

**AUSTRALASIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION AUTHORITIES**

**POSITION PAPER**

**RECOGNITION BETWEEN**

**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND**

**SENIOR SECONDARY CERTIFICATES OF EDUCATION**

**September 2014**

1. **Purpose of ACACA Position Paper**
   1. The ACACA Position Paper presents information about the relationship between VET and senior secondary education, in particular the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates of Education.
   2. The Position Paper presents ACACA’s viewpoint on specific matters arising from current developments in this context, including the proposal to revise the *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000).*
   3. The Position Paper represents the views of the Chief Executives of the ACACA agencies, rather than the Boards of the agencies.
2. **Executive Summary**
   1. The ACACA agency in each state and territory has established recognition arrangements between VET and its Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. The agencies have established these arrangements because of their commitment to provide senior secondary students with certificates with long-term integrity and credibility that reflect achievement in a wide range of studies, including VET.
   2. ACACA agencies share common goals and principles for the recognition arrangements between VET and the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education of each state/territory. The way each agency puts those goals and principles into effect is a product of the agency’s wider context, together with the agency’s collaboration with key stakeholders in the state/territory.
   3. ACACA agencies regard the proposed revision of the *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000)* as an important opportunity for ACACA and key partners involved in the VET sector to improve the quality and integrity of VET outcomes for young people and for industry.
   4. ACACA agencies support a new Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education that:

* confirms the distinction between VET and Vocational Learning;
* acknowledges that VET qualifications and Senior Secondary Certificates of Education operate within the Australian Qualifications Framework and that appropriate recognition arrangements between VET and SSCEs are essential;
* affirms that VET recognised in Senior Secondary Certificates of Education meets the following requirements:
  + it is nationally recognised VET
  + it is drawn from national recognised training packages or accredited courses
  + it is delivered and assessed by Registered Training Organisations
  + it is quality assured under nationally consistent standards.
* acknowledges that the term “VET in Schools” no longer adequately represents the complexity of the relationship between VET and senior secondary education nor the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.
  1. In the Position Paper, ACACA presents information and its perspective on the following key issues that it considers should be addressed in the redevelopment of a Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education:
* terminologyof ‘VET in Schools’;
* recognition between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates;
* quality assurance.

1. **Role and responsibilities of ACACA agencies** 
   1. ***Role of ACACA agencies***

In Australia, each state and territory possesses separate legislation that defines the responsibility of an ACACA agency, often known as a Board of Studies or a Curriculum and Assessment Authority, to awar3d a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education to students who fulfil its requirements.

The Senior Secondary Certificate of Education in each state and territory is issued in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and is known as the following:

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| --- | --- |
| • ACT | ACT Year 12 Certificate |
| • New South Wales | Higher School Certificate (HSC) |
| • Northern Territory | Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) |
| • Queensland | Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) |
| • South Australia | South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) |
| • Tasmania | Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) |
| • Victoria | Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) |
|  | Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) |
| • Western Australia | Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). |
|  |  |

***3.2 Recognition between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates***

Within the Australian Qualifications Framework, the AQF Council has acknowledged that the Senior Secondary Certificates of Education in Australia do not align with one specific level of the Framework’s eight levels.

The Senior Secondary Certificate in each state and territory is a universal qualification that is required to address the learning needs and transition pathways of the full range of senior secondary students. The diversity of students completing a Senior Secondary Certificate means that they could be studying across levels 1 – 4 of the AQF.

The place of the Senior Secondary Certificate in the AQF further takes into account that in a number of instances, senior secondary students can gain credit towards the completion of their Senior Secondary Certificate for studies they are concurrently undertaking in the VET sector or at University.

The ACACA agency in each state and territory has established recognition arrangements between VET and its own Senior Secondary Certificate.

Each ACACA agency does so on the basis that the quality of VET is regulated by the VET system through the functions of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and the VET Quality Framework.

The recognition between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates across the states and territories occurs through the following set of common practices:

* all VET given credit towards a Senior Secondary Certificate is drawn from nationally recognised training packages or accredited courses
* the VET is delivered and/or assessed by RTOs who comply with the VET Quality Framework
* all VET that gains credit towards a Senior Secondary Certificate is assessed within a competency-based assessment framework by assessors who comply with ASQA standards
* students are awarded nationally recognised VET qualifications and/or Statements of Attainment by the RTO delivering and/or assessing the VET
* each ACACA agency works with industry groups at the state/territory level in making decisions about the recognition arrangements between VET and its Senior Secondary Certificate.

ACACA states in the strongest terms that there should be *no* differentiation between the VET that features in the recognition arrangements for Senior Secondary Certificates and the VET that is delivered in other areas of the VET sector.

***3.3 Focusing on the individual as well as systems***

ACACA agencies respect the responsibility and authority of the VET sector for the management of its quality standards and the overall integrity of VET.

ACACA agencies similarly place the highest priority on the integrity of their respective Senior Secondary Certificate through the curriculum standards and associated assessment standards of each certificate, together with each agency’s major focus on the validity and reliability of the assessments that contribute to the certificate.

ACACA further affirms that a key outcome of the commitment to quality systems in both VET qualifications and Senior Secondary Certificates is the value they hold for individuals. The value of the systems is to give individuals access to credentials that recognise and contribute to their life-long learning and acknowledge that life-long learning does not necessarily occur through a linear trajectory.

This benefit to the individual is especially important in the context of senior secondary education and the relationship between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates where young people are still making ongoing decisions about their futures.

The Senior Secondary Certificate in each state and territory is designed to provide individual senior secondary students with flexible options to gain the skills, knowledge and understandings necessary for a range of future transitions and pathways.

***3.3 Focusing on flexibility***

ACACA agencies recognise the importance of providing students with flexibility in their studies towards a Senior Secondary Certificates. This flexibility underpins the policy commitment to recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA observes that a similar commitment to flexibility is evident in the recognition arrangements between the VET sector and the Higher Education sector.

ACACA acknowledges that these recognition arrangements can lead to a range of purposes and uses as to why individuals undertake both VET and a Senior Secondary Certificate. ACACA considers this diversity of purposes and uses to be a positive feature of the arrangements.

ACACA further acknowledges the concurrent study of both VET and a Senior Secondary Certificate is also likely to produce a complex set of outcomes. ACACA considers that these outcomes are best regarded as multiple rather than singular. They should not be regarded as necessarily linear.

1. **Key issues**

ACACA considers the following issues should be addressed to strengthen the relationship between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA considers the issues have particular relevance in the context of the development of a new Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education.

* 1. **Terminology of ‘VET in Schools’**

***Major considerations:***

1. In the *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000)*, the term ‘VET in Schools’ was used generally in relation to the overall framework. The term was not used to define any individual element of the framework. Instead the 6 elements of the original framework were: VET; enterprise and vocational learning; student support services; community and business partnerships; effective institutional and funding arrangements; monitoring and evaluation.
2. Since the introduction of the Framework in 2000, the term ‘VET in Schools’ has been mistakenly used by a range of groups as an entity in itself, for instance:

* ‘VET in Schools qualifications’: no such qualifications exist in the Australian Qualifications Framework
* ‘VET in Schools programs’: the programs are either VET managed by the VET sector; or vocational learning courses/subjects managed by the school sector; or other forms of student support services such as career counselling.

1. Since the introduction of the Framework, the definition of a ‘school’ has become more complex in relation to the learning needs and pathways of young people engaged in senior secondary education:

* students can be enrolled concurrently in more than one institution and public funding for the student’s learning is not allocated to only the one institution
* the structure of schools has been expanded, for instance to include Trade Training Centres and Technical Colleges
* students undertake Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships where their place of learning includes the workplace.

1. Since the introduction of the Framework, ACACA agencies have developed formal recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates. The arrangements are ‘between’ qualifications; one does not sit ‘in’ the other.

***ACACA Position***

The term “VET in Schools” no longer adequately represents the complexity of the relationship between VET and senior secondary education nor does it appropriately represent the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA affirms that an alternative term should be identified that recognises and respects:

* VET qualifications and Senior Secondary Certificates operate within the AQF and are the product of quality management systems for which the respective sector carries direct responsibility;
* the relationship between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates - and senior secondary education - is a positive feature of the learning needs and vocational pathways of young people choosing to study concurrently in both the training and education sectors.

ACACA affirms that when a new term or title is identified for the revised Framework it should relate explicitly to young people who are the focus of the framework.

* 1. **Recognition between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates**

***Major considerations:***

1. ***Extent of recognition between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates***

It is essential to acknowledge there is already a significant number of young people who are concurrently undertaking VET qualifications and Senior Secondary Certificates.

The data records of the ACACA agencies in each state and territory demonstrate that across Australia there were in 2013 over 460,000 enrolments towards a VET qualification that concurrently gained credit towards a Senior Secondary Certificate (Appendix 1). It is pointed out that the data are based on the reports of VET activity that schools and/or RTOs submit to the ACACA agencies and for which the agencies in good faith allocate credit towards the respective Senior Secondary Certificate.

The data tables in Appendix 1 present the wide range of industry areas, training packages and VET qualifications in which the young people’s enrolments occurred.

The data demonstrate a relatively higher level of participation in Certificates I and II, whilst also indicating a significant level of participation in Certificates III and IV and some Diplomas.

Some of the issues that an analysis of the data generates are addressed in the following sections.

1. ***Level of VET gaining credit towards Senior Secondary Certificates***

ACACA agencies acknowledge that Certificates I, and many Certificates II, are intentionally designed to provide preparatory/prevocational level training.

The nature and status of this level of VET raises important issues relating to what should be the comparable level of study for these VET qualifications in a Senior Secondary Certificate.

Each of the ACACA agencies has addressed the issue by placing a limit on the amount of credit for which Certificates I, and in some instances Certificates II, can gain credit towards the respective Senior Secondary Certificate.

ACACA considers the redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people engaged in senior secondary education can generate opportunities for key stakeholders to address a range of key issues related to the nature and purpose of entry level training and to the most appropriate recognition arrangements with Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA affirms it is also important to strengthen the opportunities for students to gain credit for higher levels of VET towards Senior Secondary Certificates.

This goal is strategically important in relation to ACACAs commitment to strengthen the status and profile of VET in the context of Senior Secondary Certificates and to improve the esteem in which VET is regarded in relation to senior secondary education.

ACACA considers the achievement of this goal is further likely to improve the attractiveness of the vocational training pathway for high-achieving students, both within and beyond their senior secondary studies.

1. ***Nature and status of state-accredited VET***

ACACA considers that state-accredited VET presents a number of problematic challenges for the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.

On the one hand, state-accredited VET is nationally endorsed. Within the proposed redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education, it is defined as one of the key elements of VET.

On the other hand, state-accredited VET incorporates a diverse range of programs at varying levels of competency.

Some of these are better regarded as general preparation programs or foundation skills programs.

A number of ACACA agencies have been obliged to take the position that these programs are not at a sufficiently comparable level to contribute credit towards the respective Senior Secondary Certificate.

ACACA considers the redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education should facilitate the opportunity for key stakeholders to address a number of crucial issues related to the nature and purpose of state-accredited VET and its relationship with Senior Secondary Certificates.

1. ***Age appropriateness***

ACACA acknowledges that the recognition relationships between higher level VET and and Senior Secondary Certificates can raise issues about the age appropriateness of some of the training for young people enrolled in senior secondary education.

These issues of age appropriateness can arise in relation to such areas as safety, adult status, level of experience, licensing requirements.

ACACA considers that these matters need to be addressed by making these conditions and expectations in a training package more explicit so as to address the interests of the training provider and the individual student.

Again the redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education can lead to opportunities for key stakeholders to address this matter.

1. ***Higher education selection***

A consideration of the relationship between higher education selection and the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates points to a key principle in the recognition arrangements.

This principle is the commitment to maximise outcomes for young people through a Senior Secondary Certificate that recognises and strengthens flexible pathways not only within secondary education, but also beyond it into further training, higher education and employment.

The principle was previously highlighted in the *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000)* in the eight key features on which the framework is based. The first of the eight features was:

*Explicit and well-articulated pathways: The new framework should help maximise outcomes for students by … ensuring young people have access to courses of study that not only provide industry recognised AQF qualifications but that are also recognised for entrance to university (p16).*

Theoperationalisation of this principle in the 20 years since the Framework was introduced has not been without its challenges.

As a consequence the extent and manner in which VET is now included in the calculation of a higher education selection score (i.e. the ATAR or its state-based equivalent) through a Senior Secondary Certificate varies across Australia.

At the centre of this variability of how VET contributes to higher education selection for school leavers sits the fundamental issue of assessment validity and reliability.

The variability is the product of the reality that the VET sector and the education sector define and manage assessment validity and reliability in different ways. Thus the contribution of their respective assessments to a higher education selection score is problematic.

ACACA affirms that the achievement of explicit and well-articulated pathways for senior secondary students in the context of context of higher education selection requires the ongoing collaboration of key stakeholders in the training, education and higher education sectors to address the key issue of assessment validity and reliability.

***ACACA Position***

ACACA continues to affirm the principle of explicit and well-articulated pathways for senior secondary students.

ACACA affirms that the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates contribute significantly to strengthening outcomes and pathways for young people.

ACACA considers that issues which may arise in these recognition arrangements – for instance the level of VET recognised in Senior Secondary Certificates, the nature and status of state-accredited VET, age appropriateness and higher education selection – are the consequences of the positive connections between the VET sector and the education sector.

The issues are the product of the pathways in action. Continuing collaboration between the sectors will both resolve the issues and improve the quality of outcomes and pathways for young people.

* 1. **Quality assurance**

***Major considerations:***

1. ***Responsibilities and accountabilities of ACACA agencies***

Senior Secondary Certificates are significant and well-respected credentials in the Australian community. They document for a young person the culmination of their years of schooling. They are a portable qualification that has currency both nationally and internationally.

ACACA agencies in each state and territory possess the responsibility and accountability, defined in state and territory legislation, for the quality and integrity of their respective Senior Secondary Certificate.

ACACA agencies carry a particular responsibility for the quality assurance of the assessments reported through each Senior Secondary Certificate. They individually manage the quality of the assessments for which they carry direct responsibility.

In relation to the quality assurance for VET assessment, ACACA agencies recognise and accept the quality assurance managed by the VET sector through the functions of ASQA and the application of the VET Quality Framework.

Within this protocol with the VET sector, ACACA agencies nonetheless possess the obligation to ensure the integrity of the Senior Secondary Certificate.

In relation to the VET recognition arrangements, they exercise the obligation by monitoring the quality of the VET assessments reported to them and, as appropriate and on a case-by-case basis, will liaise with the relevant VET authority where they consider there are integrity matters to be addressed.

1. ***Workplace delivery and assessment of VET in training packages***

There is a clear relationship between VET and the workplace application of the competencies that the training is intended to develop.

In the mind of some stakeholders all VET should therefore occur in the workplace and if it does not do so then it should not be regarded as VET.

This viewpoint ignores the requirements of the quality management systems that the VET sector itself has put in place.

Under these requirements the training must comply with the nationally endorsed training package. In reality some training packages do not stipulate that the training and assessment of the relevant competencies must occur in the workplace.

The quality assurance systems of ACACA agencies stipulate that the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates must be based on the quality management systems of the VET sector.

On this basis, if it is a requirement of the training package that the delveiriy of training and assessment must occur in the workplace, then every ACACA agency only recognises that VET if it complies with the workplace requirement.

On the same basis, ACACA agencies also recognise VET that is not delivered and assessed in the workplace if that possibility exists under the condtions set by the training package.

Under the arrangements for Australian School Based Apprenticehips the requirements regarding the workplace are clear and explicit.

ACACA acknowledges the value for young people and industry when VET does occur in a work context. It observes that one state, NSW, does in fact place its own additional requirement on the VET that gains credit towards its Senior Secondary Certifiate by which the VET is only recognised if it has occurred in the workplace.

ACACA considers that the relationship between the workplace and the delivery and assessment of VET deserves futher exploration by key stakeholders, including the possible implications of such an exploration for the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA observes that the exploration is as directly relevant for the VET sector as it is for ACACA agencies.

1. ***Institutional delivery in training packages***

The issue of institutional delivery is closely linked to the issue of workplace delivery of VET addressed in the preceding section.

Those stakeholders who assert all VET should occur in the workplace are frequently critical about VET that is delivered and assessed in an intentional context.

As in the previous section, ACACA affirms that the quality assurance systems of ACACA agencies for the recognition arrangements between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates are based on the quality management systems of the VET sector.

ACACA agencies recognise VET that is delivered and assessed in an institutional setting if that possibility exists under the conditions set by the training package.

ACACA observes that any issues about the institutional delivery of VET are as directly relevant for the VET sector itself as they may be for ACACA agencies.

ACACA acknowledges that the exploration proposed in the preceding section regarding the relationship between the workplace and the delivery and assessment of VET would lead to a focus on institutional delivery.

1. ***Online delivery in training***

ACACA agencies have noted a trend towards the online delivery and assessment of VET by some RTOs.

ACACA observes that this trend is likely to generate similar, if not greater, concerns from those groups who express criticisms of intuitional delivery.

ACACA notes again that this is a matter that relates directly to the conditions for the training delivery and assessment as stipulated in the nationally endorsed training packages.

ACACA notes that in the first instance it is a matter for the quality management systems of the VET sector.

1. ***Role of schools and school sectors in quality management***

ACACA observes that schools and school sectors have a crucial role to play, together with the ACACA agencies of and the VET sector, in the integrity and quality of the VET for which senior secondary student gain credit in Senior Secondary Certificates.

The role is exercised in a range of ways.

It involves schools taking steps to assist students in their understanding of the purposes and outcomes of the VET they are undertaking.

It involves schools taking steps to ensure that organisational structures such as timetables or off-site duty of care arrangements are compatible with the most conducive conditions for the delivery of VET.

It involves schools taking steps to ensure that their links with RTOs will maximise the achievement of quality outcomes for students and that the associated use of resources to secure the VET are cost-effective and not only cost- efficient.

It involves school sectors providing relevant guidelines and appropriate assistance to schools in managing the complexity inherent in the relationship between VET, senior secondary education and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA agencies affirm their commitment to work collaboratively with schools and school sectors to maximise the quality and integrity of the VET that students undertake in connection with senior secondary education and Senior Secondary Certificates.

***ACACA Position***

ACACA affirms its commitment to the quality and integrity of the VET recognised in Senior Secondary Certificates through its ongoing respect for and adherence to the quality assurance systems of the VET sector.

ACACA affirms its commitment to resolve issues or concerns raised by stakeholders about the recognition relationships between VET and Senior Secondary Certificates through constructive dialogue and collaboration. ACACA agencies will take effective action that improves the quality of outcomes for senior secondary students and recognises and respects the perspective of key stakeholders.

ACACA affirms its ongoing commitment to the achievement of explicit and well-articulated pathways for senior secondary students through collaboration with the VET sector, schools and school sectors.

1. **Looking ahead**

ACACA considers that the redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education presents an important opportunity to affirm those elements from the *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000)* that have delivered improved outcomes for young people and strengthened their pathways into further learning and employment.

The improvement in Year 12 retention rates and the significant number of students who now gain credit for VET in their Senior Secondary Certificates are indicators of the Framework’s success.

ACACA observes that where issues have arisen that need to be addressed in the operation of the Framework they are best considered as consequences of the Framework in action. They are the result of the strengthened connections between VET, senor secondary education and Senior Secondary Certificates.

ACACA considers that the effectiveness of the original *Framework for Vocational Education in Schools (2000)* is in large part due to the design of the framework. It presents a conceptual model that articulates a set of key elements and affirms the pivotal role of the connections between the key stakeholders.

The original Framework was not prescriptive or directive. It did not stipulate a set of required actions.

ACACA affirms that the redevelopment of the Framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education should build on the key attributes of the earlier framework and also acknowledge and support the significant growth that has occurred during its operation.

ACACA affirms that the redeveloped Framework will be most effective if it is based on the following features:

* the focus on young people and the contribution of senior secondary education to each young person’s life-long learning
* the connections between senior secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and employment
* the commitment to build explicit and well-articulated pathways for young people
* the commitment to quality
* conceptual clarity about the key features of the framework
* the importance of collaborative action between agencies based on understanding and respect for their respective responsibilities and accountabilities
* the well-managed use of data to monitor, analyse and evaluate the value gained from the connections between senior secondary education, vocational education and training, higher education and employment.

A framework can either shine a light or cast a long shadow.

ACACA strongly supports a framework for VET delivered to young people in senior secondary education that is in the best interests of young people and that acts as an enabling mechanism to facilitate clarity, understanding, and collaborative activity between the key agencies who provide services to them.