

Quality Council Focus

The National Quality Council (NQC) is a Committee of the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE). The Council plays a key role in bringing together industry, unions, governments, equity groups and providers to oversee and support the quality of vocational and technical education across Australia.

Quality Council Focus is a regular newsletter from the Chair and Members of the National Quality Council. The NQC seeks to strengthen relationships with its key stakeholders, by providing relevant news and updates on the progress of work being undertaken by the Council.

From The Chair

Since the meeting of the National Quality Council in July, I have met with a number of peak industry groups, Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers, as well as training officials and executives across the country to discuss the work of the Council.

Recently, I attended the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) National Conference in Perth, where I presented a keynote address on the topic of 'Quality in the VET Sector', focusing on the role and work of the Council. The ACPET Conference was a tremendous success and I commend all those involved for making this event a credit to the private provider sector.

At the end of September, I represented the NQC at an international level, when I travelled to India to participate in the Indo-Australian Forum on Vocational Education and Training. This mission was coordinated through DEST's Australian Education International (AEI) Group and the Government of India. The aim of the forum was to be to explore future partnerships between the two countries as Australia works with India to support it in reforming its training system.

The Indo-Australian Forum involved participation in a range of events and engagements as well as key presentations in New Delhi and Bangalore, with the focus on 'Quality in Vocational Education and Training'. These sessions provided me with the opportunity to present and promote the work and activities of the NQC in ensuring Australia's quality assured VET system. I was very pleased to share these sessions with fellow NQC Member and ACPET Chair, Julie Moss.

The TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) Convention took place in Melbourne in the last week in September. I was disappointed that I was not able to attend this year due to my overseas commitments, however, I believe that it was very successful. The TDA Convention is the premier annual event for TAFE directors and VET professionals from across the country to come together in a public forum and share ideas, strategies and visions for the future of public training in Australia.

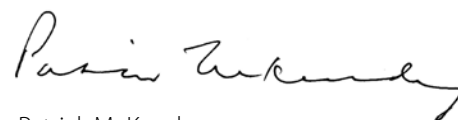
Between now and the December NQC meeting, I will continue to engage vigorously and meaningfully with a range of stakeholders. Over the next couple of months, I will pursue meetings with Commonwealth, State and Territory Shadow Ministers responsible for training, the ACTU, key industry figures, and peak industry bodies. As part of these meetings, I will be speaking to the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council in November.



These opportunities will provide open discussion about the work, priorities and activities of the NQC, as well as facilitate important feedback to the Council.

I look forward to continuing to engage with our key stakeholders to build important relationships.

Regards



Patrick McKendry

Chair

Next NQC Meeting

The NQC will hold its next meeting in December 2007.

Final date to be confirmed.

PROFILE

In each edition of Quality Council Focus, a member of the Council is profiled.

Darcel Russell
Deputy Federal Secretary
Australian Education Union



Darcel Russell joined the National Quality Council in May 2007 as its Equity representative for Indigenous Australians.

Darcel Russell began work at the Australian Education Union (AEU) as the Federal Aboriginal Education Officer in July 2001. She was elected unopposed to the position of Deputy Federal Secretary in January 2006. Darcel is a Goori woman from Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), which is located off the South East coast of Queensland. Most of her family still lives on the island, where Darcel enjoys going as often as she can to catch up with family, friends and fishing!

Prior to commencing work with the AEU, Darcel was the manager of the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit, TAFE Queensland. The unit's primary responsibilities include the development of accredited training programs specifically for Indigenous peoples, and the development of a range of print-based and multi-media resources to support the delivery of these programs. Before working with TAFE, Darcel was employed by Education Queensland, where she worked as a Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) teacher-coordinator, a classroom teacher, and as a curriculum and instructional designer.

Darcel is the current chair of the ACTU Indigenous Committee and the Indigenous representative on the ACTU executive. She is passionate about the power of public education as a tool for increasing social opportunity and promoting change.

"The public education system has the potential to provide Indigenous people with the skills to enact social change. This needs to be underpinned by the philosophy that our system must work towards affirming and establishing Indigenous identity for Indigenous people and educating non-Indigenous people about the diverse and unique histories and natures of our communities."

Darcel also co-chairs the National VET Indigenous Advisory Taskforce (NVIAT). The National VET Indigenous Advisory Taskforce has been established to provide advice, via

an Advisory Alliance, to Australian Government and State and Territory Ministers responsible for training on the issues and barriers experienced by all learners, including Indigenous. These issues include how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access, participate and gain successful outcomes in vocational education and training.

Partners in a Learning Culture 'The Way Forward' will continue to be the primary strategic document of the NVIAT, with continued emphasis on meeting the six key priorities:

1. Building the Capacity of the VET Sector
2. Creating More Pathways
3. Improving Funding Frameworks
4. Culturally Appropriate Product Development, Design and Delivery
5. Links to Employment
6. Growing VET Sector Partnerships

In the context of this document, the NVIAT has determined Links to Employment should be a priority, but is keen not to lose sight on the other strategic priorities through working in partnership with a range of stakeholders.

The 'Indigenous VET: The Way Forward' forum is to be held in Melbourne on 15-16 November 2007. Organisers hope to attract a broad range of VET stakeholders, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous to discuss their experiences of Indigenous VET.

NQC Meetings Update

The NQC has met on two occasions since the last newsletter - Thursday 5 July 2007 and Thursday 20 September 2007. The Council is currently composed of 22 members and the 5 July meeting was the first meeting for four new members, Rob Jacobs representing industry, Mark Bagshaw representing the disability equity group and Darcel Russell as the representative for the Indigenous equity group. John Langoulant of CCI WA, appointed in

March 2007, also attended his first meeting.

The Council has recently had some changes to its State and Federal representatives with Jim Davidson attending as the new representative for the Department of Education, Science and Training and Chris Whitton as the representative for the ACT.

At the 5 July meeting, discussion around the implementation of the AQTF 2007 occupied the morning session followed by an update on the Skill Sets

and Statements of Attainment from Mitch Cleary of Precision Consultancy.

Subsequent sessions included discussion around the Training Packages Standing Committee Report, a final project report on Employability Skills by Dr John Mitchell and a presentation by NCVET in regard to the Transnational Quality Strategy.

The Council also received an update from representatives participating in Working Groups and committees on behalf of the NQC. In particular, the

Council was interested in the outcomes of the recent meeting of the Disability Taskforce, noting the need for a co-ordinated focus on equity with short, medium and long term plans being identified for three projects being put forward for consideration at the next NSOC meeting.

Similarly, a report from the Indigenous Taskforce indicated concern over the loss of 'equity champions' and the impact of this on the system. The Council was advised that the current focus is on employment related issues and a draft work plan has been developed for presentation to NSOC. Planning for a major stakeholder forum in October was also underway.

At the 20 September meeting, discussion focussed on the significant development work occurring in AQTF 2007 in relation to Quality Indicators for RTOs and also in relation the Excellence Criteria both of which are on track to commence from January 2008. This was followed by a report on a number of projects designed to contribute to a view of the next generation of Training Packages. The outcomes of these projects will be considered by the NQC later in the year (see below under Training Packages Standing Committee for further details).

Subsequent sessions included a discussion on the policy and implementation implications for the NQC of the Transnational Quality Strategy arising from two recent reports highlighting that offshore delivery can carry significant risks to quality; and a discussion of the arrangements for providing advice on national strategic priorities for the National VET Professional Capability Building Program.

AQTF 2007 – Report from Quality Standing Committee

The Quality Standing Committee of the NQC has been in operation since late 2006 to oversee and guide the implementation strategy that will see the new quality arrangements for most components of AQTF 2007 in place from 1 July 2007. These components include the Essential Standards for Registration,

and the outcomes-based audit model which includes the Standards for State and Territory Registering Bodies.

To support the work of the Standing Committee a number of working groups chaired by Standing Committee members have been established to develop the various components of the new framework. Each of these components and proposed implementation arrangements have been the subject of extensive consultation with key stakeholder groups and more widely through drafts for comment on the www.training.com.au website.

Communication around the new arrangements has been an important aspect in preparation for the launch on 1 July 2007 and following it. Stakeholder general information sessions have been held in a number of locations in each state and territory throughout March and April this year. This has been followed up with professional development workshops held for state and territory authority personnel involved with registration, course accreditation and audit activity. The use of key messages targeted at particular audiences and the consistent branding of materials that support the new arrangements have ensured the roll out of materials has been trouble free.

Work is continuing on a number of components including outcome measures for RTOs, and the Excellence Criteria which need to be in place for implementation from 1 January 2008. In relation to outcome measures for RTOs, there has been agreement that these are better described as quality indicators that describe improvement over time. Three quality indicators and their descriptors have been endorsed as part of the Essential Standards for Registration and these are – an employer satisfaction indicator; a learner engagement and competency development indicator; and a competency/qualification completion rate indicator. Work is currently underway to develop the data collection instruments and pilot possible collection methodologies for the employer and learner indicators, while the completion rate indicator will be derived from the centralized core

date collection from all RTOs. In relation to this, the NQC agreed to examine the cost implications to RTOs and State and Territory Authorities, as part of a broader analysis of the regulatory load of the new arrangements.

Work on the Excellence Criteria is underway in accordance with the timeline for implementation on 1 January 2008. A suite of draft documents has been developed that will support the operation of the Excellence Criteria and are currently available to stakeholders for feedback and comment through the [training.com.au](http://www.training.com.au) website. The level of interest in the Excellence Criteria shown by participants in the general information sessions for AQTF 2007 has exceeded all expectations. It is expected that this interest will carry through to the information sessions to be delivered nationally later this year.

Training Package Standing Committee

The NQC established the Training Packages Standing Committee to provide advice on Training Package policy and strategic oversight of projects in the NQC Work Plan which relate to Training Packages. Its purpose is to ensure that improved and more timely processes are in place for the development, review and endorsement of Training Packages; and to guide work on improving the design of Training Packages, qualifications and units of competency. The Committee is co-Chaired by NQC members, Victoria and AIG; its membership includes representatives from DEST, Tasmania, ACCI, ACPET, TDA and ACTU, with an ISC Forum representative and the NQC and Committee Secretariat as fully participating observers. An equity representative is to be appointed soon.

Project work

Since the inception of the Standing Committee, its collaborative work has progressed a number of significant project areas from the 2007 NQC Work Plan. The key project areas actioned to date include:

- Enhanced Training Packages and Construction of Units of Competency. The approach taken with these two Work Plan areas has been to develop four sub-projects, the findings of which will be brought together as a significant body of research by the end of this year to inform Council decision making and further action. These projects are research-based; they bring together information and include only limited consultation, and hence are not of the scale of the High Level Review of Training Packages. In summary, the four projects involve:
 - **Rationalisation of Training Packages:** assessing progress with, and identifying barriers to, the rationalisation of Training Packages that Industry Skills Councils have been contracted to undertake during 2007
 - **Training Package design:** analysing the current design of Training Packages to ascertain whether they provide sufficient flexibility and adaptability to meet the diverse requirements of employers, individuals and the training sector nationally
 - **Qualification packaging rules:** analysing how effectively qualification packaging rules in Training Packages provide flexibility to meet Australia's emerging and changing skill needs.
 - **Construction of units of competency:** analysing whether the current specifications for and structure of units of competency meets contemporary Australian requirements.
- Improving Industry Confidence in VET Assessment: In response to issues raised in a number of forums over the last couple of years, in relation to industry confidence in the outcomes of VET assessments, this project, through research, consultation and analysis, will establish a strong evidence base for future NQC work to build industry confidence in the outcomes of VET assessment. The project tender closes 23 October and the project will be finalised by 30 April 2008.

Improved Training Package development, endorsement and review processes

Of critical importance - given the imperative to ensure that improved and timely processes are in place for the development, review and endorsement of Training Packages - has been the work undertaken by the Training Packages Standing Committee to develop better processes. Through its work and deliberations, the Training Packages Standing Committee arrived at a draft model for improving Training Package development, endorsement and review processes.

The model was considered by the Council on 5 July 2007 and was endorsed with minor adjustments; it is now being finalised for implementation in early 2008. The model provides for more streamlined and transparent processes with clearly assigned responsibilities, and provides for early information to industry and states and territories to gain forward commitment to work.

A process for evaluating the effectiveness of the improved processes, initially on a six-monthly basis is being set up.

Pathways, entry requirements and pre-requisites - formerly termed 'nesting'

The NQC has recently considered issues relating to what has been termed 'nesting' in qualifications. That term has now been replaced with more appropriate terminology, 'pathways, entry requirements and pre-requisites'. Advice is provided in the attached bulletin.

Wording on Statements of Attainment

In July, the Council considered approaches to accommodate new wording for Statements of Attainment developed through the Skill Sets project, and referred the issue of wording on Statements of Attainment

to the Training Packages Standing Committee for further work to ensure that industry needs were addressed. In September the Council endorsed changes to wording on Statements of Attainment:

- to allow wording in the case where the Statement of Attainment is awarded for an accredited 'Course in...'; and to ensure that State and Territory logos are only used within their conditions of use; and
- to allow optional additional wording on the Statement of Attainment to provide brief information about enterprise needs which are met by the combination of units.

Detailed advice in relation to the wording on Statements of Attainment will be provided in the revised edition of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Implementation Handbook, due for release shortly, and soon to be available on the AQF website www.aqf.edu.au

Engagement with Industry Skills Councils

The NQC has agreed that formal engagement with Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis together with the development of protocols to guide the NQC in responding to requests by ISCs for guidance on specific issues. A number of strategies have been put in place to improve formal engagement with ISCs including:

- distribution of the endorsed resolutions following each NQC meeting along with a verbal debrief of each meeting's outcomes by DEST;
- consultation in relation to the development of relevant project briefs as part of the 2007 NQC work plan, as well as opportunities for ISC's to be involved in certain aspects of NQC projects that directly relate to the work that they undertake.

Harmonisation with regulatory/licensing requirements

The NQC has agreed to support NQC nominees invited to participate on new occupational action groups that have recently commenced in 2007, those being land transport and property agents. Support for nominees in 2006 has enabled regulators to be better informed on training and quality assurance issues discussed at action groups and through them, the advice fed to the COAG Skills Recognition Steering Committee.

Employability Skills Update

As part of the 2006 work plan, the NQC began a project to develop a model for assessing and reporting on employability skills in Training Packages, together with a professional development (PD) strategy and resources to implement the model. Consultations in late 2006 confirmed strong support for an assessment and reporting model which involves:

- an integrated approach to assessment, where the assessment of employability skills is integrated with the assessment of technical skills within units and qualifications; and
- descriptive reporting, where short text is used to describe the employability skills developed as part of a qualification.

A PD strategy and related materials to implement the assessment and reporting model have been developed. Piloting and evaluation of the PD strategy and materials revealed a very low level of general awareness around employability skills and the impact of their being embedded in Training Packages; and confirmed the need for a general awareness-raising information campaign to underpin implementation of the PD strategy.

Further work to investigate costs associated with implementing descriptive reporting of employability skills, has been completed and the outcomes of this investigation noted by the NQC at their July 2007 meeting.

A second stage project has now been endorsed, and selection and appointment of a consultant to

undertake the work has now been completed. The second stage project will include a general awareness raising campaign and a national Train-the-Trainer program including PD workshops for key personnel in each State and Territory. Following delivery of the national Train-the-Trainer program, States and Territories will have responsibility for the roll-out of the PD strategy in their own jurisdictions.

Also included as part of the second stage project is the establishment of an employability skills website from which learners will be able to download a qualification specific employability skills report on completion of a Training Package qualification.

Skill Sets and Statements of Attainment

Implementation of the Communication and Professional Development Strategy for Skill Sets and Statements of Attainment approved by the Council in December 2006 was completed in June 2007.

Implementation of the strategy has followed a two stage process – firstly, awareness raising and information provision through articles for newsletters, communiqués, and websites, that promote and explain Skill Sets and their application; and secondly, through provision of professional development workshops.

Initial workshop sessions were very well attended in each state and territory with interest being so high that additional workshops had to be organized, bringing the total number of participants to in excess of 1000. The participants included Training Package Developers, RTOs, representatives of state/territory recognition authorities and those working within state departments of education and training in curriculum support roles, as well as representatives of state industry training bodies and some industry association and union representatives.

Given the level of interest in Skill Sets and Statements of Attainment and the need to sustain the availability of reliable information regarding their use following the workshops, the NQC will shortly consider a project proposal to develop an on-line resource. Such a resource will provide not only the

information given in workshops, but also a location for information on the NQC resolutions on Skill Sets and Statements of Attainments along with links to key documents such as the Training Package Development Handbook and the AQF Handbook.

It is anticipated that this strategy will assist COAG to meet its outcome for 31 December 2008 that 'where there is industry demand, national training qualifications will include identified skills clusters'.

NQC Meeting

The NQC will hold its next meeting in December 2007.

ACRONYMS

- AEI** Australian Education International
- AESOC** Australian Education Systems Officials Committee
- AQF** Australian Qualifications Framework
- AQFAB** Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
- AQTF** Australian Quality Training Framework
- AVETMISS** Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard
- COAG** Council of Australian Governments
- DEST** Department of Education, Science and Training
- ISC** Industry Skills Council
- MCVTE** Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education
- NSOC** National Senior Officials Committee
- NISC** National Industry Skills Committee
- NTIS** National Training Information Service
- NCVER** National Centre for Vocational Education Research
- NQC** National Quality Council
- MCEETYA** Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
- RTO** Registered Training Organisation

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