

AQF COUNCIL

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

Joint response from TAFE Directors Australia and Victorian TAFE Association

Introduction

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) represents 61 Australian TAFE providers. The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) represents 14 TAFE Institutes and 4 multi-sector universities. Our members deliver training and education across the spectrum of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) including Senior Secondary School Certificates of Education, Vocational Certificates, Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas, Associate Degrees, Bachelor degrees and postgraduate qualifications. TDA and VTA are well placed to provide input to the current review.

TDA and VTA have contributed to the AQF Council consultations in 2009 and 2010 and are pleased to contribute to these discussions regarding the review of the Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificate and Diploma qualification types and further strengthening of the AQF.

In this response TDA and VTA draw on submissions directly from TDA members and on the views of Victorian TAFE providers attending a consultation convened in February 2012. TDA and VTA members may also respond individually to the discussion paper to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations.

We have consistently advocated for an AQF where qualifications are not sector specific. In the current context of the development of a single tertiary education sector in Australia we commend the AQF Council on the release of the AQF First Edition July 2011 and for initiating this current consultation.

Our members' observe that the Vocational Graduate Certificate (VGC) and the Vocational Graduate Diploma (VGD) qualifications have been attractive to mature workers and higher education graduates seeking to acquire new high level skills relevant to a workplace situation. They confirm that, for the most part, the VGC and VGD have not been sought by higher education graduates immediately after completing an undergraduate qualification. They also note difficulties in gaining recognition by universities of VGCs and VGDs without a specific negotiated pathway with a university. VGCs and VGDs are not necessarily achieving seamless pathways to advanced standing within universities.

The discussion paper distributed by the AQF Council, *Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the Australian Qualifications Framework*, highlights the inconsistent use of nomenclature in relation to these qualification types. This may be understandable from the perspective that tertiary education providers lack certainty about the place of these qualifications in the tertiary education context.

In the historical context of the development of higher education and vocational education in Australia, it is our considered view that having the same descriptor for the Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the revised AQF causes/creates confusion in the tertiary education sector about the place of these qualifications. TDA and VTA members discussed at length the importance of qualifications that *broaden* a graduate's skills and knowledge separate to those which *deepen* a graduate's skills and knowledge. The use of the terms *Postgraduate Certificate* and *Postgraduate Diploma* align more closely to international qualifications models and may be advantageous to students' global mobility and graduates' access to global labour markets. However in the Australian context we do not think this terminology would be the best course of action as the language perpetuates separation of the Australian tertiary education sector into higher education and vocational education.

The case can be argued that a GC can serve the purpose of *broadening* or *deepening* skills and knowledge and the same could be argued for a GD. The volume of learning implies that a GD, being a longer timeframe for completion, is designed to deepen the graduates' knowledge. It seems unlikely that a GC graduate would have the same level of learning outcomes as a Bachelor (Honours) graduate.

We believe it is necessary to distinguish between naming and learning outcomes, and reform the AQF so that:

- Graduates of a GC will demonstrate a broadened knowledge.
- Graduates of a GD will demonstrate a deepened knowledge.

This distinction would also facilitate clearer pathways for further learning. To our knowledge there is no precedent in the evolution of the AQF where a qualification type has been shifted to a lower level. Implementation of any change to the AQF that describes a GC as level 7 will also require very careful consideration of transitioning arrangements in the light of accreditation cycles of existing accredited qualifications bearing the title GC.

Response to Options

Option 1: We support removal of the titles VGC and VGD to be replaced by the GC and GD and these qualification types being available for accreditation by both the VET and higher education sectors. We believe the GC and GD have distinct learning outcomes that may necessitate the qualifications being assigned different AQF Levels.

Option 2: This Option is worthy of further exploration, appearing to be both educationally sound and promoting a unified tertiary sector rather than entrenching existing paradigms. We cannot accept any changes that do not provide for accreditation of GC and GD qualifications by both the VET and higher education sectors.

Option 3: Is not supported by TDA and VTA as it is currently described in the discussion paper. We believe that the introduction of Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma qualifications will retard any progress towards the creation of a seamless tertiary education system in Australia underpinned by the AQF and adds unnecessary additional complexity to the AQF. If this option was adopted, it would widen the chasm between VET

and higher education in Australia. This belief is based on the understanding that this option effectively excludes vocational education providers that do not want the legal status as higher education providers from offering AQF8 level qualifications. TAFEs have a long history of delivering AQF8 level qualifications and wish to retain the flexibility to offer these qualifications of vocational relevance to meet the needs of our industry partners. AQF8 level qualifications can now be accredited by VET providers and we can see no reason why this should not continue into the future. Higher level VET qualifications are important to Australia's skills development agenda and this will not be addressed by segmenting the tertiary education market and only allowing AQF8 level qualifications to be accredited only by higher education providers.

Option 4: TDA and VTA reject this option. We believe that change is needed and we should not retain the status quo that the Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma are retained as level 8 qualification types as revised in 2011.

Reforms to the AQF qualification types will generate debate about reforms in other areas of VET policy. In considering each of the options we believe it is necessary to set them in the context of broader matters relating to VET policy (State and Australia levels). While we are currently drawn to the Option 2 it raises questions about future conceptualisation of the GC and GD and how they are written, the most equitable and effective funding and regulatory arrangements. For example access to Commonwealth Supported Places for TAFE providers delivering qualifications at AQF Levels 7 and 8.

TDA and VTA will continue to raise these matters within their jurisdictions with the relevant authorities.

Recommendations:

1. Delete any reference to separate *Vocational* qualifications. Titling of qualifications may be used as a cue to the intended application of a qualification. For example, *Graduate Certificate in Biotechnology, Graduate Certificate in Applied Biotechnology, Graduate Certificate in Biotechnology Industry*.
2. VET sector has the authority to accredit qualifications up to Level 8 and these are available as part of the VET Training Package framework.
3. The GC and GD qualification types must be available for accreditation **by both** the VET and higher education sectors
4. Descriptors continue to accommodate vocational and academic outcomes.

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