

**ANTA/AVCC**

**DRAFT POLICY GUIDELINES**

**ON**

**CROSS-SECTOR QUALIFICATION LINKAGES**



## Section 1 Preamble

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) are jointly committed to supporting and promoting the development of closer connections between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). Both parties recognise that the development of structured arrangements to link qualifications across the sectors represents a key process in building closer inter-sectoral relationships.

Qualification linkages are the essential working tools for the operation of a meaningful and dynamic Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Linking qualifications within the Framework is a mechanism enabling individual learners to move from one qualification to another in more efficient and effective learning pathways. Qualification linkages also provide a mechanism for creating a more open, accessible and relevant tertiary education system and a vehicle for implementing lifelong learning.

The term 'cross-sector qualification linkage' is used deliberately to identify the scope of the Policy Guidelines which encompass any formal connection between qualifications issued within VET and HE. These connections may be based on articulation and credit transfer arrangements and the current standard credit model developed by the AVCC but also extend to newer models of integrated cross-sectoral qualifications linkages.

These integrated cross-sector qualification linkages not only provide for more efficient pathways towards desired qualification(s), they also add significant value to the learning outcomes by combining VET and HE in a genuine educational praxis. These Guidelines, while confirming a commitment to developing linkages through credit transfer and articulation processes, place emphasis upon the development of these newer approaches and on innovation and diversity of approach to qualifications linkages.

The Policy Guidelines also support a diversity of organisational models for forging linkages from individual partnerships between institutions to state-wide VET partnerships with

individual HE institutions to consortia models and national arrangements between ITABS and partner universities. Existing policies, including the AVCC policy on credit transfer and the AQF Implementation Handbook, have been taken into account in the development process combined with research into exemplary models and detailed consultations with institutions and other agencies involved in cross-sectoral collaboration.

The Guidelines have been developed with particular attention to reforms in the VET sector involving the introduction of Training Packages and the Australian Recognition Framework. As Training Packages and the new linkage models are more widely implemented, the views of both learners and the organisations involved in the development process will be sought on their effectiveness in delivering extended and improved cross-sector arrangements.

These Policy Guidelines relate to formal linkages between qualifications across sectors. They do not address recognition processes for informal learning or RPL. It is anticipated that the Policy Guidelines will be extended to include advanced standing for informal learning in the near future.

As an integral part of producing these Policy Guidelines, ANTA and the AVCC have adopted a series of recommendations to facilitate the ongoing development of new and revised cross-sector linkage arrangements in the context of the new national arrangements within VET.

These draft ANTA/AVCC Policy Guidelines replace the guidelines on articulation and credit transfer included in the *AQF Implementation Handbook (First Edition 1995; Second Edition, 1998)* and the existing AVCC policy. The Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the attached Glossary of Terms.

ANTA and the AVCC will work together to assist organisations in developing the arrangements set out herein.

## Section 2 Objectives of the Policy Guidelines

These Guidelines have been developed to provide the organisations involved in determining structured cross-sector qualification linkages with a framework to guide and facilitate these arrangements.

The Guidelines are also designed to provide students and other interested individuals and organisations with information about these processes to assist understanding and clarify pathways and outcomes.

The Guidelines are based on acceptance of and support for a diverse set of arrangements and models for linking qualifications across the sectors. Different models have different strengths and reflect differing needs and contexts. The intent is to promote innovation, to extend and develop new models and to encourage a diversity of approach.

### Specific Objectives of the Policy Guidelines

These Guidelines have been developed to:-

- *provide advice* at the national level on developing cross-sector linkages between qualifications
- *assist organisations* involved in developing structured cross-sector qualification linkages by identifying key processes, models and approaches
- *promote and encourage the continuing development* of diverse structured cross-sector qualification linkages by organisations
- *facilitate* the establishment of *diverse educational and training pathways* for individuals participating in tertiary education
- *give effect* to *lifelong learning*.

## Section 3 General Principles

1. The AQF provides an agreed framework for designing, developing and issuing recognised qualifications within Australia and for supporting linkages between these qualifications.
2. Individual qualifications set the benchmarks for establishing linkages. In VET, qualifications are based on competencies and established through industry defined Training Packages and/or through accredited courses developed by State Recognition Authorities (SRAs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). In HE, individual universities determine qualifications content.
3. Cross-sectoral qualification linkages are critical to the achievement of a more efficient, open, integrated and relevant education system that can meet the challenge of rapidly changing needs and priorities for knowledge and skill development, including continuous skilling and lifelong learning.
4. The development of cross-sector qualification linkages is strongly encouraged and opportunities for forging linkages, which provide access to more efficient and effective education and training pathways, should be maximised.
5. In addition to providing more efficient pathways between qualifications, cross-sector qualification linkages should seek to add value to the learning outcomes for students through development of different approaches to qualification structures.
6. Cross-sector qualification linkages can be established between any of the qualification titles in the AQF, not only between proximate qualifications such as the Advanced Diploma and Bachelor degree and can take a variety of forms including sequential and concurrent studies.
7. Qualification linkages may be focused on a VET to HE learning pathway or a HE to VET learning pathway.

8. Qualification linkages focusing on a VET to HE pathway should incorporate the admission arrangements to HE in a transparent way, as part of the agreed arrangements.
9. Where appropriate and relevant, linkages between qualifications should identify credit relationships between one qualification and another. It is recognised that not all qualification linkages will involve granting credit for previous qualifications.
10. Where credit arrangements are established through a structured qualification linkage, the credit should be awarded to individuals who have evidence of achievement without the need for further assessment or demonstration of the relevant knowledge/skills.
11. Only organisations involved in the development and /or issuance of AQF qualifications are authorised to establish qualification linkages. The formal agreement of a qualification linkage is determined by the organisation issuing the end-point award.
12. The decision to develop qualification linkages is a matter for individual authorised organisations to determine in collaboration with each other.
13. Information about qualification linkages should be widely disseminated to students as part of enrolment information.

## Section 4 Operational Advice

*Developing linkages between qualifications*

- The bodies authorised to develop and/or issue AQF qualifications should consider the development of cross-sector qualification linkages as part of their responsibilities under the AQF.
- Linkages should define transparent and coherent relationships between the qualifications.
- Linkages will generally be developed between qualifications involving the same, similar or complementary specialisations/fields of study.
- Arrangements reflecting linkages between general and specialised qualifications may also be developed, where appropriate.
- Linkages should reflect and recognise different education and training pathways for achievement.

*Processes for developing qualification linkages from VET to HE*

- Structured VET to HE qualification linkages can be established through a number of processes. These include:
  - Articulation of existing awards
  - Credit transfer between components of existing awards
  - Integrated dual-sector sequential awards
  - Integrated dual sector-concurrent programs
- Each of these processes is suited to different purposes and circumstances. Integrated dual-sector awards provide for linkages to be considered as part of the qualification development process, articulation provides a sequential pathway between qualifications whilst credit transfer provides a means of linking individual components of existing awards.

- Processes for developing qualification linkages from HE to VET*
- Structured HE to VET qualification linkages can be established through
    - Credit transfer arrangements
    - Dual sector combined awards.
  - Where credit transfer is applied, consideration needs to be given as to whether full or partial credit transfer is granted. This will depend on the field or area and the relationship between the university subjects and the specific requirements of the competencies in the VET qualification.
  - In a dual-sector award, credit arrangements from HE to VET should be identified as part of the agreed structure of the award.
- Basis of determining the qualification linkage*
- Linkages are generally based on a content relationship in which parts of one qualification are recognised as having equivalence with or are integrated into another qualification.
  - Some linkages may also be based on acceptance of agreed relativities between different levels of qualifications in the AQF. These linkages may also involve content interrelationships.
- Content equivalence*
- Linkages that are determined through a content relationship are established primarily through identification and assessment of same, similar or complementary knowledge and skill requirements across the linked qualifications.
  - The instrument used to establish the content linkage from VET qualifications to HE qualifications is the relevant components of the Training Package, and/or accredited course curriculum (in qualifications recognised outside Training Packages), which are related to and assessed against the learning objectives and/or subject/unit descriptions of the relevant HE qualifications.

*Linkages using  
Training Package  
qualifications*

- In Training Package derived qualifications, competencies should be used as the instruments to identify content equivalences with HE qualifications. Training Package Support Materials, including the learning strategies and assessment materials, can also be used as additional tools to identify the linkage, where these materials will more clearly assist in identifying the relationships between the VET qualification and the HE qualification.
- Where competencies are used directly as the linkage instrument, the whole content of the competency needs to be considered and unpacked to ensure all knowledge and skills relevant to the linkage have been identified. A key aspect of the competency to be considered is the Evidence Guide.
- Where Learning strategies are used as an additional instrument, the relationship between these materials and the competencies that define the qualification in the Training Package needs to be clearly evident.

*Linkages using  
accredited courses*

- Where the qualifications in VET are based on accredited courses, a content linkage should be determined by comparing the modules of the VET curriculum against the subject content of the HE courses.
- All content-based linkages will be assisted by clear identification in the relevant HE qualifications of expected learning outcomes and individual subject/unit descriptions.

*Linkages based on  
agreed relativities  
between  
qualifications*

Linkages that incorporate an agreed connection and credit value between awards are suited to articulation and dual qualification arrangements that establish a sequential/concurrent pathway, particularly between Diploma level qualifications and Bachelor Degrees.

- These linkages are usually predicated on an accepted equivalence in content across a similar field or discipline between the linked awards.

*Guide to minimum credit levels*

- The following linkage relationships are identified as a minimum guide in developing articulation arrangements and dual award qualifications in the same fields between Diploma and Bachelor qualifications:-
  - 66% credit for an Advanced Diploma when linked to a three year Bachelor degree
  - 50% credit for an Advanced Diploma when linked to a four year Bachelor degree
  - 33% credit for a Diploma when linked to a three year Bachelor degree
  - 25% credit for a Diploma when linked to a four year Bachelor degree.

*Application of the linkage*

- The specific organisation(s) involved in the linkage process will determine which process to use in determining a linkage.
- It is accepted that differing credit outcomes may be established to reflect the differing requirements of individual awards.
- Linkages only have application between the agreed parties.

*Responsibility for developing qualification linkages*

- Responsibility for developing qualification linkages, between VET and HE and HE and VET is the responsibility of:
  - individual Registered Training Organisations (RTOS) in partnership with individual universities and/or
  - Training Package Developers (ITABs) in partnership with individual universities and/or
  - State Training Authorities (STAs) in partnership with individual universities.

*Responsibility for endorsement and maintenance*

- The formal endorsement of a linkage should be given by the institution/authority responsible for issuing the destination qualification.
- Maintenance of the linkage is the responsibility of the partnership organisations.
- A Training Package Endorsement and/or Review and/or course accreditation in VET or a restructuring of the HE qualification is the catalyst for review of linkage arrangements.

*Credit outcomes*

- Where Credit is an outcome of the formal linkage, it is standardised, i.e. the quantum of credit is predetermined as part of the linkage process.
- The quantum of standardised credit in qualification linkages will vary with each linkage and is dependent upon the level of agreed overlap and equivalence and the agreed relationships between awards.

*Factors impacting on credit*

- Credit should not be conditional on students meeting other substituted requirements in order to make up a 'normal load'.
- Credit should not be conditional on completion of the previous award. Individuals who have completed part of the relevant previous award are entitled to receive credit for the specific components they have achieved.
- Restraints on credit may be employed where there is a significant time elapse between achievement of the qualification/part qualification and an application for credit in the destination qualification.
- Full credit from HE to VET may not be possible for all university units when related to competencies.

*Forms of credit*

- Credit can be granted in different forms. These include specified credit, unspecified credit and block credit. The form of credit will depend on the circumstances and context. Variables may include:-
  - the linkage process
  - the qualification levels being linked
  - the discipline areas.
- As a general guide:
  - specified credit is most relevant to credit transfer based linkages based on specific content linkages, ie module Y in VET is equivalent to Unit X in HE
  - specified credit is also the most appropriate form for incomplete qualifications
  - unspecified credit is most appropriate to articulation arrangements based on agreed relative value of awards being linked and/or linkages between generic qualifications
  - unspecified credit taken as a block is most appropriate in dual and nested awards.

*Provision of information to individuals*

- Organisations involved in establishing structured qualification linkages, with or without credit, should disseminate information on their arrangements via Faculty Handbooks, Websites and through State/Territory Admissions Centres.
- Information about linkages should include advice that indicates the existence of a pathway/linkage between qualifications does not imply automatic entry into the destination qualification. However, if admission is part of the agreement, this should be clearly stated.

- Information on linkages should clearly indicate, where appropriate, whether the meeting of additional requirements (such as bridging courses) designed to provide prerequisite knowledge or skills not included in the original qualification is a condition of the pathway/linkage.
- Information about linkages which involve the applicant incurring costs should indicate whether, and in what form, such costs will be recovered.

*Appeal  
mechanisms*

- An effective means of appeal should be established in each institution in relation to credit transfer/articulation decisions. In the VET sector, the Australian Recognition Framework Principles provide for investigation of complaints.