

## Response to AQF discussion papers – graduate and postgraduate qualifications

The IRU is pleased to respond to the two AQF papers released for comment.

1. Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the AQF; and
2. Criteria for determining the addition of a profession permitted to use the alternative title 'Doctor of' for the Masters Degree extended.

### 1. Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the AQF.

The AQF is exploring the issues concerning the Graduate and Vocational Certificates and Diplomas. The two main issues raised are:

- whether the current distinction between VET and HE Graduate Certificates and Diplomas is still necessary, considering revised descriptors allow for either vocational or academic outcomes; and
- whether the use of the term '*Postgraduate Certificate*' and '*Postgraduate Diploma*' qualification types should be introduced as an indication of a 'deepening' qualification against continued use of *Graduate Certificate* and *Graduate Diploma* for study in a new area.

The paper lists four options. IRU supports Option 3 - to remove the distinction between Higher Education and VET, to redevelop the qualification descriptors at level 7 (outlining their purpose as 'broadening' qualifications) and introduce Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas ('deepening' qualifications) at level 8 for higher education providers.

#### ***Consideration of types – ensuring students and employers understand the difference.***

Creating a distinction between *Graduate* Certificates and Diplomas and *Postgraduate* Certificates and Diplomas at levels 7 and 8 respectively will inform both students and future employers more clearly about learning outcomes. At level 7 Graduate Certificates and Diplomas are in line with the Bachelor Degree, with student cohorts at this level being introduced to a new body of knowledge. At level 8 students studying a Postgraduate qualification will be deepening their expertise in an existing knowledge area.

Sector consultations since 2009 have highlighted the need for better definitions. The issue consists of differences between whether the field of study is 'broadening' or 'deepening' student knowledge in a particular field, whether it is 'new' or 'existing'.

In some cases higher education providers are already making this distinction between 'new' and 'existing', using the *Postgraduate Certificate* and *Postgraduate Diploma* nomenclature for the latter. In addition, the Commonwealth Government's higher education reporting system requiring Graduate Diplomas (not Certificates) being reported as either a 'new' or 'existing' area. As stated in the consultation paper, a review of current databases show there is inconsistency in terminology contributing to confusion in the marketplace about levels and differences between them. There is also international precedence for distinguishing the two types.

The existing distinction between VET and HE Graduate Certificates was the outcome of creating additional high level VET qualifications but wishing to avoid any confusion with the existing higher

education qualifications. The distinction has allowed the VET accredited qualifications to become established. In contrast, qualifications are accredited through both sectors against the Diploma and Advanced Diploma criteria, without a distinction in the qualification title and without significant problems emerging. On this basis the IRU supports removing the sector based nomenclature in the qualification title with the distinct accreditation processes to provide the basis of distinguishing the two.

To this end, the Graduate and Postgraduate certificates and diploma descriptors will require redevelopment. In doing so The AQFC may wish to explore with its VET constituents whether the sense of 'broadening' can be relevant to the VET competency based approach in which the higher qualifications usually build on lower levels of competence or incorporate them.

***IRU Recommendation:***

- Graduate Certificates and Diplomas:
  - Remove the distinction between higher education and VET
  - Reposition as a level 7 qualification with new descriptors focused at 'broadening'
- Create new category – Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas at level 8 for 'deepening' qualifications.

## **2. Criteria for determining the addition of a profession permitted to use the alternative title of 'Doctor of' for the Masters Degree extended.**

In 2010 the Masters Degree (Extended) was approved for six professions resulting in the qualification title 'Juris Doctor' for legal practice and 'Doctor of' for five health related professions – medical practice, physiotherapy, dentistry, optometry and veterinary practice.

The AQF defines the Masters Degree (Extended) as being different from the other forms of Masters Degrees in its purpose and volume of learning. It is now seeking views on the evidence and rationale required for adding a profession to the level 9 Masters Degree (Extended), including evidence requirements for each of the four criteria in the policy and the proposed stakeholders to be consulted.

### ***The rationale for creating additional Masters Degree (Extended) professions***

Previously the IRU was concerned about the creation of the Masters Degree (Extended). Those concerns remain but are of limited relevance given the Ministers' decision to include the qualification. The basis for the decision was evidence from comparative countries for use of the 'Doctor' styling in the case of Law and various health professions.

The consultation does not presuppose that other professions require a similar styling but sets out criteria to consider should the question arise and identifies which parties should be supportive for such a proposal to be approved.

The IRU remains of the view that the Doctor styling for a level 9 qualification is unhelpful. We therefore argue that the focus on health professions should remain as a means to contain the risk of a rapid spread of the Masters (Extended) across all professional areas.

### ***Evidence required for addition of a further professional area***

Any profession wishing to be added to the Master (Extended) list must, as set out in the *AQF Qualification Type Addition and Removal Policy*, prove there is a "clear industry, professional or community need and a sound educational rationale".

Criterion one sits strangely in the context of whether additional professions should have access to the Masters (Extended). Its focus is that a particular qualification relating to a new profession meets the requirements of the AQF for Masters (Extended). The emphasis for analysis should be the question of the need relating to the profession as addressed by the following three criteria. Should that be established, or indeed for the existing six professions, then it is for the relevant accreditation body (within a self-accrediting institution or TEQSA otherwise) to judge the particular use qualification by qualification.

Criterion two as written covers similar matters to three but introduces the issue of international comparator examples. To avoid overlap with Criterion three it should be cut back to focus on that issue – whether a Masters (Extended) in the proposed areas is supported by, or justifiable leads, international practice. The IRU argument that a health focus should be a test would be relevant here, since that is where the current international examples exist.

Criterion three addresses the question of industry, professional or community need. Along with four it goes to the major relevant issues. The detail of the criterion would be more usefully presented if structured around the relevant stakeholders with types of evidence by stakeholder clearly articulated covering the three target groups of profession, Industry and community. This could usefully be extended to a fourth, Government.

Criterion four belatedly introduces the concept of educational rationale. With criterion three covering the various other stakeholders this criterion should focus on the education bodies perspectives but could admit some comment from the other interested parties.

Hence the IRU proposes that:

- sound educational reason become the first criterion, with a focus on the input of higher education bodies;
- defined industry, professional and community need be the second, with a focus on input from relevant elements of each plus Government;
- the third criterion focus on compatibility with international practice and developments.

The current first criterion should be a presumption underlying the consideration of including a further profession –that any qualifications so approved would be consistent with the requirements of the AQF.

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