



UAC

REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Response to Discussion Paper

March 2019

ABOUT UAC

The Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) Pty Ltd (UAC) was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is a strong culture of servicing the needs of all our stakeholders, particularly our institutions and applicants.

UAC has a trusted and valued position in the higher education sector. Applicants, especially Year 12 students, turn to UAC for unbiased and authoritative information about university admissions and courses and for an easy interface with which to apply. Institutions rely upon UAC services to handle the bulk of the admissions process, allowing them to focus on their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and community engagement. Parents, schools, the media and the public know UAC as their first point of reference for university admissions in NSW and the ACT.

UAC is a member of the Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admission Centres (ACTAC), the group that facilitates communication and co-operation between tertiary admissions centres in Australia and New Zealand. UAC's Managing Director is the current Chair of ACTAC.

OUR SUBMISSION

UAC welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Discussion Paper on the Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

As a not-for-profit working in the broad interests of the education sector, UAC is well-placed to provide objective and neutral advice to government.

Our mission is to provide equity of access to higher education, and we value equally students and the universities they aspire to attend.

Included in the Review's Terms of Reference is that the AQF structure and components will be reviewed to ensure that they "effectively facilitate access to learning pathways and mobility (for example through articulation arrangements, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning) within and between education sectors, AQF levels and AQF qualifications".

The Discussion Paper notes that there is support for a "more coherent tertiary sector" and a "need for greater consistency and transparency between qualifications to support recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer". It is also noted that a "shared credit transfer register could help students make better pathway decisions" and provide "more certainty and transparency to students about the potential outcome of a request for credit"

This relates directly to UAC's interest in the development of an integrated solution for credit management, micro-credentialing and real-time verification of academic records. Our aim is to do this by introducing technology into the sector that enables trusted and fair integration for secure issuing, usage and validation of academic records.

Given the Review's interest in increasing student mobility across the tertiary sector, UAC now provides the following response outlining our credit project for consideration as part of the Review.

1. BACKGROUND

Credit granted can be an important consideration when determining whether to undertake tertiary study. Currently there is no consolidated source of credit transfer information available to prospective and current students. Institutions provide this information to students in different ways; some institutions have online tools for the assessment of credit whilst others have information only so that prospective students must self-assess. Yet other institutions have no information on their websites at all about credit transfer, and instead direct prospective students to an administrative unit or to faculties for information. That there is no consistent means by which students can inform themselves about credit indicates a lack of transparency in the current arrangements. Students have limited certainty in expected service levels and are unable to plan effectively and make informed education choices.

On the institution side there are multiple challenges. Some institutions have some level of automation in the assessment of credit transfer requests whilst others rely on manual methods such as spreadsheets and emails to manage the assessment process with multiple parties involved in the decision-making process. This situation prevents transparency and consistency in processing assessments and their outcomes.

Owing to the currently confusing array of means by which credit is managed, there are other challenges that include, but are not limited to:

- enforcement of policy relating to credit
- a lack of evidence, traceability and contestability on decisions
- ad-hoc assessment for similar requests and management of precedence
- late credit transfer requests (eg after enrolment) for units that are subject to credit
- delays on the availability of information required to assess requests for credit transfers
- lack of information to manage articulation agreements
- credit applications being disjointed from admissions applications
- data security risks in the storage and management of personal student information.

Clearly the current credit arrangements negatively impact student experience, quality management and administrative productivity, and there is an opportunity to deliver financial and non-financial benefits to students, the sector and government.

2. PROPOSED SOLUTION

To meet these challenges, UAC believes that a common, widely accessible and searchable database of pre-determined credit for current and prospective students would have significant benefits for students and the management of credit by institutions. As such, UAC has embarked on the development of a common platform. The interface will enable the search for and retrieval of the details of credit arrangements such as articulation agreements as well as individual subjects where precedents have previously been set. Credit transfer arrangements will be defined in terms of specific mappings between units of study and as block exemption/general elective type credit.

The database will include credit from:

- higher education providers, both public and private
- VET sector institutions, both public and private
- overseas institutions
- formal articulation agreements
- individual precedent cases.

Importantly, the credit platform takes into consideration the emergence and growth of micro-credentials, in addition to the rise in international mobility of students and credentials.

The search interface will allow users to retrieve and display a set of credit transfer arrangements by specifying a range of search criteria, including sector (*i.e.* VET or higher education), course level, field of education, institution name and course code or title.

Distributed ledger technology and application programming interfaces will be used to effectively access student records to automate credit searching and processing.

Machine learning can be used effectively to recommend credit based on institutions rules for subjects/courses for which there is no precedent.

Finally, credit recognition can be integrated with the university admissions process and cater for the wide range of distinctive policies and rules associated with credit within individual institutions.

3. BENEFITS

A centralised credit transfer site would be a valuable service enhancement for key stakeholders, including:

- prospective applicants/current students, by providing a centralised source of credit transfer for comparing credit across courses and/or institutions which empowers students to make informed education choices
- participating institutions, by developing tools and processes to streamline and automate their offer and credit processes and thereby lowering costs, increasing productivity and improving the student experience and student conversion to enrolment
- government; improving transparency by providing a central resource for information about pathways to and options for tertiary study using consistent terminology and outcomes. A credit platform would also promote pathways between higher education and VET and lifelong learning and potentially reduce financial liability to government.

It is important to note that the establishment of a central credit platform will not limit the ability of individual institutions to determine their own credit policies. We believe that such an approach will significantly assist the achievement of outcomes desired by the Review, and particularly:

- improve access to learning pathways and mobility within and between education sectors, AQF levels and AQF qualifications
- lead to a more coherent tertiary sector
- increase consistency and transparency between qualifications to support recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer
- support students to make better pathway decisions
- provide greater certainty and transparency to students about the potential outcome of a request for credit.

UAC thanks the Department of Education and Training for the opportunity to provide this response to the Discussion Paper on the Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework and looks forward to continued work with Government, the education sector and the broader community to deliver greater access to tertiary education.