

AQF Review – Terms of Reference

Background

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was introduced in 1995. It provided criteria for defining qualifications based on educational characteristics and outcomes for each qualification. The main AQF goals were to provide nationally consistent recognition of qualifications and facilitate student mobility between education sectors and the labour market.

Following a two-year review, a revised AQF was released in 2011, with a second edition released in 2013. It introduced the current ten level structure and aligned the AQF more closely with international practice. The revised AQF focused on descriptors for knowledge, skills and their application in increasing complexity over the ten levels of qualifications, complemented by volume of learning descriptors. It also introduced new and revised supporting policies.

The AQF remains an integral part of Australia's framework for quality assurance in education and training and is a key feature of Australia's international education standing. Since it was last revised, there have been innovations in qualifications frameworks internationally, as well as changes in the nature of work that affect Australia's skills requirements. There have also been changes in education and training practice and relevant regulatory structures.

In light of these developments, the Australian Government will appoint an expert panel to review the AQF.

Terms of reference

Taking into account developments in school, vocational and higher education, the nature of work, qualifications frameworks internationally, and the views of international and domestic stakeholders, the AQF Review Panel will:

1. Review the AQF structure and components (levels, qualifications and relevant explanations) and associated guidelines to ensure that they:
 - i. position the AQF for the future as a flexible and responsive instrument that guides the provision of consistent high quality and transparency in the Australian education system;
 - ii. reflect the knowledge, skills and capabilities required by individuals for effective economic and social participation and which meet the current and anticipated skills needs of the Australian economy;
 - iii. effectively facilitate access to learning pathways and mobility (for example through articulation arrangements, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning) within and between education sectors, AQF levels and AQF qualifications;
 - iv. reflect international good practice.
2. Review the desirability and feasibility of developing a system for the quality assurance and incorporation within the AQF of non-AQF credentials such as skill

sets, enabling and foundation courses, micro-credentials and in-service and advanced training provided by industry or professions and other non-AQF credentials.

3. Provide specific advice on:
 - i. the relationships between levels and qualifications to ensure that they are clear, appropriate and unambiguous, taking into account their use in different education sectors;
 - ii. whether the descriptors are expressed in simple language that supports ready and consistent interpretation and application;
 - iii. volume of learning including whether:
 - a) it should be a time based measure and, if so, whether it should be aligned with other time based measures employed in vocational education and training sector specifications and requirements;
 - b) it should be replaced by a credit point system;
 - c) the disparities in volume of learning between qualifications at the same level can be supported by additional information such as prerequisite learning; and
 - d) it is a necessary descriptor in the AQF
 - iv. the placement of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) qualifications in the AQF and consider:
 - a) any areas of convergence and optimal points of differentiation of VET and HE qualifications in general and specifically at levels 5, 6 and 8;
 - b) the extent to which the AQF currently implies a status hierarchy from VET to HE qualifications and whether this can be mitigated through changes to the structure or language of the AQF;
 - c) means by which the AQF can assist with greater consistency in regulation of AQF compliance between HE and VET.
 - v. whether and how the AQF should incorporate guidance for people wishing to build a qualification from a variety of courses and/or providers.
4. Provide advice on changes to AQF policies¹ that would be required to give effect to the outcomes of the Panel's advice on the Terms of Reference 1-3 and other desirable changes. Consider whether any of these policies that deal with domestic matters should be situated within Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and VET regulator registration and accreditation guidelines.
5. Consider what changes may be required to AQF governance arrangements, to the AQF itself or to regulation that references the AQF to ensure consistency of its application and to ensure ongoing currency of the AQF through monitoring and review.
6. The Panel will provide an initial report including recommendations on consequential changes to the AQF on the matters outlined above and subsequent to consideration of that report develop an implementation plan required for implementation of the changes.

¹ Including issuance policy, pathways policy, register policy, addition or removal policy, and principles and processes for alignment with international qualifications frameworks and relevant explanations.

In order to address the terms of reference the AQF Review Panel will:

- advise the Secretariat how the AQF review should be considered and approached
- advise which stakeholders should be consulted and what sources of data and research should be considered
- meet with key stakeholders and possibly hold public forums
- advise on and approve both the public discussion paper and the final report
- in addition to consulting with stakeholders, meet as required (once every two months, maximum once a month).