

9 August, 2024

Submission to the National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is pleased to make a brief submission in response to the National Skills Taxonomy (NST) Discussion Paper. Our submission relates to:

- The vision for the NST (2.3), relative to other parts of the skills system architecture
- Design considerations that support NST's alignment to other taxonomies (3.1).

Evidence base for the submission

ACER has had a longstanding role in providing evidence and thought leadership to inform vocational education and training (VET) and broader tertiary reform, notably in substantial research reports to support the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) revision and subsequent consideration of implementation options by the Australian Government.

Based on an extensive body of prior research, ACER has a particular interest in the interrelationship of the NST and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

ACER has provided ongoing advice to government relating to the revision and development of the AQF since 2019. Examples of this work include:

- Input to the AQF Review Panel's Final Report – [‘Revision or Re-vision: Exploring approaches to the differentiation of qualification types in the Australian Qualifications Framework’](#) (Department of Education, 2019)
- Research and sector consultations to inform the work of the AQF Review Working Group on [‘Revising the AQF architecture and taxonomy’](#) (Department of Education, 2022)
- Provision of technical and specialist expertise and advice relating to potential new qualification types in the AQF (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2024).

Drawing on our experience in analysing the AQF, ACER offers the following high-level insights into how it may interoperate with a NST to describe skills for learning, work and life.

Response to issues for consultation

We note that the NST Discussion Paper considers how the NST should align with other existing taxonomies, including the AQF. While broad alignment is an important objective, it is essential to recognise the distinctive role, purpose and context of each instrument and, in turn, the distinct ways in which they each describe the formation, development and application of ‘skill’.

ACER's work for the Department of Education in 2022 demonstrated an approach to the development of a ‘skills matrix’ that could underpin the AQF. This work was closely based on the recommendations of the 2019 AQF Review which aimed to give greater recognition to skills alongside knowledge. The suggested inclusion to the AQF of a ‘skills matrix’ demonstrated in

the ACER report has potential to allow Australian qualifications to more flexibly combine knowledge and skills to serve the needs of individuals and industry.

To complement these suggestions, we suggest that the role of the NST may be best oriented to defining skills in the context of their specific labour market application, enabling the AQF to define levels of knowledge and skill in the context of an education and training process. By assuming this role, the NST would help Jobs and Skills Councils to lead qualification design by mapping the skills required in their industries and occupations. This could also support the new purposes for VET qualifications proposed by the Qualifications Reform Design Group in 2024.

Revisions to the architecture of the AQF proposed by the 2019 AQF Review could then better accommodate the variable levels of knowledge and skills required across industry and the workforce. We caution that in pursuing interoperability between the NST with the AQF, there will be a need to consider ways in which the AQF may evolve and avoid constraining future review or adaptation of the framework.

If well-aligned, the NST and the AQF can each offer a set of consistent reference points when designing, developing and regulating AQF qualifications. As mentioned above, the AQF role could be in relation to the progression of skill development through educational qualifications, while the NST could focus on identifying application of skills in the workplace.

When designing the NST, we suggest that close attention is paid to the interdependent nature of knowledge, skills, and their application. We see the NST as offering most value in mapping the application of skills and knowledge in occupations, with the AQF focusing on progressions of skills and knowledge developed through training. This complementarity would improve systemic support for effective learning, qualification design and assessment, ultimately leading to better alignment between educational outcomes and workforce needs.

Team members from ACER's Tertiary and Professional Education Research Program would be pleased to discuss these observations with the JSA team if that would be useful.