the community through their governing boards and, in relation to those receiving public funds from the Commonwealth, through the Institution Assessment Framework (IAF). The IAF, which replaced Educational Profiles in 2004, is founded on the responsibilities of the Commonwealth to ensure that the institutions it funds are sustainable and deliver the outputs for which they are funded, that their outcomes are of a high quality and that they comply with their legal obligations. The IAF produces an across-the-board assessment of institutional achievements based on quantitative and qualitative data from universities and external sources. The Commonwealth assessment of an institution forms the basis of strategic bilateral discussions between the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and an individual institution.

## Quality assurance processes followed by higher education institutions whose courses are accredited by government

The National Protocols for Higher Education Approvals Processes set national criteria that an institution needs to meet before it can be accredited to provide higher education courses. The criteria include that courses satisfy the AQF and are comparable to similar Australian university courses, and the delivery and financial arrangements are appropriate. Institutions must also have quality assurance arrangements with a focus on continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

These higher education institutions are reviewed through regular re-registration and re-accreditation at least every five years undertaken by jurisdictions and/or external quality audits. Once an institution has been accredited by a state or territory it can be added to the AQF Register to show that it has met the national criteria. The quality assurance processes used to assess whether an institution meets the national criteria are established by each state and territory. These processes can vary between jurisdictions and detailed information may be obtained from each jurisdiction: please refer to the higher education contact point for each jurisdiction given in section i of the AQF Register.

In addition, if an accredited higher education institution wishes to be approved by DEEWR to access FEE-HELP it must also meet DEEWR's quality and accountability requirements, including periodic quality audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency or other body nominated in the Higher Education Provider Guidelines. The auditing arrangements for private providers are currently being finalised and further details will be posted on the DEEWR website as they become available ([http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/programmes\\_funding/forms\\_guidelines/higher\\_education\\_providers.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/higher_education_providers.htm)).

## Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)

The [AUQA](http://www.auqa.edu.au) is an independent body established by MCEETYA to audit teaching, learning, research and administration in Australian universities on a five yearly cycle. The AUQA also audits the processes of State, Territory and Commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities. The first cycle of university audits is largely complete and the second cycle is beginning in 2008. Reports are published on the AUQA website (<http://www.auqa.edu.au>).

## National Performance Monitoring and Approval

In addition to the activity noted above, the [Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations \(DEEWR\)](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/higher_education_providers.htm) publishes a range of comparative data to inform both students and institutions about the characteristics and performance of universities

## Universities Australia

University chief executives meeting as [Universities Australia \(UA\)](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au) also have a long-standing role in developing guidelines relevant to quality assurance, including the following:

- *'Nature of a University'*
- *'Code of practice for maintaining and monitoring academic quality and standards in higher degrees'*
- *'Guidelines for quality assurance in university course development and review'*
- *'AVCC code of ethical practice in the provision of education to international students by Australian universities'*

The UA also provides information and advice on degree, post-graduate and higher degree qualifications, and development

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### AQF status of qualifications

Australian States and Territories and the Commonwealth have, over time, enacted a range of legislation to govern the provision of vocational education and training, including Vocational Education and Training Acts, Trade Practices and Consumer Protection legislation and Industrial Relations legislation. During the past decade, through the former Australian National Training Authority and, currently, through the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) a national system of vocational education and training has developed, under which State and Territory governments have agreed to implement a series of national policies in the interests of an improved outcome for the sector.

In particular, governments have agreed that to issue an AQF qualification in the vocational education and training sector, the institution or agency must be registered by a National, State or Territory government recognition authority as a registered training organisation (RTO). All RTOs are publicly listed on the Internet via the [National Training Information Service \(NTIS\)](#).

While, as with higher education, quality assurance processes in the vocational education and training sector rely on a robust tradition of self-regulation at institutional level, with the recent introduction of a deregulated training market there is increasing diversity of providers and a corresponding need for more explicit and comprehensive quality assurance procedures and processes.

### Quality assurance processes followed by RTOs

The national training system is a key driver of Australia's economic and social growth. For more than a decade, the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments have been working collaboratively with industry to develop a national training system that provides the basis for high-quality, industry developed and nationally recognised training to approximately one in nine working-age Australians. Through a national network of over 4,400 public and private registered training organisations, over 1.5 million Australians from all ages, backgrounds and locations participate in vocational education and training each year.

On 1 July 2007, Australian Quality Training Framework 2007 (AQTF 2007) was introduced after endorsement by training Ministers across Australia. The National Quality Council (NQC) has worked with its members to collaboratively develop new national sets of standards to assure nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's vocational education and training system.

AQTF 2007 has three components. The first component is the Essential Standards for Registration. Training organisations must adhere to the Essential Standards, including nine conditions of registration and three AQTF 2007 Quality Indicators to become a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Only RTOs are authorised to deliver and assess nationally recognised vocational training and issue nationally recognised vocational qualifications.

The second component is the Standards for State and Territory registering bodies. State and Territory registering bodies are responsible for registering training organisations and for quality assuring the training and assessment services they provide. In accordance with AQTF 2007 and relevant legislation within each jurisdiction. Each registering body will report annually to the National Quality Council (NQC) about its achievements.

The third component is the Excellence Criteria. This is a voluntary business excellence framework designed specifically for vocational education and training in Australia. RTOs may choose to use the framework internally to continue improving the quality of their training and assessment or to apply for formal recognition of their performance by independent evaluators. The Excellence Criteria is currently under development and will be operative in 2008. Further information about AQTF2007 can be found at <http://www.training.com.au/aqtf2007/>

## **Quality assurance benchmarking activities at national level**

National coordination of key aspects of quality assurance processes is taking place through the National Senior Officials Committee and the National Quality Council (NQC). Priorities include collaborative development of an agreed set of reporting procedures and protocols to enable national monitoring of VET quality, and a risk assessment model to inform a schedule of national strategic evaluations. An independent review of AQTF 2007 at the twelve month and twenty-four month period following its implementation will also provide details of benchmarking outcomes. Registering bodies and their delegates in each jurisdiction have committed to benchmarking as a means of ensuring national consistency in implementing an outcomes focused, streamlines and transparent quality system.

As with the higher education and schools sectors, VET quality has many dimensions related to the priority objectives of the overall national training system in improving the skill levels and productivity of the workforce, including the contribution of the education and training industry itself to Australia's export earnings.

## **SCHOOLS**

### **AQF status of qualifications**

Government statutory bodies in each State and Territory issue senior secondary certificates of education which meet the requirements for this qualification under the AQF. The statutory authorities are responsible for the integrity, credibility and authenticity of the qualification, which has both a state title and a national AQF title as the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE). The role and function of statutory authorities, together with complementary quality assurance processes at the level of the individual school, reflect a well-developed tradition in the States and Territories of publicly-visible, high-level quality assurance underpinning the senior secondary qualification.

Schools also provide vocational education and training recognised under the range of AQF Certificates I-IV and are required to have the same compliance, including with the relevant legislation, as in the vocational education and training sector (see "Vocational Education and Training" above), either directly with the State or Territory training authority or through some delegated arrangement.

### **National quality assurance processes for senior secondary certificates of education**

There are three levels of quality control typically exercised in the interaction between the statutory authorities and the schools: curriculum development to achieve the best possible range of skills and knowledge and to identify explicit standards as a basis for reliable assessment; a process of registration and accreditation to control consistency of standards and the currency of the qualification; and moderation procedures to achieve comparability of student results. Quality assurance processes underpinning the SSCE include external examinations and tests, external moderation, marker monitoring and a wide range of checks and cross-checks on the reliability and validity of students' results.

In all States and Territories, various combinations of these quality assurance processes are used by the statutory boards which, through a national agency ([ACACA](#)), have developed national guidelines for assessment quality and equity, and a set of national principles for assessment and certification. These national principles support the AQF guidelines for the SSCE to achieve national consistency of outcomes (including certification of vocational education and training completed in senior secondary school), national portability, flexible pathways to the qualification and across sectors, and protocols for issuing the qualification.

## Quality assurance benchmarking activities at national level for school education

A program of national assessments of school students has been agreed between the Australian Government, States and Territories, and the non-government school sector to monitor progress towards a comprehensive set of common and agreed national goals, the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. This will provide comparable reporting across States and Territories, benchmarking of our students' performance internationally and relevant and timely information to parents on the performance of their children.

This National Assessment Programme (NAP) comprises three main elements:

- Literacy and numeracy assessments. Currently States and Territories carry out literacy and numeracy testing for Years 3, 5 and 7. From 2008 common national tests will be introduced in literacy (reading, writing, spelling) and numeracy at Years 3, 5 7 and 9;
- Triennial national sample assessments in science literacy (Year 6), civics and citizenship (Years 6 and 10), and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy (also Years 6 and 10); and
- Two major international assessments, the OECD's triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the quadrennial Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) run by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

## Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS)

All providers of education and training services to overseas students studying in Australia on student visas must comply with the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*. This protects Australia's reputation for delivering quality education services and the interests of overseas students by setting minimum standards and providing tuition and financial assurance.

The legislation mandates a nationally consistent approach to registering education providers so that the quality of the tuition, and care of students, remains high. The professionalism and integrity of the industry is further strengthened by the ESOS legislation's interface with immigration law. This imposes visa related reporting requirements on both students and providers.

The ESOS framework is administered cooperatively by the Australian Government and state and territory governments. It leverages existing registration, accreditation and compliance systems, including the Australian Qualifications Framework, to underpin the regulation of the education and training for overseas students studying in Australia.

An education provider wishing to recruit, enrol or teach overseas students must:

- be registered on the Australian Government's Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS); and
- comply with all requirements of the ESOS legislative framework.

The ESOS framework places obligations on registered providers to, among other things:

- recruit and place students in an ethical and responsible manner;
- maintain proper records of enrolment, course progress and attendance;
- report on students who breach their visa conditions;
- provide refunds as required; and
- provide appropriate support services for students.