The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) response to the *Review of Graduate and Vocational Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)* consultation paper.

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH represents Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors of 45 university faculties, with ASSH disciplines representing 33% of all students studying full-time at Australian universities. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the AQF consultation paper. While DASSH has not come to a consensus about the options presented in the consultation paper reflecting in part the diversity of practice within the current higher education sector, we have identified a number of issues relevant to the AQF consultation.

Vocational distinction: In general most of our DASSH members do not see any value in retaining a distinction in titles between vocational and other graduate certificate and graduate diploma titles. The 'vocational' distinction is outdated and has little relevance in the current educational environment.

Graduate versus postgraduate distinction: The proposal to create a distinction between graduate certificate and diploma and postgraduate certificate and diploma (option 3) has some merit provided that it is clearly understood that a graduate diploma is made up of units drawn from the undergraduate level but is taken after the student has graduated (i.e. it is postgraduate in time but undergraduate in level) and that a postgraduate diploma is made up of units drawn from the postgraduate level. Typically the graduate certificate or diploma might be taken to add a new skill or sub-discipline (such as a language or a specific professional area) while the cognate postgraduate awards might do the same thing (except at a higher level) or might be a qualification nested within a masters programme. If this change were enacted, we are concerned that the internationally recognised practice of taking a masters degree (or postgraduate certificate or diploma) in an area different from one's undergraduate degree is not compromised.

Deepening versus broadening existing knowledge distinction: DASSH is also concerned that the AQF appears to hold a linear understanding of education. This view is reflected in the assumption that each higher level of award should be understood as deepening or extending existing knowledge, education and disciplinary grounding. As a result, a change in disciplinary focus requires "back tracking" to an earlier level of attainment, artificially separating and misunderstanding the overlapping relationships between ASSH disciplines. DASSH can see no

good reason why a candidate should not be recruited into a postgraduate programme at the discretion of his/her university taking into account the full set of experience, qualifications and learning attributes they bring and not just the requirement for an undergraduate degree in a cognate or the same discipline. In some areas the proposed modification to existing practice would make masters' degrees unviable. For example, students progressing into masters programmes in Health Anthropology may well not have previous knowledge of anthropology through an undergraduate major, for example in medicine, but they have obviously have a very good grounding and developed skills in a health field. It would be entirely unrealistic to expect them to have done an undergraduate degree, which had more than a basic introduction to health anthropology. A student wishing to do a Masters programme in Archaeology might come from a range of disciplines as most archaeologists have done to date. We urge that universities are left to make their own decisions on suitable preparation for higher level qualifications and that the AQF should avoid specifying content in the way implied by what is proposed.

A change in disciplinary focus between cognate areas should not require "back tracking" to an earlier level of attainment. To require that students repeat a level of study, rather than acknowledging an appropriate degree or their existing relevant knowledge and attainment, under-values the translatability of core academic skills and the significance of cognate disciplinary understanding.

Articulation into a Masters, Research or PhD award: A related point concerns the various routes for articulation from undergraduate through postgraduate certificate or diploma and onto Masters awards. At present there is a wide diversity of approaches in Australian universities to articulation between honours, coursework masters, masters by research and PhD awards. Many universities offer a number of exit points for postgraduate students including postgraduate certificate, diploma and masters coursework awards. While managing these alternatives has become more fraught with the decision to cap Commonwealth Government Supported places for coursework postgraduate programs, there is still merit in being able to offer a range of exit points and a range of entry points that recognise prior learning.

A concern raised about Option 3 was awards that deepen (versus broaden student knowledge and experience) would not adequately capture the aims and focus of nested postgraduate awards in interdisciplinary masters coursework awards. These awards draw on the diverse experience and education of students – and both broaden and extend their existing knowledge.

Concurrent undergraduate study: ASSH Deans are particularly concerned about an underlying threat to the concurrent study of certificates and diplomas while completing an undergraduate

degree, which may come from a narrow interpretation of the AQF. Currently there is diversity of practice in Australian universities with some offering concurrent undergraduate certificates or diplomas in minors to allow students pursuing, for example, a Bachelor of Architecture, who also wish to study design or a language (but not necessarily a Bachelor of Arts) to complete the equivalent of a major or minor program of study alongside their primary Bachelor programme. Given the alarmingly low level of foreign language study in Australia and its vital importance to Australia's role in international trade, politics and security, the removal of concurrent certificates and diplomas is certain to put further pressure on many University language programs, currently struggling to survive. There appears to be contradictory advice to DASSH members from AQF on this matter. DASSH urges the preservation of these concurrent awards, particularly as a necessary means of preserving the existing range of languages, valuable to this country's future economy, international trade, diplomatic efforts and multicultural society.

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