1. Background

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was implemented from 1 January 1995, making it one of the first national qualification frameworks in the world.

In implementing the AQF, Australia’s objectives were to:
- provide nationally consistent recognition of outcomes achieved in post-compulsory education
- help with developing flexible pathways which assist people to move more easily between education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market by providing the basis for recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer and work and life experience
- integrate and streamline the requirements of participating providers, employers and employees, individuals and interested organisations
- encourage individuals to progress through education and training by improving access to qualifications, clearly defining avenues for achievement, and generally contributing to lifelong learning
- encourage the provision of more and higher quality vocational education and training through qualifications that meet workplace requirements and vocational needs, thus contributing to national economic performance
- promote national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Australia.

In 2011, Australia will implement a strengthened AQF, revised in consultation with stakeholders and designed to ensure the AQF is contemporary and reflects the changes that have occurred in Australia since 1995. In implementing the strengthened AQF, Australia’s objectives are to:
- build confidence in qualification outcomes
- improve the contemporary relevance and nationally consistent outcomes of qualifications
• improve student pathways both within and between the education sectors and between education and the workplace, and recognise non-formal and informal learning
• underpin improved and national regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for education and training
• support contemporary national policy directions in education and training
• enhance the national and international mobility of graduates and workers through increased recognition of the value of Australian qualifications
• enable international comparability of Australian qualifications and qualification standards and alignment of the AQF with international qualifications frameworks.

The Australian case is unique in that we are currently going through a process of development and implementation of a next generation national qualifications framework. At the time of writing this paper, we have in place the original AQF, developed in 1995, but anticipate that implementation of a strengthened AQF will commence from 1 July 2011.

The Australian context

Australia has a federal system of government, with one Australian (or Commonwealth) government and eight state and territory governments. Under Australia’s Constitution primary responsibility for schooling and vocational education rests with the state and territory governments. However, the Australian Government is a significant provider of funding for education and training.

The constitutional responsibilities and funding arrangements under Australia’s federal system have led to three distinct education sectors – schools, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education.

In general, the Australian Government takes a national leadership role and works collaboratively with the states and territories, industry and the community to advance national consistency, coherence, quality and effectiveness of education and training in all sectors across Australia. It focuses on the development of national and international priorities, policies and strategies for education, while the states and territories are responsible for the actual regulation and delivery within their borders.

All governments in Australia have agreed to a national approach to education and training. Recently, they agreed to implement a national regulatory body in VET which will take over the functions of the states and territories in regulating providers and accreditation of courses. Similar arrangements are planned in the higher education sector.

Factors leading to the development of the AQF

In the late 1980s, Australia found itself in a significant economic crisis with high unemployment and structural problems. Reforms to the VET system in the late 1980s were designed to address these problems by encouraging a skilled workforce, particularly in areas of need. Technological advancements in the 1980s led to many unskilled jobs becoming obsolete and other jobs requiring workers to either re-skill or up-skill to meet new workplace needs. This saw an increase in the demand for VET.
A competency-based training system was introduced to make VET more responsive to employers’ needs, and provide workers with the skills necessary to meet shortages in the economy.

The AQF was developed to support reform of the training system, and to establish and strengthen linkages between the education sectors, encouraging lifelong learning and diversity in pathways between qualifications and across sectors.

Previous systems

The AQF is an overarching national framework that is a continuation of a well-established system of national tertiary awards dating back to the 1970s.

In 1972 a national registration authority was put in place to standardise qualifications and qualifications nomenclature across the states and territories, and to promote understanding of the qualifications system in Australia and overseas. In 1987, national qualifications for VET were introduced into this framework.

Further changes were made in 1990 when the Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE) was established. A new governing body took over the functions of maintaining the standards, nomenclature and guidelines for national qualifications and quality assurance. The RATE system of qualifications was widely, but not exclusively used, (for example, it was not used in Western Australia) and did not cover all levels of VET, particularly at the trade level (for example, New South Wales had its own system of craft certificates at this level). This lack of uniformity and comprehensiveness limited mutual recognition between states and territories and was seen as a barrier to the emergence of a truly national VET sector.

From 1995 this framework was phased out and replaced by the AQF, largely in response to the growing economic demand for skilled workers and paraprofessionals, and the desire for a truly national system.

The development of the AQF

The development of the AQF in the mid 1990s was largely shaped by reforms in the VET systems, which in turn were initiated in the context of an economic downturn in Australia in the late 1980s. Training reforms were part of a larger program of microeconomic reform which was developed to improve economic performance, encompassing industry restructuring and workplace relations reform, as well as reform across schools, training and higher education. There was significant interaction between training and workplace relations reforms. Negotiations were taking place between unions and employers to establish skill related career paths to encourage workers to develop skills, and to remove impediments to multi-skilling and so increase flexibility. A Training Reform Agenda was instigated from 1988 with the aim of achieving nationally consistent arrangements in VET and with the expectation that training should be responsive to industry needs.

In the VET sector, there was a move away from the focus on curriculum content and the time taken to achieve a qualification, and a shift towards industry-focused, competency-based training for work and skilled occupations. Industry leadership of the training system was
important. The Industry Training Advisory Boards, which were tri-partite bodies comprising employer, employee and Australian Government representatives, took on an important role as change agents - promoting and developing competency-based training in their respective industry sectors. Industry leadership of the training system continues to be an important feature of the Australian system.

There was also need for a stronger national approach to qualifications accreditation and recognition to overcome differences between the different states and territories and facilitate mobility across borders. A number of reforms were put in place to improve national consistency. For example, agreement was reached through the National Framework for the Recognition of Training on national principles and processes for the accreditation of courses, the registration of training providers, credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning and assessment.

It was agreed to investigate the need for a nationally consistent framework of qualifications across both the VET and higher education sectors. This provoked debate about the application of competency standards to higher education. While some professional bodies were moving in this direction, there was a view in the higher education sector that competencies were a necessary but not sufficient outcome of learning.

In this context, the development of the AQF was complex. It took some years and involved extensive consultation. A 1991 consultation paper explored models for credentials in the VET sector with four levels of certificates and two levels of diplomas mapped to the Australian Standards Framework. This work identified a number of shortcomings in VET sector qualifications including:

- the definitions of qualifications focussed on a fixed entry level and the duration of the courses measured in full-time years or part-time equivalent, instead of outcomes to be achieved
- each qualification was defined in terms of the format of the course leading to it rather than the learning outcomes which could be achieved in various ways
- the certificate qualification level served myriad purposes from basic preparation for employment through to advanced trade levels
- the absence of satisfactory post-trade qualifications
- confused use of the Advanced Certificate title
- the unsuitability of the Associate Diploma title in light of overseas practice
- the inappropriateness of using the Diploma title for professional qualifications in light of overseas practice where a Diploma was a para-professional qualification.

Subsequently, the Ministers for Vocational Education, Employment and Training established a working party to develop a proposal for a national qualifications framework. A 1993 consultation paper continued the focus on the VET sector in terms of providing for a larger number of levels of VET qualifications, while leaving the schools and higher education sectors largely unchanged but with an emphasis also on the interface between the sectors. The paper proposed a set of qualifications and descriptors which did not include duration (although this has been retained in the more detailed guidelines).
The AQF was endorsed by Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers in December 1993, with implementation arrangements developed later and endorsed in November 1994 ready for the initial implementation date of 1 January 1995. Implementation was phased over five years, with full implementation by the end of 1999. A review of the AQF was undertaken in 2005.

### Structure of the AQF

The AQF comprises 16 qualifications. These qualifications are grouped according to the sector with authority for setting the standards of each qualification.

#### Table A: AQF qualifications mapped across the three education sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Secondary Schooling</th>
<th>Vocational Education and Training</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Associate Degree/Advanced Diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Secondary Certificate of Educations</td>
<td>Certificate II</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The AQF comprises:

- national guidelines for each of the current national qualifications issued in the senior secondary school, VET and higher education sectors
- policies and guidelines for articulation, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning
- a register of authorities empowered by governments to accredit qualifications
- a register of institutions authorised to issue qualifications
- protocols for issuing qualifications

### Implementation of the AQF

Implementation of the AQF began on 1 January 1995 and was phased over five years to allow for the gradual acceptance by all stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement has been essential to effective implementation of the AQF. Key stakeholders included national and state and territory agencies and institutions, those involved
in curriculum and accreditation, all levels of training providers, along with industry, enterprises, the professions and community groups.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), oversaw development and implementation of the AQF. MCEETYA was composed of Ministers with responsibility for education and training from the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

Ministers agreed to establish the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB), to implement and monitor the AQF and make recommendations about what action needed to be taken to achieve the AQF’s goals. AQFAB was required to report publicly and to Ministers.

To fulfil its functions, AQFAB liaised closely with the schools, VET and university sectors and, particularly, the bodies responsible for accrediting courses. This liaison role was crucial in ensuring stakeholder support for the AQF and progressing the reform initiatives. Membership of AQFAB had been representational in nature, including the three education sectors, industry, trade union, community and government representatives.

**Strengthening the AQF**

Since the AQF was introduced in 1995, Australia’s education sectors have undergone significant change. The drivers for this change include the emerging tertiary sector and growth of ‘dual sector’ institutions which provide both VET and higher education qualifications, the increasing importance of providing clear pathways between qualifications and education sectors, and the huge increase in international students studying within the Australian tertiary system.

Recognising this change and a concomitant need for our education system to remain relevant and competitive, Ministers decided to establish the AQF Council, which replaced AQFAB, and tasked it with developing advice on how to strengthen the AQF and make it more contemporary.

Significant work was undertaken and in March 2011 Ministers endorsed the strengthened national qualifications framework for Australia’s three education sectors.

This new, strengthened AQF will go a long way to meeting the challenges of an increasingly integrated Australian tertiary sector and will help ensure the quality of Australia’s education and training system. It will provide greater clarity and transparency in terms of the expected outcomes of qualifications and enable stronger pathways between VET and higher education in both directions, greater take-up of VET in schools, and better links between Australia and the global education market.

The strengthened AQF is an integrated package of specifications for the 16 qualification types and policies. Unlike the original AQF, the new, strengthened AQF has an explicit levels structure of 10 levels, with Certificate I qualifications placed at Level One and the Doctoral Degree awards at Level 10. It defines learning outcomes for each level and qualification type, in the areas of skills, knowledge and the application of skills and knowledge against which the
qualification types, with the exception of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, are located.

Moving to a levels structure is a major change. The existing AQF implied some hierarchy in qualifications structure, but it was not explicit. Changing to a hierarchical structure involved determining a structure of increasing complexity in learning outcomes, which was a time consuming and detailed process. The challenges included accommodating qualifications at particular levels and the associated perceptions of relative worth and comparability.

The policies specify the requirements for issuing qualifications, for registers of qualifications and issuing organisations, and for pathways between qualifications. The terminology of the AQF is defined in a glossary to facilitate consistent application of the policies and specifications. The holistic approach of the AQF is brought together in the AQF qualification type specifications. An additional policy has been approved to enable the AQF Council to add or remove qualification types to ensure the AQF remains contemporary.

The strengthened AQF also enhances the Masters Degree and provides for a more comprehensive Doctoral Degree.

Implementation of the strengthened AQF will commence from 1 July 2011 and will be a phased process. All requirements of the AQF will need to be met by 1 January 2015.

Reform of qualifications and the accreditation process

AQF 1995

A number of changes to qualifications took place upon the introduction of the AQF in 1995. Existing qualifications needed to meet the new AQF requirements within the initial five-year implementation phase. Each accrediting body was responsible for converting courses in its jurisdiction which they had originally accredited so as to meet the requirements of the new framework. This ensured that each course was converted by only one accrediting body. Accrediting bodies were also responsible for informing providers of the conversion process and outlining the benefits and options available.

Table B below illustrates qualifications under the various Australian systems since the 1970s.
### Table B: Summary of qualifications under Australian qualifications systems since 1971.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQF Awards</th>
<th>RATE Awards(^1)</th>
<th>ACTA Awards(^2)</th>
<th>ACAAE Awards(^3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Degree</td>
<td>Master Degree</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>PG2 Master Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma &amp; Vocational Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>PG1 Graduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate &amp; Vocational Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree (including Honours Degrees and Degrees with Honours)</td>
<td>UG1 Bachelor Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree &amp; Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Diploma Stream 3600</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>UG2 Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Associate Diploma Stream 3500 Stream 3400</td>
<td>Associate Diploma</td>
<td>UG3 Associate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV</td>
<td>Advanced Certificate Stream 3300</td>
<td>Advanced Certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td>Certificate Stream 3200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II</td>
<td>Certificate 3100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate I</td>
<td>Certificate Stream 2200</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate Stream 2100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New VET qualifications**

Upon introduction of the AQF in 1995, former trade and post-trade qualifications and the RATE Certificate and Advanced Certificate were replaced by Certificates I, II, III and IV. These new VET-authorised certificate qualifications were designed to meet industry standards for competent performance in the workplace at four benchmark levels.

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\(^1\) Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE)  
\(^2\) Australian Council on Tertiary Awards (ACTA)  
\(^3\) Australian Council on Awards in Advanced Education (ACAAE)
The two Diploma qualifications were also redesigned to meet industry requirements, but retained sufficient similarity in their general characteristics with university-authorised Diploma qualifications to support a new nomenclature common to both sectors – Diploma and Advanced Diploma.

In 1998, the AQF guidelines for VET qualifications were revised to incorporate the major policy shift from qualifications based on state-level course accreditation processes to qualifications determined through national Training Package processes.

**Bachelor Degree**

The AQF guidelines for the Bachelor Degree incorporated the descriptors for the Honours Degree, rather than use separate guidelines. The AQF Honours Degree, awarded where ‘additional work is undertaken by students who demonstrate outstanding achievement from an early stage in the degree program’, embraced both the ‘three-year plus honours year’ and the ‘four-year incorporated honours’ model, with no reference to a ‘degree with honours’.

When RATE replaced ACTA, it included advice that conversion of a (three-year) Diploma to a Degree required ‘at least one additional year of full-time academic study’. However, the AQF guidelines were silent on this issue, reflecting the significant decline of the three-year Diploma in the universities. The AQF Bachelor Degree guidelines stated that, in addition to the universities, “some states and territories have established processes to facilitate the accreditation of courses and issuance of qualifications by other recognised higher education providers”. However, AQFAB confirmed that the AQF Bachelor Degree is a higher education qualification, as distinct from a dual sector qualification, with learning outcomes authorised by the universities but able to be delivered by other recognised providers under legislation in some states and territories.

**Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma**

The AQF guidelines for the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma followed those of the previous RATE system, but also stated that the Graduate Certificate could be offered by a range of providers. AQFAB accepted the concept of dual-sector qualifications with respect to the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma, to be made explicit in a set of VET sector guidelines which were introduced in 2005.

**Masters Degree**

The AQF Masters Degree guidelines substantially followed those under the RATE system.

**Doctoral Degree**

The AQF Doctoral Degree guidelines do not include reference to various types of doctorates such as professional doctorates identified in the RATE guidelines.
Strengthened AQF 2011

The strengthened AQF was endorsed by Ministers in March 2011. It is an integrated package of specifications for the 16 qualification types and policies with an explicit levels structure of 10 levels against which the qualification types, with the exception of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, are located. In the strengthened AQF a number of changes to qualifications have occurred.

Senior Secondary Certificate of Education

The Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE) will be included in the AQF but not located at a particular level. State and territory government authorities, which have responsibility for delivering school education, considered that the level of complexity of the qualification is such that it could not be located at any one level. Individual students can choose from a wide range of subjects of varying complexity to make up the qualification, which could feasibly sit at several different levels in the framework.

Bachelor Honours Degree

The strengthened AQF introduces a separate Bachelor Honours Degree. The volume of learning of a Bachelor Honours Degree is typically 1 year following a Bachelor Degree. A Bachelor Honours Degree may also be embedded in a Bachelor Degree, typically as an additional year.

Masters Degree

The strengthened AQF now introduces three main forms of Masters Degrees within the Masters Degree qualification type. Previously there were only two, namely the Masters Degree (Research) and the Masters Degree (Coursework). The Masters Degree (Extended) has been added to prepare graduates to engage in a profession.

- The Masters Degree (Research) is designed so that graduates will have undertaken supervised study and research of which two thirds will be devoted to research, research training and independent study.
- The Masters Degree (Coursework) is designed so that graduates will have undertaken a program of structured learning with some independent research and project work or practice related learning. If this qualification is to prepare graduates for a profession a significant component of structured learning will be developed in collaboration with a relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
- The Masters Degree (Extended) is designed so that graduates will have undertaken a program of structured learning with some independent research and a significant proportion of practice related learning. As this qualification is designed to prepare graduates to engage in a profession the practice related learning must be developed in collaboration with a relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.
Doctoral Degree

The purpose of the Doctoral Degree is to qualify individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice. The strengthened AQF specifies two types of doctorate, the professional doctorate and research doctorate. The strengthened AQF amends the specification for the Doctoral Degree to make it more comprehensive and to strengthen its integrity as a qualification type characterised by research.

2. Involvement/participation of industrial sector

Industry leadership of the training system is an important feature of the Australian system. Australia has highly developed representational organisations of employers and employees who participate to varying degrees in the training agenda at the national level and across the schools, VET and higher education sectors.

Participating organisations may be industrial organisations of employers and employees – unions and employer associations – which are generally registered under state or federal workplace relations legislation such as the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009. Legislation will usually outline the standards to be met by registered organisations in relation to rules, financial reporting, elections, conduct of officers and other matters. Professional organisations also play an important role in Australia’s training system.

The involvement of industrial organisations is most structured in the VET sector and, through VET in schools programs, in the schools sector. In the higher education sector, professional bodies play an important role through the registering or licensing requirements for some professions or qualifications.

AQFAB was tasked with facilitating and monitoring Australia’s first AQF. Membership of AQFAB was representational in nature, including the three education sectors, industry, trade union, community and government representatives. Members were nominated by particular peak agencies. The trade union representative was nominated by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). This is Australia’s largest peak body representing workers in Australia. The industry representative was nominated by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), which is Australia’s largest business association.

When the AQF Council was established in 2008, members were appointed as experts, rather than representatives of particular organisations. However, they come to the AQF Council as experts from particular backgrounds, including unions, employers, the three education sectors, the Commonwealth and state/territory governments. Currently the AQF Council includes a member from the ACTU and a member from the Australian Industry Group.

Industry is also represented on the National Quality Council (NQC), which is the body charged with the oversight of Training Packages and training provider quality and which is central to ensuring that the delivery of VET meets the needs of business and employers. The NQC provides final endorsement to Training Packages developed by Industry Skills Councils (ISCs).
Industry leadership of vocational education and training

The needs of industry underpin the Australian VET system and Training Package development and review processes. Industry representatives are a diverse range of VET stakeholders including:

- employers and employees from various sized organisations throughout Australia
- peak industry groups and associations
- unions
- employer, employee and other professional industry associations and bodies.

The nature of the role of industry in the direction of the Australian VET system has been a defining feature of VET in Australia for almost two decades. Industry plays a central and critical role in determining training policies and priorities, and in developing training qualifications that contain the skills needed for the workforce.

*Industry Skills Councils*

Through the network of ISCs, industry has a direct say in determining relevant skills needs for the industry and defining the competencies required in the workplace.

The 11 ISCs are privately registered companies run by industry-based boards of directors, but whose funding is provided substantially by the Australian Government. They give all industries, peak bodies, enterprises, unions, training organisations and governments a voice in Australia's vocational education and training system through a national system of industry advisory arrangements and a structure based on industry-led boards of directors and standing committees.

The core of industry’s leadership of VET in Australia is its active involvement in the development of industry endorsed Training Packages. ISCs develop and continuously maintain Training Packages to meet the needs of the industry sectors for which they have responsibility.

A Training Package is an integrated set of nationally endorsed units of competency, qualifications and assessment guidelines designed for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. Training Packages provide an important link between the VET sector and the labour market; industry is a key stakeholder in their development, providing input through reference groups to their ISCs. Training Packages are developed through a national consultation and validation process with industry parties and other VET stakeholders.

Training Packages ensure the relevance of training and qualifications for industry. A Training Package describes the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace, but does not prescribe a training program. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) develop and deliver training programs, based on Training Package specifications, to meet the needs of individuals or enterprises.
Schools sector

Industry participates indirectly in the schools sector through the VET in Schools programs. These programs are undertaken by school students as part of the senior secondary certificate and provide credit towards a nationally recognised VET qualification within the AQF. The training that students receive reflects specific industry competency standards and is delivered by an RTO or a school in partnership with an RTO.

A key success of VET in Schools is the integration of vocational options within the traditionally academic studies at the senior secondary school level. VET in Schools programs allow Year 11 and 12 students to:

- develop industry specific skills;
- gain nationally recognised VET qualifications and units of competency while still completing their senior secondary school qualification;
- develop employability skills and an understanding of the world of work; and
- gain an understanding of the world of work which is valuable experience to assist with planning and pursuing their career pathways.

Higher education

There are two main ways in which industrial bodies are involved in shaping higher education qualifications. The first of these is in relation to registration or licensing requirements for some professions or qualifications. The Australian states and territories require people to be licensed or registered before they are permitted to provide some services. The requirements for being granted a licence or being registered often include the need to have a specified AQF qualification. For example, for an individual to be licensed as an electrical engineer (electrical contractor) he or she must have (among other requirements) completed studies accepted by Engineers Australia for membership as an electrical engineer such as a Bachelor Degree or an Advanced Diploma in electrical engineering.

Another connection between the AQF and regulation is title protection. For example, to use the title ‘architect’ in Australia a person must be registered as an architect. One of the requirements for registration is an architecture degree or degrees accredited by state and territory architects’ registration boards. In some cases this connection is governed by legislation (in occupations in which registration is governed by law, such as architecture and the medical professions) but in other cases (such as engineering, ICT and psychology) professions are self-regulating and operate without legal regulation.

Professional associations and accrediting bodies such as Engineers Australia are thus major stakeholders in the AQF and are consulted in relation to any changes.
3. Organisation and management

AQF Council

The AQF Council, which was established in 2008, is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the AQF. The AQF Council reports to Ministers of the Australian Government and the eight state and territory governments through the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment (which replaced MCEETYA). The AQF Council was established with a primary objective of strengthening the AQF and making it contemporary and relevant to Australia’s needs.

The AQF Council meets on a regular basis and reports directly to the Ministerial Council. The AQF Council has an independent chair and expert members. Membership has recently been increased and in 2011 will include two members with expertise in higher education, one VET member, one dual sector member, one schools member, one member from the union sector, one member from industry, one Australian Government member and two state/territory government members. There is also an observer from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

While members are drawn from particular sectors or areas of expertise, they are selected as experts who can contribute to the development and implementation of the AQF and who are able to take a leadership role within their sectors in relation to the AQF. The Chair of the AQF Council is responsible for making nominations for membership to Ministers, who make the final selection.

The AQF Council receives operational funding from all Australian governments, approved through the Ministerial Council. It is supported by a Secretariat. It may receive additional project funding for specific purposes, such as the development of the strengthened AQF.

The AQF Council led the process of development of the strengthened AQF. This involved commissioning of research papers and management of an extensive consultation process, including release of discussion papers, expert working groups and public presentations. The AQF Secretariat undertook much of this work, with close involvement and leadership by the AQF Council. The Chair of the AQF Council attended meetings of the Ministerial Council at key points in the development process to brief Ministers.

The AQF Council’s ongoing role is one of implementing and maintaining the AQF to ensure it is nationally and internationally robust and supports flexible cross-sectoral linkages and pathways.

Further information on the AQF Council, including its terms of reference, is available from the AQF website: www.aqf.edu.au.

The AQF Council is responsible for actively monitoring and supporting the implementation of the AQF with key users and stakeholders. Guidelines to support issuing organisations,
qualification developers and accrediting authorities implement the strengthened AQF will be available on the AQF website.

AQF Advisory Board

The AQF Council was preceded by the AQFAB, which oversaw implementation of the original AQF in 1995. At that time, the MCEETYA was the Ministerial Council responsible for overseeing the development, implementation and monitoring of the AQF.

MCEETYA established AQFAB to develop, implement and monitor the AQF. The Board was also responsible for encouraging and promoting consistency and quality of qualifications standards by providing advice to curriculum developers and accrediting bodies during the transition phase of the framework. The establishment and continued liaison with cross-sectoral stakeholders – school and higher education sectors, industry and training providers, and community and professional organisations – was an integral part of meeting the requirements of the AQF.

The Board was representational in nature, covering the three education sectors, the levels of government, industry, the community and geographical locations. This was important during the implementation phase to ensure engagement and acceptance amongst the three sectors, and across all states and territories. However, as time went by it became clear that this representative arrangement was not as effective as it could be and that a high level of expertise was required to progress implementation of reform. Hence, membership of the AQF Council, which replaced AQFAB, is now based on the particular expertise that individuals can bring to the AQF Council.

4. Curriculum and learning process

Schools

Currently, senior secondary curricula are developed by state and territory education and certification authorities. Assessment is undertaken through a range of mechanisms with some states and territories using internal ongoing assessment tasks and others incorporating external examinations.

In 2008, Commonwealth, state and territory Education Ministers agreed to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. The Declaration sets out goals that seek to ensure that all Australian school students gain the knowledge and skills that underpin effective participation in society and employment. The broad goals are that young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.

In order to ensure that all Australian students achieve those goals, a national curriculum is currently being developed, that is guided by the *Melbourne Declaration*. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established by all Australian governments to develop an Australian Curriculum from the foundation year (the year before the first year of school) to Year 12, beginning with the learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history.
ACARA is jointly funded by all states and territories as well as the Australian Government, which has committed $20 million over four years. The funding is for the development of the Australian Curriculum as implementation is the responsibility of state and territory authorities.

In December 2010, Education Ministers endorsed the Australian Curriculum for Foundation to Year 10 in the four initial learning areas. Development of the senior secondary curriculum in the initial four learning areas is underway. Draft content for 14 courses in the four learning areas is currently being revised and achievement standards are being developed. The final senior secondary curriculum in the initial four learning areas is expected to be released in late 2012.

Work is currently underway on the development of phase two of the Australian Curriculum in geography, languages and the arts. This will be followed by the final phase, with development occurring in the areas of health and physical education, technology (including information and communications technology and design technology), economics and business and civics and citizenship. Each of these phases will result in the initial publication of the Australian Curriculum for Foundation to Year 10 in the relevant subject, followed shortly after by the senior secondary curriculum.

It is anticipated that all elements of the Australian Curriculum will be published before the end of 2013. Each learning area takes approximately forty months from the initial work to endorsement and publication and goes through four stages:

- Curriculum shaping, which produces a conceptual framework for the learning area, providing broad direction on its purpose, structure and organisation. This paper is used as a guide for the curriculum writers and for extensive consultative processes with key stakeholders as well as the general public.
- Curriculum writing, which produces an Australian Curriculum for a particular learning area, including content descriptions with elaborations and achievement standards with annotated work samples. This is also subject to an extensive consultation process before finalisation and ministerial endorsement.
- Preparation for implementation, involving delivery of the curriculum to school authorities to allow them time for prepare for implementation. Implementation and related support is the responsibility of state and territory school and curriculum authorities but ACARA provides assistance such as briefings and introductory information materials to assist with preparation.
- Curriculum evaluation and review which provides for both minor and major curriculum review.

**Vocational Education and Training**

Curricula is developed by training organisations, not educational authorities. There is no external scrutiny or endorsement of curricula. However, curriculum is developed by training organisations within the content and requirements of the relevant Training Package. Australia’s VET system is based on teaching industry standards and learning outcomes, via Training Packages. Training Packages, rather than curricula, are used by registered training organisations to deliver relevant training and qualifications for industry.
Training Package programs are usually divided into modules with assessment against the range of specified national competency standards being conducted during and/or at the end of the module.

There are no external national examinations. Within the institution, assessment is usually conducted by teaching staff. Assessment is generally based on a combination of tests or examinations, projects, and practical exercises or tests. The workplace components are usually assessed either by teaching staff from the training organisation or by qualified industry-based workplace assessors.

A Training Package is an integrated set of nationally endorsed units of competency, assessment guidelines and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications designed for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. It establishes the competency outcomes from nationally recognised training.

Alignment to the AQF occurs when a group of units of competency are a viable AQF qualification or qualification(s) in line with the guidance provided in the AQF Implementation Handbook. Training Package developers must ensure each AQF qualification has a distinct occupational outcome.

Each Training Package:

- provides a consistent and reliable set of components for training, and may also be utilised for recognising and assessing skills attained through informal and workplace learning
- enables nationally recognised qualifications to be awarded through direct assessment of workplace competencies
- encourages the development and delivery of flexible training which suits individual and industry requirements, and
- encourages learning and assessment in a work-related environment which leads to verifiable workplace outcomes.

A Training Package sets out the competencies but does not prescribe how the training should be delivered, or the time taken to deliver it. It is the responsibility of the registered training organisations to develop curricula, teaching strategies and assessment methods to meet the needs, abilities and circumstances of the students and industry.

ISCs are responsible for developing and supporting the implementation of Training Packages. ISCs provide industry intelligence to the VET sector about current and future training requirements.

The NQC, a Committee of the Ministerial Council for Training Education and Employment, oversees quality assurance for the Australian VET system. The NQC endorses Training Packages and has other specific decision-making powers in relation to Training Packages.
Training Packages are reviewed every three years to ensure they remain current. This review process involves the relevant ISC as the developer of the Training Package, industry representatives, training providers and other relevant stakeholders. Each ISC produces a Continuous Improvement Plan which outlines the changes to be made to the endorsed components of Training Packages in order to meet the existing and emerging skill needs of industry. The Plan is updated annually, and posted on each ISC’s website to ensure industry, Registered Training Organisations and state and territory authorities are able to plan and respond accordingly.

Analysis undertaken for an Environmental Scan undertaken by the ISC informs the Plan and is part of the broader model for Training Package development and endorsement established in 2008 (below).

Major reform has been overseen by the NQC since 2009 to make sure that Training Packages adapt in line with changing client needs and expectations. These reforms are designed to simplify and streamline Training Packages to make content clear and straightforward, and the qualifications more flexible and adaptable. Design work is now complete and the NQC is collaborating with ISCs, state training authorities, and peak industry and education bodies to implement the new model effectively and responsively.

**Higher Education**

Australian universities and a small number of other higher education institutions have the authority to accredit their own courses. At present, this status generally derives from the legislation establishing the institution, although it is also possible for an institution to apply successfully to the relevant state or territory Government Accreditation Authority for self-accrediting status under the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes. In future, this function will be taken over by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Most courses offered by Australian universities are therefore approved by the institution itself and do not require external accreditation, except for professional accreditation. In approving new courses and re-approving existing ones, universities are expected to use the descriptors for each higher education qualification set out in the AQF Implementation Handbook to ensure that the course will lead to the required outcomes. In the case of the strengthened AQF, this will form the basis of the Qualification Standard to be used by TEQSA as part of its quality assurance processes.

At present, higher education courses provided by non self-accrediting institutions are accredited by state and territory authorities. (In the future this function will also be assumed by
Part of the accreditation process consists of ensuring that the course complies with the AQF descriptors for the qualification to which it leads.

Both universities and non self-accrediting institutions use industry advisory panels to ensure that the graduates of their courses will meet the needs of employers. In addition, accreditation panels for the courses of non self-accrediting institutions generally include a member or members with industry experience relevant to the qualification concerned.

5. Training of administrators and teachers

Schools

Responsibility for the employment of teachers and administrators for the schools sector rests with state and territory governments or with non-government school authorities and their training is undertaken through the higher education sector.

The Australian Government has established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership which has responsibility for:

- rigorous national professional standards
- fostering and driving high quality professional development for teachers and school leaders
- working collaboratively across jurisdictions and engaging with key professional bodies.

States and territories will also determine professional support for teachers linked to the Australian Curriculum.

Vocational Education and Training Sector

Responsibility for training of teachers and administrators for the VET sector rests with state and territory governments. The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), which contains the standards for the registration and monitoring of registered training providers, specifies the qualification requirements for trainers and assessors. Under the AQTF, training and assessment is delivered by trainers and assessors who:

- hold the TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Education from the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package; or
- are able to demonstrate equivalent competencies; or
- work under the direct supervision of a person who has the competencies specified in (i) or (ii) above; and
- are able to demonstrate vocational competencies at least to the level of those being delivered.
6. Linkages with international NQFs (national and regional)

The AQF has been developed to meet Australia’s education and training needs. The AQF is not formally linked to a regional qualifications framework or any other national qualifications frameworks.

However, Australia does maintain communication with other nations and regional organisations on matters relating to national qualification frameworks. There has been considerable interest internationally in the AQF as a model for national qualifications frameworks elsewhere, and Australia has participated in a number of international fora and projects looking at the potential for regional frameworks.

In 2010, a project was undertaken to explore the possibility of alignment of the AQF and the Irish NQF. The project mapped aspects of each framework in order to achieve a valid comparison between the two. The resulting report demonstrated many similarities between the two frameworks, particularly in relation to the underpinning core concepts and in many common design features. This study was not an alignment or formal referencing of the two frameworks, but it did demonstrate that an alignment is feasible, and is a good example of Australia’s dialogue with countries outside of the Asia-Pacific region.

In December 2010, Australia and the European Union held a formal policy dialogue on qualifications frameworks, their crucial role in lifelong learning, facilitating recognition and mobility and assuring quality. The dialogue was timely given the common challenges faced by the European Union and Australia in terms of transnational transparency, comparability and recognition of citizens’ qualifications expressed in learning outcomes. It was preceded by a two-day International Peer Learning Activity on Qualifications Frameworks aimed at encouraging mutual learning from national and transnational developments and exploring how qualifications frameworks can be developed into efficient instruments for international cooperation – in particular facilitating the mobility of learners and workers.

Australia and the European Commission have since commenced a joint study exploring the role that qualifications frameworks can play in: supporting the mobility of learners and workers; serving as instruments for pursuing closer international cooperation in qualifications transparency and recognition; and how the AQF might relate to the EQF and to European NQFs and how this might affect mobility of learners and workers between Australia and Europe.

Australia is also involved in the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA). Capacity Building for National Qualifications Frameworks Project, which aims to harmonise regulatory arrangements between AANZFTA countries which underpin the recognition of qualifications and the quality assurance of education provision. The project will explore the scope for development of mutually comparable NQFs in the region, based on a common reference framework.

7. Lessons learned and challenges

The development of the AQF in the early 1990s, and the strengthening process undertaken recently, provided a number of learnings for Australia.
A national qualifications framework is only one part of a training and education system, and addressing national challenges will require all parts of the system to work together. A national qualifications framework must be relevant to stakeholder and economic needs, and address identified challenges. There may need to be a package of reforms or a broader reform agenda, and changes should preferably build upon existing structures and frameworks that have stakeholder support and engagement.

Effective stakeholder engagement and consultation, particularly industry involvement, are crucial. A bureaucratic, top-heavy process is likely to receive less sector support than one that effectively engages all stakeholders.

Further, complex reform requires a long-term implementation plan that allows the time needed to achieve results. It is important that stakeholders know this and are supported through the process of implementation.

Leadership and effective governance are paramount. It is critical to have the right people driving reforms; committed to reform, influential in their sectors and able to drive change to ensure full implementation and take-up of a framework.