

Submission to the Australian Qualifications Framework

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The Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) is an association representing over 16,000 Postgraduate Students at the University of Sydney, including approximately 3,500 PhD Candidates. SUPRA has a long history of rights representation and advocacy work, and was a founding member of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). John Nowakowski is the President of SUPRA and National Secretary of CAPA.

Research Training doesn't begin and end with a PhD. Throughout a student's life, there is an ongoing need for the development, and a desire for each stage to continue the lifelong quest for learning. The simultaneous review put out by the Department of Industry, Innovation, and Scientific Research (DIISR) backs this up as the Australian Government shows a commitment to providing a highly educated and highly qualified nation. The benefits and failings of this aside, it is necessary to ensure that degrees in Australia are internationally comparable, and through the AQF, such a mechanism is enabled.

Levels 1-6 fall outside the regular operations of SUPRA, and shall be left for comment on by those more qualified in the discussion. Several comments are necessary, though, on levels 7-10, capturing both the development and early stage training of students for a research degree, as well as the general cohort of postgraduate degrees in stages 8-10.

Learning in a University environment is about the combined teaching and learning environment. The recent reviews of curricula at the University of Sydney have highlighted the need for good teaching and assessment practice, and this is something to be reflected through the Australian Qualifications Framework. Each level from 7-10 requires the difference in teaching and assessment practice to be reflected for the difficulty associated with each degree.

When choosing locations to study, the basis for many students is the perceived quality of the teaching and learning experience, together with student experience and location. The use of an enforced AQF is paramount to ensuring that degrees that attract a wide and varied market all meet a high quality and cannot be subverted by "shonky colleges". With a heavy influence from the international marketplace, particularly for Masters and PhDs, a strong TEQSA supported by a strong AQF will ensure that students can have valid perceptions of what they can achieve when attending any institute across Australia.

It is the view of SUPRA that each degree posted at a level from 7-10 needs to be closely examined by TEQSA. This is to ensure the quality of all degrees, particularly picking up on "re-badged" degrees that were Undergraduate and have been made Postgraduate (mostly in the case of Masters by Coursework). SUPRA is in full support of a decision made by TEQSA degrading a Masters course to only a level 7 or 8 if it does not meet the criteria associated with a Level 9.

SUPRA also supports the use of the honorific 'Doctor' as a term for those who have made *a sustained and significant* contribution to a field of knowledge, which can only be made by those with a core research component. SUPRA agrees with the position made by the Australian Council

of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies that “research is a fundamental defining characteristic of a doctorate”¹.

The basis for the refinement of the AQF also looks at the comparisons needed on an international field. Most Universities throughout Europe use the Bologna Process, and it is imperative that easy comparisons be made between the AQF and Bologna Process for ease of student movement.

As a final point, it is also critical that the AQF not forgo elements of Professional Accreditation that occurs throughout industry and in conjunction with many University degrees. SUPRA feels Professional Accreditation and the AQF should be complimentary, though keep separate the elements of academic and vocational purposes. The AQF should not be an easily dismissed descriptive function, but a holistic approach to sustain degree quality.

¹ Letter from Helene Marsh to Glenn Withers, July 11, 2010