

Excerpt from Duklas, J., Maki, K., Pesaro, J., Brady, J. (June, 2014). ARUCC PCCAT Transcript and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Study: an Examination of Current Practices at Canadian Postsecondary Organizations. Calgary, Alberta: Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) & Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT).

## Australia <pages 47-49>

### System Overview

The Commonwealth Department of Education is responsible for higher education and research in Australia. Each State and Territory government also has a Department of Education, though the specific departmental names may vary. The tertiary education system in Australia comprises higher education and vocational education and training. The university system includes 37 public and three small private Australian universities. Internationalization is a prominent feature of Australian higher education, with international students making up 25.7% of the student population in 2012 (Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013). There are approximately 140 other higher education providers in Australia, but they are mostly small, and account for 7% of all higher education students.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is an independent agency established by the Australian Government, with responsibility for regulatory and quality oversight of the system (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013a). In addition, TEQSA maintains and publishes a National Register of higher education providers, which serves as the authoritative information source of registered higher education providers in Australia (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Further details on the Australian educational system along with information on the qualifications framework are contained in Appendix G. Components of direct relevance to transcription and transfer credit nomenclature are described below.

### Transcript Standards and the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement

The research has not revealed documentation of country-wide transcript standards for Australia. However, in 2013, the Government of Australia, through the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, introduced *Guidelines for the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS)* (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), which is modelled after the European Union's Diploma Supplement. The Guidelines define required and optional elements to be included in each of the five sections of the Graduation Statement, which are listed in Table 2 below.

The AHEGS is distinct from academic transcripts issued by institutions in that it is only issued at course completion and a separate Graduation Statement is issued for each credential that is achieved (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia, p. 10). Guidelines for the AHEGS also define requirements for representing jointly-badged qualifications, nested degrees and double/combined degrees on the Graduation Statement.

As an illustrative example of how the system works, an institution such as the University of Queensland distributes the institutional transcript *and* the AHEGS upon graduation (University of Queensland, 2013). At the University of Queensland, students can contact the institution directly to obtain a new AHEGS, an institutional transcript, a testamur and a *Certificate of Award* (each come with additional fees). The

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latter is a letter from the University providing information on the degrees awarded along with their conferral date (2013). The institution's transcript contains a listing of all courses taken along with respective results.

### Transfer Credit Nomenclature

There does not appear to be a national directory of transfer agreements with supporting nomenclature, which could be a result of the size and complexity of institutions or the broad expectations for pathways from one credential to another that are included in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). There are numerous pathway opportunities and resources at the regional and institutional level such as those offered by TAFE SA of the government of Southern Australia, which offers courses and pathway opportunities for students in vocational education and training programs (Government of Southern Australia, n.d.a.). TAFE SA offers an online searchable database of university credit pathways and course equivalencies (Government of Southern Australia, n.d.b.).

Examples of specific institutional efforts are readily available. As an illustration, Charles Darwin University (n.d.) provides policy-based pathway descriptions on its website, based on requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework. Griffith University has a particularly comprehensive website that outlines the variety of pathway opportunities to the institution.<sup>1</sup> The University of Canberra (2013) hosts a detailed course-to-course transfer database on its institutional website. There are also examples of institutional glossaries typically at the institutional level, some of which include transfer-specific terminology (University of South Australia, n.d.; Open Universities Australia, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.griffith.edu.au/pathways>

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**Table 1: Contents of the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement**

	<b>Compulsory Items</b>	<b>Optional Items</b>
<b>Front Page</b>	AHEGS logo  Statement on the AHEGS  Certification  Institutional logo	
<b>Section 1 – The Graduate</b>	Family name  Given name  Student number	Date of birth
<b>Section 2 – The Award</b>	Name of the award (& specialization)  Detail, including admission requirements, duration of study, language of instruction and AQF level	Features of course (e.g., placements, overseas study)  Pathways to further study  Course accreditation
<b>Section 3 – The Awarding Institution</b>	Awarding institution	
<b>Section 4 – The Graduate’s Academic Achievements</b>	Course details  Key to grading	Additional course details  Special achievements, recognition and prizes
<b>Section 5 – Description of the Australian Higher Education System</b>	Introduction  Australian Qualifications Framework  Admission  Quality	

Source: *Guidelines for the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement*. (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, 2013).

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## Appendix G: International Research

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#### Qualifications Framework

All higher education and vocational education and training credentials in the tertiary education system are governed by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013), a comprehensive framework which is collectively owned by the Commonwealth, State and Territory education, training and employment ministers. The AQF is the national policy for all regulated qualifications. Introduced in 1995 and updated in 2011, the AQF provides a taxonomy for learning outcome expectations expressed as knowledge, skills, application of knowledge and skills, and volume of learning for each type of qualification. In addition, the framework defines typical expectations for pathways, assessment, and accreditation for all qualifications in higher education and vocational education and training. Beyond providing a framework that builds confidence in Australian qualifications, the objectives of the AQF demonstrate a national commitment to transfer and mobility, with reference to the development and maintenance of pathways; easy movement between education and training sectors and the labour market; support for lifelong learning; and support and enhancement of international mobility of graduates (p. 9).

The ten levels of the AQF include senior secondary certificates of education, four levels of certificates and a diploma, advanced diploma, associate degree, degree, and post-graduate qualifications. The qualifications that can be accredited using the accreditation process in the vocational education and training sector include certificates I – IV, diplomas, advanced diplomas, and graduate certificates and

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diplomas. The qualifications that can be accredited using the accreditation process in higher education include diplomas, advanced diplomas, associate degrees, and degrees, and all post-graduate qualifications.

Key content of the AQF includes:

- AQF Level Descriptors, which distinguish between level and qualifications types to give the freedom to add or remove qualification types without destroying the integrity of the AQF and its levels.
- *AQF Qualification Type Specifications*, which define detailed specifications for each type of qualification along five dimensions (summary, skills, application of knowledge, and volume of learning), nomenclature requirements, pathways available to holders of each qualification, and responsibility for accreditation and development of each type of qualification (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013, pp. 21-63).
- *AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy*, which describes the entitlements of graduates of each type of qualification to receive a 'testamur' and record of results documenting the program they have completed, as well as specific requirements to ensure the security, integrity, consistency, and transparency of these documents (pp. 69-74).
- *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy*, is designed to support and enhance student progression into and between AQF qualifications, and to maximize the credit students receive for learning already achieved in previous qualifications. The Pathways Policy outlines a series of principles to be used in credit transfer decisions, including the recognition of learning, "regardless of how, when and where it was acquired" (p. 78), that assessments be evidence-based and consistently applied; allow for credit to be used to meet specific program requirements; and be formally documented for the students. Notably, the Pathways Policy specifies that institutions negotiating credit transfer agreements take into account learning outcomes, volume of learning, program of study, including content, and learning and approaches to assessment (pp. 77-80).

Further, the Policy also asserts, as a basis of negotiations, specific expectations for the proportion of advanced standing credit to be awarded towards a higher level AQF qualification in the same or a related discipline (p. 79).

- *AQF Qualifications Register Policy*, developed to ensure that information about AQF Qualifications is publicly available, that AQF and non-AQF qualifications are readily distinguishable, to ensure the accuracy of any publicly available registers or databases about AQF qualifications, and to ensure that appropriate records are kept of all AQF qualifications issued (pp. 83-85).

The AQF also includes a glossary, defining key words and phrases in the context of their use in the levels, qualification type specifications or policies. It represents an interesting approach to achieving alignment across the spectrum including through to the area of transcription and transfer nomenclature.

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### Data and Research

Australia's National Centre for Vocational Education Research conducts, as one aspect of its many functions, the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research program that tracks students as they move from school to post-school contexts. Data are available on a cohort basis and a series of research reports, technical reports, briefing papers, and discussion papers provide an evidence-based understanding of school and post-school transitions for Australian youth. Available reports address a wide range of issues, including school-work transitions, employment outcomes, and preferred educational pathways; however, there do not appear to be studies focusing specifically on jurisdictional mobility (Department of Education, Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

### Key Strengths and Emerging Opportunities

Australia appears to have invested considerably in the development of purpose-built standards and structures in support of student mobility. The comprehensive Australian Qualifications Framework provides a national standard against which all nationally recognized credentials qualifications can be compared (including postsecondary institutions). One feature of the AQF that appears to stand-out for its potential to enhance transparency, clarity, and as a result, student mobility, is the AQF Pathways Policy, which documents the expected level of advanced standing credit to be awarded toward a higher qualification in the same or a related content area.

While not part of the European Higher Education Area, Australia has undertaken to align the AQF with the Bologna Process. Australia has also aligned its qualifications framework with those of several countries in the Asia Pacific and has been an active participant in discussions of a potential Asia Pacific Qualifications Framework (APEC Secretariat, 2009).