

**EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACT 1988**

**Strategies for Credit Transfer:  
Report of the National Board of Employment,  
Education and Training**

**The Hon. John Dawkins, MP  
Minister for Employment, Education and Training**

**December 1990**

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**NATIONAL BOARD OF  
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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28 September 1990

The Hon John Dawkins MP  
Minister for Employment, Education  
and Training  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

The reports Higher Education : A Policy Statement (White Paper) and TAFE 1989 : Commonwealth Programs and Priorities, strongly supported the improvement of credit transfer arrangements within and between the higher education and TAFE sectors and put forward a set of credit transfer principles to assist institutions in making improvements in this area.

To assist the development of a strategy for improved credit transfer, the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training agreed to fund a joint study on credit transfer practices in higher education and TAFE, including cross-sectoral provision. The resulting Discussion Paper outlined a range of measures which might be taken by institutions and State and Commonwealth authorities to bring about a national system of credit transfer within three years.

Following receipt and analysis of responses to the discussion paper, the Board sponsored a public seminar in March 1990 where the issues raised in connection with the Credit Transfer discussion paper; as well as the Board's discussion papers on Course Length and Nomenclature and Postgraduate Studies were discussed.

The two papers on Course Length and Nomenclature and Postgraduate studies were subsequently revised to take account of responses to the discussion papers and the outcome of the seminar and were provided to you as a joint response entitled Higher Education Courses and Graduate Studies in September 1990. This report was tabled on 18 September 1990.

The Board decided that, in the case of credit transfer, the issues required further investigation, particularly in terms of the cross-sectoral approach, and established a working party on credit transfer to prepare advice on this topic.

Analysis of the responses to the Discussion Paper and an evaluation of the outcomes of the seminar suggest that there is broad support for the development of a national system of credit transfer. In formulating a proposed strategy for action the working party has taken into account issues emerging from that consultative process.

At its meeting of 23-24 August, 1990 the Board endorsed the report of the working party as formal advice on improved credit transfer arrangements in Australia. Subject to your approval, the Board intends to accept on-going responsibility for reporting on credit transfer arrangements, and to pursue the strategy set out in the attached report.

The Board's advice on improved credit transfer arrangements is now transmitted to you formally for your consideration and tabling in both Houses of Parliament as soon as practicable.

As this matter falls within the portfolio responsibility of your colleague, the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, I am sending a copy of this letter to him for his information.

Yours sincerely,



G A Ramsey  
Chair

## Background

In its reports, *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (the White Paper) and *TAFE 1989: Commonwealth Programs and Priorities*, the Government strongly supported the improvement of credit transfer arrangements within and between the higher education and TAFE sectors. Following the development and release of a series of guidelines for credit transfer by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and the Australian Committee of Directors and Principals, the Government put forward (in the White Paper) a set of credit transfer principles to assist institutions in making improvements in this area. A significant feature of these principles was the promotion of credit transfer arrangements between the higher education and TAFE sectors, including the articulation of courses. Higher education institutions were also asked to include statements of intent on credit transfer in their initial profiles documentation in 1988.

## The Discussion Paper

To assist the Government in developing a strategy for improved credit transfer, the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training agreed, in February 1989, to fund a joint study on credit transfer practices in higher education and TAFE, including cross-sectoral provision. The resulting Discussion Paper outlined a range of measures which might be taken by institutions and State and Commonwealth authorities to bring about a national system of credit transfer within three years.

The Discussion Paper was circulated to interested parties for comment and ninety-two responses were received from a wide range of sources including State authorities, higher education and technical and further education institutions, professional and industrial organisations, and individuals. Most of the concepts outlined in the paper were supported, some quite strongly. It was generally agreed that credit transfer is not just a matter for higher education institutions but an issue which requires extensive consultation with, and planning by, higher education institutions, State and Territory coordinating authorities, TAFE systems, employers, professional and industrial associations, and others. The strong views elicited from these groups highlighted the need for a coordinated, planned and national approach to this issue.

The responses also indicated that there was strong support for statements in the Discussion Paper which acknowledged institutional autonomy and the need to preserve intellectual standards and freedom. There was broad acceptance of the principle that any national approach to the improvement of credit transfer should be based on consultation and negotiation.

## The Seminar

In March 1990, the National Board sponsored a seminar on three discussion papers dealing with Credit Transfer, Course Length and Nomenclature, and Australian Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees. The main purpose of the seminar was to allow further input to the discussion of these issues, in the light of written responses received, before final advice was prepared on these matters for submission to the Minister in the second half of 1990. In summary, the main outcomes of the seminar insofar as it related to credit transfer were that:

- credit transfer is an essential part of award restructuring in which multiskilling, career paths, life-long learning and new forms of work are important elements;
- while higher education institutions are generally supportive, there are concerns about how credit transfer can be implemented and what the implications may be for institutional autonomy and standards;
- consultation between all interested groups is essential to establish good, workable credit transfer — networking could involve higher education institutions, TAFE, professional and industrial bodies, students, employers and reference groups, and should also be broadly based in terms of disciplinary/institutional/sector coverage;
- more information is needed on credit transfer practices that are currently in place, particularly where these involve exemplary practice — there was support for the establishment of a national register for this purpose;
- there were proposals for a national body to facilitate consultations, to promote credit transfer in the community and among staff in educational institutions, to develop guidelines and to promote exemplary practices; and
- barriers to credit transfer, such as the availability of higher education places for TAFE and mature age students, also need to be identified.

In general, there was agreement that a national credit transfer system of common weights was at best a long-term goal. It was believed that the system should develop in stages on a case-by-case and institution-by-institution basis, with links being defined and precedents being recorded. Flexibility and diversity were seen to have a higher priority than uniformity in weights and weighting systems.

No conclusions were reached on how work experience should be assessed. It was felt that institutions should examine this issue and that courses should be modified to take account of work experience wherever possible.

## Award Restructuring and Its Likely Effects on Education and Training

Award restructuring is about removing barriers and increasing flexibility to assist career progression.

The changes occurring in industry through the award restructuring process compound the pressures for improved credit transfer and bridging arrangements, greater articulation of training and the recognition of training undertaken and skills and knowledge acquired outside the formal system of education and training.

The origins of award restructuring lie in the decision of the former Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in August 1988 to establish a new wages system. The major priorities of that decision were directed to the revision of job classifications, multi-skilling and provision of new career paths. It also provided a structural efficiency principle as a key element in the new system of wage fixing.

There were some common features which emerged from the award restructuring process which include broadbanded job classifications encompassing broad ranges of tasks, functions and/or skills; opportunities for progression from the lowest skill level through to the highest skill level within an industry (eg proposals in the metals area envisage broad skill classifications and associated career paths from production worker to professional engineer); and structured programs of skill acquisition, both on- and off-the-job, providing the opportunity for all workers to develop the skills necessary for advancement along the new career paths.

The award restructuring process, however, has major implications for the traditional system of education and training. These are due particularly to the increased integration of education and training, with career progression throughout the whole period of employment, and to the development of competency standards and associated mechanisms to assess competence.

With the development of multi-skilling and skill-based career paths which are likely to result from the award restructuring process, it will be essential to have flexible entry and exit points in the training and education systems, including flexible modes of training and flexible credit arrangements so that employees have access to appropriate training throughout their working lives.

## Other Factors which May Affect Credit Transfer and Intersectoral Links

The concept of intersectoral credit transfer does not apply only to articulation and other arrangements within and between the TAFE and higher education sectors. Provision should be made for advanced standing to be granted for knowledge acquired and experience gained in business and industry through in-house training.

While there appears to be unqualified support for the general principles of credit transfer, course articulation and the forging of stronger links with industry, there also needs to be a greater commitment to the implementation of arrangements to improve or extend such activities by TAFE, higher education institutions and industry generally. The various professional bodies have a significant role in this context.

Apart from improved credit transfer arrangements, there are other academic benefits to be gained from links involving higher education institutions, TAFE and business or industry, such as the sharing of facilities, the exchange of personnel, and in the case of industry the funding of courses. There is scope for industrial staff to contribute significantly to the academic process through the provision of teaching and tutorial

assistance and by involvement in course development, while academic staff and members of the various professional bodies can gain first hand, up-to-date knowledge and experience in their areas of expertise through working temporarily in an industrial setting.

As part of the Commonwealth's discussions with higher education institutions in respect of their educational profiles for 1991, and having regard to the statements of intent provided in the initial profiles documentation in 1988, consideration has been given to measures which seek to improve credit transfer provisions and intersectoral links. The matter will continue to be pursued by the Commonwealth in the profiles context in subsequent years. In addition higher education institutions are able to report to the relevant Parliament on significant initiatives by way of their annual reports.

These initiatives would be expected to include:

- credit transfer and articulation arrangements and agreements with other higher education and TAFE institutions, including arrangements for the provision of advanced standing for industry-based education and training;
- internal arrangements within amalgamating higher education institutions for recognising study already undertaken;
- arrangements in place with TAFE institutions for the sharing of facilities and personnel for teaching and course development and for using regional TAFE facilities to teach higher education courses; and
- examples and plans for sharing facilities and personnel with business and/or industry.

A further factor relating to credit transfer which may not be generally recognised is that it can lead to a significant saving of resources, both for potential students and for institutions. For students, it is clearly less costly if they do not have to duplicate time spent in one institution in order to meet the particular requirements of another. For institutions, there is a saving in teaching resources if students, through the granting of credit for previous study, take less time to complete their courses. This factor should be borne in mind by institutions when addressing the issue of credit transfer. It should be noted also that savings achieved by institutions through the introduction of effective credit transfer measures may be reported by way of their annual reports.

## Proposed Strategy for Action

An analysis of the responses to the Discussion Paper and an evaluation of the outcomes of the seminar suggests that there is broad support for the development of a national system of credit transfer. Taking into account issues emerging from the consultative process, an appropriate strategy for further action could encompass the following points.

- The convening by the National Board of a seminar on admission to post-school education. This would involve higher education institutions, State/Territory TAFE authorities, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, the Australian Committee of Directors and Principals, the Australian Conference of TAFE Directors and representatives of appropriate professional bodies.

- The development by the National Board's working party of draft national guidelines on credit transfer for eventual release by the Minister.

The guidelines should take into account the principles, processes and other issues suggested in responses to the Discussion Paper. These were set out in the issues paper provided to the seminar participants in March 1990. In developing the guidelines, attention should be given to the relevance of credit transfer to the award restructuring process, the funding implications and, in particular, the perception in some areas of higher education that a national system of credit transfer could threaten institutional autonomy.

- A requirement that higher education institutions include progress reports on action they have taken to improve credit transfer arrangements in accordance with the guidelines in the educational profiles documentation provided annually to the Commonwealth. The annual reports of higher education institutions would provide an appropriate mechanism for making regular reports to State parliaments on these issues.
- The conduct of a series of feasibility studies, in conjunction with appropriate professional and employer bodies, of credit transfer in employment-related discipline areas such as tourism and hospitality, business and administration. These could be funded under the Department's Evaluations and Investigations Program for the higher education component and from Commonwealth-State resource agreements for TAFE.
- The initiation and maintenance of extensive consultation with educational institutions, professional and industrial bodies, students and employers and other relevant groups in order to promote credit transfer principles within higher education institutions and TAFE systems and the community at large; monitor the suitability of the national guidelines and revise where necessary; and publicise instances of exemplary practice.

Issues for early examination through such consultations could include:

- the relationship between the changes occurring in industry through the award restructuring process and the need for improved credit transfer, bridging and articulation arrangements in education and training;
- the recognition of training undertaken and skills and knowledge acquired outside the formal education and training system;
- the means by which bridging courses might be offered through distance education and the appropriate methods for funding such courses; and
- the implementation of national arrangements for improved credit transfer in areas of national importance such as languages, technology/ engineering and business/management/supervision; and
- the implications for course design of articulation and credit transfer and the granting of advanced standing for previous studies and direct experience.

## Working Party Membership

### Convenor

Gregor Ramsey  
Chair, National Board

### Members

Grant Belchamber  
Member, Higher Education Council

George Berkeley  
Deputy Chair, Schools Council

Laurie Carmichael  
Member, National Board and  
Employment and Skills Formation Council

Michael Koder  
Counsellor, National Board

Kwong Lee Dow  
Member, Higher Education Council and  
Chair, Register of Australian Tertiary Education

Cassandra Parkinson  
Deputy Chair, Employment and Skills Formation  
Council

### Departmental Representatives

Kevin Flaherty  
Higher Education Division

Joan Armitage  
TAFE and Skills Formation Division

Tracey Murphy  
Higher Education Division  
(Secretary to the Working Party)

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