Dear Ms Doolette

Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas

The University of Sydney welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the AQF Council’s consultation paper: *Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificate and Diplomas in the Australian Qualifications Framework*, November 2011. We appreciate the Council’s efforts to continue working with institutions to further refine the strengthened AQF.

The discussion paper focuses on concerns that were raised during the AQF strengthening process regarding Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas as follows:

- There is a need to better define the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types. The views expressed included differentiating between qualifications used for ‘broadening’ and ‘extension or deepening’ in a discipline/field of study and distinguishing between qualifications that are graduate or postgraduate in purpose.
- The distinction in titling between Vocational Graduate Certificates/Diplomas and Graduate Certificates/Diplomas may no longer be relevant. Currently, the former are accredited in the vocational education and training sector and the latter are accredited in the higher education sector.

On the second point, the University of Sydney agrees that it is an artificial and historical construct to label some graduate certificates and diplomas as ‘vocational’. Given that the data provided in the discussion paper indicates that there are neither large numbers of these qualifications nor comparatively large cohorts of students in them, the University would support the removal of this qualifier from the descriptor for Level 8 qualifications. We understand that this position is consistent with the consensus view that has been reached by the Chairs of University Academic Boards nationally.
We further understand that the first point was discussed in some detail at a meeting of the National Chairs of Academic Board held in late 2011, but that there was little support either for moving the Graduate Certificate to Level 7 of the AQF, or for introducing a more detailed approach to the two qualifications based on the criteria outlined in point one above.

The University of Sydney does not currently distinguish between graduate and postgraduate courses at this level and believes that it would be an artificial exercise to categorise courses in this manner. Similarly, there is no support at the University of Sydney for the option of deeming graduate certificates to be Level 7 when they are clearly not undergraduate qualifications, while retaining graduate diplomas at Level 8. We believe this would further complicate the postgraduate coursework market with no perceptible benefit to institutions, students or employers. The University has a long standing policy separating undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and prohibiting the parallel teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the same learning situations except in clearly defined situations where this can be seen as beneficial to students in reaching the learning outcomes appropriate for their degree. The adoption of the revised AQF First Edition July 2011 has provide a strengthened framework for this policy and any proposed change of levels for graduate certificates would undermine this policy and framework. The issue of access to Commonwealth-supported places, and whether this would alter if the qualification level was changed, could also affect this position.

In conclusion, the University of Sydney would support the adoption of Option 1 as outlined on page 10 of the discussion paper, i.e. to retain the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma at level 8 with the descriptors as revised in 2011 and remove the titles Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma, with the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma qualification types available for accreditation by both the VET and higher education sectors. In the event that the AQF Council nevertheless decides to press ahead with the proposal to provide greater differentiation between qualifications, then we suggest that the distinction between ‘broadening’ and ‘extension or deepening’ in a discipline could be sharpened with the additional words, already common in the higher education sector of ‘Graduate Certificate/Diploma – new area’ and Graduate Certificate/Diploma – extension area’.

Once again, thank you for allowing us to contribute to this discussion.

Yours sincerely

[Signature removed for electronic distribution]

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