

## The Australian Qualifications Framework and Units of Competency

### The Australian Qualifications Framework

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system and covers all nationally recognised qualifications in the secondary school, vocational and higher education sectors<sup>1</sup>.

The AQF provides the standards for Australian qualifications and comprises:

- The learning outcomes for each AQF level (Levels 1 – 10) and qualification type (Certificate I through to Doctoral degree);
- The specifications for the application of the AQF in the accreditation and development of qualifications;
- The policy requirements for issuing AQF qualifications;
- The policy requirements for qualification linkages and student pathways;
- The policy requirements for the registers of:
  - organisations authorised to accredit AQF qualifications;
  - organisations authorised to issue AQF qualifications;
  - AQF qualifications and qualification pathways;
- The policy requirements for the addition or removal of qualification types in the AQF; and
- The definitions of the terminology used in the policy.

All qualifications that are included in national Training Packages or accredited by VET Regulators such as TAC must adhere to the AQF.

AQF qualifications are created by packaging units of competency into meaningful groups. The combination of outcomes from the groups of units is aligned to a relevant AQF level and qualification type. **It is important to note that individual units of competency are not aligned to the AQF.**

<sup>1</sup> Source: Australian Qualifications Framework, Second Edition January 2013

## The Qualification Code

The AQF level of a qualification is expressed in its code and title, for example:  
BSB20120 Certificate II in Workplace Skills

Each qualification has a unique eight-character code:

- the first three letters identify the training package;
- the first number identifies the AQF level;
- the next two numbers identify a qualification's position in the sequence of qualifications at that level; and
- the last two numbers identify the year in which the qualification was approved for implementation.

If we look at the qualification code and title above this means:

BSB 2 01 20 Certificate II in Workplace Skills

The qualification is from the Business Services Training Package.

The qualification is at AQF level two, and therefore called a Certificate II.

The qualification is the first qualification in the sequence of qualifications at this level. This number is simply a counter.

The qualification was approved for implementation in 2020.

## The Unit of Competency Code

A unit of competency **is not** aligned to the AQF. There are two ways that the Training Package developers create a code for a unit of competency.

### Option 1

BSB OPS 3 06 Record stakeholder interactions (Release 1)

The first three characters identify the training package, Business Services Training Package.

The next three characters indicate the unit of competency stream or group.

The first number indicates the AQF qualification in which the unit is first packaged. (*This is NOT an AQF Level for the unit*)

The next two numbers identify a unit's position in the sequence of units in that competency stream or group.

### Option 2

HLT HSS 007 Handle medical gases safely (Release 1)

The first three characters identify the training package, Health Training Package

The next three characters indicate the competency stream or group.

The next three numbers identify a unit's position in the sequence of units in that competency stream or group.

## How do I determine the level of complexity for a unit of competency?

The level of complexity for a unit of competency is determined by the statements in the unit itself. Each element and its associated performance criteria will tell you what the competent person must be able to do. The application section will often provide clues such as 'under supervision' or 'independently' suggesting how the task is to be performed. These statements, along with the information in the assessment requirements documents are what trainers and assessors must use to determine what will be taught and evidence that must be gathered in the assessment.

As an example, the unit HLTHSS007 Handle medical gases safely (Release 1) contains the following element and performance criteria.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 3. <b>Follow</b> workplace procedures and legislative requirements for storing medical gas cylinders and equipment | 3.1 <b>Store</b> all cylinders and equipment in appropriate storage locations in accordance with manufacturer recommendations |
|  | 3.2 <b>Store</b> cylinders away from combustible material   |
|  | 3.3 <b>Use</b> cylinder stock on a rotational system and <b>keep</b> full and empty cylinders separate                        |
|  | 3.4 <b>Protect</b> cylinders from cold and heat   |
|  | 3.5 <b>Close</b> and <b>secure</b> storage area   |
|  | 3.6 <b>Display</b> clearly visible signage outside medical gas storage area   |

The highlighted words indicate the type of performance that is required for each statement. In this example it is very task oriented, the competent person is following set procedures and requirements to complete the task.

Here is another example from the unit HLTANA005 Maintain quality and supply of anaesthetic equipment and consumables (Release 1)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 6. <b>Evaluate</b> anaesthetic and monitoring equipment for purchase | 6.1 <b>Develop</b> evaluation criteria and documentation for equipment being considered for trialling or purchase in consultation with the anaesthetist |
|  | 6.2 <b>Apply</b> agreed criteria to evaluation and <b>provide recommendations</b> for purchase  |
|  | 6.3 <b>Provide feedback</b> to companies on products under development, as requested  |

In this example, the performance required is far more complex, the competent person is required to undertake evaluations where they develop criteria and documentation, make recommendations and engage with external clients to provide feedback.

The trainer/assessor must fully analyse the unit of competency when developing training and assessment materials. If there are aspects of the unit that are unclear, for example, the unit might say:

*3.3. Complete applicable workplace or site documentation, including incident report form.*

The trainer/assessor will use industry engagement processes to determine the type of documentation that is used across industry and get examples of these, including incident report forms to use in their training and assessment. The validation processes in the RTO will also assist in ensuring that all trainers and assessors have a common understanding of the unit requirements and the training and assessment requirements.

## **What happens when the same unit appears in qualifications at different AQF levels?**

There are many instances in the VET sector where a Unit of Competency is included in a number of qualifications at different AQF levels.

One of the best examples of this is the unit **HLTAID011 Provide First Aid (Release 1)**

This unit is included as a core or elective unit in 85 qualifications ranging from Certificate II to Diploma, 5 Skill Sets and 13 Accredited Courses. It can be imported into many more as an unnamed elective.

### **The question**

Do I make the training and the assessment harder or easier to suit the AQF level of the qualification in which the unit is packaged?

### **The answer**

NO!

### **What should you do?**

You deliver and assess the unit as it is written. This applies whether you deliver a stand-alone unit, as part of a cluster in a skill set, or as part of a full qualification. To do otherwise compromises the principles of assessment and rules of evidence, specifically:

- You compromise validity – because the changes you make mean that the assessment is not reflective of the nationally agreed unit requirements.
- You compromise reliability – because there is not a consistent outcome for the unit.
- You compromise fairness – because the same unit has been made harder or easier for students in different qualifications.
- You compromise sufficiency – because not all required evidence has been collected (particularly if you make the assessment easier)

This will cause non-compliance in Clause 1.8 of the Standards for RTOs.

## **How to meet compliance?**

An Auditor will expect to be able to see how the RTO has unpacked the unit of competency to develop their training materials and assessment tools. Where the unit is included in different qualifications delivered by the RTO, the Auditor will want to see that any contextualisation has not increased or decreased the complexity of the unit outcomes.

Once the RTO has delivered the unit, the Auditor will also want to see how the RTO has reviewed the delivery and assessment to assure that the integrity of the unit has been maintained.

## **Further Advice**

More information is provided in:

[TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment](#)

[TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation](#)

Other Resources:

[DTWD - Assessment in the VET Sector information booklet](#)

[Australian Qualifications Framework, Second Edition January 2013](#)