

Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill

Overseas Experience on the Qualifications Framework

Introduction

At the meeting of the Bills Committee on the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill (the Bill) held on 10 October 2005, the Administration was requested to provide information on the experience of other places in the implementation of qualifications framework (QF).

2. In the course of developing our QF, we have looked into the experience of other countries. Different histories, traditions and intentions have shaped the development of their QFs. However, there are two common intentions :

- (a) the drive to integrate the post-compulsory education system to facilitate horizontal and vertical movement, to promote widely accessible opportunities for lifelong learning; and
- (b) the development of outcome standards that focus on the results of education (rather than inputs only), to act as a currency for the integrated system.

3. The following sections highlight the key observations on the Australian QF and the United Kingdom (UK) QFs, which serve as useful reference.

Development of the Australian QF

4. Since the mid-1980s, many changes have been made to Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system to facilitate the development of a more flexible, responsive, accessible system that addresses the needs of industry, employers and individuals.

5. In 1992, the high level of unemployment (of 10%) in Australia was a matter of grave national concern. Australia was emerging from a

recession. They were going through a period of adjustment to the way the business and industry was conducted in response to technological, social and structural changes. The Labour Government at the time was determined to solve the problems by, among other things, establishing the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) as a national planning, funding, and coordination body to consolidate a national VET system.

6. The Government then pledged that the new VET system should deliver quality training programmes that better meet the needs and priorities of industry and which are recognized across the country. It should assist in the development of an effective training market that provides improved opportunities, especially for school leavers.

7. The reform provided the stimulus for the development of the national cross-sectoral QF. The Australian QF reflected the greater emphasis on the diversity of learning pathways in spanning all major post-compulsory qualifications from school-leaver senior secondary certificates through to doctoral awards. The Australian QF was introduced in January 1995. A diagram showing the Australian QF is at Annex I.

8. The key objectives of the Australian QF were :

- (a) to bring together the qualifications issued by schools, VET and higher education sectors into a single comprehensive system of titles and standards;
- (b) to support flexible education and training pathways between sectors and lifelong learning;
- (c) to encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications;
- (d) to offer flexibility to suit the diversity of purposes of education and training, and encourage cross-sectoral partnerships; and
- (e) to underpin national policies, in particular on quality assurance, articulation and credit transfer.

9. It is observed that the major reforms to the organization of VET have been designed to reduce the monopoly of the public training providers and introduce a more open training market, develop a more demand and industry led VET system, and provide a national framework to achieve consistency in quality and the common recognition of VET awards. The reforms have involved an overall shift from provider-driven training to industry-driven training, with competency outcomes for agreed levels of workplace performance specified by the National Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs).

10. The key elements in regulating the Australian VET system comprise :

- (a) registration and auditing of Training Organisations; and
- (b) nationally developed and industry-endorsed Training Packages involving competency-based assessment and Australian QF outcomes.

11. In a very diverse system, the integrity of VET qualifications depends heavily on the registration of training providers. This is to ensure quality of VET services throughout Australia, and that all Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) and the qualifications they issue are recognized throughout Australia. Equally important for the integrity of VET qualifications is the set of assessable competencies in the nationally developed and endorsed Training Packages. The Training Packages provide the 'basic building blocks' to be used by RTOs to deliver training and assessment. They contain industry competency standards, a set of national qualifications, and assessment guidelines.

12. ITABs set up at the national level have primary responsibility for the development and maintenance of Training Packages. ITABs comprise representatives of employer associations, industry bodies, unions and Government. In 2003, the ANTA Board decided to take one step further with the creation of a National Industry Skills Forum, and the establishment of 10 Industry Skills Councils to progressively replace the 29 ITABs.

13. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the formal acknowledgement of a person's competencies, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. It is an integral component of the VET system in Australia. RTOs must offer RPL to all applicants when they enrol.

14. The national strategy committed for VET for 2004-2010 is as follows :

Vision

- VET works for Australian businesses - making businesses internationally competitive
- VET works for people – giving Australians world-class skills and knowledge
- VET works for communities – building inclusive and sustainable communities

Four objectives for 2004 – 2010

- Industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy.
- Employers and individuals will be at the centre of VET.
- Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment.
- Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.

15. Before the establishment of ANTA, Australia had eight separate training systems operating quite independently of each other, with the content and delivery of training largely determined by training providers. Employers operating across more than one State could not be confident that the quality of their employees' qualifications was consistent, nor that they would have the competencies industry felt they needed to undertake their work.

16. Today, the foundations of a truly national industry led system are in place with, for instance, over 80 Training Packages covering most industries and more than 80% of the workforce. Nationally recognized qualifications are offered by more than 4,000 RTOs, both public and private. Generally speaking, two elements have led to the success of Australia's VET system : national collaboration and industry engagement.

17. At present, with unemployment at about 5%, Australian businesses estimate that the most significant challenge to ongoing economic growth is the need for more skilled workers to meet the changing needs of industry. There are also skills shortages in certain trades. To meet the challenges ahead, the Australian Government is in the process of further revamping the national VET system.

Development of the UK QFs

18. The UK national qualifications system is complex. It covers well-defined National QFs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, regulated by different regulatory authorities.

19. With the proliferation of qualifications, in 1996, it was considered necessary to conduct a rationalization process and have a QF into which each type of qualification could fit in a comprehensible relationship with others. A National QF can show the relationship between qualifications and help learners, employers, higher education and other stakeholders to make well-informed judgements and choices about qualifications. Only qualifications that have been accredited by the regulatory authorities are included in the National QF.

20. The aims of the National QF (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) are :

- (a) to promote access, motivation and achievement in education and training, and therefore strengthen international competitiveness;
- (b) to promote lifelong learning by helping people to understand clear routes of progression;

- (c) to avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap of qualifications whilst ensuring all learning needs are covered; and
- (d) to promote public and professional confidence in the integrity and relevance of national awards.

21. The revised National QF with effect from 1 September 2004 is at Annex II. It now provides a broad indication of how National QF relates to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The latter Framework applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a university or college, in exercise of degree awarding powers.

22. We note that a new Framework for Achievement for young people and adults has recently been proposed in England. It will fundamentally change the way that qualifications and other learning outcomes are recognized and organized.

23. The Framework for Achievement aims to offer :

- (a) a clear structure for recognizing learning and qualifications;
- (b) smaller packages of learning units that can be accumulated and transferred easily between qualifications and awarding bodies;
- (c) the potential for employers to gain recognition for in-house training programmes;
- (d) 'levels' and 'credits' which define the standard and the volume of learning; and
- (e) standard definitions of terms such as 'certificate' and 'diploma'.

24. On the other hand, from 2001, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has brought together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework : the qualifications of higher education institutions; Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications; and Scottish Vocational Qualifications. The SCQF (at Annex III) differs from the National QF in England. In the SCQF,

qualifications are described in terms of their level and their credit value.

25. The SCQF has two general aims :

- (a) to help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential; and
- (b) to enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

26. Recent developments in the European Union (EU) suggest that a single European framework cannot be totally discounted. SCQF is said to be a model for European development, because it encompasses the school, further and higher education sectors. The EU is looking into the development of a meta-framework to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and credits, hence increasing mobility of learners and labour in the EU.

27. In the UK, National Occupational Standards (NOSs) are developed by Standards Setting Bodies, mainly employer-led National Training Organisations (NTOs). The NOSs are the basis of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) introduced throughout the UK from the late 1980s. The network of 76 NTOs, covering about 94% of the workforce, is being replaced by a smaller (25) and more strategic network of employer-led UK-wide Sector Skills Councils to identify and tackle skills-related productivity and competitiveness issues in industry and business sectors. They represent sectors which are recognised as being of economic or strategic importance to the UK.

28. England announced a Skills White Paper in March 2005 “to help millions to get the skills they need to get into work, get better jobs and help companies compete with China, India and other emerging economies”. It is advocated that improving the national skills base must be a joint endeavour between Government, employers, trade unions, universities, colleges and other training providers. Better skills go hand-in-hand with

better business performance. If training is tailored truly to the needs of businesses, then UK staff will be more dynamic and the UK economy more competitive.

29. It is noteworthy that this White Paper promoted by a Labour Government puts employers' needs and priorities centre stage. UK is empowering employers to address the skills needs affecting their business by giving them a stronger voice in shaping the design and delivery of training.

30. The overseas experiences suggest that it can take considerable length of time to develop the QF, which is a long-term manpower development project. The active engagement of all the stakeholders throughout the process is important. We have to secure the voluntary 'buy-in' and commitment of employers, employees, professional bodies, education and training providers, universities etc. for a successful implementation. Without their support and ownership of the vision, we would not be able to construct a QF for Hong Kong.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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Australian QF Qualification by Sector of Accreditation

<i>Schools sector Accreditation</i>	<i>Vocational Education and Training Sector Accreditation</i>	<i>Higher Education Sector Accreditation</i>
Senior Secondary Certificate of Education	Vocational Graduate Diploma Vocational Graduate Certificate Advanced Diploma Diploma Certificate IV Certificate III Certificate II Certificate I	Doctoral Degree Masters Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate Bachelor Degree Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma Diploma

Annex II

The revised National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

National Qualifications Framework		Framework for Higher Education Qualification levels
Original levels	Revised levels	
5 Level 5 NVQ Level 5 Diploma	8 Specialist awards 7 Level 7 Diploma	D (doctoral) Doctorates M (masters) Masters degrees, Postgraduate certificates and diplomas
4 Level 4 NVQ Level 4 Diploma Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma Level 4 Certificate	6 Level 6 Diploma 5 Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma 4 Level 4 Certificate	H (honours) Bachelors degrees, Graduate certificates and diplomas I (intermediate) Diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees, Higher national diplomas C (certificate) Certificates of higher education
3 <i>(There is no change to Level 3 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 3 Certificate Level 3 NVQ A levels		
2 <i>(There is no change to Level 2 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 2 Diploma Level 2 NVQ GCSEs Grades A-C		
1 <i>(There is no change to Level 1 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 1 Certificate Level 1 NVQ GCSEs Grade D-G		
Entry <i>(There is no change to Entry level in the revised NQF)</i> Entry Level Certificate		

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Table of main qualifications

SCQF level	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Higher Education	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12		Doctorates	
11		Masters	SVQ 5
10		Honours degree Graduate diploma	
9		Ordinary degree Graduate certificate	
8		Higher National Diploma Diploma in Higher Education	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate Certificate in Higher Education	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		