

Department of
Education and
Training

Credit Pathways in VET and Higher Education

Research Project

Final Report

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1. REGULATORY CONTEXT

Learning outcomes are defined and expressed differently between the VET and Higher Education sectors in Australia, primarily due to the introduction of competency-based training in the VET sector in the 1990s. While the AQF has been effective in promoting credit transfer and in providing guidance to institutions, it does not bridge the gap created by these differences.

For the VET sector, the national training system removed provider discretion over awarding credit for units of competency achieved with another provider. The requirement for national recognition between RTOs is articulated in clause 3.5 of the 2015 Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as follows:

- The RTO accepts and provides credit to learners for units of competency and/or modules (unless licensing or regulatory requirements prevent this) where these are evidenced by:*
- a) AQF certification documentation issued by any other RTO or AQF authorised issuing organisation; or*
 - b) authenticated VET transcripts issued by the Registrar.*

Compliance with this requirement ensures that, within VET, full credit is provided for units of competency and qualifications achieved at other institutions. Additionally, the 2015 Standards for RTOs require that VET providers offer recognition of prior learning (RPL) to individual learners (clause 1.12). In VET, RPL is understood as a method of assessment that must be available in all VET provision as a way for individuals to demonstrate their existing competency.

More broadly, the 2015 Standards for RTOs require compliance with the VET Quality Framework which includes the Australian Qualifications Framework and its attendant policies.

The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 reflects the broad intent of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, but the Standards do not refer directly to the AQF or the Policy on credit matters. The Higher Education Standards emphasise the need for providers to grant credit through RPL only if:

- a) students granted such credit are not disadvantaged in achieving the expected learning outcomes for the course of study or qualification, and*
- b) the integrity of the course of study and the qualification are maintained.*

This emphasis on guarding against learner disadvantage and maintaining qualification integrity became central to Higher Education standards during the review of the 2011 qualification standards due to concerns at that time about the risk of excessive provision of credit as a marketing strategy in an environment of uncapped university places.

Appendix A11 documents the extent to which the requirements of the Policy are addressed in the VET and Higher Education provider standards.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The need to support pathways within and between the tertiary education sectors has been an underpinning driver of the AQF since its establishment in 1995. It could, in fact, be said that it is one of three important roles that the AQF plays, the other two being the credibility it gives Australian qualifications to an international audience, and as a regulatory tool.

Provider credit and pathways policies

Despite the direct connection between RTO regulation and the requirements of the AQF, VET stakeholders do not identify with much of the specific content of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. It is seen as a document written by and for the Higher Education sector with little in the Policy applying directly to VET providers unless they are attempting to negotiate articulation arrangements with a Higher Education provider.

However, the Higher Education sector does not identify closely with the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy either. The Higher Education Standards Framework express outcome expectations that autonomous providers can use for internal monitoring, rather than a prescriptive approach focused on processes and inputs. As a result, providers vary widely in the way they implement the Policy.

Information available on provider websites is variable: although more than 90% of Higher Education institutions include credit information on their web pages, the accessibility, reliability and currency of this information varies. Tertiary admissions centres report that most learners are unaware of what credit they may be entitled to and how they would apply for it, and providers have reported that many students who are entitled to credit choose not to take it up.

In terms of outcomes for students and industry, more significant than issues around an institution's policies are the factors that act as drivers for institutions engaging actively in the provision of credit, engaging passively, or not engaging at all. The main factors have been identified as:

- ▶ serving a diverse student cohort (resulting in increased student numbers)
- ▶ responding to industry needs (also resulting in increased student numbers)
- ▶ enhancing (or in some cases preserving) the institution's reputation.

Provider decisions

Institutions which have an articulation agreement with a partner are likely to see this as a reliable way of ensuring that decisions on credit maintain the integrity of their qualifications. For students wishing to claim credit for VET qualifications, a challenge cited by many recipient providers is the lack of confidence they have in the quality of the training and assessment, and information about the capability of a student.

Provider information

There is no single source of national data (or combination) that can be used to understand the level of credit pathway activity; and the level of demand for greater access to credit pathways is impossible to ascertain. This means that there is currently no means to determine how many learners access credit pathways, let alone how many more would like to access them.

Similarly at provider level, the form in which information is collected, or not collected, and analysed, or not analysed, varies according to the practice of each provider. However, our research has found that:

- ▶ the main credit pathways, not surprisingly, are from Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Associate Degree to Bachelor Degree, and the fields of education which make most use of this are Food, Hospitality and Personal Services; Education; and Architecture & Building.
- ▶ 70 Higher Education providers reported that they had granted some credit in 2016, but the proportion of successful credit applications reported by Higher Education survey respondents varies enormously.
- ▶ AVETMISS data indicates that RPL granted as a proportion of VET subject results has declined from 4.4% in 2014 to 3.4% in 2017.

Consultations for this project suggest that there is less variation of credit pathway practice between providers in the VET sector due to the use of nationally recognised training products. The ability of Higher Education providers to self-accredit qualifications results in much greater diversity of practice in the Higher Education sector. Higher Education provider approaches to credit pathways range from highly focused and documented to extremely ad hoc, and appear to be driven by provider preferences and characteristics, rather than the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

Higher Education provider practices take account of the costs and benefits of implementing credit pathways. Some of the costs or barriers relate to practical issues: administrative costs, assessment costs, and a reduction in a provider's income from student fees. And despite the existence of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy there are no incentives or enticements for providers to award credit or establish credit pathways.


Other barriers relate to the risks some providers see to their reputation: providers with a reputation for quality and exclusivity see a need to preserve public perceptions that their programs are difficult to get into, and all providers are aware that despite identical names or titles, qualifications awarded by different providers can be of highly variable quality.

On the other hand, some providers see value in credit pathways to their business: they encourage a more diverse student mix and can be an important recruitment tool. Ironically, it is these providers who are actively engaged in the provision of credit who are least likely to see a need for a national policy.

Stakeholder views

Those consulted supported the concept of a national policy on credit pathways. It is seen as having the potential to provide a statement of principle and intent that makes national priorities for tertiary education clear to all involved, and a platform to facilitate credit transfer and articulation. However, many of those consulted, if they were aware of the Policy, were critical of its form. They commented that it contains an incongruous mix of focus areas (articulating national priorities, establishing broad principles, and providing guidance and instructions) but within an unclear framework – for example, while the intent of the Policy has informed provider standards in the VET sector, and to a lesser extent in the Higher Education sector, regulators report that the Policy itself is not specifically considered or consulted in the course of their registration and accreditation decisions.

Developers of qualifications and training products in VET and Higher Education reported their use of the Australian Qualifications Framework to guide their decisions in designing and packaging learning content. Additionally in the VET sector, the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is referenced in the Standards for Training Packages which require the inclusion of pathways advice in a mandatory companion volume implementation guide. Despite this requirement, training package developers reported that current approaches to training package development have decreased attention on the documentation of industry-wide pathways. This is because, with the maturity of training package



products, developments now more frequently focus on narrow occupational groups or industry sub-sectors rather than an industry-wide product development.

When it came to comments on the effect of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, a majority of Higher Education respondents said that the Policy, and the AQF, had played a useful role in establishing the arrangements that they have in place for credit transfer, articulation, and RPL. However, providers were emphatic that their practices would continue regardless of whether or not there was a policy.

In the remainder of this report...

Section 2 outlines the background to the project, the research methodology, and the terminology used.

Section 3 draws on project research, consultation and data analysis to respond to questions posed by the Department of Education and Training in relation to the credit policies and practices of tertiary providers and possible alternative approaches.

Section 4 provides examples of current practice that illustrate differing approaches and priorities in a range of institutions.

Section 5 reflects on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy based on insights and experiences of credit pathways shared by stakeholders.

The Appendices contain background research and primary data which serve as the basis for the material in the body of the report.

2. THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project was commissioned to inform the 2018 Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Its focus is on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and the extent to which the Policy supports student movement through credit pathways, including credit transfer, recognition of prior learning and articulation.

There is a long-standing connection between the AQF and credit pathways. Successive governments have encouraged credit pathways for reasons of both efficiency – completing qualifications without needing to repeat courses already passed – and equity – offering open access to higher-level qualifications. The first edition of the AQF Implementation Handbook (1995) stated that the AQF should ‘help with developing flexible pathways which assist people to move more easily between the 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 experience’.¹

In 1995, the establishment of articulation arrangements that connected a variety of education and training pathways was seen as crucial to a workable and useful qualifications framework. General principles and operational advice were included in the first AQF Implementation Handbook to guide further discussion in and between sectors of post-compulsory education and training. In subsequent editions of the AQF, credit pathways have been addressed in a variety of ways reflecting broader changes in the tertiary education landscape.

Despite fluctuating emphases and an evolving use of terminology, pathways and articulation have always been central to the purpose of the AQF.

The 2018 Review of the AQF will be critical for ensuring that tertiary education in Australia is underpinned by a respected, robust and cohesive organising framework. It is essential that the AQF review is informed by up-to-date data and insights into how well current arrangements are supporting flexible pathways within tertiary education. The purpose of this project is to ensure that relevant information on credit pathways is available to the AQF review.

2.1 The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

The intent of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is to provide a policy basis for credit arrangements between and within institutions. A copy of the Policy is provided in Appendix A1.

The Policy document describes its purpose as ‘to maximise the credit that students can gain for learning already undertaken’ and its aims are to:

- ▶ enhance student progression into and between AQF qualifications
- ▶ recognise the multiple pathways that students take to gain AQF qualifications and that learning can be formal, non-formal or informal, and
- ▶ support the development of pathways in qualifications design.

This relates directly to the following AQF objectives:

- ▶ to support the development and maintenance of pathways which provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market

¹ MCEETYA, 1995, Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook, First Edition, p 6

- ▶ to support individuals' lifelong learning goals by providing the basis for individuals to progress through education and training and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences.

Background

The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy was established as part of the AQF in 2011. The current (2013 edition) AQF states that the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy 'builds into the AQF the capacity to genuinely support students' lifelong learning'. The Policy includes the responsibilities of providers of AQF qualifications to ensure that there are transparent pathways for students, and the responsibilities of accrediting authorities and qualification developers to promote and facilitate pathways for students.

The need to support pathways within and between the tertiary education sectors has been an underpinning driver of the AQF since its establishment in 1995. The 2011 Policy replaced, and to some extent integrated, principles and guidelines that had been part of the 1995, 1998, 2002 and 2007 editions of the AQF.

Seminal documents in the evolutionary journey of the current AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy include:

- ▶ Articulation Arrangements (1995) – a set of principles to assist the establishment of connections between the qualifications
- ▶ National Guidelines on Cross-Sectoral Qualification Linkages (2002) – national policy guidelines agreed between the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee and the Australian National Training Authority to encourage closer connections between VET and Higher Education with an emphasis on formal linkages at institutional and system level. These Guidelines introduced a percentage-based guide to credit levels for use in developing articulation arrangements between Diploma and Bachelor qualifications. In 2004, the Guidelines were updated to include the schools sector.
- ▶ National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (2004) – national cross-sector guidelines to support implementation of RPL as an important element of Australian education and training and to encourage national consistency through sharing and facilitating good practice across sectors and jurisdictions
- ▶ Pathways to the Qualification (2002) – a section within the guideline for each qualification describing how the qualification can be achieved, including information on access, RPL, credit transfer, and time, and distinctions between VET and Higher Education pathways. In the 2007 edition this section was renamed 'Pathways to, through and from the Qualification'.
- ▶ MCEETYA Good Practice Principles (2005) – two sets of national principles adopted by MCEETYA to encourage measurable improvement over time and provide a benchmark against which progress can be assessed and reported. *Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education*, and *Principles for Good Practice Information Provision on Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education*

- ▶ Giving Credit where Credit is Due (2006) – a national study conducted by PhillipsKPA for the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to improve outcomes in credit transfer and articulation from VET to Higher Education.

Each of these documents approached the issues of movement into and between AQF qualifications, and recognition for prior learning, within the construct of contemporaneous thinking about tertiary education. As a result, the purpose of the current national Policy is coloured by a historical layering of priorities and perspectives. This evolution informs and influences current institutional policies and practices.

2.2 Project methodology

An iterative approach to research and consultation allowed the collation and interrogation of a significant volume of information within the confines of the project timeline.

Project activity included:

- ▶ targeted conversations with 15 key informants (themes arising from conversations at Appendix A2)
—to test the focus of the research and ensure that it was soundly-based and appropriately scoped
- ▶ analysis of HEIMS and AVETMISS data (analysis of data sources at Appendix A3)
—to discover the extent to which valid data is available, and to obtain any available information on the extent of credit transfer which occurs
- ▶ online surveys of VET and Higher Education providers (survey questions at Appendix A4, summary of respondent information at Appendix A5)
—to gather data on provider implementation of the Policy, including the availability and uptake of credit pathways
- ▶ a literature scan of previous national and international research findings on credit pathways
—to document alternate systems of credit transfer
- ▶ a review of Higher Education provider websites (findings at Appendix A6)
—to determine the extent of information available to students
- ▶ an analysis of six Higher Education pathways policies representing key provider categories (findings at Appendix A7)
—to examine variation in institutional policies
- ▶ consultation with a sample of 29 stakeholders (example Discussion Guide at Appendix A8)
—to gain insight into many aspects of the issue, including information from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders about provider practice and barriers
- ▶ eco-system analysis of inter-institutional credit arrangements (case studies at Appendix A9)
—to document current provider practice and insight on the establishment and maintenance of articulation arrangements
- ▶ targeted research and consultation on future requirements (paper at Appendix A10)
—to consider the implications of changing approaches to education, assessment and

workforce development brought on by the disruption of industries, work arrangements and occupations.

2.3 Terminology

Terminology adopted in this report has been influenced by the terms used in the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, the project brief, institutional policies, data sources, and in consultation with stakeholders and informants.

Terminology use that is significant to this report includes:

Policy	To differentiate between national policy and policies developed at the provider level, the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is referred to throughout the report as 'the Policy'. Provider-level policies are 'institutional policies'.
Credit pathways	To reflect the requirements of the project brief, the term 'credit pathways' is used in this report to encompass credit transfer, recognition of prior learning and articulation.
Pathways	The term 'pathways' is used throughout the report in a variety of ways, including within the title of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. Use of this term in the report reflects the repetitive and imprecise way it is used throughout the VET and Higher Education sectors.

Definitions of terms central to the report are listed below. Except where otherwise noted, these definitions are taken from the AQF Glossary of Terminology.

Advanced standing	Advanced standing is a form of credit for any previous learning.
Articulation	Articulation is the arrangements which facilitate the movement or progression of students from one course to another, or from one education and training sector to another. <i>Sourced from NCVET Glossary of VET as a definition of articulation is not contained in the AQF Glossary of Terminology.</i>
Articulation arrangements	Articulation arrangements enable students to progress from a completed qualification to another with admission and/or credit in a defined qualification pathway.
Block credit	Block credit is credit granted towards whole stages or components of a program of learning leading to a qualification.
Credit	Credit is the value assigned for the recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualifications. Credit reduces the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification and may be through credit transfer, articulation, recognition of prior learning or advanced standing.
Credit transfer	Credit transfer is a process that provides students with agreed and consistent credit outcomes for components of a qualification based on identified equivalence in content and learning outcomes between matched qualifications.

Formal learning	Formal learning is learning that takes place through a structured program of learning that leads to the full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification. (In a VET context, formal learning refers to nationally recognised training.)
Informal learning	Informal learning is learning gained through work, social, family, hobby or leisure activities and experiences. Unlike formal or non-formal learning, informal learning is not organised or externally structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support.
Non-formal learning	Non-formal learning is learning that takes place through a structured program of learning but does not lead to an officially accredited qualification. (In a VET context, non-formal learning may refer to learning outside nationally recognised training.)
Recognition of prior learning	Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is an assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit. ²
Specified credit	Specified credit is credit granted towards particular or specific components of a qualification or program of learning. <i>This is referred to by some providers as 'matched credit'.</i>
Unspecified credit	Unspecified credit is credit granted towards elective components of a qualification or program of learning. <i>This is referred to by some providers as 'unmatched credit'.</i>

² This definition of RPL from the AQF Glossary of Terminology was originally taken from the National Quality Council Training Packages glossary. It describes a narrow interpretation of RPL that may not reflect current use in all contexts. An alternative definition is provided in the NCVER Glossary of VET.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section draws on the project research, consultation and data analysis – including provider surveys and case studies – to respond to questions posed by the Department of Education and Training in the project brief.

3.1 Provider credit and pathways policies

Are provider policies easily accessible and promoted to prospective and existing students?

Clause 2.1.1 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy states that ‘all issuing organisations will have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes to provide qualifications pathways and credit arrangements for students’. Additionally, clause 2.1.2 states that these policies and processes will be ‘made publicly available, widely promoted and easily accessible to all prospective and existing students’.

VET and Higher Education provider standards also require that clear information is publicly available to support decision-making by current and prospective students.

A website review indicates that more than 90% of Higher Education institutions include information on credit policy and practice on their web pages (Appendix A6). However, institutions vary considerably in the accessibility, reliability and currency of this information. Although a review of provider websites does not provide information on how credit pathways are implemented at the institution, it does highlight the information management challenge that providers and learners face in relation to the public provision of accurate information.

Under provider standards, VET and Higher Education providers are required to make a significant volume of information publicly available. Maintaining the accuracy and currency of this information (including information on credit policy and practice) and presenting it in a way that is readily accessible and easily understood by the intended audience is a complex undertaking and one that some providers appear to have tackled more effectively than others.

Higher Education respondents to the online survey reported on how their institution makes students and prospective students aware of the credit available to them. The methods identified by respondents were through:

- ▶ admissions/enrolment processes – 98%
- ▶ course/program information – 90%
- ▶ open days – 79%
- ▶ student support services – 76%
- ▶ articulation advice from partner institution – 69%
- ▶ lecturers or other academic staff – 64%
- ▶ other methods – 55%, including:
 - interviews
 - direct recruitment from RTOs
 - international agents

- published policy on website and in offer letters
- credit calculator (online precedent database)
- admissions transparency information on the Federal website (QILT)
- credit transfer website and credit transfer application (self-service credit management application featuring tools to manage academic credit applications, portfolios of past and present learning and more.)

VET respondents reported similarly high use of course/program information (94%) and the admissions/enrolment process (94%) for making students and prospective students aware of credit available to them. Additional methods reported by VET providers were a pre-enrolment interview process, and information sessions prior to course commencement.

Although provider standards require that RPL should be made available to all learners in a pro-active way, in practice the onus is often on learners to request credit. The online survey asked VET and Higher Education providers whether they believed more could be done to raise student awareness of available credit. Responses indicated that 70% of Higher Education respondents and 65% of VET respondents agreed that more could be done.

Despite the plethora of public information on tertiary education program options and pathways, most learners are unaware of what credit they may be entitled to and how they would apply for it – according to tertiary admissions agencies. Demand for greater access to credit pathways is difficult to ascertain. Currently there is no means to determine how many learners access credit pathways, let alone how many more would like to access them.

Providers, in both VET and Higher Education, have reported that many students who are entitled to credit choose not to take it up. This can be due to:

- ▶ Limited availability of support for students entering programs with advanced standing, e.g. the learner support available to first year students is not provided as readily or as comprehensively to those entering second year – students forgo credit to get access to better support
- ▶ Timetabling issues, e.g. gaps in the student's timetable created by the awarding of credit cannot be filled with any other useful activity – students forgo credit and do the subject because no better use can be made of their time
- ▶ Off-putting RPL processes, e.g. portfolio requirements that involve multiple forms of documentation, mapping to learning outcomes and evidence from third parties that is time-consuming to compile – students forgo the credit because the learning and assessment requirements are perceived as easier than satisfying RPL (especially when they already know the subject matter)
- ▶ Minimal cost savings, e.g. in some VET contexts, the cost of providing RPL assessment is similar to the cost of the providing a training program – students have no financial incentive to choose RPL.

One effective mechanism for improving student awareness of available credit options was identified by providers contributing to the ecosystem analysis. In this example, the partner institutions (a private RTO and a university) shared a location. This allowed their shared admissions office to provide individual advice to students about the offerings of both institutions and the pathways available to them. In contrast, 63% of VET providers responding to the online survey indicated that they advised students about articulation or credit arrangements available to them AFTER they have completed their course. In these cases, it

must be assumed that the information being provided relates to pathway options available to course graduates.

Through the survey, providers suggested that solutions to improve student awareness may include:

- ▶ provision of more easily accessible and understandable information to students, and at all stages of the engagement process leading up to enrolment
- ▶ automatic credit assessment processes administered through tertiary admissions agencies, e.g. Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC)
- ▶ provision of tailored advice on options based on students' current course data and academic achievements, e.g. students at risk could be offered different courses based on their strengths and the learning outcomes they have achieved
- ▶ negotiation of consistent approaches by professional accreditation bodies, e.g. using the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) in conjunction with the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) and its international quality assurance agreements to support the free flow of students with equivalent and appropriate credit
- ▶ assessment frameworks at institutional level that encourage students to pursue credit options
- ▶ implementation of the Universal Student Identifier in the VET sector should facilitate credit processes by providing better access to accurate information on units that students have completed.

Are provider policies regularly reviewed to ensure currency with new and updated qualifications, as well as student and industry needs?

Analysis of a selection of Higher Education provider policies indicated that institutions vary in their approach to reviewing policies. Consultations with providers suggested that reviews of institutional policy were triggered by changes to the provider standards and that the credit policy may not be reviewed systematically at any other time.

In responding to the online survey, 40% of VET respondents and 90% of Higher Education respondents indicated that their institution plans to introduce changes to improve or enhance the credit process in future. While this response does not reveal whether the planned changes were triggered by, or will result in, a review of the institution's credit policy, it does suggest that efforts have been made to review the implementation of credit practices. Key themes in the planned changes outlined by respondents were:

- ▶ creation of dedicated project roles and training key staff
- ▶ tracking and cohort analysis to verify the impact of credit awarded
- ▶ focus on student experience, e.g. improving response times, informed decision-making
- ▶ comparison and benchmarking with other institutions, e.g. learning about approaches to national recognition and RPL assessment used by other providers
- ▶ improved tools, e.g. credit calculators
- ▶ development of articulation agreements

- ▶ continual process improvement, e.g. capturing new program structures in institutional policy.

Are provider policies meeting the AQF, the Higher Education Standards Framework and the Standards for RTOs?

Compliance by Higher Education providers with the Higher Education Standards Framework and by VET providers with the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 requires that all providers take account of learners' existing skills, knowledge and experience. Thus, there is a regulatory requirement for all providers to implement institutional mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning.

Although credit pathways are included in regulatory requirements for all tertiary education providers they operate differently in each sector due to the differing policy frameworks for Higher Education and VET providers.

Within VET, the concept of national recognition requires that all RTOs must recognise the AQF qualifications and statements of attainment issued by all other RTOs. National recognition is a regulatory requirement of the VET sector. The VET sector's treatment of RPL is also bound by regulatory requirements: because learning outcomes in VET are based on the achievement of competencies, RPL is a form of assessment that must be implemented and documented as rigorously as any other assessment.

More broadly, the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 form part of the VET Quality Framework, and the Standards require RTOs to comply with the VET Quality Framework. The VET Quality Framework is defined within the Standards as comprising:

- ▶ the Standards for Registered Training Organisations
- ▶ the Australian Qualifications Framework
- ▶ the Fit and Proper Person Requirements
- ▶ the Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements
- ▶ the Data Provision Requirements.

Thus, although the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is not specifically referenced in the Standards for RTOs, the Standards contain a requirement for VET providers to comply with it.

In the Higher Education sector, providers have more freedom to determine their own institutional policies and processes for credit pathways. While this enables Higher Education providers to establish practices that best suit their context, it can also result in institutional policies that are not clearly articulated, not well understood by staff, and not applied consistently.

Clause 1.4 (Monitoring) of the Policy states that accrediting authorities³ in each education and training sector are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the use of the Policy. Consultation with stakeholders suggested that providers do not feel compelled to attend separately to the requirements of AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, believing that their

³ Note: the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and the AQF refer to accrediting authorities that were current in 2013. In 2018, tertiary regulators with responsibility for accrediting courses are ASQA, TEQSA, VRQA and TAC WA. However, in the VET sector most AQF qualifications are contained within training packages. The Australian Industry Skills Committee is responsible for endorsing training packages developed by skills service organisations directed by industry reference committees. Self-accrediting universities and Higher Education providers are responsible for accrediting their own AQF qualifications for their own use in Higher Education.

compliance requirements are fully contained within either the Higher Education Standards Framework (2015) or the Standards for RTOs (2015).

It is notable then that the HESF and the Standards for RTOs do not refer directly to the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. The extent to which the requirements of the Policy are addressed in the provider standards is documented in Appendix A11.

Consultation with tertiary education regulators⁴ indicates that provider compliance with the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is not a priority for VET or Higher Education regulators, and while aspects of the provider standards relate to credit and RPL these are not a significant focus of regulatory activity.

Consultations for the ecosystem analysis found that the extent to which institutional staff actively engaged in credit pathways are even aware of the Policy is highly variable, with most staff only passingly-aware or unaware of its existence. Some of the staff interviewed considered that the Policy was “an important tool” when designing pathways, but these were in a minority and those making that comment tended to refer only to clause 2.1.10 which provides a basis for the negotiation of credit agreements between Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree qualifications and three- or four-year Bachelor Degrees.

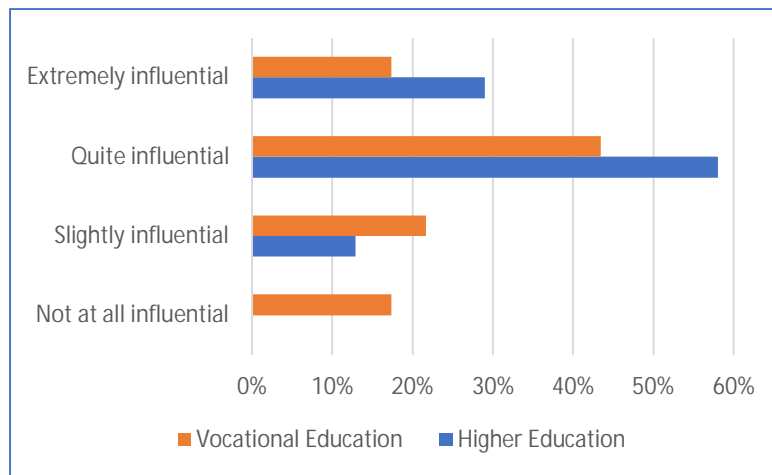
However, many staff reported that the mere existence of the Policy helped to open discussions and negotiations between VET and Higher Education providers – although after that point the Policy was considered of limited use. In one of the case studies, the process of developing credit arrangements was found to be significantly more complex than envisaged by the Policy.

In contrast to the lack of institutional attention to the Policy suggested in many consultations with Higher Education providers, an examination of a selection of Higher Education provider policies indicated that the wording of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy has been adopted in many institutional policies. This was confirmed in discussion with a policy developer at one university who advised that the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy was used as a guide when the university’s Credit and Recognition for Prior Learning Policy was revised in 2013. The Policy purpose (clause 1.1) and principles (clause 2.0) were identified as particularly important and were used to underpin an institutional policy that allowed evidence of formal, non-formal and informal learning to be submitted by an applicant and assessed for the purpose of awarding credit, advanced standing or articulation into another qualification.

The importance of the Policy was also recognised by respondents to the online survey. When asked to rate the influence of the Policy on their institution’s approach to credit, most Higher Education respondents reported that it was ‘extremely influential’ or ‘quite influential’.

⁴ The project team consulted with representatives from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Tertiary Accreditation Council Western Australia (TAC WA).

Chart: Influence of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy on the development and maintenance of approach to credit



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 21, and VET Q 20)

When asked about the essential features of the Policy, few respondents to the online survey were able to articulate a meaningful response. Some noted its importance for the international recognition and reputation of Australian qualifications. Others mentioned its value in emphasising the need for consistency, equity and transparency.

The policy is most useful but lacks rigor for implementation by Higher Education providers. Some use it as a bible, others choose to ignore. It is important for students to understand their course length and cost could be reduced if successful.

Higher Education survey respondent

Project consultations found that many stakeholders support the concept of a national policy on credit pathways. National policy is seen as valuable for providing a statement of principle and intent that makes national priorities for tertiary education clear to all involved. Further benefits of a national policy were identified by some stakeholders. These include:

- ▶ documenting an obligation for tertiary providers to enable recognition of prior learning – and potentially encouraging greater activity in this area
- ▶ providing a ‘platform for negotiation’ and a reference point for establishing credit and articulation agreements – this view principally refers to the percentages detailed in clause 2.1.10 of the Policy as the basis of negotiated credit agreements
- ▶ establishing a basis for the implementation of mechanisms to control questionable provider practices whereby credit is seen to be granted inappropriately.

However, most stakeholders expressed a view that credit would continue to be offered and awarded to students if the Policy were not there. For some providers, credit pathways are used to attract and support the enrolment of targeted student cohorts. These institutions recognise that the availability of credit pathways increases diversity in the student population and enhances the institution’s reputation as a supporter of access and equity. Other providers use carefully prescribed institutional practices to ensure that the provision of credit does not adversely impact the institution’s reputation for quality learning outcomes.

Although there is wide variation in the way in which providers, particularly Higher Education providers, implement credit pathways, stakeholder views suggest that there is universal

support for the principle of enhancing learner progression by recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Responses to the online survey indicate that 86% of Higher Education respondents believe their institution's credit policy has an impact on the cohort of students they attract. More than 50% of respondents also believe their credit policy affects their institution's reputation and the quality of programs they are able to provide.

Comments from respondents revealed underlying priorities for their institution:

▶ Attracting students

Anecdotal student feedback suggests that students want certainty of credit transfer before enrolling in an institution. The 'credit calculator' goes some way to addressing this concern and is likely a factor that attracts students wishing to transfer between and within institutions. It does not impact quality or reputation of the programs.

International students are strongly influenced by the amount of credit they are eligible for and the University needs to ensure it is adequately placed in the market.

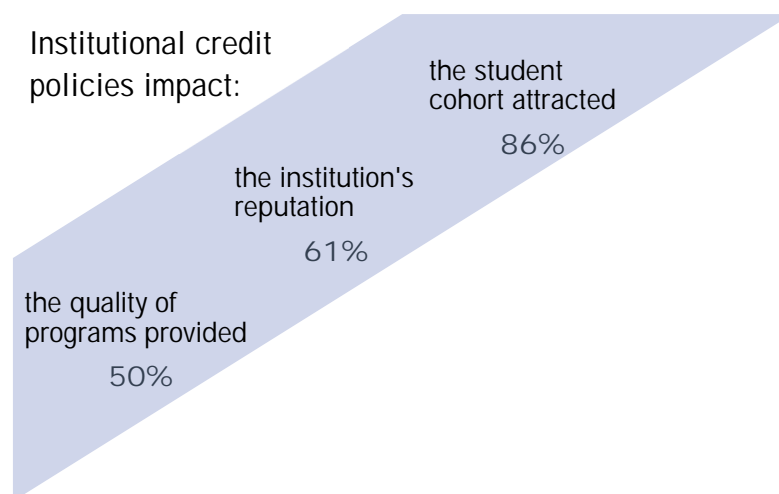
The agreements that are in place provide easier access for particular cohorts and other providers. It provides clearer information for students and therefore a better student experience which is related to the reputation. It also provides incentives to more rigorously look at curriculum alignment to improve quality.

Articulation arrangements from high-quality international institutions ensure a pipeline of high-quality students increasing diversity and internationalisation.

▶ Maintaining quality

We give very little 'block credit' and require explicit coverage of relevant learning outcomes for credit, maintaining the standard of our own courses and their outcomes.

It is the relevance of the program and reputation of the university that is foremost.



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 23)

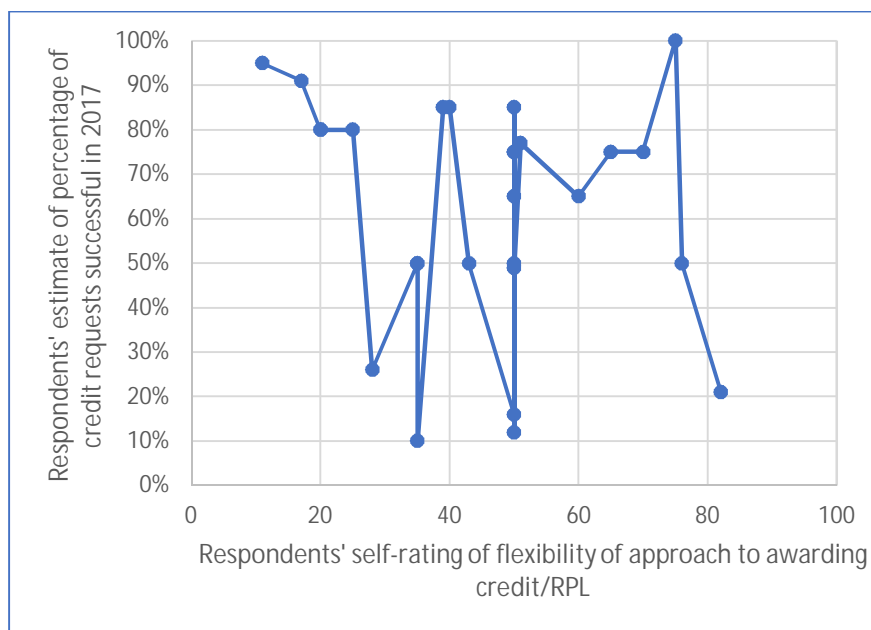
What is the broad content of provider policies?

The way in which credit pathways are implemented within Higher Education institutions, across all qualification levels, is driven by provider characteristics and, ultimately, the value of credit pathways to their business. Examples of different approaches to the implementation of credit processes by Higher Education providers are provided in Section 4.

While institutional policies are underpinned by the principles of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, they vary widely in the practices and processes they describe. Provider practice ranges from highly focused and documented to extremely ad hoc. Consultations suggest that on occasion these two extremes may exist in different faculties of the same institution possibly reflecting the differing significance of credit pathways between fields of study.

Respondents to the online survey were asked to indicate how they perceived the rigidity or flexibility of their institution's approach to awarding credit. On a scale of 1= very accommodating and flexible, to 100=narrowly defined and rigid, responses from Higher Education providers ranged from a rating of 11 to 82. Almost half of respondents selected a mid-range rating between 40 and 60 on the scale provided. An analysis of institutional size and location did not discern a pattern to the variation in responses. Nor was there evidence of correlation between the reported flexibility of a provider's policy and the reported proportion of successful credit requests.

Chart: Proportion of credit requests successful in relation to self-rating of credit policy flexibility



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 5 and 12)

An examination of a selection of provider policies indicated that they generally include coverage of all components of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, excepting the requirement to identify, negotiate and document articulation arrangements when developing courses. It is possible that this requirement is addressed through separate institutional policy and practice relating to course development – which may vary between faculties or fields of education – rather than through an institution-wide advanced standing policy.

For what type of previous study or experience can credit be granted?

Consultations with providers indicated that credit can be granted for all forms of formal, informal and non-formal learning. However, in practice providers report that credit is most frequently granted for formal learning, due to the ease with which learning outcomes can be compared with course requirements.

Providers that recruit a more diverse student cohort and a higher proportion of mature-aged students are more likely to grant credit for non-formal experiences through recognition of prior learning. Providers with high proportions of Indigenous students are much more likely to think beyond work experience and consider life and community experiences in their approach to RPL. Providers with a narrower student cohort reported that RPL was rarely used for students at their institution. Analysis of provider policies also suggests that some institutions restrict RPL to purely work-based experiences and not informal learning that may occur through community participation or broader life experience.

Case studies developed through the ecosystem analysis typify the focus of providers on credit arrangements that create pathways between formal qualifications. However, one example develops a pathway from Diploma to Graduate Certificate based on an intervening period of employment.

Are decisions regarding credit made prior to or after enrolment in the course?

Providers vary in the timing of their credit decision processes. Consultations with providers found that some included credit details as part of their offer to students before enrolment. Other providers require students to be enrolled before an application for credit can be submitted.

In the VET sector, where RPL is an assessment process, it is common for students to be enrolled and expected to participate in the learning program until their application for RPL is assessed.

The online survey gathered information from VET and Higher Education respondents on when students can apply for credit. Respondents were able to select all options that are available to students at their institution. Responses indicate that there is not a uniform approach across all providers.

Table: When students can apply for credit

Stage	Higher Education	Vocational Education
After enrolment	95%	78%
After commencing their course	78%	58%
Prior to enrolment	76%	83%
Other	12%	8%

Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 3, and VET Q 4)

Additional comments made in relation to the 'other' category were:

- ▶ Higher Education
'Only international prospective students can apply prior to enrolment. Domestic prospective students must have applied for entry and have an offer into their course.'

'Non-students can seek a 'quote' for credit using the institution's Credit Pathways Manager System.'

▶ VET

'Students can apply only after commencing their course in specific circumstances, e.g. the student missed classes/assessment for an enrolled unit at the RTO so completed the unit with another RTO and provided a Statement of Attainment for credit to be awarded as part of their qualification.'

'Generally, the institution's policy is that credit must be applied for prior to enrolment to ensure that the student is correctly exempted from the training and assessment requirements and applicable fees.'

Are other mechanisms in place, for example credit databases, to support the policies?

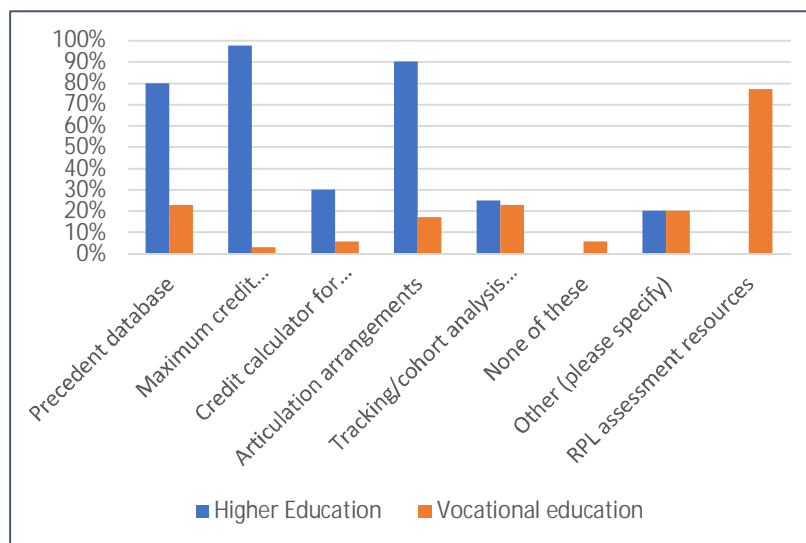
Consultations with providers indicated that providers vary in the mechanisms they have put in place to support credit pathways. Mechanisms that Higher Education providers use in implementing credit pathways include:

- ▶ Precedent databases at faculty or institution level, used to streamline decision processes by recording and referring to previous decisions
- ▶ Detailed institutional policies and manuals used to set maximum limits on credit that can be awarded for specific qualifications
- ▶ Credit calculators, available online for students to use to find out what credit they might be able to access; some calculators incorporate information from precedent databases
- ▶ Student outcomes tracking used to monitor the impact of credit on student achievement and guide improvements to the system.

In making credit decisions, providers in both VET and Higher Education focus first on a comparison of learning outcomes to determine equivalence. This approach conforms with clause 2.1.9 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy, but also highlights the lack of direct connection with the AQF itself in credit decisions. Providers do not generally use direct reference to the AQF as a tool for assessing credit.

The online survey sought information from providers on the mechanisms they use when making credit decisions. Responses indicated that RPL assessment resources are the most used mechanism for VET providers. Higher Education respondents reported that precedent databases (80%), maximum credit allowances (98%), and articulation arrangements (90%) are most used.

Chart: Mechanisms used to support credit pathways



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 6, and VET Q 6)

Other mechanisms to support credit decisions that were mentioned by survey respondents include:

- ▶ Group of Eight credit policy supported by a Quality Verification System
- ▶ Up-front assessment of credit with key international exchange partners
- ▶ Consultation between VET and Higher Education on pathway credit decisions (in dual sector university)
- ▶ Individual review of complex cases and advice
- ▶ Supporting evidence supplied by the student
- ▶ training.gov.au and training package equivalence information (for VET qualifications).

Are appeals processes readily available to existing and prospective students?

An examination of a selection of provider policies found variation between institutions in the way in which appeals processes were documented in credit policy. Consultations with providers suggested that appeals processes may be documented in a separate institutional policy, e.g. Academic Grievance Policy.

During consultations, one provider noted that the appeals process could not be used by prospective students to challenge the scope of credit before they enrol – it could only be used retrospectively.

A regulator has observed that, outside institutional appeals processes, there are currently no mechanisms to support learners who are trying to access credit.

We get queries from students who say that they have a particular certificate and can't get any recognition for it in Higher Education. There is nothing we can do about it. Higher Education providers are not forced to provide credit. There needs to be more transparency and management of student expectations both at VET and Higher Education level.

3.2 Provider decisions

What factors are taken into account in making credit transfer decisions?

Clause 2.1.9 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy states that the negotiation of credit agreements for students towards AQF qualifications at any level, vertical or horizontal, will take into account the comparability and equivalence of the:

- ▶ learning outcomes
- ▶ volume of learning
- ▶ program of study, including content, and
- ▶ learning and assessment approaches.


As previously noted, consultations revealed that providers in VET and Higher Education focus first on a comparison of learning outcomes to determine equivalence when making credit decisions. Other factors that providers reported taking into account when making credit decisions were:

- ▶ currency of the previous qualification (providers cited currency requirements between 5 and 10 years)
- ▶ professional body accreditation requirements
- ▶ comparability with overseas qualifications
- ▶ volume of learning
- ▶ assessment methodologies (Higher Education providers reported difficulty awarding credit for ungraded VET studies)
- ▶ quality of program offered by other institutions (providers reported that this was difficult for them to judge and a barrier to awarding credit).

Of the factors that providers consider, volume of learning appears to be the most contentious. While many providers report that a consideration of volume of learning informs their credit decisions, some suggest that it does not provide meaningful information due to the VET sector's emphasis on competency-based outcomes rather than the duration of training programs.

Attitudes to volume of learning are distinctly different between VET and Higher Education. In the AQF, 'volume of learning' identifies the notional duration of all activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes specified for a particular AQF qualification type. However, set (or even notional) timeframes for the delivery of training are at odds with the Australian VET sector's competency-based training system which is based on demonstration of competency, not a 'time-served' approach to training. The competency-based training model underpins the Standards for RTOs (2015) through requirements that focus on the provision of flexible, learner-centred approaches to training, and robust and rigorous assessment practices.

Higher Education providers generally have a more traditional approach to volume of learning with the achievement of learning outcomes linked to a set course duration. As a result of the differing perspectives between VET and Higher Education, volume of learning is not always a reliable factor for consideration in the development of credit pathways.



Provider policy and practice frequently distinguishes between matched (or specified) and unmatched (or unspecified) credit. Matched credit is generally required for core subjects. In this case, learning outcomes from previous study must be judged equivalent to the target core subject/s for credit to be awarded. Unmatched credit is generally available for elective units. In this case, a quantum of pre-existing knowledge and skill is judged sufficient to award credit for one or more unspecified elective subjects. Providers indicated that previous work or community experience is most often used for unmatched credit due to the difficulty of comparison with specific learning outcomes.

Some providers indicated that parameters were established to limit the extent of credit that can be awarded, such as:

- ▶ maximum amounts of allowable credit for every course (often 50%, but sometimes less)
- ▶ capstone or outcome units (where no credit is available)
- ▶ minimum study requirements, ensuring regulatory compliance for international students.

Clause 2.1.10 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy provides a basis for the negotiation of credit agreements between Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree qualifications and three- or four-year Bachelor Degrees. These are expressed as percentages of the target qualification. This clause is the most used section of the Policy and many stakeholders value it as:

- ▶ a basis for negotiating articulation arrangements between institutions
- ▶ a guide for developing Higher Education qualifications that will readily support credit pathways.

However, consultations revealed considerable variation in the way this clause is interpreted. While some stakeholders regard it as only a starting point for negotiations, others interpret the percentage figures as strict upper limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded. This interpretation is favoured in some Higher Education provider policies and is sometimes linked to institutional requirements regarding the proportion of a course that learners must complete as a student of the institution to be entitled to an award from that institution.

An examination of Higher Education provider policies found that institutions place limits on the amount of advanced standing that can be given broadly in line with the percentages indicated in clause 2.1.10 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. This is also reflected in survey responses indicating that 98% of Higher Education providers use maximum credit allowances as a mechanism for supporting credit decisions. While the limits established may be considered in line with clause 2.1.10, the use of limits could be viewed as incompatible with the purpose of the Policy to 'maximise the credit that students can gain for learning already undertaken'.

Some stakeholders suggested that the inclusion of specific percentages in clause 2.1.10 encourages narrow interpretation based on current education and training products and fails to consider the potential for new products and learning approaches to be introduced in future.

What factors are taken into account in making RPL decisions, including with reference to previous work experience?

Consultations with providers found that RPL was viewed differently between the VET and Higher Education sectors. For VET providers, RPL is an assessment process that must conform with the assessment requirements of the target unit/s of competency.

For Higher Education providers, RPL is a mechanism for recognising knowledge and skills gained through non-formal or informal learning, including work and sometimes community experience. When asked to indicate the extent to which credit pathways were used by their institution, only 10% of Higher Education respondents reported that RPL was used more than credit transfer or articulation. As noted above, RPL is most often used for unspecified credit rather than attempting to match student experiences with specified learning outcomes.

In consultations, providers from both sectors reported that authenticity of evidence is central to RPL and outlined approaches for the triangulation of evidence through third parties.

Are institutions' pathways processes and decisions evidence-based, equitable and academically defensible?

Through consultations, Higher Education providers emphasised the need to make academically defensible decisions in line with the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework. The concept of academically defensible decisions is closely linked by providers to their reputation as a quality provider and to their ability to maintain the integrity of qualification outcomes.

The implementation of consistent processes and practices across an institution is a mechanism for ensuring that sound and supportable credit decisions are made. Consultation with providers suggested that credit decision-making was sometimes variable, or even ad hoc, across institutions. However, in responding to the online survey, 63% of Higher Education respondents reported that their institution's approach to credit is consistent across all faculties/departments.

How do institutions' pathways processes and decisions maintain the integrity of qualification outcomes?

To monitor the impact of credit policies, one provider reported tracking student outcomes to ensure that awarding of credit was not adversely affecting learning or qualification outcomes.

Through consultations for the ecosystem analysis it was clear that providers view formal credit arrangements between partner institutions as a mechanism for ensuring quality outcomes that will maintain the integrity of qualification outcomes. A key benefit of credit arrangements cited by providers was the ability to ensure that students entering a program with credit were well-prepared. Institutional staff also appeared to value the opportunity that the negotiation of credit pathways gave them to reflect on the learning outcomes and level of the target programs, and the needs of the students and their employers. An unanticipated outcome from one case study (Appendix 9: Case Study D) was described as follows:

Teachers, trainers and lecturers at both institutions have begun to see new ways of working together to improve the work readiness of students such as incorporating specific workforce skills as additional informal learning opportunities for degree students.

Sarina Russo Institute – James Cook University

The development and implementation of a bridging program for Nursing Diploma students entering a degree program at Federation University (Appendix 9: Case Study C) is another example where the creation of a credit pathway has led to greater integrity of qualification outcomes through better support for students. The institution reported that the development has led to a new appreciation of vocational education by Higher Education staff, and vice versa, and a blurring of the boundaries between the two sectors. Managers, lecturers and teachers from across the sectors interact formally and informally, sharing philosophies, teaching approaches, and assessment methods. This has resulted in an improved understanding and mutual respect for each other's work.

The consultations and provider survey found that some institutions maintain the integrity of qualification outcomes, and their exclusive reputation, by limiting the availability of credit – thus ensuring they can provide programs to a relatively homogenous group of students. Other institutions take the opposite approach and find that, by having to actively address the needs of a diverse learner cohort, the quality of their programs and qualification outcomes gets a boost.

How do institutions' pathway processes and decisions recognise learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided it is relevant and current?

As previously noted, while credit can be granted for all forms of formal, informal and non-formal learning, in practice credit is most frequently granted for formal learning, due to the ease with which learning outcomes can be compared with course requirements. Greater consideration is given to non-formal and informal learning by providers that recruit a more diverse student cohort and a higher proportion of mature-aged students.

An examination of a selection of Higher Education provider policies found that all policies recognise formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission and advanced standing purposes. However, some providers place a lower limit on the amount of credit that can be granted for non-formal and informal learning compared with formal learning (e.g. maximum of 50% credit for formal learning and maximum of 30% credit for non-formal or informal learning). Additionally, specified credit in core subjects sometimes cannot be granted for non-formal and informal learning.

Most provider policies also place a time limit, ranging from 5-10 years, on the currency of formal qualifications that will be recognised in credit processes. These limits are generally established to reflect the fact that the core knowledge required by specific disciplines does change over time. Some institutions indicate that these limits are open to negotiation and that evidence of application of the qualification in the workplace and continuing professional development can help to support an application for credit based on an older qualification.

Through discussion, a representative from one university reported that by reflecting the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy in their institutional policy, in particular an emphasis on recognising multiple pathways (including formal, non-formal and informal learning), has positioned the university to develop and recognise micro-credentials for credit or articulation into its awards.

Respondents to the online survey reported on the range of qualifications awarded by their institution. Notably, 73% of Higher Education respondents indicated that their institution provided micro credentials, skill sets, short courses, and/or unaccredited programs suggesting familiarity with at least some types of non-formal learning. In contrast, only 29% of VET respondents reported providing these programs. While VET providers do not need to

deliver skill sets in order to recognise and provide credit for them, student pathways and options will be restricted if the delivery of skill sets is limited.

How are institutions' pathways processes and decisions documented for students, including reasons for not giving credit?

A review of selected Higher Education credit policies found that the requirement to document decisions for students was adequately covered. Some policies were silent on how appeals decisions would be documented but, as previously noted, appeals processes may be addressed by providers in a separate grievance policy.

Consultation with providers suggested that for many providers the volume of credit applications was so low that feedback could be provided to students on an individual basis, particularly at smaller institutions.

Respondents to the online survey identified common reasons for credit or RPL applications being unsuccessful.

Higher Education responses:

- ▶ Prior learning was too long ago (10-year expiry)
- ▶ The cited experience was poorly documented or not sufficiently relevant
- ▶ Only partial evidence was provided, and we only give whole-subject credit
- ▶ Insufficient information was provided to students requesting credit. Where transparency and clear guidelines are published, most students getting to the application stage should receive credit.

VET responses:

- ▶ Unit of competency not equivalent or relevant to the qualification
- ▶ Insufficient evidence provided, or evidence is based on overseas experience
- ▶ Outdated qualifications
- ▶ Unable to prove performance of all workplace tasks relating to units, or previous work history not current.

Survey responses reveal significant differences between institutions in their approach to awarding credit. Higher Education respondents reported figures ranging from 10% to 100% for the proportion of credit requests that are successful at their institution. The range was even more extreme for VET with one third of respondents reporting 11% or fewer credit requests were successful while success rates of 80% and above were reported by more than 40% of respondents. Respondent comments illustrated the differing institutional attitudes.

It's too hard to do. People don't keep their records or can't have claims of employment verified for various reasons.

VET respondent reporting successful outcomes of 14%

Overzealous assessors, not being flexible e.g. only relying on written evidence as opposed to also considering interviews, discussion and engagement to use alongside the written evidence.

VET respondent reporting successful outcomes of 5%

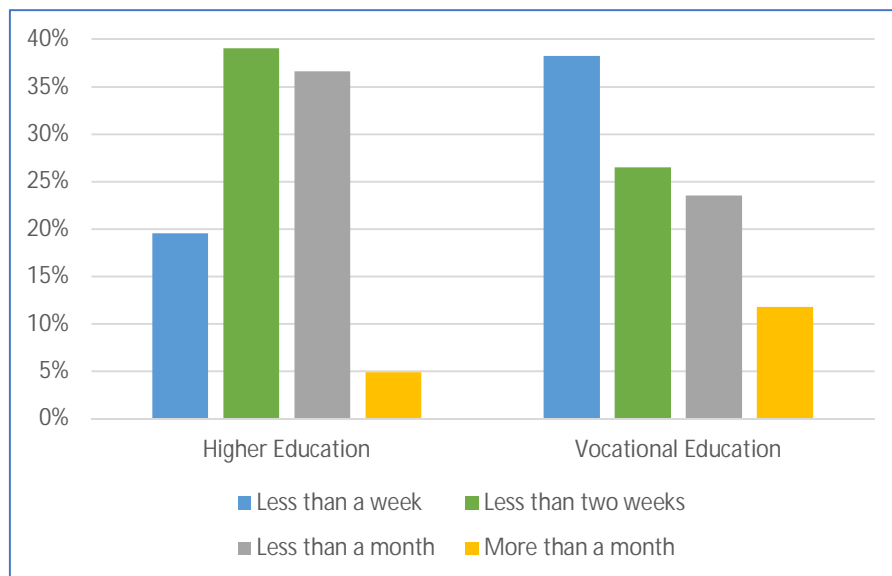
We always strive to give the student sufficient information before making an application, so they can be confident about what the outcome is likely to be. Particularly for RPL where there are significant costs involved and investment of time. Therefore, we rarely have a case of an application being denied. For RPL, we do get a number of initial enquiries where it is quickly established that the person does not have the type or amount of evidence required for a successful RPL outcome for any full units of competency. We would say that community understanding of RPL requirements is poor. There seems to be a view that a person can simply provide a CV and perhaps a letter of support from a past employer as evidence to receive RPL.

VET respondent reporting successful outcomes of 95%

How are institutions' pathways credit decisions made in a timely way so that students' access to qualifications is not unnecessarily inhibited?

Survey respondents reported on the length of time taken to provide students with an outcome for credit decisions (excluding appeals processes). Only 5% of Higher Education respondents and 12% VET respondents reported that credit decisions take longer than a month. At the other end of the scale, 38% of VET respondents and 20% of Higher Education respondents reported that credit decisions take less than a week.

Chart: Length of time taken to provide students with an outcome for credit decisions (excluding appeals processes)



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 4, and VET Q 5)

The survey did not ask respondents to indicate whether acceptable response times were required and enforced through their institutional policy and practice. However, an examination of a selection of provider policies revealed that some institutional policies are silent in relation to indicating a time in which applicants will be advised of the outcome of

their credit request. It is possible that length of time required for credit decisions is not always made clear to students or prospective students.

The review of provider policies found that all policies required that reasons for not giving credit must be documented for students. During consultations, smaller NUHEPs operating in niche areas reported that close personal contact was maintained with students, enabling the provision of feedback through face-to-face interviews as well as formal documentation.

How do institutions take account of students' ability to meet the learning outcomes of the qualification?

Monitoring the outcomes of students awarded credit is a way for providers to think about students' ability to meet the learning outcomes of a qualification. When considering the preparedness of individual students, providers reported that they considered a range of factors, such as:

- ▶ previous experiences in academic settings
- ▶ maturity
- ▶ availability of support services or bridging programs
- ▶ learning demands of the target program
- ▶ performance after enrolment (fee-for-service providers indicated that they continued to communicate with students about their fit with the program after enrolment, enabling credit to be considered after students have experienced the level of the program).

Where providers specifically design programs that are tailored for students entering with credit, the programs can be popular and successful, such as the case study examples identified through the ecosystem analysis (Appendix A9). Examples of similarly successful programs designed for Indigenous learners include:

- ▶ an articulated pathway for Aboriginal Health Workers from various TAFE courses into a Bachelor of Health Sciences (Aboriginal Health and Community Development) providing learners with entry into the block release undergraduate program with predetermined amounts of credit
- ▶ a Masters of Indigenous Education by Coursework designed to create pathways into a PhD for learners who have not previously completed higher degree research, the learning program incorporated assessments that count toward PhD entry criteria and support progression. The program has seen successful transitions into PhD programs by Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners.

However, where programs are not specifically designed to accommodate students who have been granted credit, the overall quality of the student experience and learning outcomes can be adversely impacted for students who access the program with credit. While reasons for this are anecdotal, providers suggested causal factors including lack of preparation for academic study, lack of assumed underpinning knowledge, and undeveloped support structures for knowledge-based learning approaches. Because credit decisions are made on a unit by unit basis by comparing learning outcomes they do not generally take a holistic view of learner preparation for the learning environment or mode of study. Targeted bridging programs were advocated by providers as an effective mechanism to prepare students entering programs on a credit pathway.

3.3 Provider information

What does statistical information from providers reveal?

Activity under the Policy is not reported with any rigour. Research for this project has confirmed that there is no single source of national data that can be used to understand the implementation of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

In the Higher Education sector, some credit pathways activity has been reported through the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS), but the collection is not comprehensive due to the voluntary nature of some aspects of reporting. HEIMS gathers information from VET and Higher Education providers on:

- ▶ students studying in approved VET courses who are eligible to apply for a VET student loan or VET FEE-HELP assistance
- ▶ domestic and overseas students enrolled in or undertaking a course of study leading to a Higher Education award.

In the past⁵ HEIMS has gathered data on the following elements:

- ▶ the value of credit offered and used
- ▶ the student's highest educational participation prior to commencement
- ▶ details of prior study for which credit/RPL was offered, including field of education, level of education and type of provider where study was undertaken.

The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) collects student experiences of Higher Education but does not currently capture any data on credit pathways.

In the VET sector, credit pathways data available through the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) is limited to reporting of unit outcomes as:

- ▶ credit transfer – where a training provider recognises and accepts AQF qualifications and statements of attainment issued by another RTO
- ▶ recognition of prior learning granted – where a student is assessed as competent through RPL
- ▶ recognition of prior learning not granted – where a student undergoes RPL assessment and cannot be assessed as competent.

Further information on available data is outlined in Appendix A3.

Consultations with providers indicate that some providers keep detailed, central records of credit activity, but many providers do not seem to have accurate information available. The explanations given were that credit applications are managed at faculty level and only minimal detail needs to be reported on central information systems, and (in other cases) the data is recorded but is difficult to access and interrogate in a useful way.

While the online survey of providers has gathered useful information on credit applications and approvals, this does not enable a comprehensive national view of credit activity.

⁵ Changes have been made to the scope and operation of the HEIMS data collection tool in 2018 to address acknowledged issues with low quality data. Fewer elements will be collected on credit transfer in future.

Credit applications and approvals

Respondents to the online survey were asked to provide information on students requesting credit or RPL in 2017. Responses from Higher Education respondents ranged from 10% to 60% of enrolling students requesting credit. On average, 62% of these requests were reported as successful, however as previously stated, the proportion of successful credit requests that were successful at individual institutions ranged from 10% to 100%.

VET respondents reported an average of 17% of enrolling students requesting credit or RPL, however individual responses ranged from 0 to 90%. On average, only 49% of requests were reported as successful.

According to HEIMS data, 71 institutions reported that they had granted credit to students in 2016. The reported data indicates that a total of 87,835 students were granted credit from a total commencing student count of 509,052, suggesting that 14.9% of students were granted credit.

The percentage of students receiving credit at the 71 institutions ranged from 2% (at the Australian College of the Arts Pty Ltd) to 79% (at the Top Education Group Ltd). The fields of education most frequently used as a source of credit are Management and Commerce (31,561 students granted credit), Society and Culture (16,306 students granted credit) and Health (13,851 students granted credit).

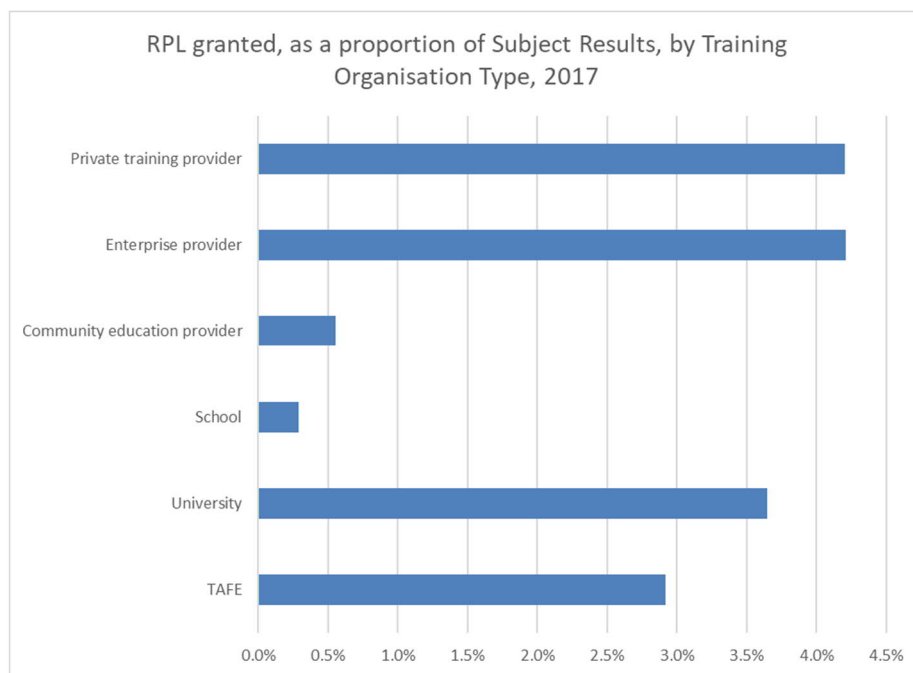
Through HEIMS, Higher Education providers also report on the basis of admission for enrolling students. Where the basis of admission is recorded as an incomplete VET award course it is possible that some credit has been awarded. In 2016, the following Higher Education providers reported admitting significant proportions of students on the basis of an incomplete VET award course:

- ▶ North Metropolitan TAFE – 28% of admissions in the field of Management and Commerce
- ▶ TAFE Queensland – 19% of admissions in the field of Health
- ▶ Perth Bible College – 13% of admissions in the field of Society and Culture
- ▶ Top Education Group Ltd – 8% of admissions in the field of Society and Culture
- ▶ The Australian National University – 56% of admissions in 'mixed field programs'
- ▶ Sydney Institute of Health Sciences Pty Ltd – 3% of admissions in the field of Health
- ▶ Charles Darwin University – 8% of admissions in the field of Architecture and Building
- ▶ Melbourne Polytechnic – 3% of admissions in the fields of Information Technology, Engineering and Related Technologies, and Creative Arts
- ▶ Australian College of Natural Medicine Pty Ltd – 3% of admissions in the field of Health
- ▶ Bond University – 4% of admissions in the field of Health
- ▶ The National Institute of Dramatic Art – 2% of admissions in the field of Creative Arts
- ▶ University of South Australia – 10% of admissions in 'mixed field programs'.

The data reported through HEIMS does not provide detail on the nature of the incomplete VET award course, or the focus of the Higher Education program to which students are admitted. It could be assumed that in some cases, Higher Education programs are designed specifically for a target student cohort, e.g. the 'mixed field programs' offered by The Australian National University.

Information reported through AVETMISS reveals that in 2017 successful RPL outcomes comprised 3.4% of all VET subject results⁶. The data indicates that the amount of RPL granted as a proportion of subject results varies between training organisation types and between funding sources.

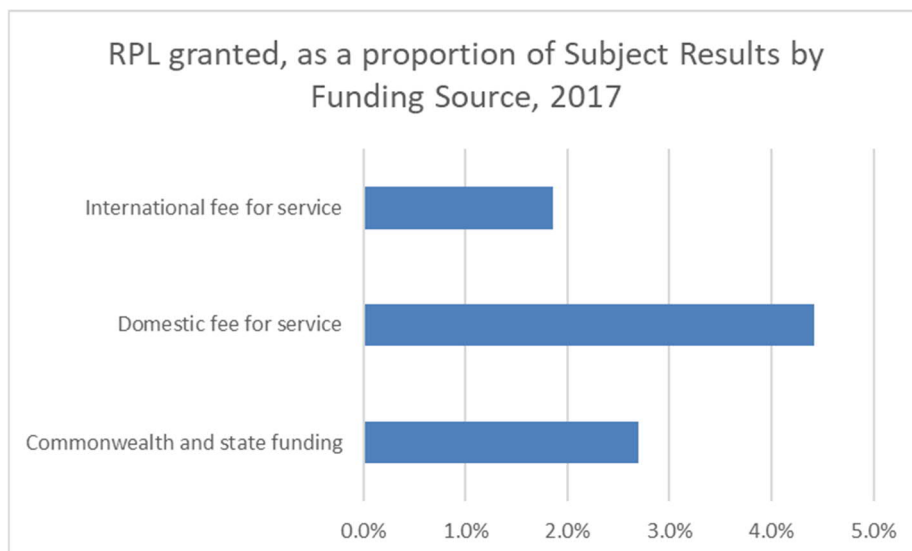
Private training providers and enterprise providers grant more RPL as a proportion of total subject results (4.2% in 2017), than do other types of provider. Not surprisingly, schools and community education providers grant the lowest proportions of RPL, with 0.3% and 0.6% respectively, as their learner cohorts more frequently have limited previous work or study experience.



Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

In 2017, the differences in the use of RPL between funding sources ranged from 1.9% of subject results for international fee-for-service VET to 4.4% for domestic fee-for-service VET. RPL was granted for 2.7% of subject results in government-funded VET.

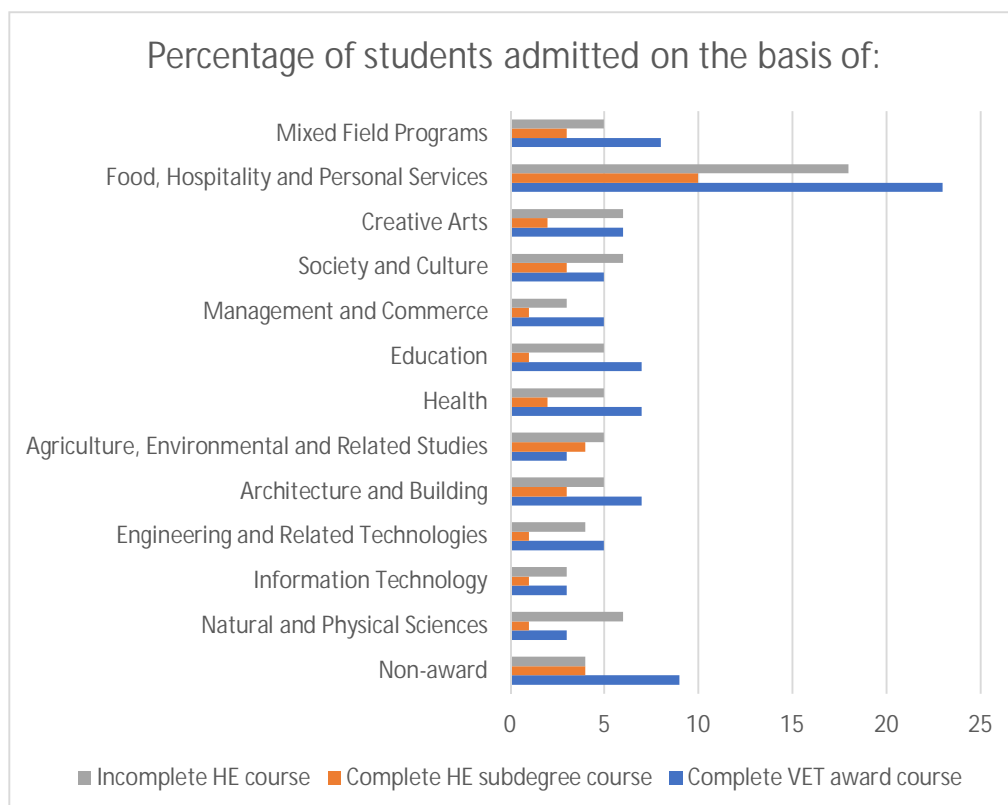
⁶ VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET




Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

Fields of education

Where students are admitted on the basis of a complete VET award, a complete Higher Education sub degree, or an incomplete Higher Education Degree it is possible (although far from certain) that some credit is being awarded. Some fields of education appear to admit a greater proportion of students on the basis of previous study. For complete VET awards, these range from 23% for Food, Hospitality and Personal Services to 3% in Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies, Information Technology, and Natural and Physical Sciences.



Source: Higher Education Student Data Collection, 2016



HEIMS data also provides information on the percentage of commencing students reported as receiving credit by field of study and institution. The table below shows how the percentage of students receiving credit varies between fields of study at a single institution, e.g. at Bond University 4% of commencing students receive credit in Health, while 23% receive credit in Natural and Physical Sciences; and across universities in the same field of study, e.g. in Information Technology 20% of students receive credit at Charles Darwin University while 1% receive credit at the University of SA, University of NSW and Central Queensland University.

Table: Percentage of commencing students receiving credit by institution and field of study, 2016

Institution	Natural and Physical Sciences	Information Technology	Engineering and Related Technologies	Architecture and Building	Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	Health	Education	Management and Commerce	Society and Culture	Creative Arts
Australian Catholic University Limited	9%	8%				6%	4%	14%	7%	17%
Avondale College Limited							24%			7%
Bond University	23%			11%		4%		20%	15%	19%
Central Queensland University	7%	1%				5%	4%	4%	7%	12%
Charles Darwin University	8%	20%		28%	13%	10%	8%	8%	13%	14%
Charles Sturt University	12%	2%			14%	10%	11%	3%	7%	15%
Curtin University	16%	5%	4%	21%	15%	16%	45%	8%	16%	10%
Deakin University	9%	4%	1%	5%	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%	5%
Edith Cowan University	19%	3%	3%			8%	2%	5%	18%	11%
Federation University Australia	6%	4%	3%			3%	9%	3%	6%	11%
Flinders University	11%	10%	4%		20%	5%	9%	11%	8%	12%
Griffith University	21%	15%	7%	17%	4%	16%	11%	14%	16%	15%
James Cook University	11%	14%	3%	23%	24%	10%	15%	10%	13%	33%
La Trobe University	13%	8%		19%	17%	10%	8%	9%	11%	16%
Macquarie University	13%	12%	9%	9%	7%	16%	9%	8%	18%	20%
Monash University	7%	6%		3%	32%	5%	2%	8%	3%	4%
Murdoch University	5%				7%	10%	5%	2%	4%	3%
Queensland University of Technology	12%	9%	4%	1%		12%	4%	13%	8%	16%
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	11%	18%	1%	2%	20%	12%	7%	13%	11%	7%

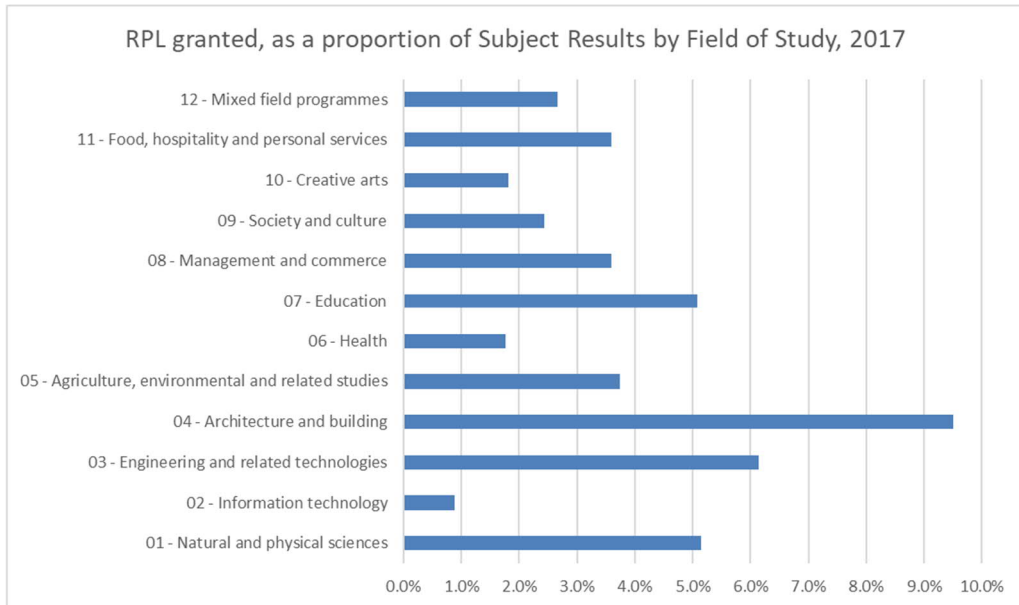
Institution	Natural and Physical Sciences	Information Technology	Engineering and Related Technologies	Architecture and Building	Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	Health	Education	Management and Commerce	Society and Culture	Creative Arts
Southern Cross University	13%	4%			13%	9%	15%	4%	17%	5%
Swinburne University of Technology	20%	14%	2%			29%	4%	10%	18%	11%
The Australian National University	9%	4%			6%	7%		7%	5%	9%
The University of Adelaide	3%	2%				4%	3%	2%	2%	4%
The University of Melbourne	4%	2%	1%	2%	4%	5%	1%	3%	4%	4%
The University of New England	16%	9%	19%	5%	9%	3%	7%	10%	13%	15%
The University of Newcastle										
The University of Queensland	11%	5%			18%	10%	6%	10%	7%	14%
The University of Western Australia	5%			5%		8%	2%	7%	13%	17%
The University of Wollongong	19%	6%	8%		37%	10%	5%	8%	12%	17%
Torrens University Australia Limited										
University of Canberra	16%	14%	10%	16%	18%	15%	48%	15%	12%	11%
University of New South Wales	1%	1%		2%		3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
University of South Australia	3%	1%				4%	3%	3%	6%	2%
University of Southern Queensland	9%	4%	6%			17%	7%	8%	13%	
University of Sydney	15%	11%	1%	3%	5%	7%	8%	6%	12%	9%
University of Tasmania	11%	6%	4%	7%	4%	3%	7%	6%	8%	2%
University of Technology Sydney	4%	5%	1%	4%		3%	12%	2%	5%	5%

Institution	Natural and Physical Sciences	Information Technology	Engineering and Related Technologies	Architecture and Building	Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	Health	Education	Management and Commerce	Society and Culture	Creative Arts
University of the Sunshine Coast	6%				3%	5%	4%	4%	6%	9%
Victoria University	15%	12%	2%	11%		14%	8%	15%	16%	41%
Western Sydney University	13%	11%	4%	8%	28%	11%	5%	9%	17%	9%

Source: Higher Education Student Data Collection, 2016

Note: Data captured through HEIMS is self-reported by institutions and may reflect underlying differences in the practices that different institutions use for recording and reporting student data.

Almost two thirds of VET respondents to the online survey for this project reported that the proportion of students requesting credit or RPL varies in different disciplines. This view is backed up by AVETMISS data which indicates that RPL granted as a proportion of subject results varies between fields of study. In 2017 this ranged from 0.9% in Information Technology to 9.5% in architecture and building.



Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

Institutions from which students awarded credit come

Information is not readily available in HEIMS or AVETMISS on the institutions from which students awarded credit come.

The online survey asked Higher Education respondents to rank the institutions from which students being awarded credit most frequently came. Available options were: TAFE, private RTO, university, NUHEP, and international institution. The responses most frequently ranked university first, TAFE second, and international institutions third.

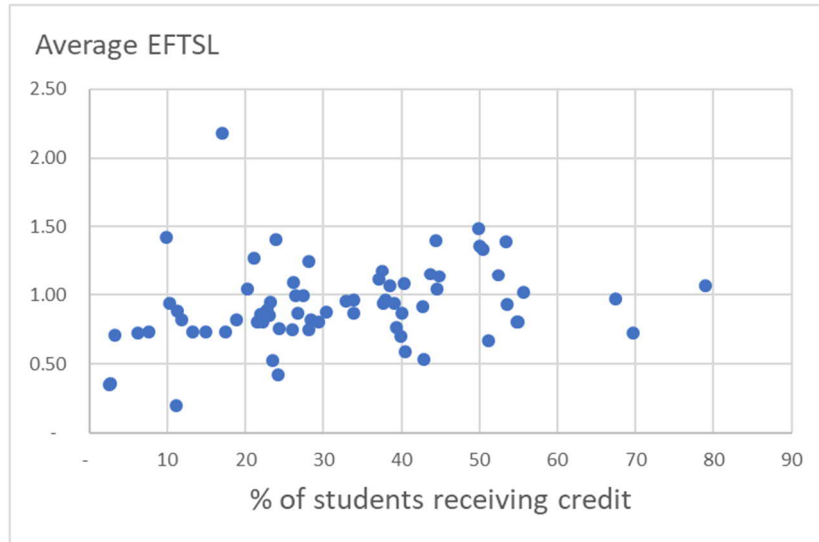
The ecosystem analysis gathered information on formal credit arrangements between a variety of institutions. These arrangements enable the receiving institution to establish a relationship with the sending institution, so that the nature, content and quality of their program is understood. However, the credit pathway established by Federation University was later opened to nursing diploma students from all RTOs. The resulting unpredictable quality of diploma students then led to Federation University's development of a bridging program to ensure all students were prepared for the requirements of the degree program.

Amount of credit awarded

For the students reported in HEIMS as receiving credit, the average amount of credit received was 0.94 equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL). The amount of credit awarded by institutions ranged from 0.21 EFTSL (at Study Group Australia Pty Ltd) to 2.20 EFTSL (at Photography Studies College Melbourne).

A comparison of average credit awarded and the percentage of students receiving credit at each institution shows no correlation.

Chart: Average credit awarded in relation to percentage of students receiving credit



Source: Higher Education Student Data Collection, 2016

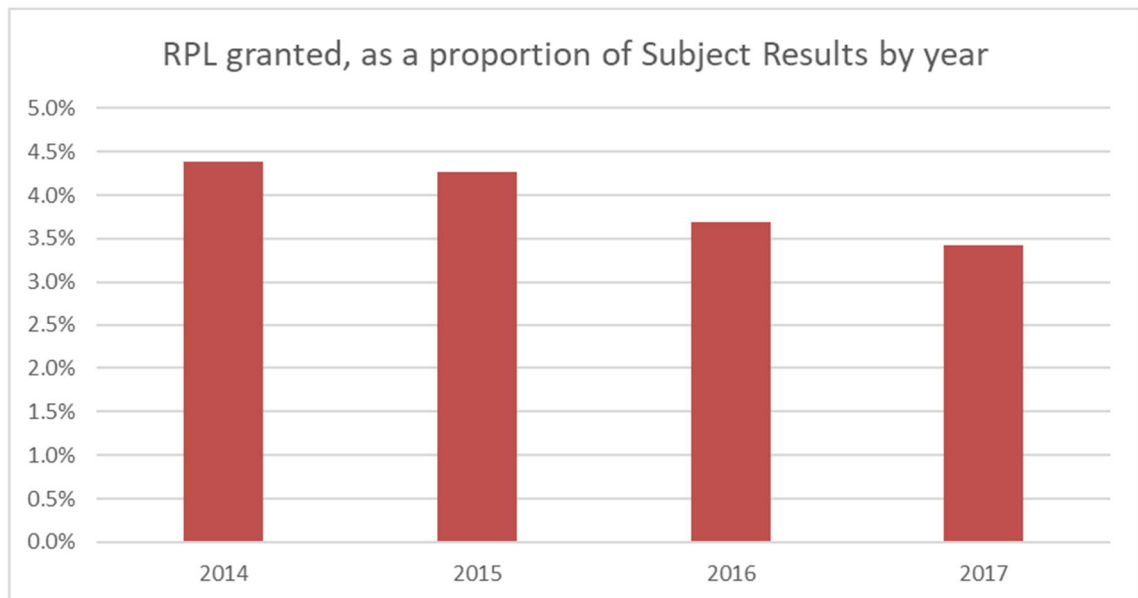
Number of appeals

No information is available on the number of appeals. Through the consultations, providers reported that appeals are minimal.

Trends over the last 10 years

HEIMS data has not been used to identify trends in credit pathways due to the low quality of the data available.

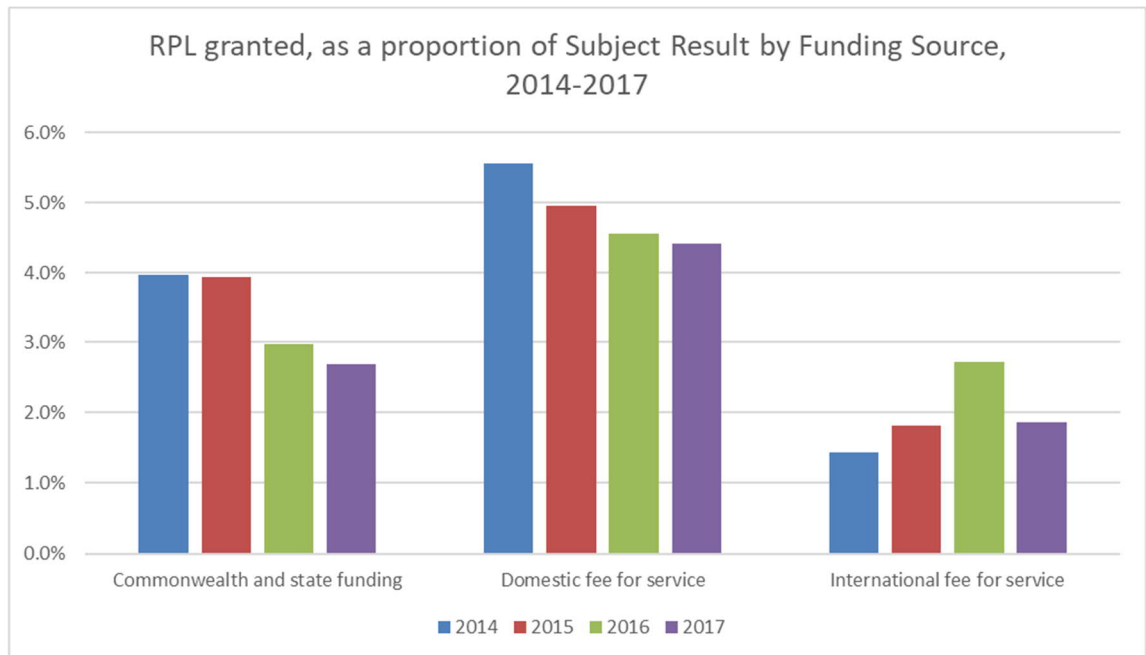
AVETMISS data indicates that RPL granted as a proportion of subject results has declined from 4.4% in 2014 to 3.4% in 2017.



Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

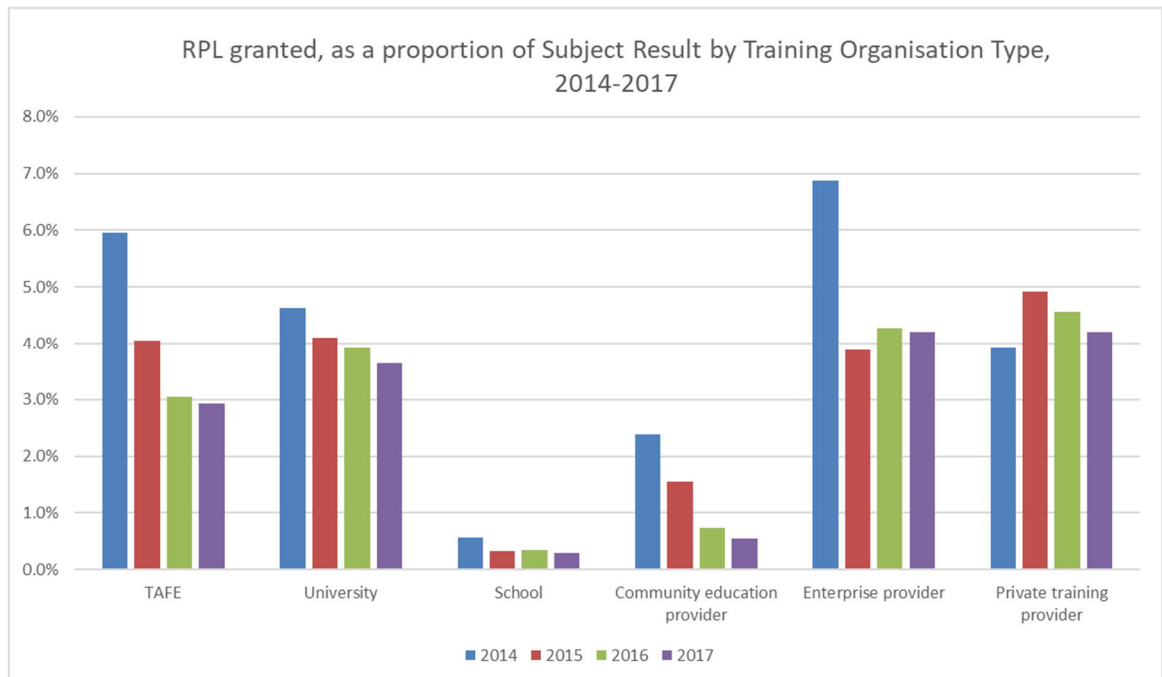
However, the decline in RPL granted has not been uniform across all provider types or funding sources. AVETMISS data shows that RPL granted has increased slightly for

international fee-for-service VET over this time from 1.4% of subject results in 2014 to 1.9% in 2017, with a peak of 2.7% in 2016.



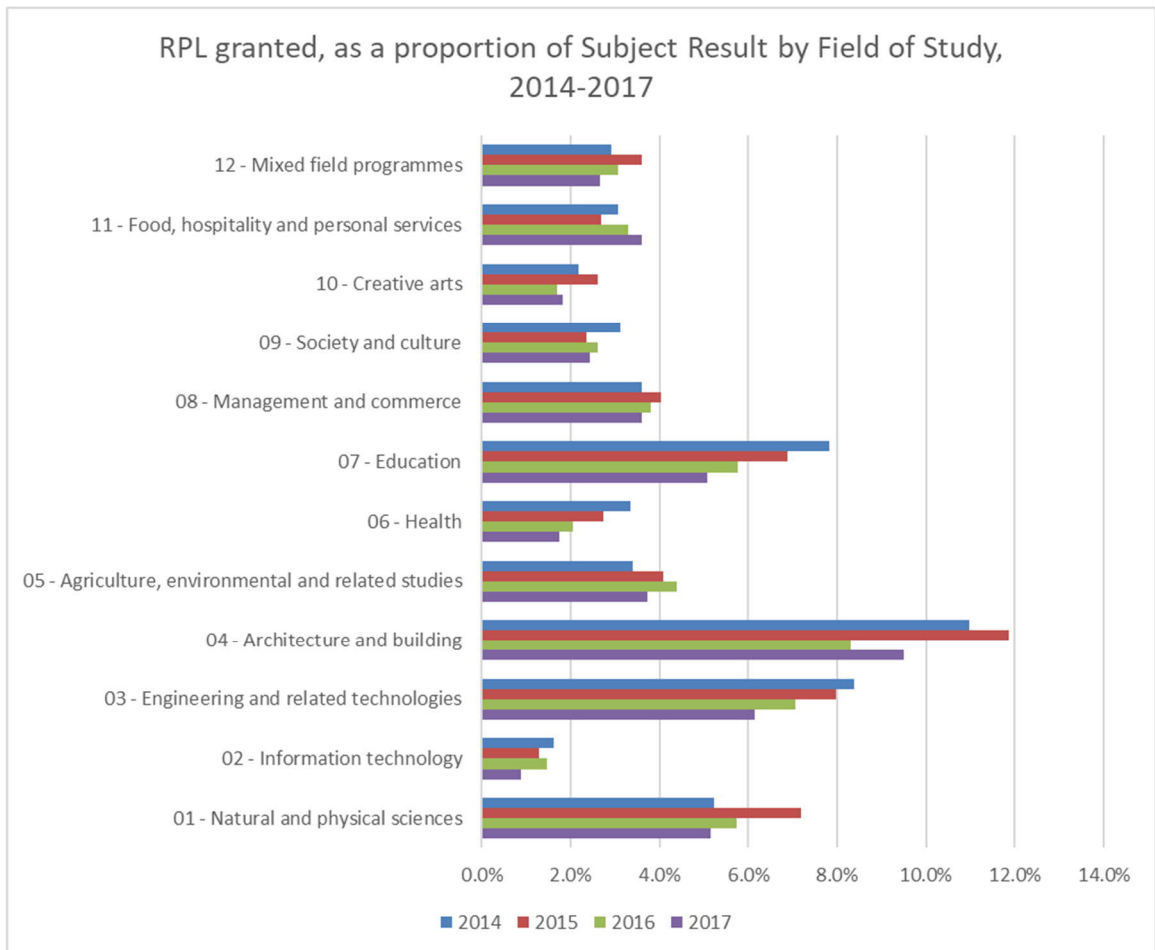
Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

Between 2014 and 2017, significant declines in RPL granted as a proportion of subject results were recorded for TAFE and enterprise providers, but for private providers RPL granted has increased slightly over this time from 3.9% in 2014 to 4.2% in 2017 with a peak of 4.9% in 2015.



Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

Some fields of study have seen steady declines in the proportion of RPL granted from 2014 to 2017. These include Education, Health, and Engineering and Related Technologies. Others have the seen the proportion of RPL granted vary from year to year.



Source: VOCSTATS, Total VET Activity, Subject Enrolments, 2014-2017, NCVET

Consultations with providers suggest that there has been little change in credit activity in recent years. However, providers acknowledged that they did not generally take note of this data.

The online survey gathered VET and Higher Education provider views on whether requests for credit or RPL have increased over the last few years. The responses showed a marked difference between the experience of VET and Higher Education providers with 55% of Higher Education respondents indicating that credit/RPL requests had increased while only 4% of VET respondents thought requests had increased. Similarly, just 6% of Higher Education respondents reported a decrease in requests for credit/RPL while 30% of VET providers reported a decrease in requests. More than half of VET respondents reported that credit/RPL requests had remained the same, a view shared by 23% of Higher Education respondents.

What are the main articulation pathways being utilised (for example between Certificates I, II and III, and Diplomas to Bachelor Degrees)?

Consultation with providers suggests that the most significant articulation pathways are from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree programs to Bachelor Degree programs. Survey responses also confirmed that Higher Education institutions award credit most frequently to students enrolling in a Bachelor degree, and VET providers award credit most often to students enrolling in Diplomas.

The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy focuses on movement from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree qualifications to Bachelor Degrees. Survey respondents were asked if there were other types of movement within and between the Higher Education and VET sectors that are important for student pathways. One quarter of Higher Education respondents referred to the need for reverse articulation where 'students in Higher Education programs can elect to take out a VET qualification when not wishing to complete their university course'. Other respondents referred to micro-qualifications and expressed concerns about non-standard arrangements potentially confusing the sector and students if they occur outside an over-arching agreed framework.

Survey respondents raised the need to consider pathways from trade-based qualifications into higher level qualifications, i.e. the pathway from trade to para-professional or professional. VET respondents emphasised the non-linear nature of student pathways with one respondent stating, 'we have students asking about credit for their Higher Education Degree towards anything from a Certificate III to a Diploma'.

What are the main types of pathways offered by institutions and utilised by students?

Consultation with providers suggests that credit for previous formal learning at a lower AQF level qualification is the type of credit most recognised and actioned by institutions. Most providers report the recognition of informal and non-formal learning as being under-used – not particularly encouraged by providers and not particularly requested by students.

Higher Education respondents to the online survey were asked to indicate which was the most-used credit pathway at their institution. Their responses were:

- ▶ 52% reported that credit transfer was most used
- ▶ 28% reported that articulation was most used
- ▶ 10% reported that RPL was most used.

When asked about credit pathways used in their institutions, 89% of VET respondents reported that RPL was available for awarding credit to their students, 94% reported that credit transfer was available, and only 25% reported that articulation arrangements were available.

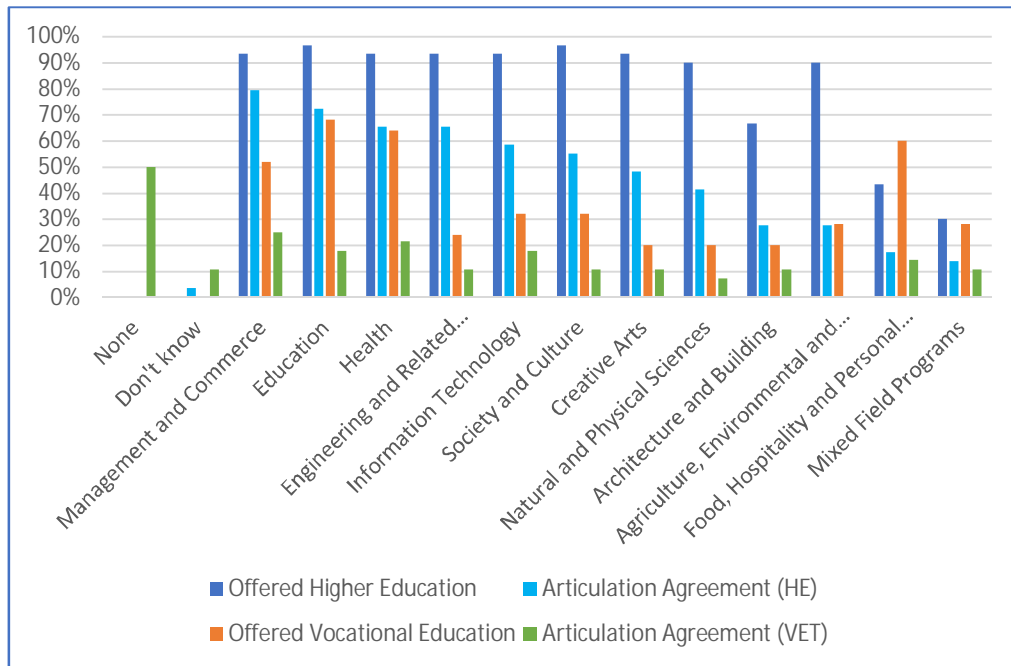
Where articulation agreements are in place, these appear to be valued by the parties. During consultations, some providers reported that more articulation agreements would be useful but the necessary support or motivation to develop them seemed lacking.

Discussions with providers for the ecosystem analysis indicated that where effective articulation arrangements are established they can generate student interest and demand and result in higher enrolments for the providers at each end of the pathway.

What types of articulation arrangements are in place, e.g. between sectors, within sectors, from one AQF level to another, and within or between disciplines?

The online survey gathered information from providers on the fields of study offered at their institution and the fields of study with articulation arrangements. Responses indicate that many Higher Education providers have articulation arrangements in place, but this varies considerably between fields of study. Articulation arrangements are more frequently in place for Management and Commerce, Education, Health, and Engineering and Related Technologies.

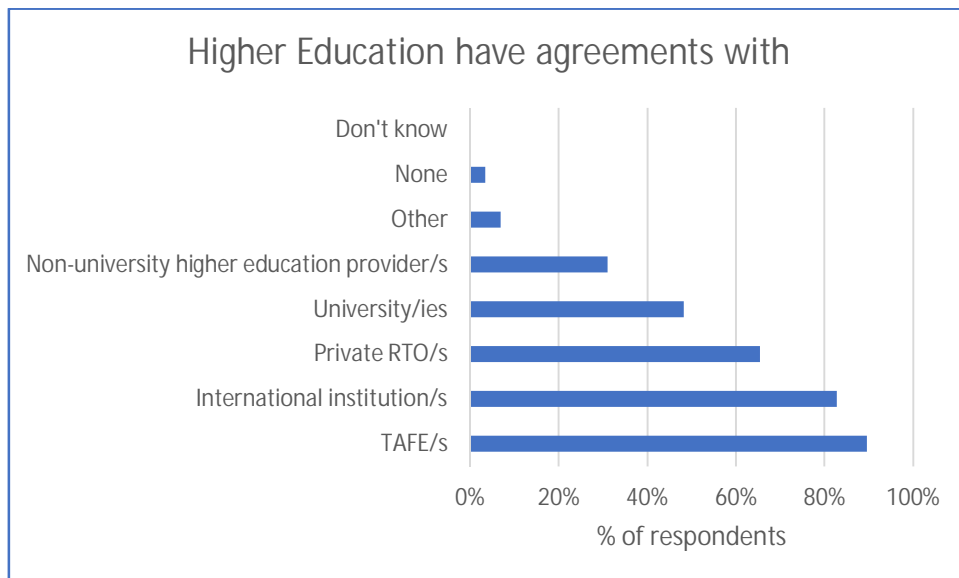
Chart: Field of education offered and field of education with articulation agreements



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 17 and 32, and VET Q 16 and 29)

Survey respondents reported on the type of organisation their institution has articulation agreements with. For Higher Education providers these arrangements were most frequently with TAFEs (reported by 90% of respondents) and international institutions (reported by more than 80% of respondents).

Chart: Parties to articulation agreements (Higher Education)



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 18)

Survey respondents also indicated whether their institution was actively pursuing new articulation arrangements. Responses revealed greater interest in the development of these arrangements among Higher Education providers than with VET providers.

Table: Pursuing new articulation agreements

Actively pursuing new articulation agreements	Higher Education	VET
Yes	79%	41%
No	7%	56%
Don't know	14%	4%

Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 19, and VET Q 18)

The following reasons for pursuing articulation arrangements were given by Higher Education survey respondents:

- ▶ Business growth targeting niche areas
- ▶ Pipeline for international students
- ▶ Increase student numbers or target specific cohorts
- ▶ Providing opportunities for students, including equity, cultural diversity and inclusiveness

VET responses were more limited but expressed a desire to meet student needs by providing pathway options, particularly in regional areas.

The ecosystem analysis gathered information on successful articulation pathways from a variety of Higher Education and VET providers. Of the eight case studies developed, four document a credit pathway from Diploma to Degree reflecting the predominance of this pathway in tertiary education. The remaining case studies document less common pathways:

- ▶ Bachelor Degree to Vocational Graduate Certificate
- ▶ Bachelor Degree to Diploma
- ▶ Skill Sets integrated in Higher Education qualifications
- ▶ Diploma to Graduate Certificate.

The case studies are included in Appendix A9.

3.4 Barriers and challenges

Respondents to the online survey were asked to identify the most significant barriers to offering and awarding credit within and between the VET and Higher Education sectors. Many responses focused on differences between the sectors.

The most significant barrier seems to be the perceived vagueness surrounding the actual requirements and process required for articulation of a VET certificate / qualification into Higher Education. The absence of clarity affects awarding of credit. Backward mapping performance elements from VET to critical thinking skills in Higher Education is problematic as they are not closely aligned and there are few specific examples. It is worth noting that students articulating from VET into Higher Education struggle with the academic writing requirements and the 'openness' of some assessment techniques in Higher Education.

Higher Education institutes insist on seeing assessments, validation/moderation, sample certificates, sometimes they want students to have 'scores'. They just

don't understand the RTO sector and take too much of an academic (sometimes snobby) approach to RTOs. When, if they understood nationally recognised training this wouldn't be an issue.

Perceptions of VET standards by Higher Education institutions. Lack of a contemporary view on VET qualifications.

Differences in professional roles, scope of practice and practice standards between national practice registration classifications that are reflected in the differences between VET and Higher Education preparatory programs.

Higher Education sector not having confidence in robust assessments that resulted in the awarding of qualifications.

Differences, in relation to quality and/or content coverage, between institutions in the same sector or between individual academics were also identified as a barrier.

There are also challenges with some institutions not accepting credit from different institutions based on perceptions of quality. Some institutions will refuse to accept specified credit for very similar Higher Education units based on the individual views of particular academics and what they perceive as gaps in the unit undertaken. This can mean that students transferring to different institutions or degrees may have to repeat content.

Course structures and subjective assessments can differ between academics.

Frequent change in training packages was identified as a problem.

The frequency with which training packages change. Keeping precedent records current with changes in training packages requires considerable effort.

Providing credit transfer for common training package units that can be assessed in quite different occupational contexts was reported as a concern by one VET respondent.

Credit transfers being applied to common units within very different qualifications – i.e. credit from Cert III Individual Support (Ageing / HACC) to Cert IV Community Services – different field etc.

These comments by survey respondents highlight the multitude of seemingly small, yet frustrating, complexities of the credit recognition process.

3.5 Responding to future needs

The 'market for learning' has evolved and continues to evolve. The changing nature of work and career patterns, the rapid advance of disrupting technologies and the learning and work preferences of Generation Y, are disrupting patterns of education and ongoing learning. Market demand is seeing the emergence of a variety of 'non-standard' qualifications that cannot currently be accommodated within the AQF or its Qualifications Pathways Policy.

While the precise nature of the future may be behind a 'veil of ignorance'⁷, we do know that:

- ▶ People will need to continue learning throughout life to a greater extent than currently – and are likely to see that they need to take more accountability for their own learning, careers and personal development

⁷ Stephen Parker, 2018, Reimagining tertiary education: From binary system to ecosystem, KPMG

- ▶ In doing this, people will engage in learning that appears 'ad hoc' when viewed from the system level, but from the individual's point of view is individually strategic or opportunistic – as in order to acquire multidisciplinary skills they may need to pick and choose from a range of qualifications at once
- ▶ In some professions and industries, there is likely to be less emphasis on the importance of qualifications, prompted by a reluctance both by employers to invest in training for the long term, and by students who are unwilling to invest in skills for an unknown future. In others, however – particularly regulated industries – the firm focus on qualifications is likely to remain
- ▶ People will move around – between jobs, sectors, countries.
- ▶ People will move between VET and Higher Education and back again and will undertake micro-learning.

In this context, a multiplicity of varied, flexible pathways within and between qualifications and other forms of learning will become increasingly important. It is timely to consider the role that the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy could play in supporting and enabling new models of learning.

Implications for learning and credentials

If we accept the premises above (described further in Appendix A10), this suggests certain needs in relation to how knowledge and skills are acquired, recognised and transferred to new contexts. Questions around how to enable the gradual acquisition, recognition and adaptation of qualifications to suit evolving career and employment purposes relate more to the operation of pathways policy than to the structure of the AQF itself. Policies or instruments that sit around the Framework may be necessary to help potential users – regulators, accrediting authorities, education and training product developers and providers, employers and others – interpret and apply the Framework in ways that respond to future demands. These may include

- ▶ nationally developed regulatory requirements (potentially looking beyond education and training to the way that the AQF is used more broadly in employment arrangements and industrial relations)
- ▶ parallel or complementary frameworks that allow the essence of AQF levels to be considered and applied more broadly than in whole qualifications
- ▶ interpretive tools or guidance that connect the AQF with other established frameworks (e.g. Australian Core Skills Framework, Core Skills for Work, General Capabilities) as well as to international qualification frameworks
- ▶ guidance material that provides users with advice and examples for using the AQF for a variety of purposes and contexts
- ▶ systems or mechanisms that help users to produce consistent, exchangeable information on learning outcomes.

The following needs, and potential implementation examples, emerge from the trends documented above:

- a. ways of recognising the multiple ways (some planned, some ad-hoc) in which people will continue to learn throughout life and for recognising and documenting smaller parcels of learning than full qualifications, so that they can form part of an individual's portfolio to support credit and career pathways – perhaps by the development of supporting tools

such as 'digital backpacks' enabled by blockchain technology (c.f. the Korean example below)

Beyond the AQF, action in this area is likely to require national agreement or regulation to support the consistent development and use of digital 'backpacks'. This may involve the development of the 'backpack' and a recognition system, or the establishment of system requirements that would allow multiple developers to create 'backpacks' that are compatible across sectors, jurisdictions, providers and contexts.

- b. improved mechanisms to capture and recognise prior learning—both for efficiency and to demonstrate the relevance of knowledge and skills acquired in one area to another (for example, the Mexican and Philippine examples below focus on more consistent and efficient ways of recognising informal learning)

Further examination of the systems used for RPL in Mexico and the Philippines may be worthwhile. Additionally, improved mechanisms for recognising non-formal and informal learning may also include:

- the creation of a framework (or set of descriptors) parallel to the AQF that describes outcomes from non-formal and informal learning across levels
 - establishment of connections between the AQF and other frameworks describing generic skills (ACSF, CSFW, general capabilities) and tools that make it possible for multiple frameworks to be used simultaneously to more fully describe individual capabilities
 - development and sharing of resources, tools and examples that support good practice implementation of RPL in a variety of contexts.
- c. new ways of recognising, describing and labelling pathways other than those that assume linear progression to higher levels, to counter current beliefs about which qualifications and pathways are superior

Development and use of a new lexicon to describe movement between various qualifications – possibly supported by the creation of exemplar programs targeted at the needs of specific industries where non-traditional pathways are beneficial. This may include reconsideration of industrial arrangements that currently prescribe or limit specific occupational or industry pathways and working with industry stakeholders to identify and trial new pathway models.

- d. making essential underpinning skills, such as literacy and numeracy skills, core skills for work, and skills such as critical thinking and creative problem-solving more explicit in qualification structures, to assist potential employees and employers (with the proviso that such skills are often highly context-dependent)

Further refinement of training product requirements (e.g. through VET training product reform) to ensure that underpinning skills are adequately addressed within qualifications. This work would be aided by the establishment of clearer connections between the AQF and ACSF and CSFW (see point b).

- e. revisiting the current distinctions between VET and Higher Education in determining RPL and recognising and encouraging pathways (Work Integrated Learning is a case in point)

Development of systems to better support collaboration between sectors, especially for the creation of articulation arrangements in either direction, including enforcement of the requirement in the current Policy for public registers of articulation arrangements to be maintained by providers and regulators.

International examples

Research by PhillipsKPA⁸ found that the second most common theme shared by National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) around the world is a desire to provide universal access to the education and training system through mechanisms that simplify entry, exit and credit transfer pathways. Given this universal objective, country-specific approaches for supporting and enabling credit pathways are everywhere.

However, there is a need to be cautious when making international comparisons. The approaches to credit pathways employed in other countries are, of course, embedded within a unique national context shaped by political, economic, educational and social structures, systems, policies, practices and assumptions. Understanding exactly how another nation's system works is a complex and time-consuming study of history and interrelationships. And often that understanding can only be applied to the Australian context in a limited way due to fundamental differences in context.⁹

Nonetheless, the following examples¹⁰ have been identified as potentially informative approaches to credit pathways. Each of them recognises the importance of learning that occurs outside the formal system – as a means to enable access for particular learner cohorts, but also in response to the growing demand for flexible, responsive approaches to workforce skilling that are needed for continuous learning throughout a working life.

The Republic of Korea

In Korea recognition of prior learning is an essential element of the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS). The ACBS comprises formal, non-formal and informal elements, and documents and recognises outcomes from various non-formal learning activities by granting credits and conferring degrees when certain numbers of credits are accumulated.

In addition to the ACBS, Korea has an e-portfolio and curriculum vitae called the Lifelong Learning Account System (LLAS). The LLAS is like a savings account for lifelong education. Individuals can set up their own account, deposit different lifelong learning experiences, and plan ahead about how to 'invest' their learning experiences in moving up the career ladder. The LLAS incorporates information from both the academic qualifications system and the vocational qualifications system. Learning records can be used to obtain a primary school certificate, exemption from secondary school courses, and for public and private employment purposes.

The Philippines

The Philippines has developed an alternative learning system that operates in parallel with all sub-sectors of the education and training system and awards the same qualifications as in the

⁸ PhillipsKPA, 2018, Contextual Research for the Australian Qualifications Framework Review

⁹ The failure and subsequent abandonment of the Training Guarantee Legislation, modelled on French legislation but applied in an Australian context, is a case in point.

¹⁰ Madhu Singh, 2015, Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning: Why Recognition Matters, UNESCO

formal system. Non-formal learning and RPL are offered within the Alternative Learning System as a mechanism for gaining primary and high school certificates that are also recognised for entry into tertiary education programs and employment.

At the technical and vocational education and training level, workplace competencies are assessed, validated and certified against competence standards as a mechanism to promote the productivity, global competitiveness and quality of Filipino middle-level workers.

In the Higher Education sector individuals who have acquired work experience and expertise through non-formal and informal training are awarded appropriate academic degrees by accredited Higher Education institutions.

Mexico

Mexico integrates non-formal learning into the credit transfer framework rather than requiring a separate mechanism of RPL. Its qualifications framework (Marco Mexicano de Cualificaciones – MMC) is designed to serve as a reference for the process of certification in all sectors and give any learner access to all levels of the education system. Assessment is based on portfolios, work performance, interviews, and formal assessment for the purposes of credit transfer into qualifications.

4. EXAMPLES OF CURRENT PRACTICE

Articulation case studies

Case studies, included in Appendix A9, were developed through field work to analyse the conditions under which successful articulation arrangements are developed and maintained. Drawn from focused, face-to-face discussion with key players from the sending and receiving institutions, the case studies document:

- ▶ long-term, comprehensive articulation arrangements that have stood the test of time (Case Studies A-D), and
- ▶ more recent and more varied arrangements driven by an identified need, often in a specific field of study or industry area – these have been included to illustrate fresh ways of thinking about qualifications pathways (Case Studies E-H).

Despite their diversity, the case studies share features that are critical to success – institutional credit pathways aligned to the AQF and the Qualifications Pathways Policy, open and dynamic dialogue between institutions, and having an active champion to guide, protect and promote the arrangement to all parties.

Reflections from institutional staff involved in the development and implementation of the articulation arrangements documented in the case studies provide insights on strengths and weaknesses of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. In summary, these are:

- ▶ The national Policy is a 'stake in the ground': Many staff involved in the articulation arrangements were not aware of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and inter-institutional agreements contained no specific reference to it. However, Higher Education institutions have generally enshrined the key principles of the Policy in their own institutional credit and RPL policies and these in turn are used to guide inter-institutional agreements. Staff who were specifically aware of the AQF Qualifications

Pathways Policy believed that it provided a starting point for discussions between VET and Higher Education providers and was a valuable framework for early negotiations, particularly in relation to guidance on the amount of credit to give in pathways from Diploma to Degree.

- ▶ AOF hierarchy is limiting: The hierarchical nature of the AQF can limit understandings about cross-sectoral movements. Institutional staff reported that too often learning outcomes are perceived to be constrained within a specific AQF level, thus limiting consideration of more innovative models and pathways that can incorporate multi-directional, multi-sectoral approaches. This limited thinking has resulted in the widespread use of terms like 'pathways to uni', implying that the whole purpose of pathways is to get to university. The term 'reverse articulation' with its associated connotation that movement down the AQF hierarchy is 'not the norm', and that a lower VET qualification is generally of lesser value, is another piece of terminology that sends the wrong message to students.
- ▶ Policy hides the complexity of credit arrangements: Experienced pathway officers at some TAFE and university providers have established consistent and efficient processes for determining the value of VET credentials. However, pathway staff at many other providers stressed the detailed work involved in establishing articulation arrangements between qualifications. Established pathways are the result of a careful mapping of learning outcomes, consideration of volume of learning, and examination of assessment approaches, resulting in extensive negotiations to finalise credit arrangements. Many pathway staff undertaking this process consider that it is significantly more complex than envisaged by the Policy, and that the Policy contains nothing to assist with the development of tailor-made solutions that address identified student needs.

Examples of Higher Education practice

The following examples have been developed through consultation with leaders at a diverse selection of Australian Higher Education institutions and reflect the insights and opinions of the leaders consulted.

The examples illustrate differing approaches to credit pathways between a range of institutions. They reveal the way that approaches to awarding credit are often determined more by provider priorities and learner cohorts than by the national Policy.

The examples are useful for demonstrating that, despite the diversity of approaches, a strict interpretation would suggest that most institutions are not fully complying with all requirements of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. Notable areas include:

- ▶ 1.1 'maximise the credit that students can gain for learning already undertaken' – Most institutions establish limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded. Consultation with providers suggests that this may be related to quality considerations, and particularly to the reluctance of institutions to put their name to learning outcomes that are achieved outside of the institution, e.g. a limit of 50% external content is commonly applied.
- ▶ 2.1.1 'all issuing organisations will have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes' – While institutional policies may be clear, at some institutions the processes by which policies are implemented appear to vary between faculties.

- ▶ 2.1.3 'recognise learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant and current and has a relationship to the learning outcomes of the qualification' – Credit is more readily awarded for formal learning. Due to the increased complexity of determining comparability and relevance, most institutions treat informal and non-formal learning differently from formal learning in their credit policies and processes. Additionally, credit for older formal qualifications is often subject to time limits. While time limits can be seen to be related to currency of knowledge, they are equally influenced by the administrative difficulties of accessing information on learning outcomes from older qualifications.
- ▶ 2.1.8 'issuing organisations will systematically negotiate credit arrangements with other issuing organisations for any AQF qualifications to maximise the credit available to eligible students' – For many institutions, the negotiation of articulation arrangements appears more serendipitous than systematic, and the purpose of negotiations does not always seem to emphasise maximising available credit.
- ▶ 2.3.2 'issuing organisations will maintain publicly available registers of their credit transfer agreements linked to the AQF Register' – It appears that credit transfer agreements are not publicly listed as part of any register, either by individual institutions or by accrediting authorities. Some providers commented on the difficulty of keeping registers up-to-date, while others suggested that a central register of these articulation arrangements would be a valuable resource for students and providers in both sectors.

4.1 Dual sector university

2016 HEIMS Data			
Enrolments:	Above 20,000	Fields of study most frequently used as basis for credit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and Commerce • Society and Culture
Percentage of new enrolments receiving credit:	42%		
Average EFTSL granted:	0.933		
2018 Provider Interview			
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>Approximately 27% of students enrol via a pathway from the VET sector or from another HE course, 50% of undergraduate students enter with some level of credit.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit Students are provided with indicative credit based on precedents. Courses are marketed with information on indicative credit for common entry qualifications. Decisions are based on equivalency of learning/competency outcomes. Some unmatched credit is awarded, but all core subjects must be matched.</p> <p>Articulation Internal articulation pathways from the VET part of the dual sector institute are created as part of all undergraduate course developments. Formal arrangements are in place with domestic and international universities.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning Work experience is primarily used for entry, not for credit. Some</p>		

	<p>unmatched (or unspecified) credit may be considered against electives. For matched (or specified) credit, the student provides a narrative and evidence demonstrating how they have achieved the learning outcomes. It is a demanding process and students generally elect not to apply for matched credit based on RPL.</p>
Institution practice	<p>Credit decisions can be made prior to and on enrolment.</p> <p>The performance of students entering via credit pathways is tracked to inform the review and improvement of pathways. Pass rates for students entering with credit are the same as those entering from Year 12. Grade point averages are slightly higher (5-10%) for direct entry students.</p> <p>A precedent database is maintained on the student management system.</p>
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity of evidence • Minimum study requirements (international students) • Maximum of 50% credit can be awarded (less in some courses) • Time limits on previous study (10 years) • Professional body accreditation requirements • Comparability of overseas qualifications
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	<p>Credit pathways are critical to the university's reputation as a university of access providing educational opportunities for all.</p>
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	<p>Ungraded VET studies</p>
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	<p>We don't need it. We are prioritising this activity anyway.</p>

4.2 Group of 8 University

2016 HEIMS Data			
Enrolments:	Above 20,000	Fields of study most frequently used as basis for credit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural and Physical Sciences • Society and Culture
Percentage of new enrolments receiving credit:	13%		
Average EFTSL granted:	0.750		
2018 Provider Interview			
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>Most students at the institution are school leavers, meaning that demand for credit transfer and RPL is very low.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit</p> <p>Advanced standing may be granted to students with or without the concurrent granting of credit points. It is granted in relation to a course of study and is generally applied to compulsory or core subjects but may be granted for other subjects. Advanced standing may be granted on the basis</p>		

	<p>of prior studies in secondary school, VET or university, or for substantial relevant, documented professional work experience.</p> <p>Articulation Pre-approved credit arrangements may include agreements with student exchange or study abroad programs, cross-institutional study arrangements, Go8 Credit Transfer Agreement, and special arrangements with polytechnics.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning While RPL is not specified in the institution's policy, advanced standing may be granted on the basis of substantial, relevant, documented professional work experience for students in some graduate programs.</p>
Institution practice	An institution-wide policy governs the institution's approach to credit, advanced standing and accelerated entry. The maximum credit which may be granted for study completed at another institution is 50% of the total credit points of the course (more credit is granted for diploma or associate degree courses completed internally).
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course requirements • Content • Learning outcomes • Assessment methods • Contact hours • Volume of learning • Credit point weighting
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	Credit pathways are not high stakes for the institution because they are not relevant to most of the student cohort.
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	(Lack of) confidence in the quality of educational standards of the 'provider' institution.
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	The institution accepts that statements in the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy are reasonable, but the institution's own perspective and judgement would be employed in credit decisions rather than reliance on a national Policy.

4.3 Small niche-area NUHEP

Note: HEIMS data is not available due to the small size of this provider.

2018 Provider Interview	
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>With a total of 300 students, only 3-4 applications for credit are received each year. Students enrolling in all courses must have work experience in the industry, no exceptions are made.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit Some students apply for credit in human resources units based on previous Higher Education study in commerce. The institute's policy allows</p>

	<p>a maximum of three units of credit. Course outcomes are individually examined by the course director in liaison with specialist discipline lecturers.</p> <p>Because most students live on campus, even where credit is granted for individual subjects many students choose to attend the classes and just not do the assessment tasks.</p> <p>Articulation Articulation is primarily used for internal movement from an Associate Degree or Diploma into a Degree. Full credit is provided for the first qualification. Bridging programs are available if the first qualification was completed more than 10 years previously.</p> <p>Students understand that they are entitled to full credit into the Degree. The internal articulation arrangements are clear and understood and students use them to pursue their Degree in stages rather than making an initial three-year commitment.</p> <p>There are no outside articulation arrangements due to the low volume of students from any one pathway.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning Credit is granted in Post Graduate qualifications for extensive work experience in business, commerce or accounting roles. The individual process is based on application forms and interview.</p>
Institution practice	A consistent institutional policy and approach is used to maintain objectivity and ensure that applicants are treated on an equal basis. Credit is considered before enrolment but can also be reviewed after enrolment if it is obvious that students could succeed at a higher level.
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student preparedness for the level of study • Time limits on previous study (10 years) • Comparability (discipline, level and learning outcomes) of overseas qualifications
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	Credit pathways are not a big part of the institution's practice, but when used it is essential that the process is equitable and supports quality learning outcomes for all students.
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	For older students it is sometimes difficult to find information on their previous courses to make credit decisions. It would help if there was a requirement for course outlines to be maintained by all institutions for an agreed period of time.
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	Practice would be the same if the policy did not exist.

4.4 Regional university A

2016 HEIMS Data			
Enrolments:	Below 20,000	Fields of study most frequently used as basis for credit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health
Percentage of new enrolments receiving credit:	40%		
Average EFTSL granted:	0.714		
2018 Provider Interview			
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>Only 5% of students are school leavers. Approximately 70% of students are mature aged and studying part-time and online. Flexibility and the availability of credit pathways attract students to the university. Sequenced pathways are designed to scaffold learners through further qualifications.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit The university has a 'fast track calculator' on its website allowing students to calculate the amount of credit they may receive. A precedent database is maintained to support approval of credit. If the application is not informed by the precedent database, the application is reviewed individually.</p> <p>The university's advanced standing policy includes a comprehensive table outlining maximum amounts of credit that can be awarded. This is expressed in credit points with maximum advanced standing permissible representing between 50% and 75% of each award.</p> <p>Articulation The university has articulation arrangements with national and international Higher Education providers.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning Although RPL is included in the university's advanced standing policy, there have been very few examples of RPL in practice.</p>		
Institution practice	The university's advanced standing policy specifically references the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and uses wording from the Policy (clauses 1.1 and 2.1.3) to express the institution's policy purpose and principles.		
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning outcomes • Volume of learning • Program of study • Learning and assessment approaches • Level of learning • Currency of formal learning (generally seven years for Higher Education, unit currency for VET) 		
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	Credit pathways are important for enabling flexible entry and advanced standing for the university's mature aged student cohort.		
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	Transitions between VET and Higher Education are impacted by the variability of outcomes from VET Diplomas in terms of volume of learning. Precedents that grant		

	a full year of credit for a Diploma toward a Degree can leave some students inadequately prepared for second year study.
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	Pathways are important to the university and would be part of business even without the Policy.

4.5 Regional university B

2016 HEIMS Data			
Enrolments:	Below 20,000	Fields of study most frequently used as basis for credit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society and Culture
Percentage of new enrolments receiving credit:	37%		
Average EFTSL granted:	1.191		
2018 Provider Interview			
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>The university has a high proportion of mature-aged, part-time and online students. International students comprise only about 5% of enrolments.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit Although the university has a policy framework, credit decisions are made haphazardly and the criteria for decision-making by academic and professional staff in different sections of the university are not always transparent or equitable.</p> <p>Articulation The university has enduring articulation arrangements in place. These are documented against course structures.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning Current university practice is ad hoc with decisions made on a case-by-case basis. However, the university is moving to a portfolio approach to support the collection of evidence for credentialed or non-credentialed learning based on learning outcomes. Students must present evidence of meeting learning outcomes. Recognition of informal learning relies on academic judgement as the sole determinant.</p>		
Institution practice	<p>Credit decisions are made after enrolment. For students it is a cumbersome two-stage process whereby they first enrol and then apply for credit.</p> <p>The university has a precedence database, but it can only be accessed by admissions staff and not by students or academics advising students in the schools/faculties.</p> <p>Currently the university does not have systematic processes for reporting credit pathway outcomes, but new curriculum management software will automate reports in future.</p>		
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning outcomes (including AQF level) Professional requirements 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currency of formal learning (generally ten years but academic judgement can be used to waive this requirement)
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	Credit pathways are important due to the university's mature-aged student cohort.
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	University culture influences how credit is awarded. Universities are all going their own way (e.g. with micro credentials) but it would be better if there were shared approaches to recognising credit (e.g. a student backpack of credit that would be recognised across institutions).
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	The content of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy does not impact the university's work on credit pathways.

4.6 ATN university

2016 HEIMS Data			
Enrolments:	Above 20,000	Fields of study most frequently used as basis for credit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society and Culture • Health • Education
Percentage of new enrolments receiving credit:	38%		
Average EFTSL granted:	0.979		
2018 Provider Interview			
Student experience of credit pathways	<p>Student attainment and graduate outcomes are critical for the university's reputation. As a result, the university is cautious in its approach to granting credit. However, carefully administered credit pathways with a focus on equivalency are seen to have a positive influence on the diversity of the student cohort.</p> <p>Individually negotiated credit Authority for decision-making is delegated to subject discipline experts. Decisions are based on academic judgement.</p> <p>Articulation Articulation agreements are set out in contracts whereby credit is preapproved. The university also has mechanisms in place to deal with exceptions, e.g. if a pass has been achieved in seven out of eight required subjects.</p> <p>Recognition of prior learning Students are required to prepare a portfolio demonstrating how their informal learning meets the outcomes of the unit. The RPL process considers professional accreditation and statements from employers for third party triangulation. Credit is only granted where the learning is relevant and strongly associated with the acquisition of equivalent knowledge and skills.</p>		
Institution practice	The university has an overall policy on credit for recognised learning which recognises formal learning (accredited programs), non-formal learning (structured, non-accredited program) and informal learning (work or other learning). The policy		

	<p>places limits on the credit available for each of the three categories with more credit available for formal learning than informal learning.</p> <p>Credit applications are usually handled prior to commencement as part of the offer, but students can also apply for credit throughout their course. The university has a tool that students can use to understand what credit might be available to them.</p> <p>Beyond the overall university policy, there are further policies and processes at local level including precedent databases at faculty level. The university is keen to centralise these to afford wider scrutiny and consistency.</p>
Factors that are considered in credit decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of learning outcomes • Volume of learning • Assessment tasks • Timeframe (less than ten years) • Quality assurance processes of the source of the credit <p>Above all these factors is a concern for making academically defensible decisions that will set students up for success.</p>
Significance of credit pathways for the institution	Credit pathways are a positive influence on the diversity of the student cohort because students who are granted credit bring different experiences.
Biggest barrier to credit pathways	Greater clarity in the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy around principles and limits of credit for non-formal and informal learning would be helpful due to the increase in MOOCs and micro-masters.
Significance of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for the institution	The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is helpful in setting out broad expectations and principles in relation to credit pathways.

5. REFLECTIONS ON THE POLICY

Consultations for the project have engaged with people in leadership, administrative and academic roles from a variety of tertiary institutions. Regulators, qualification developers, professional bodies and other interested stakeholders have also shared their insight and experiences of credit pathways and the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. Key observations from stakeholders have related to the extent to which the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is enabled by:

- ▶ Clarity of purpose
- ▶ Consistency of interpretation
- ▶ Effectiveness of oversight
- ▶ Relevance of content
- ▶ Currency of approach
- ▶ Priority of implementation.

5.1 Clarity of purpose

While survey respondents and stakeholders consulted appear to value the existence of a national policy on credit, there is a degree of vagueness about the exact purpose of the Policy and the role it should play in institutional implementation of credit arrangements. Possible purposes for the Policy can be divided into four categories.

Articulating and supporting national priorities – these relate to the role of a national policy in setting directions that will achieve valued goals, e.g.

- ▶ Maximising student credit
- ▶ Increasing the availability and use of credit pathways
- ▶ Enabling the acquisition of skills and knowledge over a lifetime
- ▶ Supporting seamless transitions within and between tertiary education and employment

Establishing broad principles – these are high-level statements that apply across sectors, e.g.

- ▶ Valuing learning regardless of how and when it was acquired
- ▶ Ensuring that students are not disadvantaged
- ▶ Maintaining the integrity of courses and qualifications

Providing guidance – this is advice that providers can use to help the implementation of credit pathways, e.g.

- ▶ Credit can be given in the form of block, specified or unspecified credit
- ▶ Percentage figures for use as the basis of negotiations

Listing requirements – these are instructions on the way that providers should operate in relation to credit pathways, e.g.

- ▶ Providers will have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes

- ▶ Credit decisions will take into account learning outcomes, volume of learning, program of study and learning and assessment approaches

The current Policy contains a mixture of content from the four categories outlined above. This mixed content may be attributed to the differing foci of the preceding AQF documents – encompassing principles, guidance and articulation arrangements – but, regardless of its origin, the mix contributes to stakeholder confusion over what the Policy is for, and what they should do with it.

Almost all stakeholders consulted expressed a view that national policy was valuable for expressing agreed national principles that are relevant across jurisdictions and education sectors. Many providers indicated that they valued the advice on credit allowances provided in clause 2.1.10. A minority of those consulted expressed the view that more specific advice on how to implement credit pathways would be valuable.

5.2 Consistency of interpretation

Credit pathways are an integral, almost subconscious, part of the way the VET sector operates. The requirement for national recognition between RTOs ensures that, within VET, full credit is provided for units of competency and qualifications achieved. RPL is understood as a method of assessment that must be available in all VET provision as a way for individuals to demonstrate their existing competency. Coming from this perspective, VET stakeholders do not identify with much of the content of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. It is seen as a document written by and for the Higher Education sector and little in the Policy applies to VET providers unless they are attempting to negotiate articulation arrangements with a Higher Education provider.


Although VET stakeholders believe that the language and content of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy are more familiar to Higher Education providers, university staff have also reported that they did not feel Policy ‘spoke to them’. It seems that neither stakeholder group fully identifies with the Policy, which can only compound the complexity of negotiating cross-sectoral pathways.

The Policy provides broad statements about what to take into account when negotiating credit towards AQF qualifications (clause 2.1.9) but it does not help Higher Education providers deal with more testing issues, such as the variability of outcomes between VET providers, recognition of ungraded competencies, or differences between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Some providers consulted for the ecosystem analysis expressed a view that the Policy presents a misleading image of the task of negotiating credit arrangements that is removed from the complexity of the actual process. In an environment where many providers are self-accrediting, it may seem fitting to limit the extent and detail of guidance provided in the Policy, but this again raises the question of what purpose the Policy serves.

5.3 Effectiveness of oversight

As a recognised national framework, the AQF has been central to much of the policy and regulatory activity in the tertiary sector since 1995. The Framework and its attendant policies have influenced provider behaviour and increased the attention and importance given to credit pathways. However, active monitoring or oversight of the AQF has been limited and, as a result, many stakeholders are unsure of the status of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

While the Policy is overseen by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, it is no longer the responsibility of a national agency or authority with a clearly designated and narrowly defined focus on the AQF. Clause 1.4 of the Policy states that accrediting authorities in each



education and training sector are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the use of the Policy. But compliance with the Policy is not mandated or policed by regulators in the VET or Higher Education sectors and the Policy is not directly referenced in standards for VET or Higher Education providers.

In addition to the requirements for providers of AQF qualifications, the Policy contains requirements for accrediting authorities. These requirements are contained in clauses 2.2 and 2.3.2 of the Policy and relate to:

- ▶ having publicly available policies and processes that promote qualification pathways
- ▶ identifying, negotiating and documenting effective articulation arrangements between AQF qualifications
- ▶ giving specific attention to identifying, developing and documenting qualification pathways:
 - ▶ between access qualifications such as Certificate I and Certificate II to Certificate III qualifications
 - ▶ from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree to Bachelor Degree in the same discipline to provide 'Diploma to Degree pathways' taking into account the percentages in 2.1.10, and
 - ▶ to create integrated qualifications at different AQF levels.
- ▶ maintaining publicly available registers of articulation arrangements incorporated into qualifications linked to the AQF Register.

There is little evidence that these requirements are being implemented by accrediting authorities, and publicly available registers of articulation arrangements do not appear to be in use – adding to provider confusion over the current status of the Policy.

In addition, provider activity under the Policy is not reported with any rigour. While some information on credit awarded by VET and Higher Education providers is recorded through HEIMS and AVETMISS, this is not in a form that is useful for monitoring activity or outcomes or for informing decisions that might lead to improvements.

Stakeholders recognise the need to have data on credit pathways at an institutional level and see value in collecting and using credit data for internal purposes. Without data it is impossible to make informed decisions, or to review or improve existing processes. Many of the providers consulted and surveyed for this report indicated that they had plans to improve internal processes and record-keeping to support future credit decisions at their institution.

Monitoring of credit pathways is not about regulation. It's about finding out what is really happening. If there is no monitoring we end up in a place, like we are now, where there is no data or evidence to support any of the decisions we may adopt. We need to know what is happening out there, what the real relationships are.

State Regulator

Given the multiple purposes of the Policy there is no clear view from stakeholders on the type of oversight that would be appropriate for the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. However, there is agreement that the Policy should be overseen in a way that values and maintains the national, cross-sectoral nature of the AQF.

5.4 Relevance of content

Although the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy was ostensibly developed as part of the 2011 strengthening of the AQF, the Policy content draws on guidelines and principles that were a part of previous editions of the AQF. The mixed content of the Policy contributes to stakeholder confusion over its purpose and was highlighted in stakeholder consultations.

The Policy appears to be trying to articulate national priorities, establish broad principles, and provide guidance and instructions. These multiple functions lead some stakeholders to observe that the Policy contains an incongruous mix of high-level principles and detailed specification, and others to describe it as superficial and internally conflicted.

Examples of content issues identified during consultation are:

- ▶ Clause 1.1 – describes the purpose of the Policy but it is unclear how the ‘aims’ relate to the purpose, or how that relates to the ‘capacity to genuinely support students’ lifelong learning’ described in the introduction.
- ▶ Clause 2 – outlines principles relating to pathways that underpin the Policy, but the stated principles are not clearly reflected in the detail of the Policy, possibly because the term ‘pathways’ is used continuously but is not clearly defined within the Policy and is used widely through the tertiary sector to describe the movement of individuals between many education and employment contexts, not only with reference to qualifications.
- ▶ Clause 2.1.10 – provides percentage values for credit that should be used as the basis of negotiations, but stakeholders disagree on how rigidly this clause should be interpreted.

Rather than clarify how qualifications pathways should be implemented, the Policy tends to merely document all possible options, e.g. ‘2.1.7 Credit can be given to students in the form of block, specified or unspecified credit.’ This is neither helpful advice or a requirement that must be followed, merely a statement of fact that could be omitted from the Policy without consequence.

Consultation for the ecosystem analysis found that institutional staff felt the challenges of implementing formal, inter-sectoral credit transfer arrangements – such as the need to build mutual respect, identifying institutional benefits, dealing with the lack of grading by RTOs, conforming with government funding decisions – are not addressed or aided by the Policy.

5.5 Currency of approach

Some of the stakeholders consulted have described the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy as backward-looking. The scope of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is, quite naturally, bounded by AQF qualifications. The Policy focuses on pathways into and between AQF qualifications and does not attempt to elaborate on what might comprise informal or non-formal learning (although those terms are defined in the AQF Glossary of Terminology). Some stakeholders regard the focus on full AQF qualifications as an indication that the Policy has not kept pace with demand for knowledge and skill development options beyond the AQF, e.g. massive online open courses (MOOCs) available nationally and internationally, vendor training underpinned by certification from multinational companies, and skill sets and micro-credentials targeting niche employer needs.

Additionally, although the principles underpinning the Policy encompass flexible and horizontal pathways, stakeholders point out that the Policy detail (epitomised by indicative credit amounts in

clause 2.1.10) focuses on one-way movement from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree qualifications to Bachelor Degrees. This emphasis does not reflect current thinking about the importance of aggregating knowledge and skills in a non-linear fashion across AQF levels. Stakeholders have questioned whether the pathways concept is itself dated when non-linear, patchwork approaches to the acquisition of knowledge and skills are more relevant to the needs and experiences of the current and future workforce.

Stakeholders note that components smaller than qualifications cannot currently be located within the AQF or aligned to an AQF level, and this creates barriers for recognition and credit pathways. Increasing employer interest in skill sets and micro/nano credentials was identified as an important consideration for the future of credit pathways. The value of pathways from Higher Education to VET was also highlighted as relevant for building the vocational and technical skills required in emerging industries, but to date little has been done in policy or practice to support such movement.


5.6 Priority of implementation

The examination of a selection of institutional credit policies revealed variations in the way that providers implement and manage processes and practices to support credit pathways. Where Higher Education providers regard credit pathways as critical to their business and reputation, their institutional policies and processes embody the spirit of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. Ironically, these providers are least likely to see a need for the national Policy because they have identified compelling reasons to prioritise credit pathways – possibly initially prompted by the introduction of the AQF and its attendant policies.

Barriers to the implementation of credit pathways centre on the provider's assessment of costs and benefits. Consultations with a range of providers have shown that while awarding credit is seen by some Higher Education providers as beneficial for the diversity of their student cohort and their reputation for accessibility, others see credit pathways as a risk to their reputation. Providers with a reputation for quality and exclusivity believe that they need to preserve public perceptions that their programs are difficult to get into, and that a proactive credit policy has the potential to damage their brand. Awarding credit may also reduce a provider's income from student fees and subsidies if overall delivery is reduced.

The process of implementing credit pathways has administrative costs for providers that may not be recouped. In both VET and Higher Education, the RPL process can be administratively burdensome and time-consuming and yet deliver less income from program delivery. Articulation arrangements are also time-consuming for institutions to establish and, although they are intended as long-standing agreements, they are vulnerable to the impact of sudden changes in qualification structure, program content, delivery mechanisms and personnel.

Credit decisions are also complicated by the difficulty providers face in assessing the quality of programs offered by other institutions. This applies to Higher Education providers considering credit applications for students with qualifications from the VET or Higher Education sector. In consultations, Higher Education providers stressed the challenge of staying abreast of which providers (in the VET or Higher Education sector) are 'reliable' and which are not. For VET providers the issue is even more frustrating. Not all VET qualifications are regarded as equal by providers reviewing applications for credit, but only Higher Education providers are able to discriminate on the basis of the qualification source. National recognition in the VET sector requires that VET providers recognise the units and qualifications issued by all other registered VET providers. While this quality issue in the VET sector cannot be addressed through AQF policies, it is critical to the implementation of credit pathways.



Despite the existence of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy there are no incentives or enticements for providers to award credit or establish credit pathways. If increased pathways activity is seen as a national priority, mechanisms for off-setting the financial burden of implementation may be appropriate to encourage providers to change their behaviour.

6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Research, consultation and data analysis for the project, while unable to quantify the scale of credit currently being awarded, have revealed insights into the way that credit pathways are developed, implemented and accessed that might usefully contribute to the 2018 Review of the AQF.


Although the data reveals wide variation in how providers implement credit pathways, compliance with provider standards ensures that institutions have regard for attending to individual learner needs and recognising prior formal, non-formal and informal learning. Research indicates that providers are also conscious of their responsibility for communicating the availability of credit options to students and have a range of practices and tools in place to support this. Many providers acknowledge that more could be done to inform prospective students about pathways; however, changing community perspectives of the value and benefits of educational pathways is a complex cultural issue that is likely to also require action at the system level.

Providers, particularly in Higher Education, have identified that more can be done to support or enable the implementation of credit pathways, and many are taking active steps to make improvements to their processes through the creation of new tools and support mechanisms. The development of articulation agreements is also being pursued by some providers – 79% of respondents to the Higher Education provider survey reported that new articulation arrangements were being pursued. Examples of successful articulation arrangements gathered through the project highlight the benefits of implementing these pathways. Benefits accrue not only to individual learners, employers and funding bodies – who all benefit from the more efficient achievement of qualification outcomes – but also to providers, who have found that functional credit pathways can attract students and positively impact program quality and outcomes.

Despite the pursuit of process improvements and articulation agreements by some providers, it is clear from data gathered through the project that the implementation of credit pathways is highly varied. Differences in institutional policies and practice appear to be driven primarily by student cohorts and business models. Although some providers recognise the benefits possible from implementing effective credit pathways, all providers are aware of the significant time and resource costs involved in establishing articulation arrangements and conducting RPL assessments.

Although there is universal support for the principle of enhancing learner progression by recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning, the research confirms that credit is more readily available for formal learning. Providers themselves report that mechanisms to recognise non-formal and informal learning are not as extensively used or robustly developed as those used to recognise formal learning. While the task of comparing learning outcomes, volume of learning, program of study and learning and assessment approaches – as outlined in the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy – is complex, it is effective and understood by providers as the process to determine credit for formal learning. The steps for determining credit for non-formal and informal learning are less clear and, as a result, the time-consuming nature of RPL is often off-putting for students and providers. This can sometimes result in an unintended collusion between students and providers to forgo credit.

Given that changes in industry and workforce demands appear to be requiring the continual acquisition of smaller chunks of knowledge and skill, pathways beyond formal qualifications are increasingly important. Project research found that many Higher Education providers are already experiencing an increase in demand for credit. The ability of providers to recognise non-formal and informal learning will become paramount, and greater access to resources and support for the credit process may assist providers to implement these pathways more extensively.



The project uncovered a degree of confusion over the purpose of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. The AQF and its attendant policies have almost certainly played a role in establishing a culture that aims to value all forms of learning and maximise opportunities for movement between qualifications and education sectors. National policy is seen as valuable for providing a statement of principle and intent that makes national priorities for tertiary education clear to all involved. The challenge for the future will be to ensure that agreed national principles are realised in practice, and that the framework on which any pathways policy is based recognises current and emerging realities of the market for qualifications – thus enabling learners to continually build and adapt their knowledge and skills for application in new and varied contexts.

APPENDICES

A1: AQF QUALIFICATIONS PATHWAYS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

The *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy* builds into the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) the capacity to genuinely support students' lifelong learning. It is Australia's national policy on qualifications pathways.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to maximise the credit that students can gain for learning already undertaken. It aims to:

- enhance student progression into and between AQF qualifications
- recognise the multiple pathways that students take to gain AQF qualifications and that learning can be formal, non-formal or informal, and
- support the development of pathways in qualifications design.

1.2 Scope

This policy covers all education and training sectors that issue AQF qualifications and the responsibilities for making qualification pathways accessible to students.

The terminology used in the AQF policies is not sector-specific. To support consistency of understanding and interpretation, definitions of the terminology are provided in the *AQF Glossary of Terminology*.

1.3 Users

The principal users of this policy are the authorised issuing organisations¹¹, accrediting authorities including self-accrediting organisations, students and graduates in each education and training sector.

The other users of this policy are employers, industry and professional bodies, and licensing and regulatory bodies who may use this policy as a guide to the role of credit in developing learning pathways and achieving learning outcomes.

1.4 Monitoring

Accrediting authorities in each education and training sector are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the use of this policy.

2. POLICY

This policy is underpinned by the principles that pathways:

- are clear and transparent to students
- are systemic and systematic
- enable flexible qualification pathways

¹¹ In this policy the term 'authorised issuing organisation' is abbreviated to 'issuing organisation'.

- may be horizontal across AQF qualifications at the same level as well as vertical between qualifications at different levels
- can facilitate credit for entry into, as well as credit towards, AQF qualifications, and
- eliminate unfair or unnecessary barriers for student access to AQF qualifications.

2.1 Responsibilities of issuing organisations

2.1.1 All issuing organisations will have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes to provide qualifications pathways and credit arrangements for students.

2.1.2 These policies and processes will:

- ensure that pathways into and between qualifications are available to all students for all relevant qualifications
- be made publicly available, widely promoted and easily accessible to all prospective and existing students to enable them to:
 - make well-informed choices between alternative pathways
 - take into account the credit that may be available to them, and
- be regularly reviewed to maximise applicability to new and updated qualifications and to student and industry needs.


2.1.3 Issuing organisations' decisions regarding the giving of credit into or towards AQF qualifications will:

- be evidence-based, equitable and transparent
- be applied consistently and fairly with decisions subject to appeal and review
- recognise learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant and current and has a relationship to the learning outcomes of the qualification
- be academically defensible and take into account the students' ability to meet the learning outcomes of the qualification successfully
- be decided in a timely way so that students' access to qualifications is not unnecessarily inhibited
- allow for credit outcomes to be used to meet prerequisites or other specified requirements for entry into a program of study leading to a qualification or for the partial fulfillment of the requirements of a qualification, and
- be formally documented for the student including any reasons for not giving credit.

2.1.4 Giving credit into or towards an AQF qualification should not impinge upon:

- the integrity of qualification outcomes and discipline requirements, or
- the responsibility of issuing organisations to make decisions on admission, prerequisites or programs of study, and the students' likely successful completion of the qualification.

- 2.1.5 Credit will be given on the basis of formal individual negotiations between students and issuing organisations or formal negotiated agreements between issuing organisations.
 - 2.1.6 Recognition of prior learning or advanced standing for relevant and current informal or non-formal learning will be available for students and may be used for entry requirements or credit towards an AQF qualification.
 - 2.1.7 Credit can be given to students in the form of block, specified or unspecified credit.
 - 2.1.8 Issuing organisations will systematically negotiate credit agreements with other issuing organisations for any AQF qualifications to maximise the credit available to eligible students for both entry into and credit towards AQF qualifications.
 - 2.1.9 Credit agreements negotiated between issuing organisations for credit for students towards AQF qualifications at any level, vertical or horizontal, will take into account the comparability and equivalence of the:
 - learning outcomes
 - volume of learning
 - program of study, including content, and
 - learning and assessment approaches.
 - 2.1.10 Credit agreements negotiated between issuing organisations for credit for students towards higher level AQF qualifications in the same or a related discipline, having taken into account 2.1.9, should use the following as the basis of negotiations:
 - 50% credit for an Advanced Diploma or Associate Degree linked to a 3 year Bachelor Degree
 - 37.5% credit for an Advanced Diploma or Associate Degree linked to a 4 year Bachelor Degree
 - 33% credit for a Diploma linked to a 3 year Bachelor Degree
 - 25% credit for a Diploma linked to a 4 year Bachelor Degree.
 - 2.1.11 These agreements do not preclude any further institutional or individual student negotiations for additional credit.
- 2.2 Responsibilities of accrediting authorities and qualification developers
- 2.2.1 Accrediting authorities and organisations developing qualifications⁵ will have policies and processes that facilitate and promote qualification pathways and these policies and processes will be publicly available.
 - 2.2.2 Accrediting authorities and organisations developing qualifications will identify, negotiate and document effective articulation arrangements between AQF qualifications.
 - 2.2.3 Specific attention will be given to identifying, developing and documenting qualification pathways:
 - between access qualifications such as Certificate I and Certificate II to Certificate III qualifications

- 
- from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree to Bachelor Degree in the same discipline to provide 'Diploma to Degree pathways' taking into account the percentages in 2.1.10, and
 - to create integrated qualifications at different AQF levels.

2.3 Registers

- 2.3.1 Issuing organisations will maintain publicly available registers of their credit transfer agreements linked to the AQF Register.
- 2.3.2 Accrediting authorities will maintain publicly available registers of articulation arrangements incorporated into qualifications linked to the AQF Register
- 2.3.3 These registers will link to any future national registers of articulation and credit transfer arrangements.

A2: KEY INFORMANT CONVERSATIONS

Key informants were consulted in an ex-officio capacity to provide diverse perspectives and insights based on their knowledge and experience of the AQF and credit pathways in a variety of contexts.

Conversations with key informants were used to develop themes for discussion with stakeholders. These were:


- ▶ **Rationale – *the purpose of the AQF and credit pathways policies***

Credit pathways are challenging providers to implement in a way that satisfies all stakeholders and maintains the quality of provision. There are currently perceptions that the AQF imposes a hierarchical, and university-dominated, view of knowledge and skill that is unhelpful for learners and divorced from the reality of the labour market. Greater clarity on the purpose of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is important for considering how it can best fulfil its intended function.
- ▶ **Architecture – *the structure of the framework and its associated policies***

Users of the AQF express concerns about ambiguities and inconsistencies in the detail of level and qualification descriptors, yet at the same time they argue that some non-specificity in the descriptors is essential for allowing flexibility in interpretation. The approach to volume of learning is regarded by users as a shortcoming of the AQF and unhelpful for credit pathways. The use of credit points is regarded more favourably, however equating VET experience with Higher Education measures of credit or volume of learning will continue to be problematic. The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy does not cover all forms of credit, e.g. internal credit awarded in nested qualifications, and does not align well with VET concepts of recognition of current competency.
- ▶ **Regulation – *the way implementation of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is monitored***

There is user conflict between the need for black-and-white certainty in the AQF and the need for flexibility. This tension is exacerbated by a situation where policies attached to a national framework are implemented only through their reflection in two separate sets of provider standards with separate regulatory processes. As a result, credit pathways are treated and prioritised differently between the sectors. Many users believe that rigid regulation of the AQF and credit pathways policies would stifle innovation and focus provider attention on risk rather than quality.
- ▶ **Advantages – *the benefits and risks of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy for stakeholders and clients***

For providers the incentives to offer and award credit to students appear to be limited. Awarding credit can mean forgoing the opportunity to earn revenue and potentially compromising quality outcomes and damaging the provider's reputation. Potential provider benefits may include the ability to attract and enrol a more diverse student cohort and enabling greater international mobility for students. TEOSA receives complaints from students about failure of providers to comply with their advertised credit policies or standing arrangements, thus imposing extra costs on students who don't get the credit they expect. In contrast, some research has suggested that students entering programs with advanced standing may be disadvantaged by poorer learning outcomes. Industry bodies report that employers are more interested in skills and knowledge than



in qualifications. Employer support for skill sets and micro-credentials indicates that employers value narrowly-focused, just-in-time skill building solutions that are responsive to their specific workforce needs. However, recognition of skills and knowledge acquired in the workplace can be important for enabling employees to participate in further learning.

▶ *Fitness for the future – the suitability of the framework and its associated policies for future directions in credit recognition and pathways*

It has been proposed that AQF descriptors that relate to autonomy and responsibility do not accurately reflect future work arrangements or job complexity, but rather an out-dated, linear pathway to employment. Some users believe there is a need for the AQF and pathways policies to take account of emerging trends such as disaggregated learning models, modular learning, work integrated learning, mature age entry and increasing student mobility.

Together with questions on credit pathways activity, these themes were used to inform the development of discussion guides for the stakeholder consultations.

A3: DATA AND INFORMATION

As discussed in the report, there is no one clear source of data to use to understand the application of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

The information and tables below begin with the users of the policy, their expected activity and hence likely data able to be collected and reported. Further detailed tables identify the reporting requirements, and the data examined during this project.

Table 1: Users, expected activity, and likely data

Drawn from the key sections of the Policy, the table below shows:

- ▶ the users of the Policy,
- ▶ the communicated intent of the Policy,
- ▶ the activity likely to result from people and institutions using the Policy, and
- ▶ the possible data points flowing from such activity.

Who?	What?	How?	Data
Users of the policy are...	... and they expect the policy to assist them to...	...they are then likely to...	...and this should be visible in data for example...
Students and graduates	Access credit for entry into a qualification Access credit towards a qualification	Access pathways to qualifications Enrol into qualifications Apply for recognition of credit or prior learning from and for a qualification Appeal decisions Complete qualifications	Refer Table 2
Authorised issuing organisations	Maintain policies and processes for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualifications pathways and • credit arrangements 	Give credit into or towards qualifications and Recognise prior learning via management of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • admission into... • prerequisites for... 	Refer Table 3

Who?	What?	How?	Data
Users of the policy are...	... and they expect the policy to assist them to...	...they are then likely to...	...and this should be visible in data for example...
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programs of ... • awarding of ... qualifications, and negotiate credit arrangements with other organisations	
Accrediting authorities	Implement and monitor use of policy by issuing organisations	Identify, negotiate and document (in a register) effective articulation arrangements Make registers publicly available	publicly available registers of articulation arrangements incorporated into qualifications linked to the AQF Register Note no such register currently maintained by TEQSA nor ASQA.
Qualification developers	Support the development of pathways in qualifications design	Identify, negotiate and document effective articulation arrangements	<p>2.1.10 is the primary focus for TEQSA and this is seen in the accreditation process overseen by TEQSA that includes ensuring institutions meet the provisions of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015:</p> <p>Section 7.1 of Part A, in relation to representations about the outcomes associated with undertaking a course of study and eligibility for acceptance into another course of study</p> <p>Section 7.2 of Part A, in relation to information for students to enable informed decision making and of information available prior to acceptance of an offer of the standing credit transfer arrangements</p> <p>In VET, Standards for VET Accredited Courses 2012 VAC</p>

Who?	What?	How?	Data
Users of the policy are...	... and they expect the policy to assist them to...	...they are then likely to...	...and this should be visible in data for example...
			<p>7.8 VET accredited courses provide information on educational pathways and articulation where applicable.</p> <p>Information for graduates on relevant pathways into other VET and higher education courses on completion of the course is required to be included in Section B: 8.1 of the course.</p> <p>Developers must provide the details of any formalised articulation arrangements that have been established with other institutions and must also submit evidence confirming these arrangements are in place with course accreditation application.</p> <p>In relation to training package development in the VET sector, the Standards for Training Packages and two supporting policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Package Products Policy – requires that developers provide advice on qualifications pathways, “such as Australian Apprenticeships and VET in Schools” Training Package Development and Endorsement Process Policy. – Principle 5 requires that training packages facilitate recognition of an individual’s skills and knowledge and support movement between the school, vocational education and higher education sectors.
Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employers 	“Guide as to the role of credit in:	Access public policies, processes and	Refer to subsequent Appendix A6 showing results of the review

Who?	What?	How?	Data
Users of the policy are...	... and they expect the policy to assist them to...	...they are then likely to...	...and this should be visible in data for example...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry bodies • professional bodies • licensing and regulatory bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing learning pathways and • achieving learning outcomes" 	articulation arrangements managed by issuing organisation and accrediting authorities and accessible to students and graduates	of a sample of institutions' websites.

Table 2: Reporting requirements prescribed outside of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy
As per HEIMShelp¹², the following table outlines the key types of information that all institutions reporting to the Department are expected to submit.

Students	Courses	Units of study
Enrolment details:	Accredited courses:	Units:
name	listed on:	cost for students
address	TEQSA; or	census date
date of birth	training.gov.au	length of each unit (EFTSL) e.g. 3 months, half a year
citizenship	Length of the course (e.g. 1 year)	Field of education (for a unit of study this is referred to as discipline group code)
gender	Type of course (e.g. diploma)	consistency with published schedule of fees
disability	Field of education (e.g. engineering)	
indigenous status		
CHESSN & TFNs (for students who access HELP)		

Table 3: Data expected to be collected relevant to AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

Table 3 is drawn from the data submission guidelines detailed on HEIMSHHELP - Information about requirements and procedures for higher education and VET providers.

Institution type and requirements	Element name applicable to the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy
VET Data Collections – 2018 submission guidelines ¹³ “VET providers are required to report data for all students studying in approved VET courses who are eligible to apply for a VET student loan or VET FEE–HELP assistance.”	Credit offered value Credit /status Higher Education provider code Highest educational participation prior to commencement Credit used value Details of prior study for which credit/RPL was offered Field of education of prior VET study for which credit/RPL was offered Level of education of prior VET study for which credit/RPL was offered

¹² <http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/resources/toolkits/pages/1-collect-the-right-information#nav>

¹³ http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/2018_Data_Requirements/2018VET/Scope/Documents/VET-2018-Data-Collections-submission-guidelines.pdf

Institution type and requirements	Element name applicable to the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy
	Type of provider where VET study was undertaken
<p>Higher Education Student – 2018 submission guidelines¹⁴</p> <p>“Higher education providers (providers) approved under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) must report data for all domestic and overseas students enrolled in or undertaking a course of study leading to a higher education award of the organisation.”</p>	<p>Credit offered value</p> <p>Credit/status Higher Education Provider code</p> <p>Highest educational participation prior to commencement</p> <p>Credit used value</p> <p>Details of prior study for which credit was offered</p> <p>Field of education of prior VET study for which credit was offered</p> <p>Level of education of prior VET study for which credit was offered.</p> <p>Type of provider where VET study was undertaken</p>

Data available

For VET we note the following:

Provider reporting through AVETMISS captures outcomes on a unit-by-unit basis. In relation to credit pathways this may include the outcomes:

- ▶ credit transfer – where a training provider recognises and accepts AQF qualifications and statements of attainment issued by another RTO
- ▶ recognition of prior learning granted – where a student is assessed as competent through RPL
- ▶ recognition of prior learning not granted – where a student undergoes RPL assessment and cannot be assessed as competent

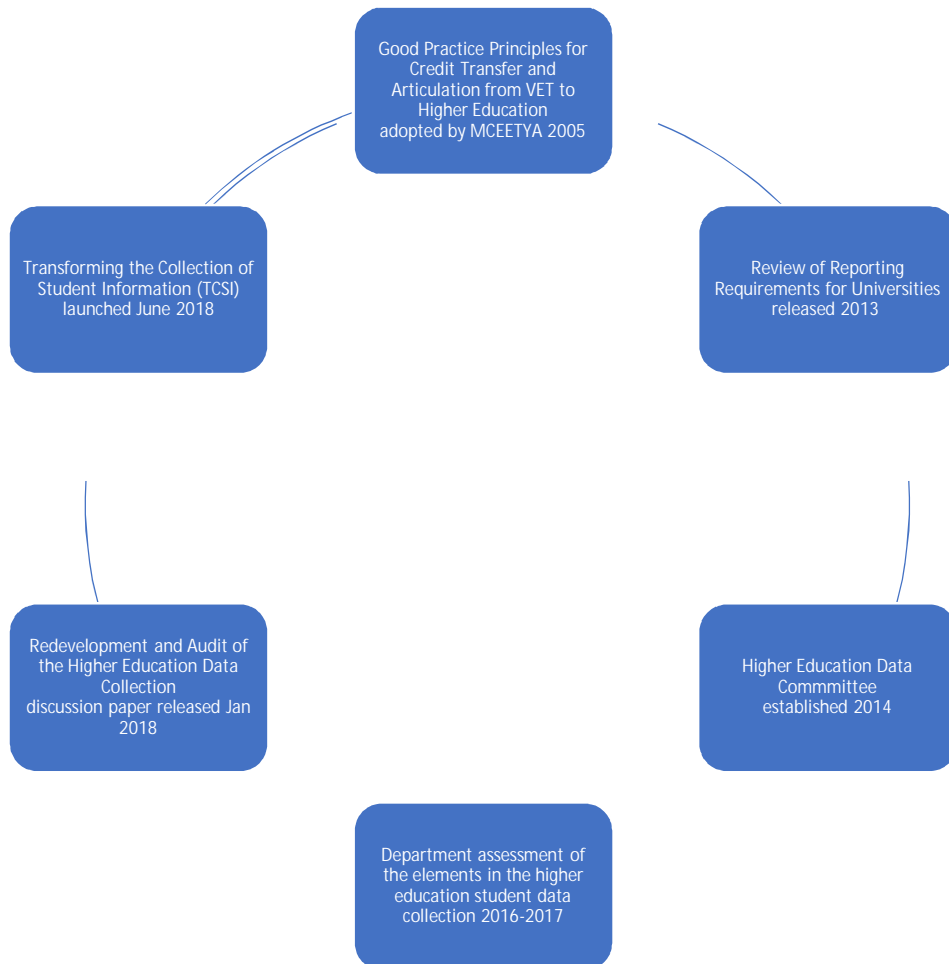
Information on RPL available through AVETMISS is limited due to the treatment of RPL as a form of assessment.

For Higher Education we note the following:

The approach to reporting on activity related to credit transfer has been looked at numerous occasions over the last 13 years. As shown in the diagram below, this process is about to come full circle.

¹⁴http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/2018_Data_Requirements/2018HigherEdStudent/Scope/Documents/HigherEducationStudent-2018-submission-guidelines.pdf

HEIMS data is based on a 50% response rate and as identified in the Redevelopment and Audit of the Higher Education Data Collection discussion paper released Jan 2018, "...these elements are complex to report and not well understood by providers or well-structured in HEIMS...".



Redevelopment and Audit of the Higher Education Data Collection Discussion Paper - Jan 2018

This recent paper was to consult with the Higher Education sector to seek views on areas including:

- ▶ how reporting and accessing data can be made more efficient,
- ▶ whether to reduce the number of elements that have built up over time, and
- ▶ if this would lead to data quality.

Questions raised on the removal of certain elements including those relevant to credit transfer¹⁵:

¹⁵ <http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/Resources/Documents/Redevelopment-and-Audit-of-the-Higher-Education-Data-Collection.pdf>

5.4 Credit transfer arrangements

Impacted element	560 Credit used value 561 Details of prior study for which credit/RPL was offered 562 Field of education of prior VET study for which credit/RPL was offered 563 Level of education of prior VET study for which credit/RPL was offered 564 Type of provider where VET study was undertaken 565 Credit offered value 566 Credit/status Higher Education provider code
Purpose	The former Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed a number of initiatives to strengthen credit transfer and articulation from vocational education and training and higher education. That initiative led to the introduction of these elements in order to measure and assess credit transfer patterns.
What has changed	The elements are complex to report and not well understood by providers or well-structured in HEIMS. For some of these elements there is less than 50% response rate. This lack of consistency reduces the reliability of the data.
Proposal	Review the elements to ensure they are fit-for-purpose and can be interpreted consistently by all providers. Part of that review could also consider if an integrated VET / Higher education unique student identifier would be capable of observing students' pathways to higher education.

Data available *continued*

The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching website (QILT) data includes student feedback about student experience and graduate outcomes but does not include any questions and thus resulting data on credit or pathway arrangements.¹⁶

The TEQSA website does not include any publicly available data nor reference to the publicly available register as stated in 2.3.2 of the AQF policy.¹⁷

Neither the TEQSA nor CRICOS (<http://cricos.education.gov.au/default.aspx>) websites yield commentary or information on credit arrangements when an institution search is used. [Tested with ANU BEcon].

¹⁶ <https://www.qilt.edu.au/about-this-site/student-experience>

¹⁷ <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/our-approach-quality-assurance-and-regulation>

A4: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Higher Education Survey

Survey Introduction

The Department of Education and Training has commissioned Ithaca Group to conduct this survey to gather information on credit that is awarded to Higher Education students for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The survey will contribute to current research and consultation activities that are exploring aspects of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and its implementation in preparation for a review of the AQF in 2018-19. More information on the AQF Review is available on the Department's website.

This survey focuses on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and the way it is implemented through provider policy and practice. Findings from the survey will contribute to Government thinking in preparation for the AQF Review.

Responses to the survey are anonymous. You are invited to contribute based on your experience of higher education credit processes - these may be from a faculty or institution-wide perspective. The survey will close on Friday 20 July 2018.

Questions about the survey can be directed to the Department of Education and Training, AQFReview@education.gov.au

Credit Decisions

We would like to know about the processes that your institution, or your faculty, uses to offer and award credit for students.

1. *Do your responses to this survey relate to credit processes used within a faculty, more than one faculty, or across your whole institution? (select all fields of education that apply)*

Whole institution
One or more faculties
Natural and Physical Sciences
Information Technology
Engineering and Related Technologies
Architecture and Building
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
Health
Education
Management and Commerce
Society and Culture
Creative Arts
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
Mixed Field Program
Other (please specify)

2. *How are students and prospective students made aware of credit available? (select all that apply)*

Articulation advice from partner institution
Course/program information
Open days
Student support services
Admissions/enrolment process
Lecturers or other academic staff
Other (please specify)

3. *When can students or prospective students apply for credit? (select all that apply)*

Prior to enrolment
After enrolment
After commencing their course
Other (please specify)

4. *Typically, how long does it take to provide students with an outcome for credit decisions? (excluding appeals processes)*

Less than a week
Less than two weeks
Less than a month
More than a month

What factors influence the time it takes for credit decisions?

5. *How would you rate the flexibility of your approach to the awarding of credit?*

(1) Very accommodating and flexible Narrowly defined and rigid (100)

6. *What mechanism/s do you have to assist credit decisions? (select all that apply)*

Precedent database
Maximum credit allowances
Credit calculator for student use
Articulation arrangements
Tracking/cohort analysis of students awarded credit
None of these
Other (please specify)

7. *Do you plan to introduce changes to improve or enhance credit processes in future?*

Yes
No

Can you outline why, or why not?

8. *Do you think more should be done to raise student awareness of available credit?*

Yes
No

If yes, do you have any suggestions?

Credit Activity

We would like to know about the credit that is awarded to students.

9. *In 2017, approximately what proportion of your enrolling students requested credit or RPL?*

0 per cent

50 per cent

100 per cent

10. *Over the last few years, has there been a change in the proportion of students accessing credit or RPL at your institution or faculty?*

Increased over the last few years

Decreased over the last few years

Remained the same

Don't know

Other (please specify)

11. *Does the proportion of students requesting credit or RPL vary in different disciplines, faculties or fields of education?*

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, please provide examples.

12. *In 2017, approximately what proportion of credit requests were successful?*

0 per cent

50 per cent

100 per cent

13. *In your experience, what are the most common reasons for credit being denied?*

[text response]

14. *How would you rank these credit pathways according to the extent to which they are currently used by your institution or faculty? (with 1 being most used)*

Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Credit transfer

Articulation

15. *How would you rank the qualification levels in which credit is most frequently awarded at your institution or faculty? (with 1 being most frequent)*

AQF 5 Diploma

AQF 6 Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree

AQF 7 Bachelor Degree

AQF 8 Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma

AQF 9 Masters Degree

AQF 10 Doctoral Degree

16. *How would you rank the institutions from which students being awarded credit most frequently come? (with 1 being most frequent)*

TAFE

Private RTO

University

NUHEP
International institution

17. *In which fields of education does your institution currently have articulation agreements in place? (select all that apply)*

None
Don't know
Natural and Physical Sciences
Information Technology
Engineering and Related Technologies
Architecture and Building
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
Health
Education
Management and Commerce
Society and Culture
Creative Arts
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
Mixed Field Program
Other (please specify)

18. *What type of institution/s does your institution have articulation agreements with? (select all that apply)*

None
Don't know
TAFE/s
Private RTO/s
University/ies
NUHEP/s
International institution/s
Other (please specify)

19. *Is your institution actively pursuing new articulation agreements?*

Yes
No
Don't know

What is the main reason for pursuing these arrangements, or not?

20. *Are the credit allowances outlined in section 2.1.10 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy useful as the basis for credit discussions and policy?*

Yes
No

If no, please provide your reasons.

Credit Policy

We would like to know about your institution's policy on credit and its relationship to the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

21. *How influential is the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy in the development and maintenance of your institution's approach to credit?*

- Not at all influential
- Slightly influential
- Quite influential
- Extremely influential

22. *Is your institution's approach to credit consistent across all faculties/departments?*

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If no, what is the reason for the differences of approach?

23. *Do you believe that your institution's credit policy has an impact on: (select all that apply)*

- the student cohort that is attracted to your institution
- the quality of programs that your institution is able to provide
- the reputation of your institution?

If you answered yes to one or more of the above, please outline your reasoning.

24. *What do you regard as the most significant barrier to institutions offering and awarding credit within and between the VET and higher education sectors?*

[text response]

25. *What features of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy are essential to maintain for the future?*

[text response]

26. *The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy focuses on movement from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree qualifications to Bachelor Degrees. Are there other types of movement within and between the Higher Education and VET sectors that are important for student pathways?*

[text response]

Respondent information

We would like to know a little about you and your institution.

27. *Your role at the institution:*

- Executive management
- Academic management
- Academic staff (teaching and research)
- Professional staff

28. *Your involvement in credit policy and practice: (select all that apply)*

- Development and/or review of credit policy
- Approval of credit decisions
- Negotiation of articulation agreements

Negotiation of credit or RPL with students
Oversight or monitoring of institutional practice
Other (please specify)

29. *Provider type*

University
Non-university Higher Education Provider

30. *Main location*

Metro
Regional

31. *Institution size*

Enrolments above 50,000
Enrolments 20,000-50,000
Enrolments 5,000-20,000
Enrolments 1,000-5,000
Enrolments less than 1,000

32. *Field/s of education offered at the institution (select all that apply)*

Natural and Physical Sciences
Information Technology
Engineering and Related Technologies
Architecture and Building
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
Health
Education
Management and Commerce
Society and Culture
Creative Arts
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
Mixed Field Program

33. *Qualification levels awarded by the institution (select all that apply)*

Certificates I-III
Certificate IV
Diploma
Advanced Diploma
Associate Degree
Bachelor Degree
Bachelor Honours Degree
Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma
Masters Degree
Doctoral Degree
Micro credentials, skill sets, short courses, unaccredited programs

VET Provider Survey

Survey Introduction

The Department of Education and Training has commissioned Ithaca Group to conduct this survey to gather information on credit that is awarded to higher education and VET students for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The survey will contribute to current research and consultation activities that are exploring aspects of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and its implementation in preparation for a review of the AQF in 2018-19. More information on the AQF Review is available on the Department's website.

This survey focuses on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy and the way it is implemented through provider policy and practice. Findings from the survey will contribute to Government thinking in preparation for the AQF Review.

Responses to the survey are anonymous. You are invited to contribute based on your experience of credit processes - these may be from a department or RTO-wide perspective. The survey will close on Friday 20 July 2018.

Questions about the survey can be directed to the Department of Education and Training, AQFReview@education.gov.au

Credit Decisions

We would like to know about the processes that your RTO, or your department, uses to offer and award credit for students.

1. *Do your responses to this survey relate to credit processes used within a department, more than one department, or across your whole RTO? (select all fields of education that apply)*

Whole RTO

One or more departments

Natural and Physical Sciences

Information Technology

Engineering and Related Technologies

Architecture and Building

Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies

Health

Education

Management and Commerce

Society and Culture

Creative Arts

Food, Hospitality and Personal Services

Mixed Field Program

Other (please specify)

2. *Which of these processes for awarding credit is available to students at your RTO? (select all that apply)*

Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Credit transfer - recognition of units/qualifications achieved in another course or at another RTO

- Articulation - formal recognition arrangements between courses and/or education providers
Other (please specify)
3. *How are students and prospective students made aware of credit that may be available to them? (select all that apply)*
- Advice from partner institution/other RTO
Course/program information
Open days
Student support services
Admissions/enrolment process
Lecturers or other academic staff
Other (please specify)
4. *When can students or prospective students apply for credit? (select all that apply)*
- Prior to enrolment
After enrolment
After commencing their course
Other (please specify)
5. *Typically, how long does it take to provide students with an outcome for credit decisions? (excluding appeals processes)*
- Less than a week
Less than two weeks
Less than a month
More than a month
- What factors influence the time it takes for credit decisions?
6. *What mechanism/s do you have to assist credit decisions? (select all that apply)*
- Precedent database
Maximum credit allowances
Credit calculator for student use
Articulation arrangements
Tracking/cohort analysis of students awarded credit
- RPL assessment resources
None of these
Other (please specify)
7. *Do you plan to introduce changes to improve or enhance credit processes in future?*
- Yes
No
- Can you outline why, or why not?

8. *Does your RTO advise students about articulation or credit arrangements that are available to them after they have completed their course, e.g. credit for entry into higher level qualifications, or at other institutions?*

Yes

No

If so, how?

9. *Do you think more should be done to raise student awareness of credit available to them?*

Yes

No

If yes, do you have any suggestions?

Credit Activity

We would like to know about the credit that is awarded to students.

10. *In 2017, approximately what proportion of your enrolling students requested credit or RPL?*

0 per cent

50 per cent

100 per cent

11. *Over the last few years, has there been a change in the proportion of students accessing credit or RPL at your RTO?*

Increased over the last few years

Decreased over the last few years

Remained the same

Don't know

Other (please specify)

12. *Does the proportion of students requesting credit or RPL vary in different disciplines?*

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, please provide examples.

13. *In 2017, approximately what proportion of credit or RPL requests were successful?*

0 per cent

50 per cent

100 per cent

14. *In your experience, what are the most common reasons for credit or RPL being denied?*

[text response]

15. *At which qualification level do you most frequently award credit or RPL?*

Certificate I-II

Certificate III

Certificate IV

Diploma

Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree
Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma

16. *In which fields of education does your RTO have articulation agreements in place? (select all that apply)*

None
Don't know
Natural and Physical Sciences
Information Technology
Engineering and Related Technologies
Architecture and Building
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
Health
Education
Management and Commerce
Society and Culture
Creative Arts
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
Mixed Field Program
Other (please specify)

17. *What type of institution/s does your RTO have articulation agreements with? (select all that apply)*

None
Don't know
Other VET provider/s
Non-university higher education provider/s
ATN university/ies
Regional university/ies
G8 university/ies
Other (please specify)

18. *Is your institution actively pursuing new articulation agreements?*

Yes
No
Don't know

What is the main reason for pursuing these arrangements, or not?

19. *Are the credit allowances outlined in section 2.1.10 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy useful as the basis for negotiating articulation agreements?*

Yes
No

If no, please provide your reasons.

Credit Policy

We would like to know about your RTO's policy on credit and its relationship to the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.

20. *How influential is the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy in the development and maintenance of your institution's approach to credit?*

- Not at all influential
- Slightly influential
- Quite influential
- Extremely influential

21. *What do you regard as the most significant barrier to institutions offering and awarding credit within and between the VET and higher education sectors?*

[text response]

22. *What features of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy are essential to maintain for the future?*

[text response]

23. *The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy focuses on movement from Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree qualifications to Bachelor Degrees. Are there other types of movement within and between the Higher Education and VET sectors that are important for student pathways?*

[text response]

Respondent information

We would like to know a little about you and your institution.

24. *Your role at the RTO:*

- Executive management
- Academic management
- Academic staff (teaching and research)
- Professional staff

25. *Your involvement in credit policy: (select all that apply)*

- Development and/or review of credit policy
- Approval of credit decisions
- Negotiation of articulation agreements
- Assessment of RPL
- Oversight or monitoring of RTO practice
- Other (please specify)

26. *Provider type*

- Dual sector institution
- TAFE
- Private RTO
- Enterprise RTO
- Other (please specify)

27. *Main location*

- Metro
- Regional

28. *RTO size*

- Enrolments above 20,000
- Enrolments 5,000-20,000
- Enrolments 1,000-5,000
- Enrolments less than 1,000

29. *Field/s of education offered at the RTO (select all that apply)*

- Natural and Physical Sciences
- Information Technology
- Engineering and Related Technologies
- Architecture and Building
- Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
- Health
- Education
- Management and Commerce
- Society and Culture
- Creative Arts
- Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
- Mixed Field Program
- Other (please specify)

30. *Qualification levels awarded by the institution (select all that apply)*

- Certificates I-III
- Certificate IV
- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor Degree
- Bachelor Honours Degree
- Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma
- Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Micro credentials, skill sets, short courses, unaccredited programs

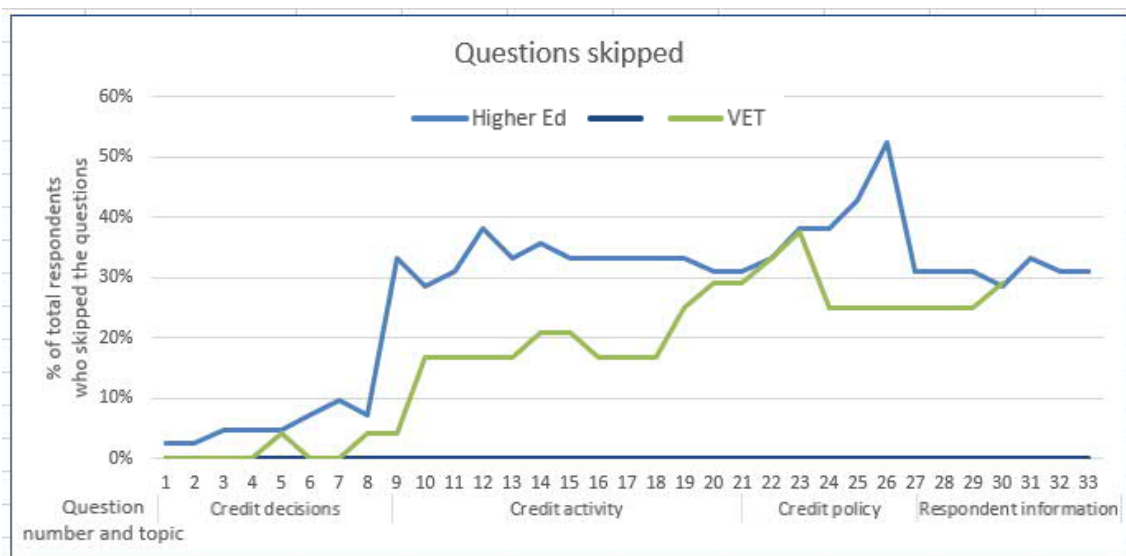
A5: SURVEY RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Process

Online surveys, conducted by Ithaca Group, aimed to gather information on current practice in relation to credit, RPL and articulation from a range of tertiary providers. Separate online surveys were created for VET providers and Higher Education providers. Providers were invited to complete the survey as follows:

- ▶ Higher Education
 - direct email invitations from the Department were sent to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) at 42 Australian universities. Follow up phone and email communication by Ithaca Group was used to identify and/or contact nominated or additional respondents.
 - email request from the Department to the Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE) to distribute the survey link to their members.
- ▶ 44 detailed responses were received – 16 responses were obtained via an anonymous weblink distributed via DVC(A)s or other provider personnel, 28 were responses to a direct email invitation issued by Ithaca Group.
- ▶ VET
 - email request from the Department to TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) and Community Colleges Australia to distribute the survey link to their members
 - promotion of the survey link by Ithaca Group to the Australian VET Leaders forum on LinkedIn.
- ▶ 36 detailed responses were received via an anonymous weblink.

The surveys did not include compulsory questions and respondents were able to skip questions. While some skipped questions related to the provision of insights or feedback that may not have been applicable to all respondents, many respondents also skipped questions relating to respondent information such as their role and type of organisation.



Respondents

The surveys gathered the following information on the responding individuals and institutions.

Institution or Department

Respondents were given the option of completing the survey from the perspective of a whole institution or from one or more faculties within an institution. As shown below, the majority of respondents completed the survey from the perspective of a whole institution.

Higher Education	Responses (greater than 4%)	Vocational Education	Responses (greater than 4%)
Whole institution	71%	Whole RTO	83%
One or more faculties	17%	Education	14%
Education	14%	One or more departments	8%
Management and Commerce	10%	Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	8%
Creative Arts	10%	Health	8%
Engineering and Related Technologies	7%	Society and Culture	8%
Society and Culture	7%	Food, Hospitality and Personal Services	8%
Natural and Physical Sciences	5%	Information Technology	6%
Information Technology	5%	Management and Commerce	6%
Architecture and Building	5%	Creative Arts	6%
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	5%	Other	6%

Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 1, and VET Q 1)

Location

Survey respondents were predominantly from institutions located with a metropolitan location – 67% of Higher Education respondents and 68% of VET respondents identified as metropolitan.

Provider type

All respondents to the Higher Education survey identified as being from a University. No responses were received from Non-University Higher Education Providers (NUHEPs).

Respondents to the VET survey identified as being from:

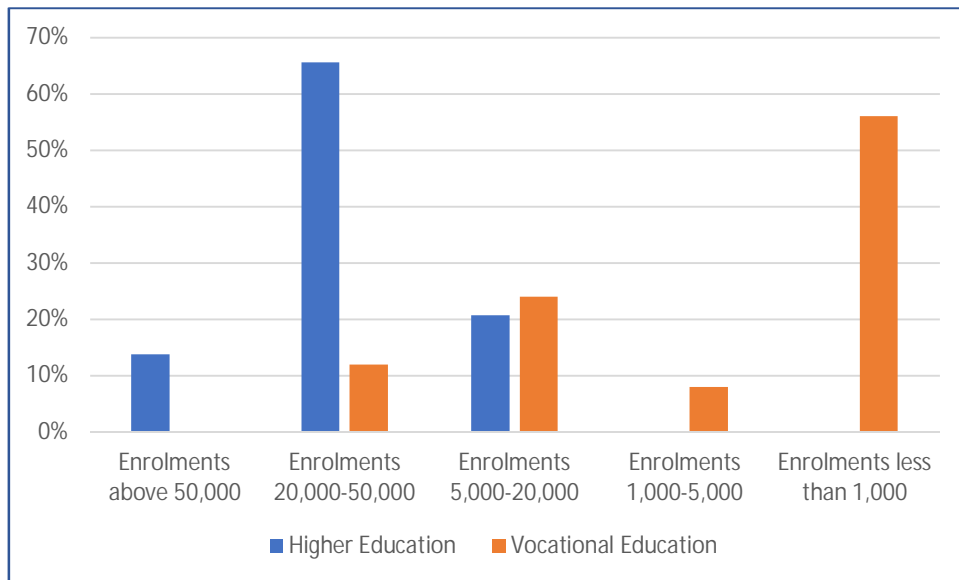
- ▶ Dual sector institution – 8%
- ▶ TAFE – 20%
- ▶ Private RTO – 44%
- ▶ Other – 28% (including respondents identifying as High School, Community RTO, Learn Local RTO/ACFE registered provider)

Student numbers

The bulk of respondents to the Higher Education survey indicated that their institution had enrolments between 20,000 and 50,000 (68% of respondents). A further 14% reported student enrolments greater than 50,000, while 5% of respondents reported enrolments from 5,000 to 20,000.

Of VET respondents 56% reported enrolments of less than 1,000, with only 12% reporting enrolments greater than 20,000. Enrolments between 5,000 and 20,000 were reported by 24% of respondents, and between 1,000 to 5,000 by 8% of respondents.

Chart: Respondent institution size



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 31, and VET Q 28)

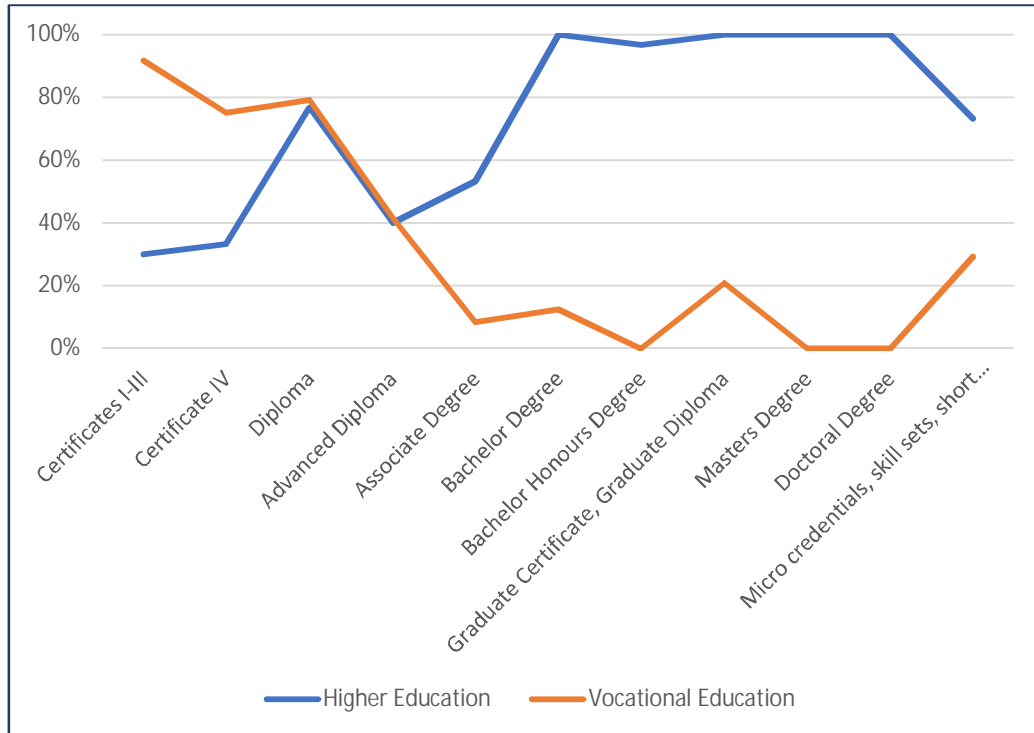
Note: The VET provider survey included an answer option for 'enrolments above 20,000' and did not include an option for 'enrolments above 50,000'.

Qualifications awarded

The surveys asked respondents to indicate which AQF qualifications were awarded by their institution. All Higher Education respondents indicated that they awarded Bachelor Degree, Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters Degree, and Doctoral Degree qualifications. Additionally, some Higher Education respondents reported that they awarded Certificates I-III (30% of respondents), Certificate IV (33%), Diploma (77%), Advanced Diploma (40%), Associate Degree (53%), and micro credentials, skill sets short courses and/or unaccredited programs (73%).

VET respondents reported more variation in the qualifications awarded by their institutions with 92% awarding Certificates I-III, 75% awarding Certificate IV, 79% awarding Diploma, 42% awarding Advanced Diploma, and 21% awarding Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualifications. Only 29% of VET respondents indicated that their institution provided micro credentials, skill sets, short courses, and/or unaccredited programs.

Chart: Qualification levels awarded by respondent institution

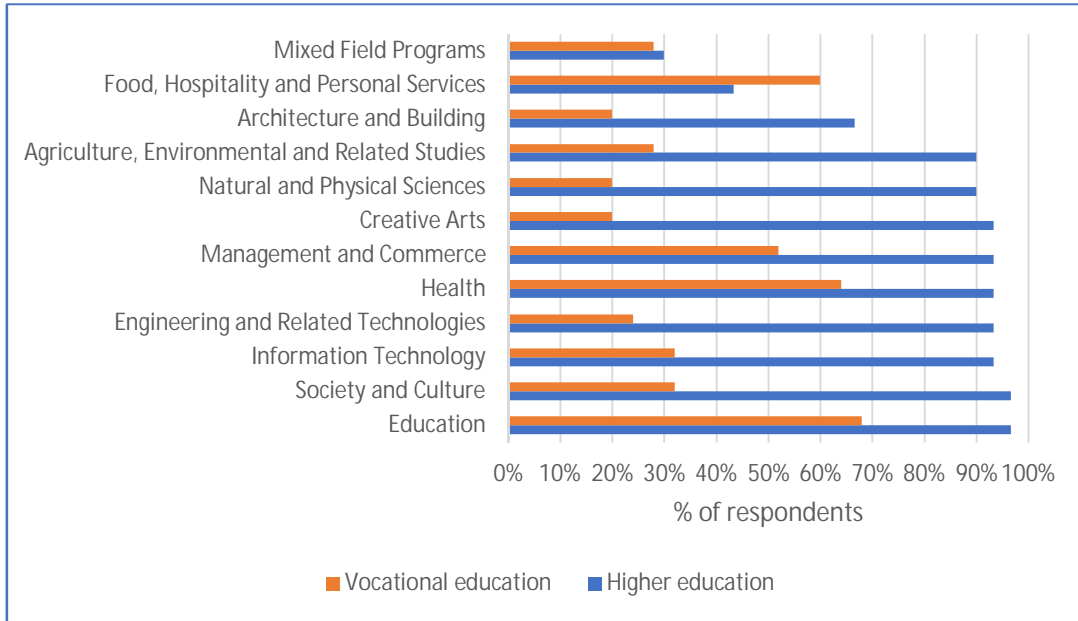


Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 33, and VET Q 30)

Fields of education offered

Respondents were asked to indicate the various fields of education offered at their institution. Most Higher Education respondents indicated that their institution offered qualifications in all, or almost all, fields of study. VET respondents were more varied in the fields of study they reported.

Chart: Fields of education offered by respondent institution



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 32, and VET Q 29)

Role of respondents

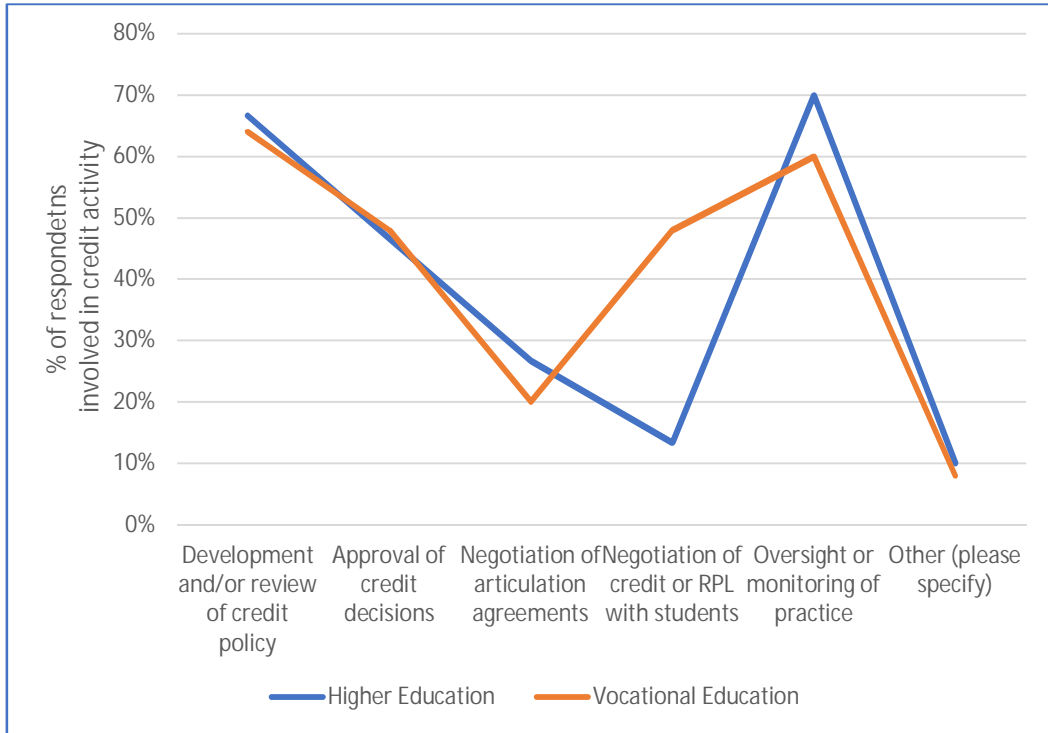
Survey respondents were asked to indicate their own role within the institution. Responses were as follows:

	Higher Education	VET
Executive management	45%	48%
Academic Management	21%	28%
Academic staff (teaching and research)	7%	12%
Professional staff	28%	12%

Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 27, and VET Q 24)

Respondents were also asked to indicate their role in the implementation of credit pathways. The majority of VET and Higher Education respondents indicated that they were involved in the development and/or review of credit policy, and oversight or monitoring of practice.

Chart: Respondent involvement in credit policy and practice



Source: Provider Survey (Higher Education Q 28, and VET Q 25)

A6: REVIEW OF WEBSITES

Our review

Under section 2.1 Responsibilities of issuing organisations, the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy states:

2.1.1 All issuing organisations will have clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes to provide qualifications pathways and credit arrangements for students.

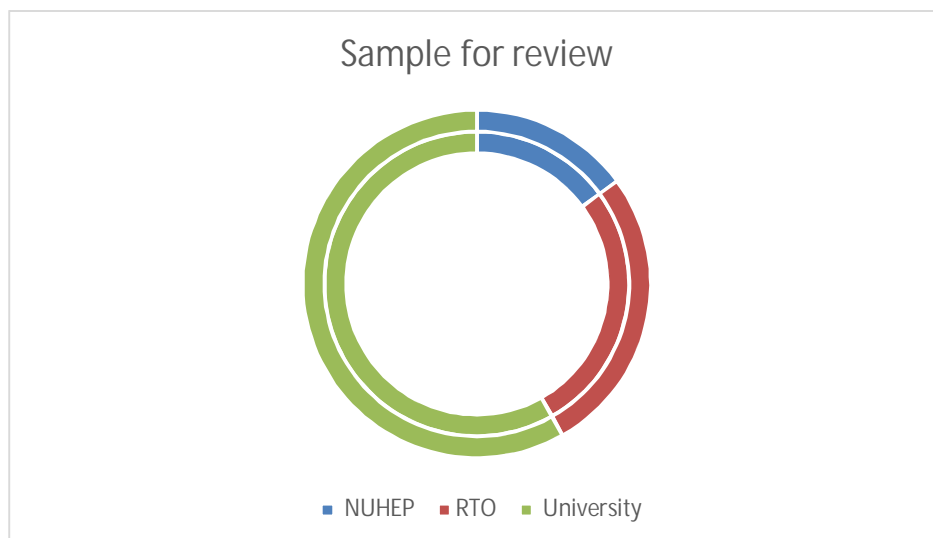
To review responsibilities for clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes, we selected a sample of institutions and accessed their main webpage to review their performance against the criteria grouped under the following key questions:

- ▶ Does it exist?
- ▶ Is it clear?
- ▶ Is it able to be used?
- ▶ Is it accessible?
- ▶ Is it accurate?
- ▶ Is it specific?
- ▶ Is there help available?
- ▶ Does the content of the policy meet the needs?

Sample information

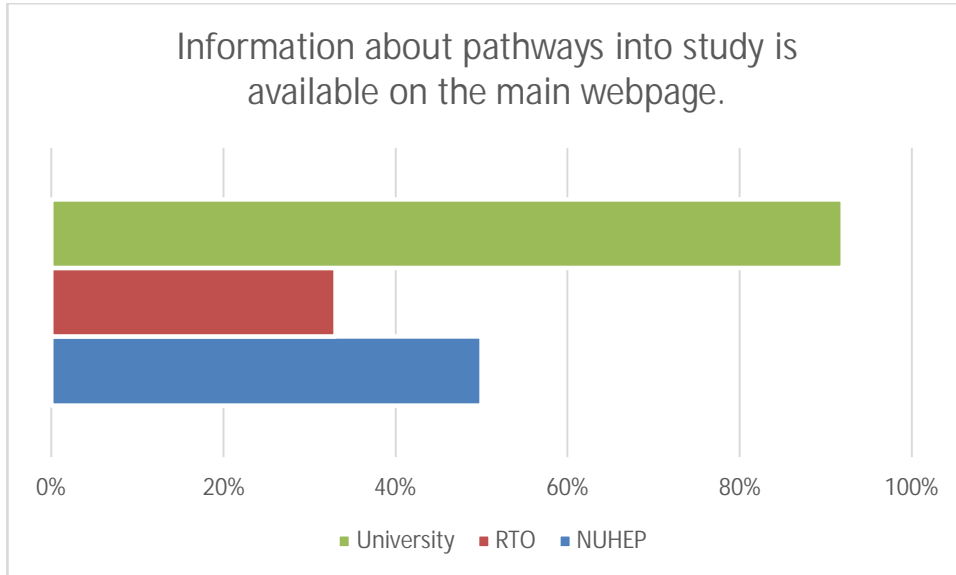
Institution type as percentage of total sample (n=67)

NUHEP -	10 -	14.93%
RTO -	18 -	26.87%
University -	39 -	58.21%



Results

Using a student lens, a review of institution websites has identified that more than 90% of institutions include information about their approach to credit transfer and other elements of the qualifications pathways on their main webpage.



Focus	Detailed criteria	Results	Yes
Does it exist?	Information about pathways into study is available on the main webpage.	NUHEP	50%
		RTO	33%
		University	92%
Is it clear?	Language used in the institution's pathways and credit policy is clear, simple and pitched at a suitable level for someone who has not completed Yr 12.	NUHEP	90%
		RTO	17%
		University	72%
	The pathways and credit policy clarifies how previously attained credit will be applied towards the new course (processes).	NUHEP	80%
		RTO	17%
		University	79%
	The pathways and credit policy clarifies for what type of previous study or experience credit can be granted.	NUHEP	80%
		RTO	17%
		University	79%
	The pathways and credit policy clarifies whether decisions regarding credit are made prior to, or after, enrolment in the course.	NUHEP	70%
		RTO	11%
		University	74%
Is it able to be used?	The institution's policy covering pathways and credit is available to both prospective and existing students.	NUHEP	90%
		RTO	17%
		University	87%
Is it accessible?	Website information about pathways options link to the institution's pathways and credit policy.	NUHEP	40%
		RTO	0%
		University	46%
	Searching "credit transfer" on the website will bring up the institution's pathways and credit policy.	NUHEP	70%
		RTO	17%
		University	77%
Is it accurate?	The institution's pathways and credit policy is regularly reviewed (last 6 months?). Note date that the institution's pathways and credit policy was last reviewed	NUHEP	60%
		RTO	0%
		University	26%
Is it specific?	Information regarding how much credit can be transferred towards the new course is available prior to enrolment in the course.	NUHEP	60%
		RTO	6%
		University	62%
	There are publicly promoted tools that enable students to calculate credit available to them (e.g. credit databases or academic advisors) that complement the pathways and credit policy and make it easy for students to access the information that they need prior to enrolment.	NUHEP	0%
		RTO	0%
		University	62%
	Options to request additional information or an appeal/review exist regarding pathways and credit arrangements exist.	NUHEP	80%
		RTO	11%
		University	69%

Focus	Detailed criteria	Results	Yes
Is there help available?	Information regarding how to request additional information or appeal/review credit decisions are easy to find [e.g. via links from main webpage or the pathways and credit policy]	NUHEP	20%
		RTO	0%
		University	56%
	There are credit transfer agreements in place (and publicly available via website) that complement the pathways and credit policy and facilitate ease of entry between participating institutions.	NUHEP	50%
		RTO	28%
		University	46%
Does the content of the policy meet the needs?	The pathways and credit policy provides for consideration of credit for prior formal learning [successfully completed units of learning that take place through a structured program leading to a formally recognised qualification]	NUHEP	90%
		RTO	17%
		University	82%
	The pathways and credit policy provides for consideration of credit for prior non-formal learning [successfully completed units of learning that take place through a structured program but does not lead to a formally recognised qualification]	NUHEP	60%
		RTO	17%
		University	79%
	The pathways and credit policy provides consideration of credit for prior informal learning including but not limited to learning gained in work experience, volunteering, internships or workplace training	NUHEP	60%
		RTO	17%
		University	79%

A7: ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDER POLICIES

Purpose

Following the information gleaned from the analysis of providers' websites, the intention of this current analysis was to see whether there would be benefit in analysing the actual *policies* that underpin the information on the websites.

Approach

The policies of a sample of higher education providers were analysed against the Australian Qualifications Framework Pathways Policy (AQFPP).

The providers selected for analysis were as follows:

Institution	HE Provider Type	Category
A:	Go8 University	Table A university
B:	ATN University	Table A university
C:	Regional University	Table A university
D:	Innovative Research University	Table A university
E:	Private University	Table B university
F:	Specialist NUHEP	Non-university Higher Education Provider

The results are in the attached table, in two forms:


- ▶ colour-coding to show how each institution's Advanced Standing Policy rated on that element of the AQF Qualifications Pathway Policy

	Explicitly referenced
	Partly stated or implied
	Silent

- ▶ explanations in the Notes where a simple coding was insufficient.

Findings

1. There's a lot of dark green in the table, meaning that explicit reference is made to the AQFPP, item by item. This is not necessarily indicative of anything except an institution's determination that its policies should reflect appropriate national policies. In fact, in some cases the agreement in the wording is so exact that one cannot escape the conclusion that it was copied-and-pasted in. Some lack of attention is reflected in the policy of one university, which contained references to out-of-date frameworks and guidelines.

- 
2. None of the sample organisations' policies refer to using the percentages in section 2.1.10 of the AQFPP to negotiate articulation arrangements elsewhere, although they do reference it for dealing with applications from individual applicants.
 3. None of the sample organisations' policies refer to the requirement in the AQFPP (section 2.2.2) to identify, negotiate and document articulation arrangements when developing courses.
 4. Not all institutions have specific reference to the need (section 2.3) for publicly available registers in their policies.

Key policy element		Key policy elements present in institutional policies						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	Notes
1.1	Purpose statement – alignment with AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy statement							Note 1
2.1.1	Clear, accessible and transparent policies and processes							
2.1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pathways into and between qualifications are available 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> publicly available 							Note 2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regularly reviewed 							Note 3
2.1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence-based, equitable and transparent decisions 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent and fair decisions, subject to appeal and review 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, subject to relevancy, currency. 							Note 4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academically defensible 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> timely 							Note 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prerequisites for entry or for partial fulfilment of qualification 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions formally documented including reasons 							Note 6
2.1.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not impinge on integrity of qualification outcomes and discipline requirements 							
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation's responsibility to make decisions on admission, prerequisites or programs, and likely successful completion 							Note 7
2.1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on formal individual negotiations between students and issuing organisation OR formal agreements between issuing organisations. 							
2.1.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RPL or advanced standing for relevant and current informal or non-formal learning may be used for entry or credit towards a qualification 							
2.1.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Block, specified or unspecified credit 							
2.1.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematically negotiated credit 							
2.1.9	Comparability and equivalence of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning outcomes Volume of learning Program of study Learning and assessment approaches 							
2.1.10	% of credit - basis of negotiation							Note 8
2.1.11	Additional credit available							Note 9
2.2.1	Policies and processes that facilitate and promote, publicly available							
2.2.2	Articulation arrangements during course development							Note 10

2.2.3	Attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ access qualifications ▪ bachelor degree pathways ▪ integrated qualifications 							Note 10
2.3.1	Publicly available register of credit transfer agreements (Issuers)							Note 11
2.3.2	Publicly available register of articulation arrangements (accreditors)							Note 11

Note	Comment (key observations highlighted in blue)
1	<p>Institution E's policy and, to some extent, Institution F's policy are more explicitly aligned than others in the sample with the <i>AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy</i> and include transcribing sections of that policy. Other sample policies also follow this practice to some extent, creating policies that are compliant with the letter of the <i>AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy</i> but may not reflect the degree to which that policy is incorporated in institutional practices.</p> <p>Institution C's policy was least well aligned of the sample policies and contains reference to out of date frameworks and guidelines.</p>
2	<p>Institution C's policy is publicly available, but as it is not as comprehensive as other sample policies in meeting the <i>AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy</i> requirements its approach to some areas of the policy is not readily known.</p>
3	<p>Institution B and Institution C policies neither provide a requirement to review the policy regularly nor indicate review dates in the policies themselves. The remaining sample policies provide some indication that they have been reviewed and/or are scheduled for review. None indicate a requirement for review within the policy itself but it may be that the requirement is systematic and is part of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures.</p>
4	<p>All policies recognise formal, non-formal and informal learning for admission and advanced standing purposes, consistent with the findings of the website review. Institutions place limits on the amount of advanced standing that can be given broadly in line with the percentages indicated at 2.1.10 in the <i>AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy</i>. For post-graduate courses the limit is typically 50%. Some institutions place limits on advanced standing based on the extent of formal versus non-formal and informal learning. Institution D, for example, limits advanced standing given for informal learning to one-third of a course. Also, consistent with the findings of the website review, policies provided stronger guidance on recognition of formal learning.</p>
5	<p>Most policies indicate a time in which applicants are to be advised of the outcome of their advanced standing request; typically, ten days or during enrolment. Institution C's and Institution D's policies are silent in this regard.</p>
6	<p>Institution A's and Institution D's policies specify an appeal procedure but do not require the reasons for the decision to be documented. Institution C's policy provides for an appeal process but does not mention the need for any documentation or the need to advise applicants of the reasons for the decision. It may be the case that each of these universities has this requirement in a separate appeals policy.</p>
7	<p>All institutions indicate the responsibility for these decisions; however, Institution A and Institution C do not specifically refer to consideration of a students' likely successful completion.</p>
8	<p>No Institution's policy refers to using the percentages indicated in section 2.1.10 as a basis for negotiating credit with another issuing organisation. Interestingly, the policies all use the indicated percentages for a different purpose; that is, as the basis for determining advanced standing limits for individual applicants. This may indicate the appeal and usefulness of this kind of guidance at the national policy level.</p>

9	Institution F's policy specifically indicates that additional credit may be available. It may be inferred from other institutions' policies but is not stated.
10	None of the institutions' policies refer to the requirement to identify, negotiate and document articulation arrangements when developing courses.
11	Not all institutions have been specific about the need for publicly available registers in their policies. The website review found that 50% or fewer of sample institutions had readily accessible registers. This could be owing to some uncertainty about what is needed in the registers and the difference between the registers required as an issuing organisation and those of an accrediting organisation as universities have both these roles. As Institution F is not self-accrediting, it would not be required to have the register for accrediting organisations: in these cases, it would be expected that TEQSA would have this.

A8: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION – SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Higher Education Providers Discussion Guide

Ithaca Group has been commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training to conduct research on credit pathways policy and practice to inform the 2018 Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework.


As part of this research, we would like to discuss the following questions with you.

1. Are you clear about the purpose of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy?
 - a. *Are you aware of other policies or structures that serve the same purpose, nationally or at an institutional level?*
 - b. *If the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy did not exist what would be the impact on the work of your organisation?*

2. How are credit decisions made at your organisation for:
 - a. individually-negotiated credit
meaning, credit that is negotiated on an individual basis for learners based on previous units or qualifications studied
 - b. articulation arrangements
meaning, formal credit arrangements based on agreements between organisations
 - c. recognition of prior learning?
meaning, individually negotiated credit on the basis of previous experience
 - d. *What is the broad content of your organisation's policy regarding credit, e.g. for what types of previous study or experience can credit be awarded?*
 - e. *Are credit decisions made prior to or after enrolment in a course?*
 - f. *Does your organisation have mechanisms in place, e.g. credit databases, to support credit processes?*
 - g. *Do you have appeals processes that are available to existing and prospective students?*

3. What factors are considered in your credit decision-making process?
 - a. *E.g. reference to the previous qualification's:*
 - i. *learning outcomes*
 - ii. *volume of learning*
 - iii. *program of study, including content*
 - iv. *learning and assessment approaches*

- v. *currency of previous learning.*
 - b. *What factors are considered in making RPL decisions in relation to previous work experience?*
 - c. *What approaches do you use to ensure that credit decisions are:*
 - i. *Evidence-based, equitable and academically defensible*
 - ii. *maintaining the integrity of qualification outcomes*
 - iii. *recognizing learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired*
 - iv. *documented for students, including reasons for not giving credit*
 - v. *decided in a timely way so that students' access to qualifications is not inhibited*
 - vi. *attentive to students' ability to meet the learning outcomes of the qualification?*
4. What impact does the availability of credit pathways have on:
- a. the student cohort you enrol
 - b. the quality of your programs
 - c. the reputation of your institution?
 - d. *Do credit pathways assist with international mobility for students – either by attracting international students to Australia, or supporting international recognition for Australian-educated students?*
5. What statistical information, or indications of trends that you've observed, in relation to the awarding of credit at your organisation can you provide?
- a. *For example, the number of credit applications and approvals, and/or detail on:*
 - i. *fields of education most using credit pathways – and those least likely to use it*
 - ii. *the institutions that students who are applying for, and/or receiving credit, are coming from*
 - iii. *the amount of credit typically granted, i.e. what proportion of the course to be studied, at what AQF levels*
 - iv. *the number (or proportion) of appeals*
 - v. *the dominant articulation pathways, e.g. from Diploma to Bachelor degree, from Certificate IV to Diploma*
 - vi. *the most used type of pathway, e.g. individual credit transfer, articulation or RPL*
 - vii. *the articulation arrangements your organisation in place, e.g. between sectors, within sectors, from one AQF to another, and within or between disciplines?*
6. It has been suggested that the hierarchical nature of the AQF creates barriers to the flexible acquisition and recognition of skills and knowledge across multiple levels. Has this been an issue in your experience?

- 
- a. For example, individuals expect to progress in only one direction when occupations or workplaces may require skill development across a number of AQF levels.*
 - b. If so, what could be done about it?*

 7. It has been suggested that the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy should be removed from the AQF and dealt with separately by HE and VET regulators.
What would be the impact of such a change?
 - a. How does the content of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy impact on your organisation's work in relation to credit pathways?*
 - b. Do regulatory requirements influence the way that your organisation implements credit pathways? In what way?*
 - c. Do you believe that the availability and quality of credit pathways should be monitored? If so, how could this best be done?*

 8. Do you believe that a credit point system could be helpful for implementing credit pathways?
 - a. In what way?*

 9. Do you consider that the proportional credit allowances outlined in 2.1.10 of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy are appropriate as a basis for credit negotiations?
 - a. Why, or why not?*

 10. What are the essential elements of the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy that are important to maintain into the future?
 - a. Can you identify anything that you think needs to change in the policy for it to continue to be fit-for-purpose in the future?*

 11. Beyond the AQF and its policies, what factors do you believe help or hinder the implementation of credit pathways?
 - a. For example, have you found that the requirements of professional bodies create a barrier to credit pathways?*

A9: ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS

Our early conversations drew our attention to a number of formal inter-institutional arrangements for articulation and/or advanced standing which we felt would yield insights beyond those to be obtained from the stakeholder consultations and provider survey.

As we finalised our consultations and proceeded to carry out the field work, we became aware that there are two categories of arrangements that were worth documenting:

- ▶ long-term, comprehensive articulation arrangements that have stood the test of time (A-D), and
- ▶ more recent and more varied arrangements driven by an identified need, often in a specific field of study or industry area – these have been included to illustrate fresh ways of thinking about qualifications pathways (E-H).

Wherever possible, the case studies document:

- ▶ Nature, scope and history
- ▶ Agreement on credit
- ▶ Impact and outcomes
- ▶ The challenges and how they were overcome
- ▶ Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy.¹⁸

In order to gain as much insight as possible, almost all the discussions and interviews were held face-to-face (with individuals or groups, as appropriate) rather than by phone.

	University/ RTO Partnership	Field(s) of Study	Categories addressed
A	Chisholm Institute + La Trobe University	Accounting Community Services Early Learning Information Technology Nursing Business Administration	Independent metropolitan TAFE Institute with a university
B	Griffith University + TAFE Queensland	Business Children's Services Community Services Dental Services Digital Design and IT Education and Training Engineering Built Environment Hospitality Nursing	One large state-wide TAFE system with a university

¹⁸ The Case Studies are creatures of both the nature of the arrangement being studied (i.e. E-H have a different basic focus to A-D) and to constraints in our primary research: e.g. the information available from each site, and the differing levels of access our team had to staff, which was out of our control. This also means that the case study descriptions are of quite different lengths.

	University/ RTO Partnership	Field(s) of Study	Categories addressed
		Sports and Recreation Tourism and Events	
C	Federation University Australia (University) + Federation University Australia (RTO)	Nursing	Dual sector university Regional university and RTO
D	James Cook University + Sarina Russo Institute	Business Studies	Large private RTO with a university
E	TAFE Queensland + several universities	Pharmaceutical Sciences	Non-conventional pathway courses
F	TAFE Queensland + several universities + Department of Education and Training; Queensland College of Teachers	Early Childhood Education	Example of a 'reverse articulation' agreement
G	TAFE Queensland + several universities	Science / Pathology	Integrated VET-HE Pathways
H	TAFE Queensland + several universities	Business Studies	Skipping the 'undergraduate degree step'

A. Chisholm Institute / La Trobe University – Melbourne

In 1998, the major technical and further education (TAFE) colleges in south east Melbourne merged to create Chisholm Institute, one of the largest tertiary education institutions in Victoria. Chisholm Institute is a government-owned TAFE that offers over 300 certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, bachelor and graduate certificate courses. The Institute comprises seven locations across Melbourne's south east. Chisholm Institute provides adult education in a number of areas including health and community care, education, hospitality, information technology, trades and business.

La Trobe University commenced in 1967 with 552 students enrolled, the third university to open in Victoria. La Trobe University has grown to accommodate more than 36,000 students, with campuses in Melbourne (Bundoora), Melbourne City (Collins Street and Franklin Street), Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura, Shepparton and Sydney.

The partnership between La Trobe University and Chisolm Institute is valued by both parties and has been extensively promoted, with explicit public mention of a 'cooperative relationship for the furtherance of tertiary education in the State of Victoria'.¹⁹

The collaboration started with the development of a three-year degree program where a first year TAFE Diploma of Accounting qualification is combined with a further two years of university study to complete the Bachelor of Accounting. This model has now been extended to other fields of study.

An outcome of this arrangement is students remain on the same (Chisholm) campus following completion of the Diploma, providing a sense of continuity and belonging as well as familiarity with facilities and services.

Agreement on credit

Initially, students who completed the one-year Chisholm Diploma of Accounting not only gained a nationally recognised qualification but gained credit points and were eligible to go straight into the second year of the La Trobe Bachelor of Accounting. The final two years of the degree were delivered at Chisholm Dandenong. The essence of this agreement was that Chisholm Diploma students are guaranteed direct entry to the second year of a specified La Trobe degree.

This, or a similar arrangement, has now, as part of a more comprehensive agreement, been extended to Information Technology, Nursing (Enrolled Nurse Entry), Early Learning, Community Services, and Bachelor of Sports Coaching and Development (from 2019).²⁰

The typical pattern is for the Diploma courses to be offered at a Chisholm campus and the La Trobe bachelor's degree is then completed in two more years (or equivalent part time), so that the student gains both qualifications.

¹⁹ "The purpose of this Agreement is to establish by:

- (a) introducing La Trobe curriculum, teaching resources and teaching methodology at Chisholm;
- (b) conducting educational courses and awarding relevant qualifications recognised throughout Australia;
- (c) using world-class teaching methods;
- (d) providing Students with tuition, teaching facilities, services and management of a standard equal to that enjoyed by students at La Trobe; and
- (d) increasing public awareness and acceptance in the community of the activities conducted by the parties under this Agreement."

²⁰ The amount of credit varies by course. The amount of credit awarded to Diploma students for Community Services is equal to 8 subjects, Nursing equal to 11 subjects and Early Learning equal to 8 subjects.

Following the capping of Commonwealth Supported Places the arrangement will adopt an articulation pathway where students will be required to apply for entry to the second year of the degree; that is, there will be no guaranteed place for each of the Diploma students. Entry to the second year of the La Trobe degree will be via a competitive application process. Students therefore will be eligible (not entitled) to transition to the second year of the degree. From 2019 Chisholm will continue teaching La Trobe courses at Chisholm through the articulation pathway for the second and third years of the degree.

Impact and outcomes

Enrolment numbers depend on the success of Chisholm recruiting into the degree program as well as the attractiveness of the La Trobe program, however enrolments have remained steady.

Retention was low in 2016 (however this was skewed by a cohort of international students) but has improved from 2016 to 2017. Success rates and completion rates for 2015 and 2017 are comparable with the reference cohort at La Trobe Bundoora. At a subject level student success is high, with some subjects at 100%.

Impacts that were noted include:

- ▶ La Trobe sees students as being better prepared than a standard articulating student due to the La Trobe engagement and oversight of the Diploma.
- ▶ More students come to the TAFE as a consequence of the arrangement.
- ▶ If a partner is delivering the course at first year level, La Trobe sees it is better protecting itself from issues such as first year attrition rates.


La Trobe supervision of the Chisholm teaching impacts on the quality of the Chisholm Diploma including:

- ▶ materials and assessment in the Diploma have been upgraded and taught at a higher level than previously
 - learning activities include the requirement for academic writing, referencing and research
 - academic skills support provided in the Diploma better prepare students for the second and third years.

The challenges

The direct credit pathway agreement between Chisholm and La Trobe has operated successfully but faced challenges including:

- ▶ Information systems integration of two institutions servicing different sectors with differing student management systems. The individual systems of each institution are unable to exchange information, that is, no interoperability.
- ▶ Reconciling student enrolment data and financials between institutions required manual intervention.
- ▶ The need for a partnership governance structure with dedicated management and academic teams at each institution.
- ▶ Implementing Higher Education standards into a VET provider with associated differing course development and delivery requirements.

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- ▶ The need to provide considerable resources on the part of each institution to understand one another's approach in relation to competency-based training and a Higher Education curriculum.
 - ▶ The need to scale-up student support services, particularly in relation to student academic writing and research skills.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

Overall, there is limited awareness of the Policy, including where it may be found. Most interviewees stated they could not recall detail of the Policy, and the inter-institutional agreement contains no specific reference to it. There was, however, comment by interviewees that the guidance on the amount of credit was helpful including 'There is value in guidance around the amount of credit across the systems ... but allows institutions to justify their own arrangements'.

B. Griffith University / TAFE Queensland – Brisbane & regional Queensland

TAFE Queensland is a state-wide training provider delivering courses and services from fifty locations throughout Queensland. TAFE Queensland is committed to the development and maintenance of shared credit pathways with local and national universities to help the personal and academic development of students. There are currently over 450 established pathways between TAFE Queensland and fifteen Higher Education providers, both public and private (including the Queensland University of Technology, James Cook University, the University of Southern Queensland and Griffith University).

This case study focuses on the relationship with Griffith University because of its long-standing nature. Griffith University and TAFE Queensland have a long history of working collaboratively to create pathways for VET students seeking Higher Education qualifications – specifically, pathways from Diploma to Degree. Indeed, the first pathways agreement between Griffith and TAFE was signed more than 20 years ago.

Since that time the relationship has deepened, and new credit arrangements have evolved; over 82 credit pathways now exist across 11 discipline areas (Business, Children's Services, Community Services, Dental Services, Digital Design and Information Technologies, Education and Training, Engineering and Built Environment, Hospitality, Nursing, Sports and Recreation, and Tourism and Events). From January 2016 to July 2018 (2½ years) 1,551 TAFE Queensland students received academic credit into their Griffith University studies.

Agreement on credit

Credit for each of the pathways is formalised and published by both TAFE Queensland and Griffith University. Griffith University operates and maintains a Credit Precedent Database which is a searchable central repository of all approved credit transfer arrangements (<https://www.griffith.edu.au/apply/credit-transfer>). TAFE Queensland publishes a comprehensive guide to learning pathways outlining each pathway and the total number of credit points available. (<https://tafeqld.edu.au/assets/oneweb/PDF/course-guides/2018/TAFE-Queensland-2018-university-pathways-guide.pdf>)

While each individual course is evaluated separately based on learning outcomes, volume of learning and assessment, credit of between 40 and 80 credit points is typical for the Diploma to Degree pathways.

Impact and outcomes

The Diploma to Degree pathway arrangements are now very well-established and the TAFE Queensland / Griffith partnership is mature and stable and credit transfer arrangements operate seamlessly. Significant outcomes include:

- ▶ Strong relationships between institutions that (i) are based on honesty, trust and mutual respect, and (ii) value the strengths and contribution of both institutions.
- ▶ Clear and transparent credit pathways that are effectively promoted to students.
- ▶ A partnership that operates effectively at many levels, including meaningful dialogues between academics and teachers about each other's programs and processes.
- ▶ Institutions working together to deliver combined staff orientations and student inductions.

Credit processes are governed and monitored very closely by both providers and there is recognition that students transitioning from TAFE Queensland need to have the knowledge and skills necessary for success at university.

While commercial benefits to the two institutions remain a key driver for the establishment of pathways, there is a strong, mutual focus on student progression and success that is having a positive impact on TAFE employee satisfaction levels.

The challenges

While the pathways between TAFE Queensland and Griffith University are operating successfully, challenges remain including:

- ▶ Determining the value of VET credentials at the appropriate academic level is challenging but processes are in place to ensure this is done consistently and efficiently.
- ▶ Consistent marketing and promotion effort is required to ensure that students are aware of their options. Pathways are actively promoted on the TAFE Queensland website, in secondary schools and through education expos. Throughout their program, all diploma students are made aware of the pathways available to them.
- ▶ Navigating the differences in learning approaches between TAFE and the University including an understanding and appreciation of Competency Based Training (CBT).

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

The opinion of staff at both TAFE Queensland and Griffith University was that the hierarchical nature of the AQF has at times limited understandings about cross-sectoral movements. Some perceive specific learning outcomes and processes to be constrained within a specific AQF level thus limiting consideration of more innovative models and pathways that can incorporate multi-direction, multi-sectoral approaches. This limited thinking has resulted in the widespread use of terms like 'pathways to uni', implying that the whole purpose of pathways is to get to university. The term 'reverse articulation' with its associated connotation that movement is down the AQF hierarchy and that the VET qualification is of somewhat lesser value is another piece of terminology that sends the wrong message to students.

The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy provides the principles and aims enshrined in Griffith University's Credit and Prior Recognition Policy that enables the establishment of pathway arrangements. The success and sustainability of those pathway arrangements is due to an open and dynamic dialogue between institutions. Each pathway is the result of a careful mapping of learning outcomes, volume of learning, and examination of assessment approaches, resulting in extensive negotiations to finalise credit arrangements.

C. Federation University – Ballarat

Federation University is one of five dual-sector universities in Australia, offering qualifications at AQF levels 1 to 10, and like other dual-sector universities it has two distinct parts, a 'higher ed' part and a 'VET' part which essentially operate as two separate organisations. The university was created when the former University of Ballarat and the Gippsland Campus of Monash University were amalgamated.

The focus of this case study is the arrangement by which students who have qualified with a Diploma of Nursing from Federation University are granted pre-arranged credit in the Nursing Degree course.

Agreement on credit

Agreement has been reached within the University that a Diploma of Nursing gives one year of 'block' credit in the three-year degree course. The University has also decided that graduates of other RTOs are also able to take advantage of this arrangement.

Impact and outcomes

The number of students availing themselves of this opportunity is quite a small proportion of the total degree course enrolment, amounting to a median of 16 students per year in a total commencing enrolment which varies between approximately 400 and 1,000.


One advantage for students has been that students who wish to do so can first obtain their Diploma, enabling them to use an accepted qualification to work in a hospital while they undertake their degree, without needing to undertake any more study than they would if they had enrolled in the degree course in the traditional way.

In addition to the undoubted benefit to students, the University feels that the availability of this arrangement has been extremely beneficial both to the institution in terms of its reputation in the region, and to the profession (as other universities have since felt pressure to do likewise). The Grampians Area Health Service has been extremely supportive of the University's efforts in this area as they see the advantages in students having multiple learning pathways available to them. To quote a representative of the Health Service: 'We need flexibility and options for students, we need to accommodate those students who need to work while they study – or no-one will choose nursing. It's as simple as that.'

The challenges

As with other dual-sector universities, the fact that both sectors are within the same organisation has not always led automatically to academic co-operation. In other such universities we have been told that the sort of arrangement described here can be more difficult to create than between a single-sector university and an RTO, and the past situation described in our consultations has been similar. In the case of Federation University, relationships have been built based on mutual respect and trust, and it is this that has led to the success of the venture.

Another considerable challenge has been the lack of confidence that the University is able to have in the capabilities of Diploma of Nursing graduates from other RTOs, finding that students from certain RTOs are not necessarily ready for the second year of a degree course. This is exacerbated by the fact that students in an RTO are not graded. This challenge has been addressed by granting only one year of credit (rather than the 1½ years previously



granted by the University) and enrolling all such students – including Federation University Diploma graduates – in a bridging program with a capstone examination. This enables the University to fill any gaps in knowledge, skills or workplace experience.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

While the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy did not drive this initiative – and although it is not seen to offer any help in resolving the challenges that have been faced – the one staff member of those interviewed who had heard of the Policy said that in his opinion it was a useful ‘stake in the ground’, and that the figures in clause 2.1.10 played a significant role in the University’s decisions on the amount of credit to give.

Comments made by staff suggested that the university staff in particular did not feel that the document ‘spoke to them’, and there were some comments on the overuse of jargon.

More significant, however, is the perception that the Policy does nothing to assist the University to develop tailor-made solutions for students which might be needed in particular cases, but which contravene funding regulations.

D. Sarina Russo Institute and James Cook University – Brisbane

Sarina Russo Institute, a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and the Brisbane Campus of James Cook University have established several effective learning pathways. This case study focuses on the diploma to degree pathways in Business Studies; approximately 90% of Diploma graduates from the Sarina Russo Institute currently receive credit and are accepted into the Bachelor of Business Degree at James Cook University.

The partnership between the two education institutions is strong and well-established. The two institutions share a location in the Brisbane Central Business District but the partnership is much deeper than the sharing of physical resources. It is based on a shared commitment to providing students with relevant, contemporary skills that increase their employability. However, the shared location provides significant benefits, for example, admissions and enrolments are shared by the two institutions. This allows the admissions office to provide individual advice to students about the offerings of both institutions and the pathways available to them.

Agreement on credit

Successful completion of the Diploma of Business with the Sarina Russo Institute provides entry into the second year of a Bachelor of Business with James Cook University. This pathway information is publicly available and promoted on the websites of both Institutions. Information on pathways is also provided to potential students during the admissions process.

Impact and outcomes

The pathways program and the Sarina Russo /James Cook partnership is operating very successfully and has provided many expected and some unexpected outcomes. Expected outcomes have included the following.

- ▶ Clear and well-publicised credit pathways designed to improve student career options and learning outcomes
- ▶ Well-rounded graduates, with the blend of academic and vocational skills, that is highly valued by employers
- ▶ Graduates with improved work readiness and employability.

Other less expected outcomes arose from VET and University staff working closely together.

- ▶ Teachers, trainers and lecturers at both institutions have begun to see new ways of working together to improve the work readiness of students such as by incorporating specific workforce skills as additional informal learning opportunities for degree students
- ▶ Staff at both institutions are planning and working collaboratively to develop joint solutions to challenges and problems impacting student progress and work readiness
- ▶ The reputation of both institutions with students and employers has been improved
- ▶ Higher Education staff have a new appreciation of vocational education, and vice versa – resulting in a blurring of the boundaries between the two sectors.

Both institutions conduct regular reviews to examine student performance and regular feedback is provided both formally and informally. One result of the review processes has been the addition of academic study skills in the Diploma (e.g. writing, researching, making

presentations and referencing); these have been included in the diploma course to ensure students can transition into the second year of the degree with relative ease. The co-location of the two institutions facilitates feedback processes and the quality of both the Diploma and Degree programs has benefited in many ways. Managers, lecturers and teachers from both organisations interact formally and informally sharing educational philosophies, teaching approaches and assessment methods. This has resulted in an improved understanding of, and mutual respect for, each other's work.

The challenges

The key initial challenge for both institutions has been to develop a shared understanding of the differences between VET and Higher Education, especially in learning approaches and assessment methods. Working through these differences was helped by the fact that both organisations were aligned in their commitment to positive employment outcomes for their students, and the realisation that working collaboratively through pathways would provide students with a mix of skills and experiences that would improve learning outcomes and make them more work ready.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

Staff at both institutions agreed that the AQF and the Qualifications Pathways Policy were important tools when designing the pathways from Diploma to Degree. The Policy provided a starting point for discussions between VET providers and Higher Education providers. While many issues and concerns impacted the final decisions regarding credit arrangements (including volume of learning, learning approaches and assessment methods), the credit suggestions in Clause 2.1.10 of the Policy provided a useful starting point. Furthermore, staff reported that, in their experience, the mere existence of the Policy helped to open discussions and negotiations between VET and Higher Education providers.

Introductory comment on Case Studies E-H

While the conventional pathways from completed VET qualifications to Higher Education pathways are most common, TAFE Queensland has also negotiated and established a range of non-conventional pathways using approaches that encourage movement across the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) that cater for both changing student needs and evolving industry expectations.

These non-conventional pathways include:

- ▶ concurrent enrolment in VET and Higher Education courses
- ▶ Higher Education to VET pathways
- ▶ coupling of diploma and degree programs.

The following four case studies provide examples of how innovative credit pathways can be developed to cater for particular industry and professional demands.

E. Bachelor of Science to Vocational Graduate Certificate (VET)

The Bachelor of Science to Vocational Graduate Certificate (VET) pathway – was designed and developed following a concern from the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical industry that degree graduates were not skilled for jobs in the industry. A Vocational Graduate Certificate²¹ was developed in partnership with the industry that addressed the development of high-level industry work skills. To ensure the course was developed at AQF Level 8, a postgraduate cadetship model was developed allowing students to apply skills in highly regulated workplaces relying on high levels of quality assurance and control.

Following the initial development, it was realised that the vocational skills relevant to the pharmaceutical industry were also pertinent to other areas of Science including Food Technology and Cosmeceuticals. As a result, Science graduates looking to improve their employment opportunities began to enrol in the Vocational Graduate Certificate: student enrolments approached 100 during the first two years of the course.

Agreement on Credit

Following the initial acceptance of the qualification by both industry and students, formal credit pathways began to be examined by TAFE and universities. The first formal agreement was between what was then Southbank Institute of TAFE (now one site of TAFE Queensland) and Griffith University. Griffith offered their students the opportunity to replace a full semester of their final year with the TAFE-based Vocational Graduate Certificate.

Impact and Outcomes

One of the main outcomes of the pathway was the acceptance by industry, government, TAFE and universities of what was then known as the 'reverse articulation model' paving the way for approaches that move between AQF levels and recognise the importance of vocational skills. A further key outcome was the development of a demand-driven industry model and a new pathway to graduate employment.

²¹ Although Vocational Graduate Certificates are no longer included in the AQF, at the time this articulation pathway was developed it was an AQF Level 8 qualification delivered only in the VET sector.



Challenges

The biggest challenge arising from this example is the need to ensure that innovative pathways have a champion to guide and protect them, and to negotiate acceptable outcomes: someone who will not only provide quality and consistency but will also actively promote the program to all parties.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

The initial development of the Vocational Graduate Certificate preceded the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy. However, the AQF provided a broad framework for both the development of the qualification and the subsequent negotiation of the credit pathway.

F. Bachelor of Education to Diploma of Early Childhood Education

Dual awards and credit transfer arrangements that allow TAFE Queensland Education students completing diplomas to gain credit for Bachelor and Master courses have been in place for several years. However, almost 10 years ago, a stimulus to consider new credit pathways arose due to the development of a Queensland Workforce Action Plan for the Early Childhood Education sector that required some workers in the sector to have degree qualifications. TAFE Queensland, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training and the Queensland College of Teachers, developed a program to allow primary school teachers holding a Bachelor of Education to gain credit towards the Diploma of Early Childhood Education allowing them to pursue a new career option in early childhood education and care. The initial demand for the Diploma was high and, while demand varies from year to year, enrolments remain high and fifteen nationally recognised training providers now offer the Diploma.

Agreement on Credit

Following a comprehensive mapping and development project, it was agreed that holders of a recognised Bachelor of Education Degree would be offered credit for three full units in the Diploma of Early Childhood Education as well as partial credit in a number of other units. Candidates could also seek further credit through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) depending on work experiences and other qualifications.

Impact and Outcomes

As well as providing a new learning pathway for degree holders, the project achieved the following outcomes:

- ▶ Increased the career options available to primary teachers
- ▶ Addressed the changing legislative and workforce requirements in the Early Childhood Education sector.

Challenges

During the initial design and development stages of the pathway, the major challenge related to the intensive nature of mapping of learning outcomes and negotiating appropriate credit arrangements with all the key stakeholders.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

While the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy offered a framework for the work it did not provide a strong impetus for the development of the pathway.

G. Integrated VET-HE Pathways

This model intersperses Certificate courses or specific VET skill sets into Degree courses. The integration of a Certificate (or Skill Sets) in a Degree allows students to develop practical work skills while undertaking their academic coursework. TAFE Queensland has used this pathway in different formats with various universities across diverse disciplines for over ten years. For example, in the past three years, 116 Bachelor of Exercise Science students have incorporated the Certificate III or IV in Fitness into their degree, and 100 Bachelor of Biomedical Science students have incorporated the Certificate III in Pathology Collection into their degree.

This model has been used for university architecture students to complete specific drafting units (e.g. use of Autodesk Revit Architecture software) to complement their degree-level qualification.

Agreement on Credit

Certificate courses and/or vocational skill sets can be incorporated as electives during the degree course.

Impact and Outcomes

Significant outcomes of this model include:

- ▶ an additional learning outcome recognised by the industry thus potentially increasing a graduate's employability
- ▶ diversification of learning outcomes for students in degree programs
- ▶ earlier employment of degree students in their area of study resulting from their industry-related VET studies
- ▶ a model on which to build future approaches to the incorporation of Skill Sets into Degree electives
- ▶ a model that reflects the evolution of modern Degrees and demonstrates opportunities to incorporate micro- and flexible credentials in Degree programs
- ▶ a strong and deepening relationship between TAFE Queensland and partner universities.

Challenges

A major challenge in creating and maintaining this pathway was the development of a shared understanding between partners of the concept of 'competency' as demonstrating the depth and breadth of skills specified in units. It has been difficult for some University staff to appreciate that competency does not mean a final mark of 50%.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

It is recognised that the AQF and the Qualifications Pathways Policy provide a basis for negotiations between institutions and the design of pathways. In accrediting degrees that contain content from qualifications at other levels, universities give consideration to the AQF and to the industry value of competency-based courses, and their attractiveness to students.

H. From Diploma to Work then to Graduate Certificate

The pathway from Diploma to Degree is well-established and well used but not all students seek to move to a Degree course following the completion of a Diploma. Many Diploma graduates enter directly into work, thus applying their new skills in real-world situations and learning new workplace skills. Later on, when they wish to gain a higher-level qualification, a Bachelor Degree seems inappropriate and unlikely to enable them to develop the higher-level knowledge they wish to obtain.

The benefits of recognising these work skills and industry experiences as credit when workers seek to undertake further study was recognised by TAFE Queensland and their partner universities. Using its alumni network TAFE Queensland is currently promoting opportunities for their diploma graduates currently in the workforce to gain entry with credit to Graduate Certificates and/or Master programs using their formal learning and workplace experience (informal learning).

Agreement on Credit

TAFE Queensland is currently working with universities to formalise credit arrangements for business studies graduates with work experience.

Impact and Outcomes

Development of a new pathway model (Diploma – Work – Graduate Certificate).

Provision of a new learning pathway for Diploma Graduates who proceed directly to the workforce after graduation.

Strengthening of the TAFE Queensland alumni network.

Challenges

The challenge is to maintain strong linkages with graduates in order to market the new model to them.

Reflections on the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy

Pathways and partnerships are facilitated and enabled by university credit and RPL policies that embed the principles of the AQF and the purpose of the Qualifications Pathways Policy – recognising the multiple pathways that students take to gain AQF qualifications, and that learning can be formal, non-formal or informal.

A10: BRACING FOR DISRUPTION: THE IMPACT OF DRIVERS OF CHANGE ON WORK AND LEARNING

Introduction

If you talked about a disruption in the 1950s, you might have been referring to an unexpected phone call, or a misbehaving child unsettling a classroom. It was an inconvenience. Something that interrupted an event, an activity or a process. In 2018, disruption has come to mean something quite different. We talk about being in an ‘age of disruption’ where technology, demographic shifts, globalisation and generational change are significantly altering the way people live and work, what they value and the choice and nature of products and services available to them. These disruptions are, at once, both destructive and creative—decimating jobs and industries while also creating new opportunities, wealth and productivity gains.

In its report on digital disruption, the Productivity Commission described disruptive developments as:

‘...developments that drive substantial change across the economy for many firms, households or workers, with impacts that impose significant costs of adjustment as they make capital obsolete and leave some workers significantly underutilised for some time. In other words, ‘big, sometimes fast and always unruly’’ (Australian Government, 2016).

This paper outlines some of the ways that industries, work and skill needs are being disrupted, what’s driving change, and some implications for the future of education and training. It aims to inform thinking about the ways in which the Australian Qualifications Framework supports learning and qualification pathways.

Drivers of disruption

A few key drivers are responsible for much of the disruption: technology, demographic shifts, globalisation and the changing expectations of many young people.

Technology

Probably the most disrupting influence is technology, and there’s barely an area of life that’s not impacted. It’s changing the way we relate, our leisure time, how we transact and do business, our work and how we learn.

As well as the social media platforms and on-demand streaming services that have transformed media, communications and entertainment, other disruptive technologies include:

- ▶ *The 'Internet of Things'* – the interconnection of physical objects made possible through sensors, actuators and wired and wireless networks.
- ▶ *Autonomous Vehicles/Drones* – these are replacing human labour and increasing productivity across industries. For example, Rio Tinto will increase its fleet of autonomous haul trucks by more than 50 per cent by 2019, which is expected to deliver an additional \$500 million of free cash flow annually from 2021.
- ▶ *Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning* – machines are matching, and in some cases, outperforming humans in a variety of work activities, even some that require cognitive capabilities.
- ▶ *Robotics* – robots have the potential to transform our lives in myriad ways. They've already revolutionized production lines, and they're getting smarter, smaller and more capable all the time.
- ▶ *Digital Traceability* – this enables a product and all of its information to be monitored throughout its lifecycle: from design to the field. Using this information, stakeholders can review a product's history to determine where a downstream issue first arose.
- ▶ *3D Printing* – 3D printers are being used across almost every industry, enabling rapid prototyping, rapid manufacturing, creation of parts and interior elements for cars and aircraft, supporting design processes. A cutting-edge example of 3D printing with the potential to significantly disrupt the construction industry is a company in China, which uses recyclable materials to print houses for \$4,800 per unit. Parts are printed separately and later assembled.
- ▶ *Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality* – an interactive computer-generated experience, which takes place within a simulated environment. It incorporates auditory and visual sensory feedback. This immersive environment can simulate the real world with many diverse applications. Augmented Reality is a type of virtual reality technology that blends what the user sees in their real surroundings with digital content generated by computer software.
- ▶ *Blockchain* – the blockchain is an incorruptible digital ledger of economic transactions that can be programmed to record not just financial transactions but virtually everything of value.

Advances in robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence are transforming how companies manufacture products and deliver services, ushering in 'what's being called the 'fourth industrial revolution' (Chin et al, 2018, p2).

Late adopters of these technologies delay at their peril. Kodak provides an extreme example. In the late 1970s, it developed one of the world's first digital cameras. But it opted not to commercialise the device, for fear that it would cannibalise existing products. Now, the domination of digital photography has reduced the company to just a shell of its former self (World Economic Forum, 2018, p8).

Shifting demographics

Demographic trends have already impacted industries and workforces; and will continue to do so. One is the aging of our workforce and declining birth rates. Today 14% of Australians are aged over 65. By 2050, 25% of Australians will be aged over 65 (Lie, 2017). This will mean a shrinking workforce and skill pool, and more demand for healthcare services and social assistance. Asia's growing and wealthy middle-class population is creating a surge in demand in Australia for services like education, healthcare and tourism (Lie, 2017).

The last decade has also seen seismic shifts in consumption patterns. Between 2007 and 2017 expenditure on pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and toiletries increased by 85%. Spending on takeaway food was up 70% and the amount we spend in cafes, restaurants and catering has grown almost 62%. A sharp increase in online shopping and demands for instant gratification of younger generations is driving the need for highly efficient supply chains and changing the face of retail in Australia (Lie, 2017).

The sheer size of Australia's fast-growing population will also put a strain on our food, energy, water, resources, space, security and lifestyle, with ripple effects across industries.

Globalisation

Globalisation means that our workers can cross the globe and international workers can come to us. The future will see more and more international trade and physical mobility. This has already impacted industries, which haven't been able to compete with cheap labour and production costs overseas. New technology platforms are adding another dimension to globalisation, making it easier for foreign workers to do jobs in Australia from remote locations including IT, design, architecture and business services. According to research, up to 11% of service sector jobs may be lost to workers undertaking jobs in Australia from foreign countries (Foundation for Young Australians, 2018)

Generational change

Some of the changes to the way we work and learn are being driven by the expectations of young people. They have been shaped by experiences different from many who make decisions about educational policy, and in the workplace, they value online social connectedness, teamwork, free expression, close relationships with authority figures, creativity, work-life flexibility, and use of technology.

Stereotypically, they prefer to work in groups with hands-on experiences. They enjoy trial and error. They don't particularly value reading and listening to lectures. They want learning to be creative, interactive, and fun; and they enjoy thinking outside the box. (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011). And while they're not all like that, recent research tells us that they comprise a sizeable proportion (Dickie, McDonald and Pedic 2011).

Gen Y is the mobile generation, always considering their options. They can't fathom the idea of one career for their entire working life. According to social commentator, Bernard Salt, they are the 'options generation', who are pioneering the notion of an evolving multi-faceted career. They call themselves slashies – a term used to describe someone who has a few jobs, for example an accountant/journalist/blogger. They're also having children later, giving them time to try out different careers. Salt says Gen Y has a patent on disruption, which differentiates them from preceding generations. They're extraordinarily creative and entrepreneurial.

The impacts of disruption

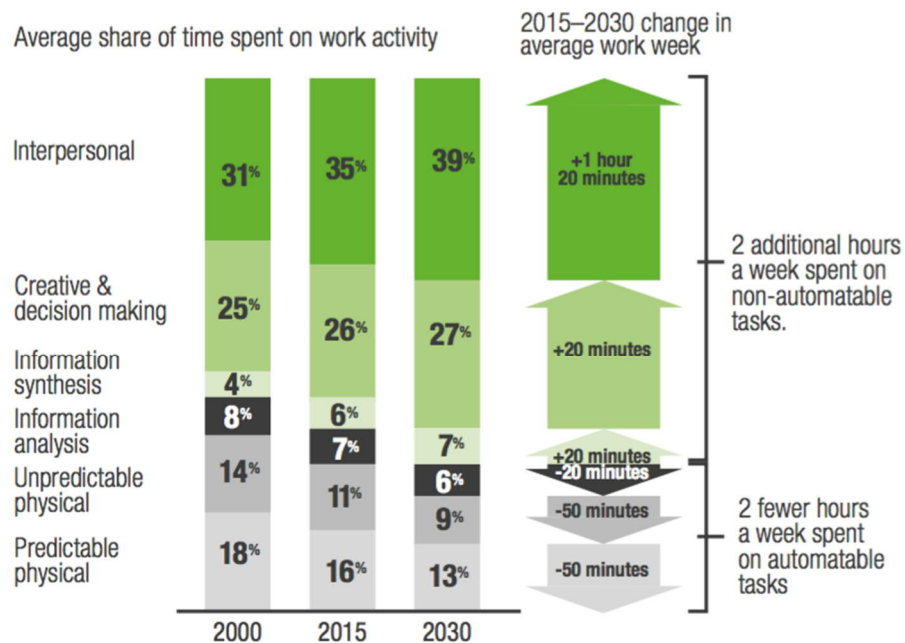
These disruptive forces are changing whole industries, jobs, skill requirements and patterns of employment.

Changes to the jobs we do and the way we do them

The rise of automation is significantly impacting industries and jobs, especially those that involve manual and routine tasks. While only a small percentage of occupations could be wiped out entirely by machines, it's been predicted that about 60% of all occupations involve at least 30 per cent of activities vulnerable to automation (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017). These are most prevalent in manufacturing, accommodation and food service, and retail trade, and include some middle-skill jobs.

The decline in middle-skill jobs is creating an 'hourglass' labour market. Higher skill occupations remain in demand as do menial low-wage jobs that can't be automated, but middle-skill jobs – particularly those which can be codified – are shrinking.

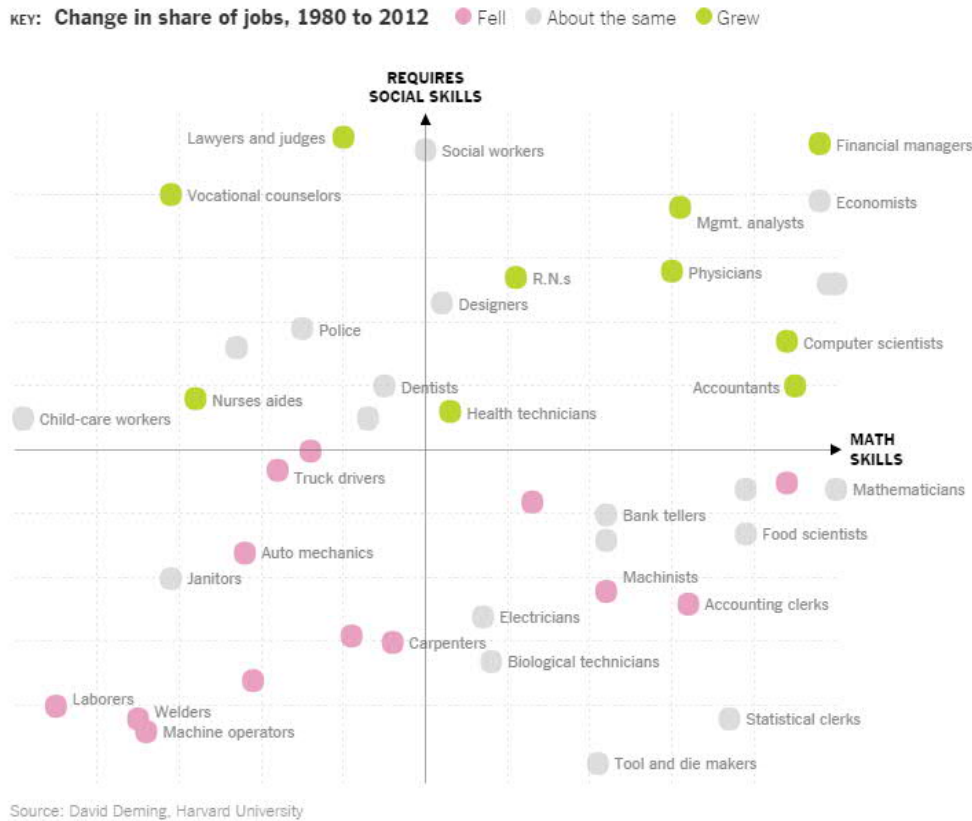
Increasing automation in workplaces is not just changing the kinds of jobs people do, but also the way they do them. AlphaBeta was commissioned by Google to analyse how Australians spend their time at work and the proportion of time they spend on different work tasks. They identified six categories of work tasks: interpersonal, creative and decision-making, information synthesis, information analysis, unpredictable physical work and predictable physical work (repetitive and routine physical tasks). Their analysis showed that, since 2000, workers have been able to spend less time on routine and manual tasks, because of automation, and spend more time on complex activities that require a high degree of creative thinking and decision-making, problem-solving, interpreting information and personal interaction. The graph below illustrates this analysis and breakdown of work tasks.



Source: AlphaBeta, The Automation Advantage (O*NET, AlphaBeta analysis)

In short, 'automation is causing Australian workers to rely more on their brains and personalities than on physical labour.' (AlphaBeta, 2017)

Another analysis of changes in jobs in the US between 1980 and 2012, shows a similar trend. As depicted in the graph below, the share of occupations not requiring high levels of social skills (bottom half of the diagram) fell, and those that did require social skills rose. Many occupations requiring neither social nor maths skills (bottom left-hand segment) fell (Deming, 2015).



As well as changing the nature of jobs, automation and advancing technologies will also create entirely new jobs in the future.

Evolving skill needs

To capture opportunities of the future, new skill sets will be needed, many of which are multidisciplinary. We will need workers with high-level technical skills, as well as the capacity to think creatively and critically (World Economic Forum, 2016). In the past, companies looked for individuals with specific experience and knowledge. In recent years, the balance has tipped in favour of 'hard skills' like coding and data science. Looking ahead, human skills and learning agility will be more and more important (see diagram above).

In 2017, the World Economic Forum commissioned a project exploring how organisations must transform to support innovative business models and to integrate disruptive technologies and data analytics into their business practices.

It found that for companies to remain viable, they must enable their employees to build both soft and hard skills, and developed a diagram (below) illustrating which skills will be most critical in the future.



[From World Economic Forum (2018), p17]

The rise of non-standard work arrangements

The last decade has seen an increase in non-standard employment arrangements. Today, 27% of Australia’s private-sector workforce is casually employed, and the figure is 35% for workers without post-school qualifications (Healy et al, 2017). This pattern is being exacerbated by the proliferation of start-ups using apps to connect and mediate between buyers and sellers in a range of markets, including markets for in-person services: Uber, Deliveroo, Airtasker and AirBNB to name but a few well-known ones. These companies are disrupting established firms and markets, and creating more opportunities for casual work.

We now talk about the ‘gig economy’ – where people take on temporary, consulting projects and contracts. This can be in a range of roles, from junior admin and hospitality right up to highly skilled workers, developers and designers and marketers and even to the executive level – with executives spending time in other companies to share their experience and expertise.

As well as having the technology to enable these arrangements, the younger generation of workers have the right mindset for shorter-term roles. They’re looking for experiences and growth more than stability.

Fluid career pathways

Each year almost one tenth of the Australian workforce changes jobs (600,000 change industry and around 450,000 change occupations) (CEDA 2015). Rather than following a linear career progression, workers are now navigating a fluid career journey, moving regularly between employers and projects (World Economic Forum, 2018, p19).

The 2018 survey of millennials and Gen Z workers conducted by Deloitte shows that this trend is only likely to continue in the future. 43 per cent of respondents envision leaving their

job within two years and only 28 per cent seek to stay beyond five years. Many respondents said they view the gig economy as an attractive alternative adjunct to their jobs (Deloitte, 2018), leading to the notion of 'flexicurity' – supporting fluid career flexibility while still offering workers transparency, social safety nets and transferable benefits (World Economic Forum, 2018, p19).

The implications for learning and credentials

The 'market for learning' has evolved and continues to evolve. The changing nature of work and career patterns, the rapid advance of disrupting technologies and the learning and work preferences of Generation Y, are disrupting patterns of education and ongoing learning. We are seeing the emergence of a variety of what would have been described as 'non-standard' qualifications which the market tells us are needed and valued, but which cannot be accommodated within the AQF or its Qualifications Pathways Policy as currently configured.

In its examination of what organisations need to do to thrive in the future, the World Economic Forum (2018) concluded that the ever-increasing pace of technology will require all workers to commit to ongoing learning. In its view, the notion that formal education will serve individuals for their entire career is no longer the case, and the future of learning will involve a continuous cycle in which digital inclusion is achieved through:

- ▶ Skill building – preparing for the workforce with new skill training, practical courses that combine academic and real-world experience and active job placement.
- ▶ Continual evolution – reinforcing and advancing capabilities as businesses and industries evolve.
- ▶ Radical reskilling – retraining workers for new opportunities as existing roles are displaced, offering a path to employment in new skill areas.

The Council for Foreign Relations agrees:

'Citizens will need to rethink education, jettisoning the notion of education as something largely completed before they enter the workforce. Instead, lifelong learning and periodic retraining will become the new normal.'
(Council for Foreign Relations, p.vi)

It is possible that the excitement of recent writing on the subject of change exaggerates certain trends or presumes that past changes foreshadow even greater change in the future. It's easy to get carried away by the rhetoric – for example, in preparing this report we shied away from assertions we came across such as 'Of the jobs that today's students will hold in 2030, it is estimated that 85% don't exist today.' Many of the changes written about as disruptive are really evolutionary, and have been with us a long time: it is salutary to see how many of the predictions now being made are also to be found in writings from the early 2000s.

We do know, however, that:

- ▶ People will need to continue learning throughout life to a greater extent than currently – and are likely to see that they need to take more accountability for their own learning, careers and personal development
- ▶ In doing this, people will engage in learning that appears 'ad hoc' when viewed from the system level, but from the individual's point of view is individually strategic or

opportunistic – as in order to acquire multidisciplinary skills they may need to pick and choose from a range of qualifications at once

- ▶ In some professions and industries, there is likely to be less emphasis on the importance of qualifications, prompted by a reluctance both by employers to invest in training for the long term, and by students who are unwilling to invest in skills for an unknown future. In others, however – particularly regulated industries – the firm focus on qualifications is likely to remain
- ▶ People will move around – between jobs, sectors, countries.
- ▶ People will move between VET and Higher Education and back again and will undertake micro-learning.

This suggests certain needs in relation to how knowledge and skills are acquired, recognised and transferred to new contexts. Questions around how to enable the gradual acquisition, recognition and adaptation of qualifications to suit evolving career and employment purposes relate more to the operation of pathways policy than to the structure of the AQF itself. Policies or instruments that sit around the Framework may be necessary to help potential users – regulators, accrediting authorities, education and training product developers and providers, employers and others – interpret and apply the Framework in ways that respond to future demands. These may include nationally developed regulatory requirements (potentially looking beyond education and training to the way that the AQF is used more broadly in employment arrangements and industrial relations); parallel or complementary frameworks that allow the essence of AQF levels to be considered and applied more broadly than in whole qualifications; interpretive tools or guidance that connect the AQF with other established frameworks (e.g. Australian Core Skills Framework, Core Skills for Work, General Capabilities) as well as to international qualification frameworks; guidance material that provides users with advice and examples for using the AQF for a variety of purposes and contexts; systems or mechanisms that help users to produce consistent, exchangeable information on learning outcomes.

The following needs, and potential implementation examples, emerge from the trends documented above:

- a. Ways of recognising the multiple ways (some planned, some ad-hoc) in which people will continue to learn throughout life and for recognising and documenting smaller parcels of learning than full qualifications so that they can form part of an individual's portfolio to support credit and career pathways – perhaps by the development of supporting tools such as 'digital backpacks' enabled by blockchain technology (c.f. the Korean example in the body of the report).
Beyond the AQF framework, action in this area is likely to require national agreement or regulation to support the consistent development and use of 'digital backpacks'. This may involve the development of the 'backpack' and recognition system, or the establishment of system requirements that would allow multiple developers to create 'backpacks' that are compatible across sectors, jurisdictions, providers and contexts.
- b. Improved mechanisms to capture and recognise prior learning – both for efficiency and to demonstrate the relevance of knowledge and skills acquired in one area to another (for example, the Mexican and Philippine examples in the body of the report focus on more consistent and efficient ways of recognising informal learning).
Further examination of the systems used for RPL in Mexico and the Philippines may be worthwhile. Additionally, improved mechanisms for recognising non-formal and informal learning may also include:

- the creation of a framework (or set of descriptors) parallel to the AQF that describes outcomes from non-formal and informal learning across levels
 - establishment of connections between the AQF and other frameworks describing generic skills (ACSF, CSFW, general capabilities) and tools that make it possible for multiple frameworks to be used simultaneously to more fully describe individual capabilities
 - development and sharing of resources, tools and examples that support good practice implementation of RPL in a variety of contexts.
- c. New ways of recognising, describing and labelling pathways other than those that assume linear progression to higher levels, to counter current beliefs about which qualifications and pathways are superior.
Development and use of a new lexicon to describe movement between various qualifications – possibly supported by the creation of exemplar programs targeted at the needs of specific industries where non-traditional pathways are beneficial. This may include reconsideration of industrial arrangements that currently prescribe or limit specific occupational or industry pathways and working with industry stakeholders to identify and trial new pathway models.
- d. Making essential underpinning skills, such as literacy and numeracy skills, core skills for work, and skills such as critical thinking and creative problem-solving more explicit in qualification structures, to assist potential employees and employers (with the proviso that such skills are often highly context-dependent).
Further refinement of training product requirements (e.g. through VET training product reform) to ensure that underpinning skills are adequately addressed within qualifications. This work would be aided by the establishment of clearer connections between the AQF and the ACSF and CSFW (see point b).
- e. Revisiting the current distinctions between VET and Higher Education in determining RPL, and recognising and encouraging pathways (Work Integrated Learning is a case in point).
Development of systems to better support collaboration between sectors, especially for the creation of articulation arrangements in either direction, including enforcement of the requirement in the current pathways policy for public registers of articulation arrangements to be maintained by providers and regulators.

While few of these developments are likely to be incorporated within the AQF, they are developments that stakeholders in the tertiary sector are exploring or are interested in pursuing. Future iterations of an AQF pathways policy will need to take such aspirations into account if it is to continue to provide a sound basis for recognition of qualifications which accommodates the changes to work that many anticipate.

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A11: VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDER STANDARDS REQUIREMENTS

References to the AQF, credit and recognition in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015

Section of Standards	Reference
1.1 Admission	includes 2b) that prior to enrolment and before fees are accepted students are informed of their rights and obligations including policies, arrangements and potential eligibility for credit for prior learning.
1.2 Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning	requires that assessment of prior learning is undertaken for the purpose of granting credit for units of study within a course of study or toward the completion of a qualification, such assessment is conducted according to institutional policies, the result is recorded and students receive timely written advice of the outcome. Credit through recognition of prior learning is granted only if a) students granted such credit are not disadvantaged in achieving the expected learning outcomes for the course of study or qualification, and b) the integrity of the course of study and the qualification are maintained.
1.3 Orientation and Progression	includes 6) students have equivalent opportunities for successful transition into and progression through their course of study, irrespective of their educational background, entry pathway, mode or place of study.
1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment	notably does not reference the AQF but rather 1) The expected learning outcomes for each course of study are specific, consistent with the level and field of education of the qualification awarded, and informed by national and international comparators.
1.5 Qualifications and Certification	includes 3) When an Australian Higher Education Qualification is offered, the course of study leading to the qualification is either self-accredited under authority to self-accredit or accredited by TEQSA and the learning outcomes for the qualification are consistent with the level classification for that qualification in the Australian Qualifications Framework. Also reference to the AQF in relation to issuance of qualifications (although notably, no reference to the issuance policy). With regard to RPL this standard includes 7b) records of results state credit granted through recognition of prior learning
7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students	requires that information for students is available prior to acceptance of an offer, written in plain English where

Section of Standards	Reference
	<p>practicable, accompanied by an explanation of any technical and specialised terms and includes (among other things)</p> <p>a) information to assist in decisions about courses or units of study, including the course design, prerequisites, assumed knowledge, when and where courses/units are offered, application dates, arrangements for recognition of prior learning, standing credit arrangements, pathways to employment and eligibility for registration to practice where applicable, and</p> <p>d) information to give access to current academic governance policies and requirements including admission, recognition of prior learning, transition, progression, assessment, grading, completion, qualifications, appeals, academic integrity, equity and diversity, intellectual property and withdrawal from or cancellation of enrolment.</p>
7.3 Information Management	includes an extensive list of information that Higher Education providers must make publicly available (from financial standing of the provider to lists of courses of study and indicative enrolments, annual reports and organisational charts) but does not include a requirement that articulation arrangements/agreements are made publicly available.

References to the AQF, credit and recognition in the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015

The Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 form part of the VET Quality Framework. The Preliminary section (Part 1) of the Standards states that RTOs are required to comply with the VET Quality Framework. Within the Glossary section of the Standards, the VET Quality Framework is defined as comprising:

- ▶ the Standards for Registered Training Organisations
- ▶ the Australian Qualifications Framework
- ▶ the Fit and Proper Person Requirements
- ▶ the Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements
- ▶ the Data Provision Requirements.

Thus, although the AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy is not specifically referenced in the Standards for RTOs, the Standards contain a requirement for VET providers to comply with it.

Specific references to the AQF within the Standards are listed in the table below.

Section of Standards	Reference
1.8	The RTO implements an assessment system that ensures assessment (including RPL) complies with assessment requirements of the relevant TP or accredited course and is

Section of Standards	Reference
	conducted in accordance with the Principles of Assessment and the Rules of Evidence.
1.12	The RTO offers RPL to individual learners.
3.5	The RTO accepts and provides credit to learners for units of competency and/or modules where these are evidenced by AQF certification documentation issued by another RTO
Standard 3 context	RTOs are not obliged to issue any certification that would be entirely comprised of units or modules completed at another RTO or RTOs.



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