



## **AQF COUNCIL**

# **Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the Australian Qualifications Framework**

**November 2011**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The AQF Council is undertaking a review of the AQF Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas qualification types.

In its advice on a strengthened AQF of November 2010 to the (then) Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE), the AQF Council informed MCTEE that there was an emerging view that greater differentiation of the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types may be required and that a new qualification type may be needed to achieve this. There was also a general view across the vocational education and training and higher education sectors that the distinction between vocational and higher education Graduate Certificates and Diplomas was no longer necessary because the revised descriptors allow for either vocational or academic outcomes. The AQF Council advised MCTEE that insufficient evidence had been provided to justify a change at that point in time and that further research needed to be undertaken.<sup>1</sup> MCTEE was informed that the new *AQF Addition and Removal of Qualification Type Policy* would allow for change in the future should evidence justify it and the levels-based structure of the revised AQF provides the framework to consider how greater differentiation in these qualifications could be achieved.

The purpose of this consultation paper is to consider the future direction for these qualification types. This paper provides a summary of issues raised by stakeholders, an overview of the evolution of these qualification types in the national system of qualifications, a brief description of recent enrolments and completions, and how such qualifications are handled in the qualifications frameworks of selected countries. Section 6 of the paper proposes options for consideration by stakeholders.

You are invited to consider the issues and options and provide comment on possible changes to these qualifications types. Comments are required by the close of business on Friday 24 February 2012 and should be sent to the AQF Council by email to [aqfc@deewr.gov.au](mailto:aqfc@deewr.gov.au).

## 2. SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

During the consultations undertaken in 2009 and 2010 by the AQF Council on strengthening the AQF, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education stakeholders raised the following key issues:

- There is a need to better define the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types. The views expressed included differentiating between qualifications used for 'broadening' and 'extension or deepening' in a discipline/field of study and distinguishing between qualifications that are graduate or postgraduate in purpose.
- The distinction in titling between Vocational Graduate Certificates/Diplomas and Graduate Certificates/Diplomas may no longer be relevant. Currently, the former are accredited in the vocational education and training sector and the latter are accredited in the higher education sector.

### 2.1 Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma

Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are usually offered by higher education providers and accredited within the higher education regulatory framework.

During the consultations, it was reported that current practice for some higher education institutions is to offer qualifications titled 'Postgraduate Certificate' and 'Postgraduate Diploma'; qualification types that are not part of the AQF. Where this is occurring, it was reported that the 'postgraduate' nomenclature tends to be used for those qualifications that are offered for continuing

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<sup>1</sup> AQF Council, *Strengthening the AQF: Advice to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment, November 2010*, page 8

studies in the same area of study (for extension or deepening), whereas ‘graduate’ nomenclature tends to be used for those qualifications in a new area of study (for broadening).

One rationale given for this distinction is that the Commonwealth higher education reporting system requires that Graduate Diplomas in a new area of study are distinguished from Graduate Diplomas in the same area of study. The former are referred to as ‘Graduate Diploma – new area’, and the latter as ‘Graduate Diploma – extension area’. This distinction is not made for Graduate Certificates.

A brief investigation of current qualification databases shows that nomenclature in use for AQF Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas is variable and not always consistent with the AQF. For example, the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) provides a comprehensive source of data illustrating the use of AQF titles. There are over 400 qualifications listed in the ‘level’ field as Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualifications that are titled in the ‘course name’ field as either a ‘Postgraduate’ or ‘Post-Graduate’ Certificate or Diploma. Some state accrediting authorities, which have approved qualifications for registration on CRICOS, appear to use the institution’s preferred qualification type title such as ‘Postgraduate’ in the ‘course name’ field with the correct AQF qualification title ‘Graduate’ used in the ‘level’ field. It is reasonable to assume that qualifications designated as ‘postgraduate’ on CRICOS are also listed as such on University websites which form part of the AQF Register. This variability in nomenclature contributes to confusion in the marketplace about the level and difference between a ‘Graduate’ or ‘Postgraduate’ Certificate and Diploma.

To reflect current practice for offerings and reporting of both qualification types and/or to provide the opportunity for more accurate nomenclature that reflects the purpose of qualification types, there may be justification for:

- the separation of the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma into four qualification types: Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma at different AQF levels, or
- revising the location of the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma at different levels in the AQF, or
- a variation of either of these options.

## **2.2 Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma**

Vocational Graduate Certificates and Vocational Graduate Diplomas are usually offered by vocational education and training providers and accredited within the VET regulatory framework.

Throughout the AQF Council’s consultations on strengthening the AQF, stakeholders from both the VET and higher education sectors suggested that the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are no longer required as discreet qualification types and that a Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma, allowed to be accredited in the vocational education and training sector, could be used in their place.

The strongest reason for this is that the general equivalence of learning outcomes for both the higher education and vocational education and training qualification types is widely accepted. This has been reinforced by the revised AQF through its focus on learning outcomes that are generic to all education sectors regardless of content or learning approach and the revised descriptors in the AQF that allow for either vocational or academic outcomes for all qualification types.

The rationale for the use of different titles in the VET and higher education sectors stems from the period when the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) was considering the introduction of the VET qualifications at this level. Concerns about the use of the titles Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in the VET sector were raised by the higher education sector. While there was support for the VET sector to add new qualification types and there was acceptance that they could be at the same ‘level’ as the higher education qualification types, there was an argument presented for different titles and descriptors to distinguish them from their higher

education counterparts.<sup>2</sup> The findings from the consultations for strengthening the AQF suggest that this view about differentiation is no longer widely held or supported.

Despite being separate qualification types in the AQF, in practice the AQF nomenclature of Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma has not been strictly adhered to. For example, some State and Territory qualification registers show the use of the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma nomenclature for those qualification types accredited as VET qualifications instead of the correct AQF titles of Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma.

There is a precedent for dual sector accreditation; both the Diploma and the Advanced Diploma qualification types can be accredited by both VET and higher education accrediting authorities. During the consultations for strengthening the AQF, no significant tensions or issues were raised by stakeholders from either sector about the dual sector accreditation arrangements for these qualification types. The recent policy discussions in Australia about the emergence of a tertiary sector indicate that a workplace focus of a VET-accredited qualification and an academic learning focus in the higher education-accredited qualification using the same qualification type and nomenclature can be accommodated and understood. This approach can be applied to the Vocational/Graduate Certificate/Diploma qualification types.

### **3. BACKGROUND TO THE QUALIFICATION TYPES**

#### **3.1 Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma**

The Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE), *Nomenclature and Guidelines for Awards in Advanced Education*, implemented in 1972, was the first nationally agreed framework for higher education qualifications. The Graduate Diploma was included as a Post-Graduate Award (category PGI). It was defined as one year of full time study following the satisfactory completion of an undergraduate Degree, or in some cases a Diploma, as a pathway from an undergraduate Degree qualification, with or without additional work experience or some equivalent qualification.

The ACAAE recognised that a Graduate Diploma award could be:

- an extension within the field of study of the student's previous award and as a result would be both postgraduate in time and substantially in standard, or
- in a different field of study to the student's previous award and as a result would be post graduate in time but not necessarily post graduate in standard, or
- some combination of these two categories.<sup>3</sup>

The Graduate Diploma, with these characteristics, was retained in the Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA) *Guidelines for the National Registration of Awards in Advanced Education*<sup>4</sup> from 1986 to 1991.

The ACTA guidelines identified that the Graduate Diploma within a field of study covered in the undergraduate qualification was an 'extending' qualification providing 'specialised study in depth in an area'. The Graduate Diploma undertaken in a different field of study, although not an extension in depth of knowledge gained in the Bachelor Degree or Diploma, still needed to be designed for and at a level appropriate for a graduate intake, that is it should offer a level of study that goes beyond that of undergraduate qualifications.

The Graduate Certificate was introduced into the framework of higher education awards from June 1988 by ACTA. It was designed as a half year of full time study in duration and with the same

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) Report to MCEETYA July, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE), 1972, *Nomenclature and Guidelines for Awards in Advanced Education*, page 8

<sup>4</sup> Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA), 1982, *Guidelines for the National Registration of Awards in Advanced Education*, page 7

purpose as the Graduate Diploma. The difference was that the latter offered more in-depth consideration of a discipline area.

The Graduate Certificate was intended for two purposes:

- to build on and deepen knowledge and skills gained in a previous undergraduate qualification for specific vocational or professional upgrade purposes;
- to broaden knowledge and skills into a new area completely different to the one in which the student had previously studied.<sup>5</sup>

When the Australian Education Council *Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE)* was introduced in 1991, both the Graduate Diploma and the Graduate Certificate were retained with these same characteristics.<sup>6</sup>

In 1995 both the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma were included in the Australian Qualifications Framework when it was introduced.<sup>7</sup>

The former AQF Advisory Board undertook a review of higher education qualifications in 2000.<sup>8</sup> The key issue for the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma at that time was whether or not a distinction should be made between the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma for qualifications developing knowledge in a new professional area and a Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma for qualifications developing knowledge in an existing professional area. At the time the distinction was considered to be too difficult to make in practice and had the potential to confuse both employers and students. No change to the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma was made.

Some changes to the descriptors for the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma were made to further differentiate them from the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma when the latter were introduced by MCEETYA in 2005.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.2 Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma**

The Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma qualification types were added to the AQF in 2005 as vocational education and training qualification types and located at the same 'level' as the higher education Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma.

The Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma qualification types were included in response to a need for higher level qualifications for experienced tradespeople and other mature workers with or without existing qualifications, and for higher education graduates wishing to acquire new high level skills tailored to a workplace environment.

At the time, the reasons for the decision to include parallel graduate-level qualification types for the VET sector rather than dual sector qualification types (such as the Diploma and Advanced Diploma) were to:

- demonstrate the similarity but the distinctiveness of the Vocational Graduate Certificate/Diploma and the Graduate Certificate/Diploma
- avoid apparent quality assurance issues and indicate clearly that Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are accredited in the higher education sector according to criteria related to the benchmarks for academic performance while the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are based on accreditation criteria for competent performance in the workplace at benchmark levels across industry

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Australian Education Council, 1991, *Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE)*  
<http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/RATE%20MAY%201991%20EDITION.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> AQFAB, 1995, *Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook First Edition*, [www.aqf.edu.au](http://www.aqf.edu.au)

<sup>8</sup> AQFAB, 2000, *Review of the AQF Guidelines for the Bachelor Degree and the Postgraduate Qualifications*

<sup>9</sup> AQFAB, 2007, *Implementation Handbook Fourth Edition*, [www.aqf.edu.au](http://www.aqf.edu.au)

- clearly confer status to VET as a sector of expanded learning choice for graduates in response to the upward shift in skill and knowledge requirements in the workplace and to recognise the contribution of the labour market sector to education and training
- eliminate the perception of the VET sector as being a graduate ‘dead-end’
- enable another horizontal pathway opportunity from VET into higher education.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.3 Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the revised AQF**

In the revised AQF, approved by MCTEE in March 2011, the AQF qualification types of Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are all located at level 8 and have similar descriptors.<sup>11</sup> The descriptors and the relationship between the qualification types reflects the similarities in the characteristics of the qualification types as described previously in the *AQF Implementation Handbook 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2007*.<sup>12</sup>

The Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Certificate have the same descriptor which means that graduates achieve learning outcomes at the same level, although not necessarily with the same combination of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills. Similarly, the descriptors for the Graduate Diploma and Vocational Graduate Diploma have the same learning outcomes which allow for knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills to be applied in different proportions.

As they are located at the same level, the differences between the Graduate/Vocational Graduate Certificate and the Graduate/Vocational Graduate Diploma are very slight. The descriptors allow for graduates of the former to have specialised knowledge whereas graduates of the latter will have advanced knowledge. The volume of learning further differentiates the Graduate/Vocational Graduate Certificate from the Graduate/Vocational Graduate Diploma. The volume of learning for the former is typically 0.5 to 1 year while the latter is typically 1 to 2 years.

Research undertaken during the development of the descriptors to empirically examine the structure of the proposed strengthened AQF confirmed that overall the complexity of the learning outcomes descriptors for the four qualification types were within the range of complexity estimates for AQF level 8.<sup>13</sup>

The revised AQF describes but does not determine the regulatory framework for each of the qualification types. In the AQF, the Graduate Certificate/Diploma are described as meeting higher education accreditation standards and the Vocational Graduate Certificate/Diploma are described as meeting VET accreditation standards.

## **4. STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE QUALIFICATION TYPES**

### **4.1. Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma**

Statistics from the Commonwealth higher education statistics collection<sup>14</sup> indicate that Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are important qualifications for higher education students at post-Bachelor Degree level. Student participation in both Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas has increased over time as part of the broader trend of increasing postgraduate enrolments.

<sup>10</sup> AQFAB, 2005, internal papers

<sup>11</sup> AQF Council, 2011 Australian Qualifications framework First Edition July 2011, page 16

<sup>12</sup> AQFAB, 2007, *Implementation Handbook Fourth Edition* pages 53-67, [www.aqf.edu.au](http://www.aqf.edu.au)

<sup>13</sup> Victoria University, 2010, *Empirical validation of the Strengthened Australian Qualifications Framework using Item Response Theory*, <http://www.aqf.edu.au/PoliciesPublications/tabid/196/Default.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, *Higher education statistics collection, 2009*

Published completion data show that between 1998 and 2009:

- Graduate Certificate completions have risen substantially for domestic students from 5,259 in 1998 to 12,581 in 2009. For overseas students the increase has been from 517 to 2,423 in 1998 and 2009 respectively.
- Graduate Diploma completions in a new area of study for Australian students have stayed at about the same level, fluctuating in the 10,000 to 11,000 range each year. For overseas students, completions increased by more than double from 1,252 to 2,922.
- Graduate Diploma completions in the same area of study have increased significantly to 6,000 and 6,540 in 2008 and 2009 respectively from a quite consistent 3,500 to 4,500 range between 1998 and 2007. For overseas students, completions have increased from 508 to 923.

The most popular broad fields of education for students completing Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas in 2009 were: Society and culture (9223 completions); Education (8791 completions); Management and commerce (8033 completions); and Health (5665 completions).

#### **4.2. Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma**

The most recent published statistics collected by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research<sup>15</sup> shows that from 2005, when they were introduced, until 2008 student uptake of Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas was not significant, with Vocational Graduate Certificates ten times more popular than Vocational Graduate Diplomas.

Enrolment data for 2005-2008 show:

- Vocational Graduate Certificate enrolments have fluctuated, with no consistent pattern, from 1,400 in 2005; 900 in 2006; 1,100 in 2007; to 1,300 in 2008
- Vocational Graduate Diploma enrolments have been steady at 100 students per annum.

Completion data for 2005-2008 show:

- Vocational Graduate Certificates completions were 500 in 2005, 400 in each of 2006 and 2007 and 700 in 2008
- Vocational Graduate Diploma completions have not been reported due to their very small numbers.

## **5. THE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE AND GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN OTHER NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

For comparison, a brief overview of how Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are included in the national Qualifications Frameworks of New Zealand, the United Kingdom (Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Areas is provided. Each of these Qualifications Frameworks is based on the concept of explicit learning outcomes as is the revised AQF.

### **5.1 New Zealand**

New Zealand's new Qualifications Framework (NZQF), established on 1 July 2010, replaced the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (also known as **KiwiQuals**) and the National Qualifications Framework. The NZQF has ten levels of qualifications with level 1 the least complex and level 10 the most complex.

Both Graduate and Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma qualification types are located in the NZQF. Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are located at the same level as the Bachelor Degree (level 7), while Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas are located at the same level as the Bachelor Degree with Honours (level 8).

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<sup>15</sup> National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2010, *Students and Courses 2009*

The Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are designed primarily as vehicles for Bachelor Degree graduates to pursue further study at an undergraduate level. The Graduate Certificate can be designed as a bridging qualification for candidates developing educational, professional or vocational knowledge in a new discipline, profession or subject area or for broadening or deepening of skills or knowledge already gained in an undergraduate qualification. The Graduate Diploma can be designed to either broaden knowledge and skills or develop knowledge in a new area.

The Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma serve as qualifications recognising continuing professional development in the same area as the candidate's original Bachelor Degree. The Postgraduate Certificate is designed to extend and deepen a candidate's knowledge and skills through formal instruction and directed inquiry. The Postgraduate Diploma is designed to extend and deepen a candidate's knowledge and skills through a systematic and coherent survey of current thinking and research in a particular body of knowledge, and may include instruction in the relevant research methodologies.<sup>16</sup>

## 5.2 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, Scotland has a separate Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) that has 12 levels from access at level 1 to Doctorate at Level 12. The SCQF includes Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma qualification types. Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are co-located in the SCQF with both the Bachelor Degree and the Honours Degree while the Post Graduate Certificates and Post Graduate Diplomas are located at the same level as Masters Degrees.<sup>17</sup>

The remainder of the United Kingdom – England, Wales and Northern Ireland – has a common framework for higher education qualifications known as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). The FHEQ has five levels; three undergraduate levels and two postgraduate levels.<sup>18</sup> The Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are co-located at the same level as the Bachelor's Degree and the Bachelor's Degree with Honours, while the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma are located at the same level as the Masters Degree.

Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualifications are identified as 'short courses and professional 'conversion' courses based largely on undergraduate material and taken usually by those who are graduates in another discipline'.<sup>19</sup> The FHEQ proscribes that titles with the stem 'graduate' should be used for qualifications from programs of study that typically require graduate entry or its equivalent and have learning outcomes that match relevant parts of the descriptor for a qualification at level 6.

The Postgraduate Certificate requires a shorter period of time than the Postgraduate Diploma. The Postgraduate Certificate can form part of longer qualification (for example Masters Degree by course work) or can be designed specifically to provide grounding in a discipline at postgraduate level in a relatively short period of time.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.3 Comparison of New Zealand and the United Kingdom

The positioning of Graduate and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas qualifications in the United Kingdom and New Zealand national qualification frameworks are shown in Table I below.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/nzqf/understand-nz-quals/>

<sup>17</sup> Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, <http://www.scqf.org.uk/features/Framework.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Quality Assurance Agency, 2008, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, page 10

<sup>19</sup> Quality Assurance Agency, 2008, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, pages 20-22

<sup>20</sup> Higher Education Policy Institute, 2010, *Post graduate education the United Kingdom*, Ginevra House, page 7  
<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/466-1764/Postgraduate-education-in-the-UK.html>

**Table 1: Graduate Certificates and Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas in the Qualification Frameworks of the United Kingdom and New Zealand**

	<b>Scotland (SCQF)</b>		<b>England/Wales/Northern Ireland (FHEQ)</b>		<b>New Zealand (NZQF)</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>Qualification types</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>Qualification types</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>Qualification types</b>
<b>8</b>	Diploma of Higher Education	<b>5</b>	Foundation Degree Diploma of Higher Education Higher National Diploma	<b>7</b>	Bachelor Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate
<b>9</b>	Bachelors/Ordinary Degree Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma				
<b>10</b>	Honours Degree Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma	<b>6</b>	Bachelor's Degree Bachelor's Degree with Honours Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma	<b>8</b>	Bachelor Degree with Honours Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificates
<b>11</b>	Masters Degree Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma	<b>7</b>	Master's Degree Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma	<b>9</b>	Masters Degree
<b>12</b>	Doctoral Degree	<b>8</b>	Doctoral Degree	<b>10</b>	Doctoral Degree

#### **5.4 European Higher Education Area**

The *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)* was adopted in 2005 as a result of the 'Bologna Process'. Twenty-nine European countries initially signed the Bologna Declaration in June 1999 for the harmonisation of higher education qualification systems in Europe to promote mutual recognition of qualifications, demonstrate transparency and ease mobility of staff and students. Currently 47 countries are signatories to the FQ-EHEA.

The FQ-EHEA uses the term 'cycle' to describe three sequential levels of learning outcomes identified by the Bologna process. Higher education qualifications correspond to the three cycles as follows:

- Cycle 1 – Bachelor Degree (undergraduate)
- Cycle 2 – Masters Degree (postgraduate)
- Cycle 3 – Doctoral Degree (postgraduate).

The FQ-EHEA recognises that within national contexts there is the possibility of intermediate qualifications within Cycles 1 and 2. There are generic descriptors based on learning outcomes that successful students are expected to attain at the end of each cycle, commonly known as the Dublin Descriptors.

Each signatory country has agreed to verify that its national Qualifications Framework is compatible with the FQ-EHEA by 2010. In the United Kingdom, Scotland verified its framework for qualifications against the FQ-EHEA in 2006 and England, Wales and Northern Ireland did so in 2008. The validated alignments are shown in Table 2 below. Qualifications regarded as intermediate qualifications in a relevant cycle are denoted by the boxes shaded grey.

**Table 2: United Kingdom and Scottish higher education qualifications at each level and the corresponding cycle of the FQ-EHEA<sup>21</sup>**

Europe (FQ-EHEA)	United Kingdom (FHEQ)		Scotland (SCQF)	
	L	Qualification Types	L	Qualification Types
Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle)	5	Foundation Degree Diploma of Higher Education Higher National Diploma	8	Diploma of Higher Education
Intermediate awards within the first cycle	6	Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma	9 10	Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma
First cycle (end of cycle)	6	Bachelor's Degree Bachelor's Degree with Honours	9 10	Bachelors/Ordinary Degree Honours Degree
Intermediate awards within the second cycle	7	Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma	11	Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma
Second cycle (end of cycle)	7	Master's Degree	11	Masters Degree
Third cycle (end of cycle)	8	Doctoral Degree	12	Doctoral Degree

In summary, the examples from New Zealand and the United Kingdom show that these countries have distinguished Graduate Certificates and Diplomas from Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas and furthermore comparisons with other countries can be made through mapping.

## 6. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THESE QUALIFICATION TYPES

The previous sections highlight that the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma and Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are well embedded in the qualification system in Australia. The revisions to the AQF highlight that there is little to distinguish these qualification types which have almost identical descriptors. The informal use of the 'Postgraduate' nomenclature in the higher education sector and the limited uptake of the 'Vocational' nomenclature in the VET sector suggest that the current distinction between these four qualification types may be insufficient for current needs.

Three options for change are proposed for consideration. A fourth option of no change is also provided for consideration.

### Option I

Option I is to retain the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma at level 8 with the descriptors as revised in 2011 and remove the titles Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma. The Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types would be available for accreditation by both the VET and higher education sectors.

This may require an amendment to the legislation for the Australian Skills Quality Authority which determines that the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma can be accredited as part of the VET regulatory framework.

<sup>21</sup> Table adapted from: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2008, *Verification of the compatibility of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)*  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQSelfCert.pdf>

## **Option 2**

Option 2 builds on Option 1 (that is to remove the titles Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma) and redevelop the Graduate Certificate as a level 7 qualification type and retain the Graduate Diploma as a level 8 qualification type.

Both the Graduate Certificate (at level 7) and Graduate Diploma (at level 8) qualification types would be for both new (broadening) and extension (deepening) qualifications.

Both the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types would be available for accreditation in the VET and higher education sectors.

For illustration, the Appendix provides a draft descriptor for a new Graduate Certificate and the draft changes to the existing descriptor for the Graduate Diploma for illustration. If this option is adopted, further consultation on the descriptors would occur.

## **Option 3**

Option 3 builds on Option 1 (that is to remove the titles Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma) and redevelop the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma as level 7 qualification types. Both would be available for accreditation in the VET and higher education sectors. New Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma qualification types would be introduced as level 8 qualification types and be available for accreditation in the higher education sector only.

The Graduate Certificate and Diploma qualification types would be developed as level 7 qualification types with new descriptors and used for both new (broadening) and extension (deepening) qualifications. The same descriptor would be used for both and the distinguishing feature would be the volume of learning.

The Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma qualification types would be developed as level 8 qualification types based on the current descriptors for the Graduate Certificate and the Graduate Diploma. They would be for extension (deepening) qualifications only. The same descriptor would be used for both and the distinguishing feature would be the volume of learning.

For illustration, the Appendix provides a draft new descriptor for the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma at level 7 and draft changes to the descriptor for the Graduate Diploma which would be used for the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma. If this option is accepted, further consultation on the descriptors will occur.

This may require an amendment to the legislation for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency which determines that the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma can be accredited as part of the higher education regulatory framework.

## **Option 4**

Option 4 is to retain the status quo, that is the Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are retained as level 8 qualification types as revised in 2011.

Accreditation and re-accreditation during the AQF implementation period would be supported to allow for more appropriate differentiation between the qualification types to occur.

Table 3 below provides a summary of the four options.

**Table 3: Summary of four options for future direction for Vocational/Graduate Certificates and Diplomas**

Option	AQF Level 7 Qualification Types	AQF Level 8 Qualification Types
1		Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma
2	Graduate Certificate	Graduate Diploma
3	Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma	Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma
4		Graduate Certificate Vocational Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma Vocational Graduate Diploma

Whatever option is adopted, transition arrangements will be developed to support qualification developers, accrediting authorities and issuing organisations with implementation and to inform qualification users of the change.

## 7. CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. What is the case for retaining the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma as level 8 qualification types and removing the Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma titles (option 1)?
2. What is the case for the Graduate Certificate becoming a level 7 qualification type and the Graduate Diploma becoming a level 8 qualification type (option 2)? Will this provide a more meaningful distinction between these qualification types? If there is a case, how could the distinction be made?
3. What is the case for introducing a Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma at level 8 and revising the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma as level 7 qualification types to distinguish them (option 3)? If there is a case, how could the distinction be made?
4. What is the case for no change (option 4)?
5. If other option(s) should be considered, what is the case for it?
6. What are the implementation issues and transition arrangements that should be considered?

## 8. RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

Responses to the consultation questions are required by close of business on Friday 24 February 2012.

Responses should be sent to the AQF Council by email to [aqfc@deewr.gov.au](mailto:aqfc@deewr.gov.au). Hard copy responses by mail are not required.

Responses may be published on the AQF website.

Queries should be directed to the AQF Council by email to [aqfc@deewr.gov.au](mailto:aqfc@deewr.gov.au) or 08 8306 8688.

## APPENDIX

### Draft descriptors for proposed Graduate Certificate at AQF level 7 and Graduate Diploma at AQF level 8 for illustration

	<b>Proposed Graduate Certificate Draft Descriptor</b>	<b>Proposed Graduate Diploma Draft Descriptor</b>
Level	Level 7	Level 8
Purpose	Qualifies individuals to apply <i>broad and coherent knowledge and skills in a new discipline or area of practice for professional work and/or further learning</i>	Qualifies individuals to apply a <i>deepened</i> body of knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake professional or highly skilled work and as a pathway for further learning
Knowledge	Graduates will have broadened knowledge within a <i>new discipline or professional area</i>	Graduates will have <i>deepened specialised / advanced</i> knowledge within a <i>discipline or professional area</i>
Skills	Graduates will have <i>in the new discipline or professional area</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cognitive and technical skills to demonstrate a broad understanding of knowledge</li> <li>• cognitive and creative skills to exercise critical thinking and judgement in identifying and solving problems with intellectual independence</li> <li>• communication skills to present a clear, coherent and independent exposition of knowledge and ideas</li> </ul>	Graduates will have <i>within a discipline or professional area</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cognitive skills to review, analyse, consolidate and synthesise knowledge and identify and provide solutions to complex problems</li> <li>• cognitive skills to think critically and to generate and evaluate complex ideas</li> <li>• specialised technical and creative skills in a field of highly skilled and/or professional practice</li> <li>• communication skills to demonstrate an understanding of theoretical concepts</li> <li>• communication skills to transfer complex knowledge and ideas to a variety of audiences</li> </ul>
Application	Graduates will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills <i>in the new discipline or professional area</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with initiative and judgement in planning, problem solving and decision making in professional practice and/or scholarship</li> <li>• to adapt knowledge and skills in diverse contexts</li> <li>• with responsibility and accountability for own learning and professional practice and in collaboration with others within broad parameters</li> </ul>	Graduates will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to make high level, independent judgements in a range of technical or management functions in varied specialised contexts</li> <li>• to initiate, plan, implement and evaluate broad functions within varied specialised technical and/or creative contexts</li> <li>• with responsibility and accountability for personal outputs and all aspects of the work or function of others within broad parameters</li> </ul>
Volume of learning	The volume of learning of the Graduate Certificate is typically 0.5-1 year	The volume of learning for the Graduate Diploma is typically 1-2 years

The words in italics indicate the suggested changes from the existing descriptors.

**Draft descriptor for proposed Graduate Certificate and Diploma at AQF level 7 and proposed Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma at AQF level 8**

	<b>Proposed Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma Draft descriptor</b>	<b>Proposed Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma Draft descriptor</b>
Level	Level 7	Level 8
Purpose	Qualifies individuals to apply <i>broad and coherent knowledge and skills in a new discipline or area of practice for professional work and/or further learning</i>	Qualifies individuals to apply a <i>deepened</i> body of knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake professional or highly skilled work and as a pathway for further learning
Knowledge	Graduates will have broadened knowledge within a <i>new discipline or professional area</i>	Graduates will have <i>deepened specialised /advanced</i> knowledge within a <i>discipline or professional area</i>
Skills	Graduates will have <i>in the new discipline or professional area</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cognitive and technical skills to demonstrate a broad understanding of knowledge</li> <li>• cognitive and creative skills to exercise critical thinking and judgement in identifying and solving problems with intellectual independence</li> <li>• communication skills to present a clear, coherent and independent exposition of knowledge and ideas</li> </ul>	Graduates will have <i>within a discipline or professional area</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cognitive skills to review, analyse, consolidate and synthesise knowledge and identify and provide solutions to complex problems</li> <li>• cognitive skills to think critically and to generate and evaluate complex ideas</li> <li>• specialised technical and creative skills in a field of highly skilled and/or professional practice</li> <li>• communication skills to demonstrate an understanding of theoretical concepts</li> <li>• communication skills to transfer complex knowledge and ideas to a variety of audiences</li> </ul>
Application	Graduates will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills <i>in the new discipline or professional area</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with initiative and judgement in planning, problem solving and decision making in professional practice and/or scholarship</li> <li>• to adapt knowledge and skills in diverse contexts</li> <li>• with responsibility and accountability for own learning and professional practice and in collaboration with others within broad parameters</li> </ul>	Graduates will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to make high level, independent judgements in a range of technical or management functions in varied specialised contexts</li> <li>• to initiate, plan, implement and evaluate broad functions within varied specialised technical and/or creative contexts</li> <li>• with responsibility and accountability for personal outputs and all aspects of the work or function of others within broad parameters</li> </ul>
Volume of learning	The volume of learning of the Graduate Certificate is typically 0.5-1 year The volume of learning of the Graduate Diploma is typically 1-2 years	The volume of learning of the Postgraduate Certificate is typically 0.5 - 1 year The volume of learning of the Postgraduate Diploma is typically 1-2 years

The words in italics indicate the suggested changes from the existing descriptors.