



Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework

Discussion Paper

DECEMBER 2018

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Review Panel wishes to draw on the considerable expertise and experience that has developed across a broad range of organisations and individuals in relation to the Review's [Terms of Reference](#).

In its discussion paper, the Panel has opted to provide to organisations and individuals some of the Panel's initial thinking about the case for change to the AQF, but invites differing analysis, conclusions and proposals.

To make a submission to the Review, please email this form to AQFReview@education.gov.au by **15 March 2019**.

Please note that the Australian Government Department of Education and Training will not treat a submission as confidential unless requested that the whole submission, or part of the submission, be treated as such.

Please limit your response to no more than 3000 words.

Respondent name

Karen Seary, Chairperson, NAEEA.

Respondent organisation (where relevant)

National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia Pty Ltd (NAEEA),
<http://Enablingeducators.org/>

Submission 2 – NAEAA final position

The following questions were the focus of the reconvened NAEAA Executive meeting on 15 May, 2019:

1. Is there a case for a more consistent approach to defining (and delivering) Enabling programs across the sector, particularly as regards the potential for common learning outcomes to be defined at the exit point, to assist with their recognition and use/transferability between institutions for the benefit of these students.

The NAEAA Executive agrees there is a case for a more consistent approach that would provide a benchmark, greater institutional legitimacy and recognition of the study completed by students in pre-undergraduate Enabling programs. A consistent approach via common learning outcomes for enabling programs could assist with the recognition and transferability of enabling qualifications between institutions. The NAEAA Executive impress that current Enabling programs meet university standards and are regularly reviewed, evaluated and benchmarked through existing university processes. NAEAA Executive members are currently developing common learning outcomes and a benchmarking framework for enabling programs.

Enabling programs have resulted in excellent educational outcomes for hundreds of thousands of students across Australia for almost half a century. Enabling as a very diverse sector in and of itself should be recognised as it is not just one program type. Instead, programs and courses differ even within the same institution because they are designed for different areas of focus (eg. disciplines and degree pathways) and are also offered in different areas even within the same institution to engage different groups - importantly, for example, Indigenous students. NAEAA is concerned that the alignment of Enabling programs/courses to a specific existing level or levels within the AQF may remove this flexibility and thereby reduce the value of what currently is an excellent preparation for students who need extra help to access degree level study.

Several nationally focussed projects to date have established there is a consistency across many current Enabling programs in terms of benchmarking and curriculum design (Relf, et al., 2017, Irwin, Baker, & Carter, 2018; Baker & Irwin 2015a; Baker & Irwin 2015b; Hodges, et al., 2013). Mapping the work across the sector is important, as long as this does not result in a uniform, 'model' approach rather than a collaborative framework. Inclusion is at the heart of Enabling programs and it is crucial that these programs maintain their vital role as responsive mechanisms that work to develop the capabilities of people across our vast regions. The programs must be dynamic and flexible in order to engage and enable students from a wide variety of different backgrounds, including those from different ages and stages of leaving school.

One piece of work completed by the NAEAA Executive in early 2019 considered the standards recommended for Enabling programs. The majority of Enabling programs for entry are based in universities which are self accrediting bodies monitored by TEQSA through the Higher Education Standards Framework (<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/teqsa-contextual-overview-hes-framework>) As such, NAEAA recommends that, if using the HES as the framework to ensure quality of Enabling programs designed for entry into award studies, the following should be implemented in the provider university.

Course quality assurance

- Courses are approved and accredited through the provider university policies or TEQSA (HES Domain 5.1)

- Courses are monitored and reviewed in accordance with the university provider policy (Domain 5.3)
- Courses have appropriate academic integrity processes in place in line with provider university policies (Domain 5.2)

Student participation and attainment

- Admission requirements and processes are clear including subject requirements to progress to specific award courses (Domain 1.1)
- Orientation is offered to all students within the course and provided to assist all students in transition to Enabling studies (Domain 1.2)
- Student progression within an Enabling program is monitored and reported on, along with students' progression to award courses and other important outcomes such as work and other forms of study (Domain 1.2)
- Alignment of student learning outcomes with assessment is appropriate and benchmarked with Enabling like courses (Domain 1.4)
- Clear definitions around successful completion of a program (Domain 1.5)

Learning Environment

- Clear alignment between university policy and practices in Enabling programs around facilities and infrastructure, students wellbeing and safety, students complaints and grievances (Domain 2)

Teaching

- Course design is explicit in course documentation including theoretical underpinnings. Design should be accessible to expert review. (Domain 3.1)
- Academic staff who teach in these programs must have relevant qualifications and be exposed to leadership from a senior academic. (Domain 3.2)
- The course providers should be able to demonstrate that the learning resources are appropriate for an Enabling course (Domain 3.3)

Other

- The course providers should abide by all other university policies in relation to governance and information (Domains 6 and 7)

2. Should Enabling programs be included in the AQF? If so, in what form?

NAEEA has settled on recommending Enabling programs be located in the AQF as is the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE) in the present Australian Qualifications Framework, second edition document. On page 14, under the AQF qualification type learning outcomes descriptors, Enabling programs would occupy a separate column akin to the SSCE. Then, as is the case on page 24 under AQF specification for the SSCE, Enabling would have its own qualification type descriptor. This option is the simplest action to have Enabling programs acknowledged within the AQF. Inclusion in the AQF would address concerns about the transparency and portability of Enabling program achievements (Pitman, et al., 2016); however portability may also be facilitated by Memorandums of Understanding between institutions with regards to the recognition of Enabling education qualifications should the decision be made to not include such programs in the AQF.

3. Could the current AQF (or should) accommodate these programs under one of the existing qualification types?

The Executive decided it would be too complex to locate the myriad of Enabling programs offered nationally across multiple levels of the AQF. Enabling programs, because of their diverse nature nationally, could conceivably match outcomes described across AQF levels 4 & 5 but not consistently so and to locate them within the existing levels would be a complex task.

The issue of how programs would be allocated to a level would most sensibly relate to the criteria of learning outcomes and volume of learning/credit points, although this would be very difficult to establish across such a diversity of offerings which have legitimate reasons for course design and duration. Australian universities interpret and subsequently implement Enabling programs in a variety of ways. This is considered important to meet the diverse needs of students in different locations and to tailor programs to different institutional contexts. The NAEEA Executive therefore unanimously agree that enabling programs should be included in the AQF as a separate category (similar to the SSCE) and not spread across a number of levels.

4. Is there a case to be made for a new, shorter form credential to be developed?

The introduction of a shorter form credential could be considered as the purpose of Enabling programs is to prepare students for tertiary study and not explicitly or directly for employment, as featured in the current AQF descriptions applied to the TAFE/VET sector. The 'Summary' and 'Knowledge' descriptions of the levels of the AQF do not directly apply to Enabling programs, so a new form could be introduced.

In summary, NAEEA favours the inclusion of Enabling programs in the AQF but emphasises that establishing a framework for Enabling programs must take into account the many existing programs that are long standing and have been very successful in preparing large numbers of students for undergraduate study. Into the future, Enabling programs must be dynamic and flexible in order to engage and enable students from a wide variety of different backgrounds and ages in line with the needs of individual institutions to remain relevant to their specific communities. There must be consideration given to the diversity of Enabling students, the range of undergraduate programs students articulate into, the relative disadvantage of students, their critical importance to the widening participation agenda, and a focus on the exit outcomes and capabilities rather than arbitrary and uniform curriculum requirements. The establishment of an Enabling space within the AQF would thus require extensive consultation with existing providers and the NAEEA, the peak representative body for Enabling education in Australia. A significant period of transition, allowing universities to move through their self-accreditation processes within a realistic timeframe, will be necessary to ensure successful implementation of any national framework which includes Enabling education. Enabling programs should be included in the AQF as a separate category (similar to the SSCE) and not spread across a number of levels.

References

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