

## **AQF COUNCIL**

### **Development of an Australian VET Graduation Statement**

#### **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 dual-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 pleased to respond to the Consultation Paper (October 2013) 'Development of an Australian VET Graduation Statement.

This response draws on member consultations and on the views of members, including from two dual sector universities, attending a focus group convened in November 2013. TDA and VTA members may respond individually to the discussion paper to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations.

The following views have been strongly supported by all participating in the consultation process and most particularly by two dual sector universities.

##### **Differentiation of the VET sector from Higher Education**

The Consultation paper fails to articulate any convincing argument for the benefits of a graduation statement in the VET context. There is no clarity about who the audience is for the proposed graduation statement – students, employers, Universities or other education providers. The paper relies on the rationale for graduate statement in the higher education context and wrongly translates these to the VET context.

Supplementary graduation statements will not enhance the utility of VET qualifications in the labour market and for further study. They will merely be a significant administrative impost. In the absence of evidence supporting the case for a graduation statement, TDA and VTA refute the need for a graduation statement for use in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector.

In the Higher Education context, universities and other higher education providers design and develop courses at the local level that are extremely diverse in their content. A Bachelor of Arts degree, for example, is a common nomenclature used by many universities yet the content of the courses will vary between higher education providers and between students with different courses designed for different career outcomes. A graduation statement therefore has the ability to provide the student with a description of the specific knowledge achieved in the course and as a tool to

communicate with potential employers and other educational institutions about the knowledge the student brings to the table.

In the VET context, the need for any supplementary statements upon graduation is unnecessary by virtue of the existence of national, industry endorsed Training Packages. The details of national Training Packages are easily accessible. That the consultation paper suggests there is a need for a graduation statement is a sleight on Training Packages, indicating that they are not understood by industry or sufficiently descriptive of the skills and knowledge the graduate brings to a potential employer or education providers. Deficits in understanding by industry need to be addressed through Training Packages and existing reporting strategies. Deficits in understanding of VET by higher education institutions need to be addressed through engaging in dialogue with VET providers. Higher education institutions will not gain any deeper understanding of a VET graduates outcomes from a graduation statement. If the AQF and Training Packages are doing their job a graduation statement would simply be 'busy work', requiring unnecessary administration effort for no gain.

The Consultation paper states 'provision of pathways information through the graduation statement is particularly important' (page 6). It will be impossible to accurately reflect the education pathways available to the VET graduate because pathways rules are not mandated by policy. As such pathways between VET and higher education still rely on personal relationships between selection officers, agreed arrangements between particular higher education faculties and schools in individual TAFE providers. There is a very long way to go before there is universal acceptance of VET qualifications by higher education providers and application of credit transfer or advanced standing. A far more reliable point of reference for a graduate seeking to use a qualification for advanced standing or credit transfer remains the websites of providers. A graduate statement may very quickly lose currency in terms of eligible pathways.

TDA and VTA members are not convinced that a graduation statement for VET graduates will facilitate international mobility any better than existing documentation. The Consultation paper makes blanket statements about the link between a graduation statement for VET graduates and the graduates' improved competitiveness in the global labour market yet no evidence is offered to substantiate the claims. How will a graduate statement increase the portability of Australian VET qualifications compared to the current testamur and graduates' CVs?

## **Design of a graduation statement**

TDA and VTA request publication of evidence of evaluation of the AHEGS that shows graduates and providers value the AHEGS and evidence of research indicating the AHEGA model has application to VET. It is a long bow to infer that all dual sector universities will support adopting the AHEGS design for VET graduates. Only one of six dual sector universities is referred to in the Consultation paper as noting the desirability of adopting the AHEGS design for VET graduates. What of the remaining five dual sector universities?

On the basis of details provided in the Consultation paper, modelling a graduation statement for VET graduates based on AHEGS is flawed. The qualification summary, a copy and paste from the Training Package, provides a good broad overview and a statement about functional autonomy but does not convey in enough detail the skills and knowledge gained from the qualification at that AQF level. A

statement of skills and knowledge aligned to the AQF level descriptors would provide an employer with a deeper understanding of the competencies the applicant presents.

The design promoted in the Consultation paper does not reflect the realities of packaging of courses in the VET context with an employment outcome as the end game. Pathways in terms of employment are not referenced. An overly simplistic statement regarding educational pathways can narrow the graduates understanding of pathways and future options and can be prone to focusing on linear pathway progression and within one Training Package. Legitimate, alternative pathways and the portability of individual units across a variety of qualifications can be overlooked. For example, to say the Certificate IV in Project Management Practice leads specifically to the thirteen job roles listed in the Training Package is artificially limiting and not reflective of reality. It may be more appropriate to list the project management skills/knowledge gained from this qualification and note that these support and augment a wide variety of job roles across a broad spectrum of industries.

Further, TDA and VTA members are most concerned that the graduation statement will revert to being a marketing tool for education providers.

Finally, TDA and VTA seek clarification if an Australian VET Graduation Statement will become part of VET providers' regulatory requirements. If this is not the case, how does AQF Council propose ensuring the quality and integrity of graduation statements issued?

## **Implementation**

TDA and VTA do not support an Australian VET Graduation Statement. However, should such a graduation statement be implemented, there is little benefit in a system that allows VET providers to opt-in and opt-out of producing a graduation statement for each VET graduate. The statement needs to have intrinsic value to the graduate and that, in part, relates to graduates knowing that these documents are widely used in the marketplace for labour, by employers. Employers therefore need to expect each graduate to present a statement in their application for work.

Implementation of an Australian VET Graduation Statement will be a significant administrative impost on TDA and VTA members. This is not diminished for dual sector universities. Student management systems are likely to be capable of adaption to issuing a graduation statement but systems will need to be reconfigured. The graduation statement would lose currency quite quickly in the VET context unlike in higher education where courses typically have a lifecycle for review that may be five years. Constant updating of information linked to graduation statement will be required due to the redundancy of information arising from revisions of Training Packages.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** AQF Council publishes evidence of research on the need for graduation statements in the VET context including evidence that industry is seeking supplementary information in addition to what is currently provided and available (eg Statement of Attainment, providers' websites, training.gov.au, AQF policies on credit transfer and pathways).

**Recommendation 2:** AQF Council consults across public and private VET providers, including all dual sector universities, in all jurisdictions, specifically regarding the granular detail of the design of any Australian VET Graduation Statement.

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November, 2013