

Principles and Processes for the Alignment of the AQF with International Qualifications Frameworks

Background

The AQF Council's first term of reference requires it to provide policy advice to the Ministers responsible for tertiary education, skills and employment on 'national and international recognition and comparability of qualification standards and alignment of qualification standards / frameworks' and on 'strategic strengthening of the AQF required to meet identified needs such as improving national consistency and contemporary relevance, including national and international portability'.

International comparability of qualifications and alignment with other qualifications frameworks are important national objectives. The international mobility of graduates and workers is significant. To support this mobility, recognition of the relationship of qualifications in the national qualifications frameworks of other countries or regions with the AQF may be beneficial. The AQF Council has developed principles and processes for guiding discussions about alignment of the AQF with other national qualifications frameworks.

Benefits of alignment of the AQF

The benefits of alignment between the AQF and national or regional qualifications frameworks are at several levels. These range from economic benefits at a national or regional level to benefits for individuals.

The benefits of alignment include:

- providing a systematic basis for improving mutual trust and the recognition of qualifications between nations or regions
- facilitating transparency and reliability of information about qualifications and the qualifications framework in each nation or region
- increasing international understanding, comparability, confidence and recognition of qualifications for both study and employment
- contributing to the credibility and robustness of each nation's or region's qualifications systems, including knowledge and understanding of the various quality assurance systems and processes supporting the qualifications frameworks
- assisting the international mobility of students and skilled workers by increasing confidence that their qualifications will be understood and recognised in Australia and other countries
- improving employers' understanding of qualifications to assist with skills supply, and
- providing a comparative benchmark for the AQF.

Principles for alignment of the AQF

The overarching principles are core considerations for Australia in any alignment process. The general alignment principles set out the expectations for each nation or region (including Australia) in the alignment process.

Overarching principles:

- Alignment of the AQF with other nations' or regions' qualifications frameworks will be undertaken only where there is a demonstrable benefit to Australia.
- Alignment between the AQF and national or regional qualifications frameworks should enhance any existing relationships and arrangements between these nations or regions.
- The AQF will not be adapted to suit another nation's or region's requirements.
- Alignment of national or regional qualifications frameworks with the AQF will not result in the automatic recognition of the nation's or region's qualifications as AQF qualifications.
- Alignment will usually be between the AQF and another national or regional qualifications framework. However if the nation or region does not yet have a formal national or regional qualifications framework, the national or regional qualifications system may be used for alignment of qualifications.

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General alignment principles:

- The legitimacy and responsibilities of all relevant national or regional and Australian bodies involved in the alignment process are clearly determined and transparent.
- The Australian, national or regional quality assurance system for education and training are integral to the qualifications framework and is consistent with international quality assurance principles.
- There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the AQF and the levels in the national or regional qualifications framework.
- The national or regional qualifications framework and its qualifications are based on the principles and objectives of learning outcomes that are comparable to the learning outcomes in the AQF.
- The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the Australian, national or regional qualifications framework and/or describing the place of qualifications in the qualifications system are transparent.
- National or regional policies for the validation of all learning, and credit systems where these exist, are an integral component of the national or regional qualifications frameworks.
- The alignment process includes the stated agreement of the relevant accrediting and/or quality assurance bodies for each nation or region.
- The alignment process involves international experts to support and assist the development of trusted outcomes.
- One comprehensive report, setting out the alignment and the evidence supporting it is jointly published by the relevant national authorities in each nation or region and addresses separately each of the principles.

Processes for alignment of the AQF

In Australia international alignment of the AQF with other national or regional qualifications frameworks will be undertaken by the following bodies with specified responsibilities.

Australian Government

The alignment of qualifications frameworks is a negotiated agreement with other nations or regions for which the Australian Government is the lead agent. The Australian Government is responsible for:

- Signing any multilateral or bilateral agreements to commence alignment.
- Agreeing to formal commencement of the alignment.
- Leading the negotiation process using the expert and technical advice of the AQF Council.
- Signing the final alignment agreement.

Australian Qualifications Framework Council

As the national body with the delegated responsibility to maintain, monitor and promote the AQF and provide advice on international alignment, the AQF Council is responsible for:

- Recommending potential alignment opportunities.
- Managing the development of expert and technical advice on alignment, through the AQF International Alignment Committee and its projects, and providing this advice to the Australian Government as part of its negotiation process.
- Coordinating the involvement of an international expert to validate the technical advice.
- Publishing and disseminating the final alignment report.
- Maintaining the register of final reports and arrangements.
- Providing guidance on the use of the resulting arrangements by education and training institutions such as facilitating inclusion of relevant information in graduation statements.

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AQF International Alignment Committee

The AQF International Alignment Committee is a representative committee established to undertake the technical alignment of the AQF with other nations or regions with which the Australian Government has signed an agreement. It is responsible for:

- Undertaking the activities required to align the AQF with the qualifications framework of another nation or region under the guidance of the AQF Council using agreed and transparent processes.
- Ensuring participation of people with an interest in the alignment through a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure widespread and open consultation and dissemination of the final report.
- Coordinating alignment project teams and/or consultants.

Membership of the AQF International Alignment Committee includes representation from the following bodies:

- AQF Council
- Commonwealth department responsible for education, training and employment
- Education experts from the relevant various education and training sector(s) including qualification developers, providers and their peak bodies, and students and their peak bodies
- Social partners including employer representative bodies, unions, industry and professional representative bodies and occupational licensing bodies
- Relevant government agencies including Australian Education International-NOOSR
- Regulatory and quality assurance authorities
- International expert
- Country expert (as required).



**Australian Qualifications
Framework Council**

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