



AQF Council

Development of an Australian VET Graduation Statement

Consultation Paper October 2013

Australian Qualifications Framework Council

A Committee of the COAG Standing Council on
Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment

www.aqf.edu.au

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I Executive Summary

Graduation statements are official documents provided to graduates alongside other certification documentation such as testamurs and records of results. A graduation statement provides an explanation of the qualification achieved, the awarding institution, and the education system to which the qualification belongs. It provides graduates with information that enables qualifications to be easily understood and considered by overseas and domestic employers and institutions.

Specific details relevant to each graduate's qualifications and achievements can be included, such as information about further study and work pathways facilitated by the qualification, and information about the graduate's training (e.g. practical work placements).

Graduation statements are established internationally, including in European Union countries and New Zealand. In Australia, the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS) is issued to higher education graduates at all universities and an increasing number of private higher education providers. Currently, though, there is no equivalent for the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia, as there is in other countries.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council is undertaking a project to better understand issues for providers which might arise from the introduction of a VET sector graduation statement. This paper aims to stimulate discussion and seek input to identify potential design and implementation issues. Section 4 describes a possible design based on the AHEGS, and Section 5 canvasses some implementation options, including a staged implementation with voluntary issuance.

The proposed VET sector graduation statement is only intended for use where the graduate has completed an AQF qualification. Thus, the issuance of a graduation statement would not be required where only a skills set or units of competency, not amounting to the completion of a qualification, have been completed.

The AQF Council encourages all interested parties to provide views regarding the proposed design and the implementation plan for such a statement. Submissions should be sent via email to aqfc@aqf.edu.au by close of business on 15 November 2013.

Next steps

Following feedback through submissions to this paper and other consultation processes, the AQF Council will consider the next stages of this project. A proposal will be developed for the next steps, which might include detailed quantification of resources required and a pilot with a number of providers.

Focus questions

To provide a focus for stakeholder submissions, the following questions are posed throughout the paper. Submissions need not be limited to these questions.

Q1: How well do you think a VET Graduation Statement, with a design as outlined in Section 4, would meet the aims outlined in Section 3? Are there any modifications which could be made to better achieve those aims?

- Q2: If you are a provider, do you use a commercial student management system (SMS), and if so, which? If you are a provider or a vendor of an SMS, could your existing system generate a VET graduation statement? If not, could it be modified to do so?
- Q3: Some options for implementation are outlined in Section 5. Are there any other options or implementation issues that you would like considered?
- Q4: If you are a provider or an SMS vendor, would you be willing to participate in a pilot?

2 Background

One of the core functions of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council is to provide policy advice on improving flexible qualification linkages and pathways in education and training within and across all sectors and to the labour market. To this end, the Council undertook the *Graduation Pathways Project*, which investigated ways of providing information to graduating students about the pathways enabled by their qualification.

The *Graduation Pathways Project* concluded that tertiary graduation statements could be used as a tool for a national approach to the detailed documentation of pathways for graduates in the long term. Graduation statements enhance the utility of qualifications in the labour market and for further study, but they do not replace existing certification documentation such as a testamur or a record of results.

This consultation is part of a further project to develop a graduation statement which could be used in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector, which will include graduation pathways information. The outcomes of the project will include recommendations on the structure and format of this graduation statement, options for implementation and indicative resourcing required. They also will identify issues which would require further investigation if the implementation of a VET graduation statement were to proceed.

This paper seeks to stimulate public comment on the suggested design and options for implementation. Face-to-face consultations also will be conducted with key stakeholders which, together with responses to this consultation paper, will inform the next stages of the project.

3 Rationale

The overall purpose of this project is to consider and, if appropriate, develop and implement a graduation statement for the vocational education and training sector. The graduation statement, if implemented across the VET sector, would sit alongside and not replace other documentation currently issued to graduates. It would deliver a number of benefits to graduates, whether they intend to move on to further study, enter or continue in the workforce, or to explore further options internationally.

Service to graduates

The broad intention of a graduation statement is to describe a VET qualification in an easily-understandable way. The level and nature of the training undertaken can be explained, as well as the education and training system in which the qualification is accredited. As a result, the statement provides graduates with an official, informative document that can be used for employment purposes or for entry to other institutions, both overseas and domestically.

The provision of pathways information through the graduation statement is particularly important. It is able to provide a way to document for graduates the pathways facilitated by the award of their qualification, including any articulation, credit transfer or advanced standing arrangements the issuing organisation has negotiated with other institutions.

Domestic and international mobility

The explanatory power of the statement is useful in facilitating graduate mobility, both within and outside Australia.

For students moving to further study or work domestically, the benefits of a graduation statement lie primarily in the provision of information about pathways. For employers, the benefits include information about the training undertaken by the student. In addition to information about the program of learning, providers can include information about particular methods of training or assessment and regulatory requirements which the qualification allows the graduate to meet.

For graduates moving internationally for further work or study, the graduation statement has the benefit of providing an explanation of Australia's education system and quality assurance arrangements, details about the program of learning the graduate has undertaken and the place of the qualification within the system. This information will give readers an understanding of the qualification and that its bona fides are established under government authorised quality assurance processes, as well as confidence that the information about the qualification is officially recognised.

A standardised graduation statement can promote Australia's world-class VET system and leverage that reputation to the graduate's advantage. Increasing the portability of qualifications in this way will allow Australia's VET graduates to better compete in the global labour market.

Graduation statements in Australia and overseas

The Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS) provides information about the graduate, the award/qualification, the issuing organisation, the graduate's achievements, and the Australian higher education system.

The AHEGS has been issued since 2010. It is valued by graduates and providers and is issued by all universities and a significant number of other higher education providers. The VET graduation statement is intended to be modelled on the AHEGS, providing similar details including information on pathways.

European countries issue a graduation statement entitled the European Diploma Supplement which provided a model for the AHEGS. European countries also issue a Certificate Supplement, an analogous document designed for vocational qualifications.

Both the European Diploma and Certificate Supplements form part of the Europass, a single portfolio of documents with the purpose of communicating and presenting information relating to a person's qualifications and competencies.

The New Zealand Tertiary Education Qualification Statement (NZ TEQS) was implemented in 2009. This also is modelled on the European Diploma Supplement and is available for issuance throughout the entire tertiary education sector. The guidelines provide for either a stand-alone version, similar to the AHEGS, or as a document which must be read in conjunction with other certification documentation such as the transcript.

Examples of the NZ TEQS and the European Diploma and Certificate Supplements are available on their respective websites, which are listed in Appendix A.

The implementation of a VET graduation statement would bring Australia in line with international practice in documentation provided to graduates and assist Australia in meeting its international obligations.

4 Design

A number of options for the design of the proposed VET graduation statement are available. There are three existing models which should be considered: the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS), the New Zealand Tertiary Education Qualification Statement (NZ TEQS) and the European Diploma and Certificate Supplements. Each of these sets out the structure of the statement and identifies certain fields which are to be compulsory, such as the student's name and the name of the issuing organisation, and others which are optional.

There are strong reasons for the adoption of a design based on the AHEGS. Similarity in design promotes understanding amongst existing domestic and international users of the AHEGS, and fosters a unified view of the reputation and quality of AQF qualifications. With all Australian universities and approximately 40 private higher education providers issuing the AHEGS, the design represents a tested model which has enjoyed significant support from stakeholders.

An AHEGS-like design also allows dual-sector providers to issue similar documentation to their VET and higher education graduates. At least one dual-sector university noted this as desirable during the consultation phase of the AHEGS project. It is also likely to minimise implementation issues for those with existing systems which are set up to provide AHEGS documentation.

While there are no current plans to combine the AHEGS and the proposed VET graduation statement to form a single graduation statement for the tertiary education sector, similarity in design will facilitate this if it is later considered to be desirable.

Proposed design

If a VET graduation statement were to be implemented, the AHEGS design could be easily modified for the VET sector. The AHEGS consists of a number of sections, as follows:

- First page information, which includes the logos of the AHEGS and the awarding institution, the purpose of the statement, and certification;
- Information about the graduate;
- Information about the award (including a currently non-compulsory section on pathways to further study);
- Information about the awarding institution;
- Information about the graduate's academic achievements; and
- A standardised statement explaining Australia's higher education system.

The *Guidelines for the Presentation of the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement* which detail the content of each section are reproduced at Appendix B.

An AHEGS-based design might include the same sections, customised for the VET sector.

Modifications might include the following:

- The replacement of the AHEGS logo with any VET graduation statement logo which may be developed, and replacement of the description of the higher education system with a description of the VET system;
- The use of the Unique Student Identifier, if and when implemented, in the graduate information section;
- The pathways field in the description of the award would become a compulsory field, discussed in more detail below;

- The course accreditation field would also become mandatory and would include:
 - as a requirement, information on the endorsement of the training package by the National Skills Standards Council, or the accreditation of the course by the relevant regulator; and
 - as an option, information about satisfying regulatory requirements in the relevant jurisdiction for particular occupations; and
- The section describing the graduate's academic achievements would include, for example, the units of competency achieved (rather than grades received for units), and awards or prizes received.

Consistent with the AHEGS, providers will be free, within the constraints of the mandatory sections, to design a graduation statement to suit their needs. The requirements within the structure will be that:

- All sections must be included in the specified order;
- All compulsory fields must be included (including some standardised wording for various sections such as the description of the VET system); and
- Certain information must appear on the first page of the statement.

A sample VET graduation statement is provided at Appendix C.

Pathways field

This field provides an opportunity for training organisations to outline their pathways arrangements which are relevant to this graduate. For example, it can describe formal credit or advanced standing arrangements with other education organisations, or identify further study options (both in VET and higher education) which might be suitable. This information can be modified depending on the graduate's choice of elective units of competency.

Standardised wording would need to be developed which providers can include as part of the compulsory pathways field. Parts of this wording would be made mandatory. For example, the wording would include a statement about the *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy*, and also include links to appropriate stable websites such as:

- The page on the provider's website outlining its pathways policies and arrangements;
- The jurisdiction's Tertiary Admissions Centre;
- The relevant Industry Skills Council; and
- Databases such as MySkills and MyUniversity.

Examples which might be suitable for inclusion are set out at Appendix D.

Q1: How well do you think a VET Graduation Statement, with a design as outlined above, would meet the aims outlined in Section 3? Are there any modifications which could be made to better achieve those aims?

5 Options for Implementation

Information required

The content in the proposed design outlined in Section 4 relies primarily on material which should be available through providers' existing student management/information systems (SMSs). Much of the content would be consistent across different graduation statements. For example, providers might need to create a short description of the organisation, if one does not already exist, but this would be the same on all statements issued by that provider. Similarly, descriptions of qualifications could be reused.

There is a small amount of material which providers might need to customise for each graduate. For example, this would include:

- Data on achievements specific to that graduate;
- Information about work experience and industry placements undertaken by the graduate as part of their training; and
- Pathways which are available to a particular student on the basis of electives or industry placements which are specific to that graduate.

Integration with existing systems

Based on the experience in the higher education sector, the function of generating a VET graduation statement may be able to be integrated into providers' existing SMSs. Where the system automates the production of other documentation such as a testamur or record of results, the functionality of producing a graduation statement could be added.

Providers would still be required to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to reduce fraudulent reproductions and use of the statements, in accordance with the *AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy*. Providers would also need to retain electronic or paper versions of the statements issued, both for record-keeping purposes and to issue replacement copies if required. These functions should already be part of the systems in place for other certification documentation.

Electronic form

As an alternative, a standard design for the VET graduation statement could be created and made available online. Providers would be able to download the design in a commonly-editable format and insert the relevant text and logos before printing and signing it.

It is unlikely that there would be a facility to save these documents in a central repository, and providers would be expected to retain paper or electronic versions in their own systems.

This option would be useful for providers that do not wish to design their own statements and for which it would be inefficient to integrate the functionality into an existing SMS. This includes providers which do not currently automate the generation of other certification documentation.

Integrity

In order to maintain the integrity of the VET graduation statement, measures would need to be adopted similar to those in place for the AHEGS. This would include:

- A mechanism to review a sample document before the provider is approved to issue the VET graduation statement;
- The protection of the words “Australian VET Graduation Statement” and any logo through a trademark owned by the Commonwealth and/or States and Territories; and
- A licence deed between the owner(s) of the trademark and the approved provider which gives the provider the right to use the trademarked logo and words.

The VET graduation statement is only intended for use where the graduate has completed an AQF qualification. Thus, the issuance of a graduation statement would not be required where only a skills set or units of competency, not amounting to the completion of a qualification, have been completed.

Timeframe and next steps

The next steps in this project will be for the AQF Council to take into account the feedback and issues raised by the VET sector and consider the future direction of the project. A proposal for the next stage would be developed with detailed timeframes. This might include a study to quantify the resources needed, and a pilot with a small number of providers.

Experiences in implementing other graduation statements such as the AHEGS have indicated that it is important for providers to be involved in the development of the statement, that pilots will be useful in identifying and resolving implementation issues, and that a staged implementation is likely to be the best approach.

A staged implementation of the VET graduation statement, initially on a voluntary basis, would therefore be proposed. This is consistent with other graduation statement models, including the AHEGS and the NZ TEQS. While some time would be needed for providers to modify their systems, voluntary issuance would allow faster implementation than would otherwise be required.

Additionally, a pilot would be conducted with a small number of providers to refine the design of the statement and identify implementation issues. The providers would be drawn from across the VET sector and include a variety of sizes and structures (e.g. enterprise RTOs, large public providers, small private providers, and so on). The pilot would be overseen by a Reference Group and, while the exact timelines would be identified at the conclusion of this stage of the project, might be conducted during 2014.

Once a design is finalised, workshops and other communication activities would be conducted to encourage uptake in the VET sector. A contact point, such as a central email address, would be created to provide advice and assistance with any implementation issues.

Q2: If you are a provider, do you use a commercial student management system (SMS), and if so, which? If you are a provider or a vendor of an SMS, could your existing system generate a VET graduation statement? If not, could it be modified to do so?

Q3: Some options for implementation are outlined above. Are there any other options or implementation issues that you would like considered?

Q4: If you are a provider or an SMS vendor, would you be willing to participate in a pilot?

6 Conclusion

A graduation statement for Australia's VET sector would enhance the utility of AQF qualifications as pathways to further study and to work in the domestic and international labour markets. It would also present an opportunity for information to be communicated to graduates about the pathways facilitated by their qualification.

The AQF Council encourages all interested parties to provide views regarding the proposed design and the implementation plan for such a statement. The questions posed throughout the paper may be a useful starting point for stakeholder submissions.

Making a written submission

Stakeholders should indicate if they desire their submission to remain confidential.

Submissions should be sent by close of business on 15 November 2013 via email to:

Di Booker
Director Policy AQF Council
Level 9, 63 Pirie Street, Adelaide
08 8406 4737
aqfc@aqf.edu.au

7 List of Appendices

- A Further reading and useful links
- B *Guidelines for the Presentation of the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement*
- C Sample VET Graduation Statement
- D Examples of content for pathways field