

## **A New Terrain? Challenges for an Australian tertiary education sector**

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### **1 New Terrain?**

According to the Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper (p21), Australia's Higher Education system needs to have the capacity to:

- meet the needs of the labour market (contributing to economic development)
- provide opportunities for all capable students to participate (development of human capital)
- provide students with a stimulating and rewarding higher education experience
- connect effectively with other education and training sectors
- play a vital role in the national research and innovation system
- operate internationally
- contribute effectively to the development of Australia's social and cultural structures and its national and regional economies'. (global issues)

I do not think that we would have any arguments with these ideals and I would also suggest that they are equally relevant to the VET sector; particularly in the sense that the paper goes on to ask questions regarding resourcing, governance and regulation – issues common to both the higher education and VET sectors.

We will wait for the outcomes of the Review to discover what strategies are identified to enable the sectors to achieve these ideals. In the meantime, we can consider whether this 'terrain' is new and what are the issues that need to be addressed in the tertiary sector?

What is on the landscape now? (2007 DEEWR and NCVET statistics)

1. More than 2000 higher education and vocational education providers
  - Almost 200 Higher Education institutions
  - Over 1900 vocational education and training Registered Training Organisations
2. More than 2.6 million students across higher education and VET
  - Just over 1 million students in higher education
  - More than 1.6 million students in VET
3. Diverse international student population in both sectors with over 330,000 students enrolled year to date September 2008 (excluding ELICOS and non-award courses)
  - 179,903 in Higher education
  - 155,927 in the VET sector
  - More students in both sectors studying Australian courses off shore

4. Complex and different governance, regulatory and quality systems for both part of the tertiary sector. The one consistent arrangement for both higher education and the VET sectors is the Australian Qualifications Framework.

What do we want?

- A single tertiary system?
- A diversified tertiary system with increased variety?
- A more seamless system, taking into consideration the COAG goal to allowing learners to move in and out of education at all levels throughout their various stages of life and work?

### **How blurred are the boundaries between higher education and VET?**

Traditional views of higher education and VET are that they are two quite different educational worlds. Learners in the VET sector are typified by a need for practical, technical trades focussed learning or learners seeking paraprofessional, work ready roles. On the other hand, the learner at university aims to achieve qualifications to enable them to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., and label them as 'professionals'.

Submissions to the Higher Education review have suggested that the boundaries between the sectors have become increasingly blurred over the past decade.

VET institutions now are able to offer degree and postgraduate courses, higher education institutions are able to offer diploma and advanced diplomas, other institutions are dual sector – what impact does this have on the learner, is it efficient, what are the issues, can the pathways be improved, if so, how?

James Calleja, in an article published in 2007 (p160) about linking VET and higher education in Europe that equally describes the situation here in Australia, indicates that there is a

paradigm shift in providing education – the result of a radically changing context of work and the essential meaning of life environment and work today. If a job is not for life, then likewise, an educational achievement is not necessarily for life either. People today need to change jobs and also increasingly want to change jobs. They need to change jobs because they are made redundant or their place of work no longer exists. They may want to change jobs for career progression or are challenged by other private, occupational or short-term achievable targets. They may want to experience various kinds of development or they may be given the opportunity to live in a different country. All these factors provoke innovation and change in the way we perceive and provide education and training.

Our goal should be to create greater synergy between the sectors, optimise entrance pathways and transferability between the sectors – bridging academia and VET with student flows and outcomes enhancing the workforce capacity across Australia.

Calleja goes on to suggest some solutions

There is no fixed formula to bring VET and higher education to synergise their impact on learning, except for structural and substantive changes in the way learning institutions perceive economic and social challenges....VET

and higher education must reformulate the comprehensive provision of post-compulsory education and training. This reformulation must be guided by combined and shared policies that address economic and social issues from different but equally significant perspectives. The traditional divide between VET and higher education will, in the long run, be seen as a superficial barrier to the interests of the economy, investment and economic growth. Through joint...initiatives VET and higher education institutions ...will deliver more and better learners, more and better workers and more and better jobs. (Calleja p165)

It is interesting to recall words from the 1988 White Paper quoted by Gregor Ramsay in *The Australian*, supporting a 'unified national system, (with) greater diversity in higher education rather than any artificial equalisation of institutional roles..... diversity and quality are paramount'

The answer is that we probably do want a diversified system – one that does facilitate variety but one in which there are strong connections between the components.

**The question was a new terrain. The terrain must be one in which the learner is central, addressing the critical issues of equity, efficiency and enhancing the skills base.**

## **2 What are the challenges for the Australian tertiary education sector?**

The challenges are many, they are not new but nonetheless as relevant now they were in the past. They are challenges for the whole education system, not just the tertiary sector and including the Australian Qualifications Framework.

- Challenge 1 Meeting the needs of learner, employers and industry.
- Challenge 2 Meeting the lifelong learning needs of the population
- Challenge 3 Building strong connections between the existing two components of a tertiary sector.
- Challenge 4 Addressing Government initiatives
- Challenge 5 Addressing societal issues – stronger linkages between society and the tertiary sector
- Challenge 6 Involvement in the international environment
- Challenge 7 Developing and implementing good policy and regulation

### **Challenge 1 - Meeting the needs of the learner, employers and industry.**

The OECD in its 2007 publication *Qualifications systems. Bridges to Lifelong Learning* finds that students are motivated to learn when they have good inducements to learn and are located within a qualifications system that is structured to provide them with:

- choices of qualifications that provides them with 'good returns'
- access to excellent information (including a qualifications framework) and support services that ensure they are guided to appropriate qualifications for their aspirations and have the freedom to make decisions about their future learning
- the ability to obtain credit for all their learning (formal, informal and non-formal)
- access to learning opportunities that match their learning and assessment preferences
- minimal obstacles to taking up learning opportunities
- support to minimise costs (lower, spread out over time or deferred)
- opportunities to provide input to qualification design and delivery (student,

- employer surveys, needs analysis etc)
- value placed on up-to-date qualifications in the workplace
- qualifications that are integral to progression in educational and/or work settings
- access to good quality teaching (OECD p134-137).

Employers and industry are a diverse group in themselves, looking for a wider skills market, flexible systems including credit transfer and RPL to reduce training costs and facilitate immediacy of training solutions, the availability of staff qualified in current theory and practice, and access to simplified and efficient systems that reduce the training 'maze' and costs.

As a result, the educational system should be one in which educational providers:

- can articulate the benefits of their courses to increase demand
- provide learning programs that meet client needs (e.g. that provide skills and knowledge for employability)
- can market qualifications according to well-known, nationally benchmarked and respected structures, such as a qualifications framework
- can differentiate course offerings in response to demand
- provide credit transfer and other recognition of prior learning services and learning pathways
- ensure coordination of provision within and across sectors
- recognise that the workplace is a learning site
- can assure quality courses, teaching and management.

## **Challenge 2 – Meeting the lifelong learning needs of the population**

Lifelong learning for all has become a widely shared policy objective among OECD countries and beyond. It is seen as a necessary condition for individual success in the labour market and social well-being as well as a basis for democracy and citizenship (OECD p18)

Ken Boston, in a presentation he made to the World Bank recently, defines a qualification as 'a piece of social and economic emancipation' providing an opportunity for individuals to move to new levels of social mobility and income generation which has an impact on the individual and his/her circumstances and in aggregate on the nation as a whole. He went on to say that all governments can do is 'create a set of conditions, incentives and disincentives which will encourage hundred of thousands or millions of individuals each to decide that they want a ticket to ride...for the purpose of travelling to an individual goal, not because of altruism about the future of the nation in a global economy'. (Boston p3)

How does the Australian qualifications system and particularly the tertiary sector meet this imperative and the desire of learners?

How can we optimise the system so that it provides the greatest incentive to learn throughout life? (OECD p162)

The tertiary sector has an important role in lifelong learning particularly if it is able to develop strategies to increase the quantity, quality, distribution and efficiency of learning opportunities.

Key issues for learners are easy access to:

- qualifications including the ability to navigate appropriate pathways between qualifications
- recognition of non-formal and informal learning processes resulting in

- credit for the experience and knowledge they have gained, whether in the classroom, in the workplace or elsewhere
- credit transfer for previous qualifications (or parts of qualifications)

Developing a single co-ordinated system of qualifications and maintaining a clear structure of qualifications (in others words, a qualifications framework) are two strategies the OECD identifies that will increase the efficiency of qualifications systems to meet lifelong learning needs. (OECD p90) This is a challenge for the AQF in addition to the provision of clear, unambiguous AQF policy and implementation advice that supports development of sector qualifications that reflect the needs of the intended audience.

### **Challenge 3 - Building strong connections between the all components of the education sector.**

Regardless of whether the tertiary sector is defined as 'single', 'diversified' or 'seamless', it is critical to ensure that there are strong connections between the various components of the system. The AQF Council considers that the key issues to enable connections between, and within, sectors include:

- enhancing the ability for learners to move between the sectors,
- enabling the portability of qualifications both nationally and internationally, and
- facilitating the achievement of personal lifelong learning goals (particularly in terms of recognition of work based learning and other learning outside the formal sector).

The AQF recognises that the schools sector, vocational education and training sector and higher education sector each have different types of learning, reflecting the distinctive educational missions and responsibilities of each sector. The AQF connects these sectors in a single coherent framework incorporating qualification titles and guidelines.

An important aspect of the AQF is the development of closer connections between secondary education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. The development of structured arrangements to link qualifications across the sectors represents a key process in building closer inter-sectoral relationships and a mechanism for creating a more open, accessible and relevant post-compulsory education system and a vehicle for implementing lifelong learning.

Key components of the AQF are the guidelines for cross-sector qualification linkages and recognition of prior learning. The *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL* were developed as a result of intense stakeholder consultation during 2002-3 and the *National Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages* were developed jointly by the (then) AVCC and ANTA in 2002 and expanded to include the schools sector in 2004.

The scope of the term '*cross-sector qualification linkage*' in the AQF National Guidelines includes any formal connection between qualifications issued within secondary education, VET and higher education. These connections may be based on articulation and credit transfer arrangements but also extend to integrated cross-sector qualification arrangements.

These guidelines support a diversity of organisational models for forging links from individual partnerships between institutions to state-wide secondary education/VET arrangements, to VET partnerships with individual higher education institutions, to consortia models and national arrangements between

Industry Skills Councils and partner universities.

#### **Challenge 4 – Addressing Government initiatives (COAG, Skilling Australia)**

The Council of Australian Governments Working Group's agenda is providing challenges for the tertiary sector, particularly in terms of how the sector can meet the workforce development and skill utilisation components of the Productivity Agenda. As the Discussion Paper released in September 2008 states 'Australia requires a population that is highly skilled, productive and engaged in work.' (COAG p19)

The COAG agenda aims to place clients at the centre of the education and training system, reforming products and services to meet a more demand and client driven system, the ability for education and training systems to meet the education and training requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to ensure that human capital is maximised.

The work being undertaken by Skills Australia indicates that

Evidence is clear that increased investment in skills boosts workforce participation and productivity and has benefits for quality of life. All Australian governments have expressed their commitments to develop a responsive national training system to deliver the higher level skills necessary for Australia's long term growth (Skills Australia p1)

Responses from the tertiary sector will need to include strategies to provide a responsive tertiary sector enabling Australians to develop the skills and qualifications they need, when they need them. These will include strategies to meet the:

- COAG objectives to increase the number of Australians with post compulsory qualifications and increase the level of those qualifications, including acquisition of a qualification that is occupationally relevant.
- impact of the changing demographics of the working age population mean that Australia like most nations has an ageing population (with the exception of India) who need up-skilling or topping up of skills or more realistically the recognition of their skills. Yet the early exit of baby boomers is a reality with many commentators suggesting that there is a tendency for those with post compulsory qualifications to exit early.
- needs of a mobile labour market and the recognition of qualifications. There is skills wastage or poor skills utilisation when we have skilled workers but they are unable to use their qualifications. This applies to both Australians and also immigrants who have gained their qualifications overseas. (COAG p19)
- need for 'more coherent interface between VET and higher education sectors and more tangible outcomes from this relationship' (Skills Australia p8) resulting in more effective pathways and greater collaboration, including increasing the opportunities for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, overcoming barriers to learning and skills development.

There will be work for the AQF Council in this agenda including ensuring that the components of the Framework are up to date and relevant (such as the descriptors of the qualifications), that the Framework can respond to the need for

'new' qualifications, including combinations of awards, and is able to facilitate credit transfer and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and that the AQF is aligned with international qualifications, standards and frameworks.

### **Challenge 5 – Addressing societal issues**

Each country's qualifications system is bound up in social, economic and cultural factors and qualifications are both motivators for people to learn and also obstacles preventing people from having their learning recognised and as a result achieving the work and life balance (along with income) that they desire. (OECD p20)

How can the tertiary sector address the issue of social inclusion – inclusion of the disadvantaged and minority groups into tertiary education providing opportunities for them to obtain qualifications that will enable them to participate fully in the workforce? We know that socioeconomic backgrounds can influence participation and that they do influence educational aspirations and school results. As the University of Melbourne's response to the Higher Education review indicates, we don't necessarily understand 'who goes to university and why or why not' and further research needs to address this issue. (University of Melbourne p18)

The *Aimhigher* program in the UK has the goal of widening participation of young people traditionally underrepresented in higher education by building links between schools, colleges and universities. Strategies have included a dedicated website, information provision, events, and financial support and advice.

More funding for the student and the institution may help but strategies that may assist in relation to achieving better social inclusion in our tertiary sector may include developing greater community engagement by the tertiary sector, customisation and increasing choice, adopting a learner-centred view and flexibility, increasing learning opportunities to excluded groups (unemployed, indigenous populations, disengaged youth).

### **Challenge 6 – Involvement in the international environment**

The Australian tertiary sector has had a long involvement with providing education and training for international students – both in Australia and offshore. 330,000 international students enrolled in the sector this year indicates that Australian qualifications and its education system are attractive to these students. However there is increasing pressure on the sector to become more internationalised – to develop relationships with international partners, to meet the need for more mobile 'globally skilled' workforce, and to recognise international qualifications.

As the Higher Education Review Discussion Paper highlights, international recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes is increasingly becoming a pressure point for higher education. Increased mobility of students, teachers and academics (including Australian and international students and staff and international students returning home or going elsewhere following graduation) and an increasingly internationalised labour force is placing pressure on the international recognition of, and confidence in, Australian qualifications. Strategies that may be considered include aligning with international initiatives such as the Bologna processes.

The rationale the Bologna framework (and the European Qualifications Framework) in Europe, and more recently the goals of the ASEAN countries to 'harmonise' their higher education systems, is to provide a mechanism to enable

international recognition and transparency of qualifications, to promote international mobility and employability of learners and graduates and to increase the compatibility of the regional higher education systems.

Bologna has become central to the higher education policy of the European Union with the long term goal to integrate the higher education frameworks of the 45 European countries by 2010. The ASEAN initiative is in its infancy but the goal is achievement by 2015.

Australia does not need to adopt the Bologna Framework but needs to be aligned to it (or 'Bologna compatible') and cannot ignore it if our tertiary education sector is to retain its reputation for high quality and relevance in the global environment. The Australian three cycle degree system (bachelor, post graduate programs, doctorate) and a national qualifications framework means that Australia has some of the elements of the Bologna framework. The recent Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement also aligns with the EU Diploma Supplement.

**The Brisbane Communiqué** was developed as a result of recognition that the emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region should also be on promoting awareness of the benefits of mobility and increasing the transparency of education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes rather than seeking to emulate the process of reform of national education systems and regulatory processes in Europe.

These Australian initiatives need to continue to build on the work currently underway on quality assurance frameworks (report and principles published in February 2008), recognition of educational and professional qualifications (report published in April 2008), and common competency standards for teachers, particularly of science and mathematics (scoping study report published May 2008). Common recognition of technical skills across the region is to be included and the work is an ambitious long term goal.

An area of work that needs to be done is strengthening credit transfer arrangements. The project 'University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific' (UMAP) that has been endorsed by APEC, has developed a pilot UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS) to facilitate greater student mobility in the region by providing a framework for establishing credit transfer arrangements.

In regard to the AQF, an important aspect of our strengthening project will be to ensure we are able to incorporate the increased expectations being placed on national qualifications frameworks in both domestic and international arenas as a result of globalisation of education, increased labour mobility, including recognition of qualifications across borders.

Alignment and/or comparability with international qualifications, standards and frameworks is a challenge that the AQF Council will also need to address as part of its strengthening process.

### **Challenge 7 – Developing and implementing good policy and regulation**

Qualifications frameworks are increasingly used as policy tools, as instruments of accountability and as a tool for regulation and quality assurance. The OECD indicates that 'they are overarching tools that can be used to engage all stakeholders in developing and co-ordinating the qualifications system'. The AQF is an important part of Australia's education systems' regulatory and quality assurance framework.

As the literature indicates, qualifications frameworks cannot guarantee that high quality education will be achieved and they do not stand alone as instruments of policy. However

by regulating the approval of qualifications to the framework it is possible to define acceptable national standards, (including consistency)... that might reference the capacity of a body issuing the qualification to deliver learning. Sometimes these 'approved' qualifications are favoured in national funding regimes. (Coles p5-6)

The OECD also identifies the key benefits of the use of a framework for a country is as a regulatory tool that can help create certainty about the value of qualifications, set out the key requirements of qualifications and provide quality assurance mechanisms for qualifications. (OECD p180) We need to continue to build relationships across all sectors, working closely with the regulators in each State and Territory.

A key issue for the AQF Council is the ability of the framework to ensure national consistency of qualifications in all sectors with arrangements that can be applied and accommodates the sector's needs.

### **The Australian Qualifications Framework**

The function of the Australian Qualifications Framework is similar to other national qualifications frameworks in providing 'a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within the country and internationally'. (Tuck pv) The Australian Qualifications Framework is the national framework for the recognition and endorsement of all national qualifications in post-compulsory education and training in Australia.

The AQF helps learners, employers and education and training providers to participate in and navigate the qualifications system supporting national standards in education and training and encouraging lifelong learning.

The AQF was established in 1995 by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to protect the quality of Australia's education and training as it provides a quality assurance mechanism for the national system of qualifications issued by approved education and training institutions.

Recently all governments, through Australia's Education Ministers (MCEETYA) and Vocational Education and Training Ministers (MCVTE), agreed to strengthen the AQF governance arrangements to ensure that the AQF continues to be nationally and internationally robust and responsive to the challenges presented by globalisation, the rapid internationalisation of education and training and national and international developments of relevance to national qualifications policy. In May 2008, Ministers agreed to establish the AQF Council.

The new Council has been given the role of providing advice to Ministers on the strategic strengthening of the AQF to ensure that it continues to be nationally and internationally robust, and supports cross-sectoral linkages and pathways and improved national consistency and relevance.

### **Value of qualifications frameworks**

The OECD identifies that the benefits of qualifications frameworks include:

- contributing to a coherent, transparent and more integrated qualifications system

- increasing and targeting access to qualifications
- opening up progression routes
- introducing flexibility for learners, providers and users
- promoting recognition and validation of all qualifications (including non-formal/informal learning)
- promoting VET and adult learning
- making qualifications more relevant to societal and labour market needs
- promoting investment and participation in skill development in the workplace. (OCED p180)

This is difficult to assess in quantitative terms as indicators for describing qualifications systems do not exist or do not describe the system in an adequate way for sound qualitative analysis. (OECD p75)

In brief, 'the value of (a qualifications framework) lies in its potential to contribute to policy goals such as lifelong learning, recognition of skills, or improving the quality of education and training. (Tuck pv)

### The AQF Objectives

The AQF aims to:

- provide **nationally consistent** recognition of outcomes achieved in post-compulsory education;
- assist with developing **flexible pathways** which provides options for people to move more easily between education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market by providing the basis for recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer and work and life experience;
- **integrate and streamlines** the requirements of participating providers, employers and employees, individuals and interested organisations;
- offers **flexibility to suit the diversity of purposes** of education and training;
- **encourage individuals to progress** through the levels of education and training by improving access to qualifications, clearly defining avenues for achievement, and generally contributing to lifelong learning;
- **encourage the provision of more and higher quality vocational education and training** through qualifications that normally meet workplace requirements and vocational needs, thus contributing to national economic performance; and
- promote **national and international recognition of qualifications** offered in Australia.

### Who are the users and stakeholders? What are their expectations?

1. Students' expectations include:
  - lifelong learning
  - transparency
  - ability to 'move through the system'
  - portability of qualifications
  - comparability of qualifications – nationally and internationally
  - credit transfer (with an associated credit system/learning bank e.g. proposed UK system?)
2. Employers' expectations include:
  - ability to map skills
  - mobility of workers
  - portability of qualifications

- comparability of qualifications – nationally and internationally

3. Other stakeholders with similar expectations include:

- Government
- Accreditation and recognition authorities
- Professional associations
- Industry Councils
- State Training Authorities
- Universities and education and training providers

**Have we met these expectations in Australia? What has the AQF achieved?**

Feedback the Council has received through various mechanisms tell us that stakeholders consider the AQF important as it is a:

- vital reference point for Australia's education and training system
- cross-sectoral and national framework, accepted by key stakeholders and education sectors over a long period of time
- foundation plank for quality assurance systems
- guide to industry and individuals on what qualifications mean
- respected brand in Australia and overseas

However stakeholders have also told us that changes need to be made to the AQF to better meets its aims. For example respondents to the Review of Higher Education answering the question in the regard to the AQF, commented on the need for an 'AQF that works', that it needs to be simple, flexible, more integrated and a 'unitary and internationally comparable qualifications framework'. Comments were also made that the current AQF 'splits the sectors' and while the AQF maybe useful for VET it has less application in the higher education sector.

Our strengthening the AQF project will consider how it can become a stronger framework and more relevant and responsive to the changing requirements of the education and training system.

A recent paper about the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework identified the need for realistic expectations of the impact of a qualifications framework particularly in terms of how effective a framework is in achieving change. David Raffe indicates that it should:

- be an instrument of change rather than an agent of change. For example it can supply the tools for credit transfer but it cannot itself ensure that credit is recognised and transferred...
- achieve impact through policy breadth
- be complemented by other policies which motivate people to use the potential which the framework provides...(for example lifelong learning policies and strategies, policies for the recognition of non-formal learning and links between sectors). (Raffe p65)

**Strengthening the AQF**

As a direct outcome of the review of the AQF Advisory Board, the Council's Charter includes the mandate to undertake an examination of the existing AQF and provide MCEETYA with advice on its future direction including the strategic strengthening of the AQF.

The Council needs to reflect on how the AQF can support a more seamless and easily navigable tertiary sector, to ensure it continues to be nationally and

internationally robust and responsive to the challenges presented by the increasing globalisation of both post-compulsory education and skilled labour and national and international developments of relevance to national qualifications policy.

The Council at its last meeting in October considered a proposal and timelines for how this work may proceed. Of particular interest to Skills Australia are three key areas: facilitating credit and articulation, strengthening the 'architecture' of the AQF and enabling the international recognition and portability of qualifications.

### **What are the challenges for the AQF in the future?**

1. **Recognition of learning** gained outside the formal system, including qualifications issued by professional bodies, through work-based learning or occupational qualifications or, for example, through indigenous or community learning – how can the AQF incorporate these alternative learning pathways?

The role of qualification frameworks and connections with the validation of non-formal and informal learning is illustrated in the research leading to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) report *Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe – a snapshot 2007*. This report suggests that the aims of qualification frameworks

may be directly related to further development and systems of validation of non-formal and informal learning...and open up development of coherent, learning outcomes-based standards for qualifications. This could facilitate opening up a broader set of outcomes, including those acquired through learning in non-formal and informal settings....reducing barriers between education, training and learning institutions and systems and to promote access, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes.

A successful lifelong learning strategy implies that individuals have increased access to learning, be able to transfer and combine the outcomes of learning and to progress vertically as well as horizontally within systems. (CEDEFOP p37, 39)

2. **Cross sector linkages** including encouragement of increased cooperation between sectors. We also need to question the maintenance of an AQF as a 'entirely sectorally differentiated framework'. (Wheeihan)

Schools and vocational education and training – issues emerging include:

- the emerging policy issues related to the development of greater consistency in the provision of VET in senior secondary certificates, particularly different interpretations between jurisdictions of the relationship and equivalences between senior secondary certificates and VET qualifications
- VET in Schools debates and associated credit and RPL issues.

3. **Credit transfer and the expectations of stakeholders and users of the role** that a qualifications framework can play. The questions for enhancement of the AQF include the appropriateness of the inclusion of strategies for:
  - a credit or articulation framework including links between qualifications and parts of qualifications
  - the promotion and removal of barriers to effective credit arrangements
  - the development of processes to benchmark and report on credit
  - the removal of barriers that inhibit 'coherent post-secondary provision' and

- transferability between sectors
- transparent and objective recognition and credit transfer.

The AQF Council will continue to encourage initiatives that support the ability for students to move between the sectors using seamless pathways and progression processes.

The PhillipsKPA report *Giving credit where credit is due* identified 'the need for a more concerted effort in order to move to another level of outcomes in credit transfer between VET and higher education' identifying strategies of particular relevance to the response to this question.

These include:

- support for credit transfer principles within institutions,
- developing systems and process to ensure credit transfer is an integral part of admission and enrolment processes,
- establishment of mutual respect and commitment by all partners, and
- promotion of credit transfer to students.

The report identified that 'students who transfer to higher education programs with credit for the VET studies perform as well or better than other student cohorts. Importantly retention rates among these students generally seem to be higher than for other student cohorts'. (PhillipsKPA pii-v)

Hard evidence of good learning outcomes as a result of credit transfer would support any further work that the Council undertakes in consolidating the various sets of national principles and guidelines on credit transfer and articulation into a single set and in reviewing the *AQF National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning*.

The AQF Council has responsibility for addressing three recommendations of the PhillipsKPA report:

- Recommendation 3 - Developing common terms and embedding their use within core policies and documents and institutional use
- Recommendation 7 - Revising good practice principles, taking into account the agreed common terminology
- Recommendation 8 - Strengthening the AQF, providing a stronger basis for credit transfer arrangements between VET and higher education qualifications.

Taking into account recommendations 3 and 7, a project has commenced to investigate:

1. whether the development of common terminology and definitions regarding credit transfer and articulation, and the embedding of this common terminology in a coherent set of MCEETYA national principles and guidelines, can facilitate the adoption of national principles and guidelines across the sectors, and
2. whether a shared understanding of terminology with common agreed definitions and more coherent and consistent policies and practices will facilitate students' pathways and more effective credit transfer arrangements between the sectors and assist with retention issues.

The research undertaken in the first stage of this project, drafting the common definitions, indicates that there is a strong degree of common understanding of definitions and support for embedding them into a single set of MCEETYA national principles and guidelines. The project is due to be completed in December 2008.

Recommendation 8 will be addressed through the Council's strengthening project.

#### 4. **Relationships with international frameworks and multilateral agreements.**

Alignment and/or comparability with international qualifications, standards and frameworks is a challenge that the AQF Council will need to address as part of its strengthening process.

The Council will also be considering the role of the AQF in meeting the challenge posed by the OECD (p183) for qualifications frameworks to assist in:

- facilitating the increasing international mobility of labour, students and trainees
- finding co-operating partners for training providers not only at bilateral but also at multilateral and international levels
- identifying more effectively issues for sustainable co-operation and exchange
- promoting understanding of the context in which education and training is delivered and to enable comparison and discussion (internationally)
- contributing to mutual recognition or transparency of qualifications and skills

#### **To conclude**

Janice Reid's recent comments in *The Australian*, although focussed on research in higher education, equally apply to conclusions we may draw about a diversified tertiary sector...

The best use of our scarce resources is to continue building a system that can collaborate, compete, cooperate, borrow, harness and share the educational and research expertise available nationally and internationally.

The promise of an education revolution provides a rare opportunity to critically assess the policies and decisions that have, intentionally or inadvertently, determined the sector's trajectory over the past two decades.

(We need to ensure that the).....potential of the whole system is fully mobilised and amplified and its benefits available to society at large.(Reid p27)

**For the Australian Qualifications Framework Council** – our goal will be to ensure that our reform agenda is not unrealistic and can be achieved; that you as stakeholders are not disappointed by the pace; that we have sufficient resources; and that our promises are not 'political' but are practical and deliverable.

Thank you

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