



Murdoch University Submission to the Australian Qualifications Framework Review

Murdoch University supports an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) that encourages and enables innovation, while assuring the quality of all post-secondary qualifications and avoiding unintended consequences of new credential types.

The Framework should include consideration of learning objectives, graduate outcomes and recognition of the multiple time frames in which outcomes can be achieved.

The AQF provides a scaffold against which regulatory agencies, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), can assess the learning outcomes of a qualification for accreditation. The inherent capacity for self-accreditation by Self-Accrediting Higher Education Providers (SAI HEPS) can also be tested with respect to mechanisms to ensure compliance with the AQF.

Increased cooperation between TEQSA and ASQA, including shared compliance review processes, would facilitate a shared understanding of desired outcomes at each Level and alignment of course offerings to Levels.

Compliance with the AQF and other external accreditation protocols should be managed through rolling review by the regulatory agencies and individual quality assurance processes, which in turn are subject to review by TEQSA and/or ASQA.

A clear process for the addition of new credential types must be outlined. This should include demonstration that credentials have met internal quality assurance processes, align to the AQF, and do not subvert existing qualifications.

1. The AQF Taxonomy and Levels

Murdoch University appreciates the variation in the sectors that are delivering at each level. We agree that assuming a uniform increase in competency for knowledge, skills and application at each level is not appropriate. Exploring how combinations of levels for each area (knowledge, skills and application) may be introduced to accommodate for this variation is a worthy exercise. This is understood to mean that in practice, for example, a graduate may achieve level 5 by accomplishing Knowledge at level 4; Skills at level 6 and Application at level 5 or alternatively Knowledge at Level 6, Skills at Level 5 and Application at Level 4. Murdoch looks forward to seeing how this ideas develops in future consultations.

2. Shorter Form Credentials

It is understood that by using Levels as the focus of the Framework, the widest range of credentials can be aligned to the AQF.

It is clear that a broad range of educational offerings has arisen, and will continue to arise, as institutions seek to meet industry, professional, and community needs. Some of these micro-credentials will be 'stand-alone' courses that meet specific educational needs. As such, it may be possible and indeed desirable for these to be included in the AQF at a particular level based on learning outcomes and assured as such.

That being said, the compliance burden inherent to this approach to micro-credentialing is critical, with the potential to act as a real or perceived barrier to innovation. Such an approach would have significant implications for longstanding and established processes for the recognition of prior learning and add complexity in the recognition of short courses and University (non-AQF) awards for credit (albeit with a greater assurance of the appropriateness of credit across a broader range of learning experiences).

The conception of micro-credentials presented in the consultation paper assumes inherent value in the "award" course and could be applied in a way supporting a linear progression focussed on the attainment of increasingly specialised knowledge and skills. Arguably, this is conception may not reflect the necessary shift from accretive to networked acquisition of knowledge and skills where application is defined by the learner's personal context.

Taking a wider scope on the matter to reframe the debate on whether micro-credential offerings have to derive from AQF providers would be to appreciate that the real question of standards is whether the graduate has demonstrated the attributes of the relevant AQF Level on completion of their award. If this is taken as the base for assuring standards then the discussion about the individual learning experiences, ie how the defined learning outcomes are being taught and assessed through such modes as micro credentialing or short courses, is irrelevant.

3. Enterprise and Social Skills

Institutions commonly incorporate enterprise and social skills into the defined learning outcomes of a unit/course/qualification.

The AQF drives design and subsequent learning experiences. If, as we would argue, the sector values enterprise skills then it is important that there is a requirement for inclusion in the framework. As Kift would say "if it matters it should be in the curriculum". There is scope to define such skills in the AQF Levels as high level outcomes that allow providers to account for context (industry, discipline, employment environment).

4. Volume of Learning & Credit Points

As indicated, Murdoch University is of the view that learning outcomes should be at the heart of the AQF. Definition of learning in terms of input measures based on volume/time reduce opportunities for innovation and preference face-to-face learning over alternative pedagogies (for example competency-based learning).

If a volume of learning measure is to be retained, a credit point system is preferred to permit greater flexibility in unit offerings – for example intensive offerings, short courses, or self-directed online learning. In such a system credit points should be relative to hours of structured, semi-structured and self-directed learning. Fractions of a year or standardised teaching period as used in a typical University context are less relevant given the emergence of emerging learning modalities which may or may not be offered by a university, and which may or may not be recognised by a micro credential aligned to the AQF.

5. Senior Secondary School Certificate

Murdoch University supports Senior Secondary School Certificates remaining outside the AQF. In so doing, we support development of a clear statement detailing how Certificates are positioned on the pathway to post-secondary qualifications.