THE CREDIT MATRIX
BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN QUALIFICATIONS
CONSULTATION REPORT
2004

Victorian Qualifications Authority
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) wishes to thank all those who took the time to consider the credit matrix and provide us with their views. The thoughtful comment and advice are very much appreciated.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2003 the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) consulted with stakeholders on the concept of the credit matrix – a common system of describing and recording learning in post compulsory qualifications. It would be designed to build better linkages between qualifications and enhance the operation of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in Victoria.

The credit matrix would work by describing units of post compulsory qualifications in terms of levels (for complexity of learning) and points (for volume of learning). By providing a common measure across the full range of post compulsory qualifications available in Victoria, the credit matrix would make it easier to compare different units and qualifications.

In this paper, we use the term “unit” to mean the smallest part of a qualification that can be separately certificated. For example, a unit can be a VCE unit, a unit of competency or a module from Vocational Education and Training (VET), or a subject from a Higher Education course.

Based on the strong positive response to the concept of the credit matrix in the 2003 statewide consultation, the VQA commissioned a team to develop a detailed model of levels and level descriptors to describe complexity of learning, and a means for allocating points, to describe volume. The detailed model and possible ideas for implementation were the focus of the consultation on which this paper reports.

The consultation period ran from 15 November 2004 to 15 December 2004. In November 2004 the VQA published a consultation paper The Credit Matrix – Making it Work and distributed copies to over 2500 individuals and organisations within Victoria, as well as to interstate, national and international contacts. The paper was also made available on the VQA’s website.

The VQA ran seventeen targeted consultation forums for particular stakeholder groups, including education providers, employers, unions, qualification designers, selection officers, career advisers, students and parents.

Over 200 individuals and groups responded to the consultation either through sending in a written response or attending one of the consultation forums.

A qualitative approach has been used to analyse the feedback. The responses are presented against the key questions which were the focus of the 2004 consultation. Namely:

- how the design achieves the overall aims of the credit matrix
- the effectiveness of the level descriptors in describing complexity of learning across the range of post-compulsory qualifications; and
- advice and issues surrounding implementation.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that the design of the credit matrix would be capable of achieving the five aims, reaffirming the strong support shown in 2003 for the credit matrix concept. These aims are to:
- make the qualifications system easier to understand
- allow for the design of more flexible qualifications that could include new and different kinds and combinations of knowledge and skills
- provide a simple and uniform way of describing qualifications and recording achievement in them
- make it easier to keep track of learning achieved and to plan ahead – for individuals, providers and employers, as well as the system as a whole
- help ensure learning already successfully achieved need not be repeated.

There was general support for the level descriptors and their ability to describe all the learning outcomes across the range of qualifications in the AQF. The descriptors were valued for being short, yet detailed enough to encompass a broad range of learning outcomes. There were, however, a number of suggestions for refinement.

The system of points to denote volume was generally accepted and understood. Stakeholders observed, however, that average designed learning time is a new concept to many in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, who are more accustomed to dealing with nominal hours, which are allocated at the state level and relate to funding for delivery.

A frequent question which emerged from the consultation was who would be responsible for allocating the points and levels, particularly for VET qualifications developed at the national level. Respondents emphasised the importance of the levels and points being credible and reliable in order for the credit matrix to achieve its aims.

There was a wealth of advice on how best to implement the credit matrix. Stakeholders advised that given the large number of units and qualifications in the Victorian education and training system, it would be best if a phased approach is taken. Advice was mixed in terms of which industry or field of study to focus on first. Some advised to start with an industry which has barriers and inconsistencies between qualifications, and others suggested starting with an industry which has good linkages and pathways.

Many advised that the success of the credit matrix required the support of Higher Education institutions, and so it was emphasised that initial implementation should include at least one Higher Education provider.
Respondents indicated that all of the support materials suggested in the consultation paper would be useful, but there was, in particular, support for an online database of units and qualifications and case studies. Guidelines were suggested by policy makers, particularly to clarify who allocates levels and points, and professional development was often suggested by providers.

It was recommended that the databases/s required to support online access to units and qualifications and records of learning should not:
- have the effect of increasing provider workloads
- duplicate existing databases and hence should draw on or link to APS, AVETMIS and NTIS, as well as participating university databases.

Many stakeholders advised us that the credit matrix “cannot be all things to all people”. In particular, the VQA was advised to be clear to all stakeholders about the limitations of the credit matrix.

Many stakeholders also observed that the timing for the credit matrix was good, given discussions at the national level about ways to improve credit transfer between qualifications from different education sectors. The observation was often made throughout the consultation forums that a national credit-based system would be preferable to one that only covered the state system.
BACKGROUND

In 2003 the VQA commenced work on identifying ways in which the qualifications system could better support and enhance learning pathways, and to facilitate participation in lifelong learning.

This work was closely linked to two of the VQA’s legislated objectives:
- ensure and support appropriate linkages between qualifications
- facilitate procedures that will enable people to re-enter education and training and acquire qualifications throughout their lives.

A key element identified in this work was the need for a common measure that would allow learning successfully achieved in different kinds of qualifications to be effectively compared.

The credit matrix, which would provide this common measure, draws on notions underpinning credit-based systems developed in other countries.

It centres on a common approach to describing and recording learning outcomes successfully achieved. If applied uniformly across all the post compulsory qualifications available in Victoria, the credit matrix could:
- make the qualifications system easier to understand
- allow for the design of more flexible qualifications that could include new and different kinds and combinations of knowledge and skills
- provide a simple and uniform way of describing qualifications and recording achievement in them
- make it easier to keep track of learning achieved and to plan ahead – for individuals, providers and employers, as well as the system as a whole
- help ensure learning already successfully achieved need not be repeated.

Designed to apply in Victoria, the role of the credit matrix would not be to replace or detract from the nationally agreed AQF but to work with, and enhance its operation to the benefit of all students in the state.

The VQA was keen to ensure that the credit matrix project met the needs of all its stakeholders, and so has undertaken the project in incremental steps, with regular consultation.

The first of these steps was a statewide consultation in 2003 on the concept of the credit matrix. Overall, 81 per cent of respondents were supportive of the concept.

On the basis of this support, the VQA developed a detailed model of levels, level descriptors and a process for allocating points. It then tested the credit
matrix design through a number of trials and modelling projects, in a broad range of industry and education and training settings and designed to:

- gauge the useability and usefulness of the levels, descriptors and points, and the process for assigning them
- examine the outcomes of credit rating and the degree to which the ratings yielded a picture of relationships between the various units and qualifications that was useful and made sense
- examine the extent to which the credit matrix seems likely to realise one or more of its stated aims, and contribute to aspects of strategic importance in the respective fields of study/training.

The trialling projects include:

- those established in August 2004 with advice from the Credit Matrix Board Working Group and the Stakeholder Reference Group, the Industry Forum and external experts. Projects were established in collaboration with the IT Skills Hub, Transport and Distribution Training Victoria, the Victorian Business Services, Finance and Property Industry Training Board, the Engineering Skills Training Board and the Process Manufacturing Training Board
- the ongoing project with the Gippsland Education Precinct
- recent work with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), involving the application of both NZQA descriptors and the credit matrix descriptors to selected VQA and NZQA qualifications, and with Victoria University, involving a focus on pathways in Arts and Humanities subjects.

In addition to feedback from trials, the VQA also sought broader stakeholder views on the design as well as advice on implementation. The consultation in 2003 was deliberately statewide, seeking as large a response rate as possible. The purpose of the 2004 consultation was to conduct more-targeted consultations to ensure that the credit matrix design of levels, level descriptors and points would meet the specific needs of the diverse range of stakeholders, and to gather ideas on how best to put the credit matrix into action. The information collected will be used as a basis for refinements to the credit matrix design and to inform the development of an implementation strategy.
THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation period ran from 15 November 2004 to 15 December 2004. In November 2004 the VQA published a consultation paper *The Credit Matrix – Making it Work* and distributed copies to over 2500 individuals and organisations within Victoria, as well as to interstate, national and international contacts. The paper was also made available on the VQA’s website.

The VQA ran seventeen targeted consultation forums for particular stakeholder groups, including education providers, employers, unions, qualification designers, selection officers, career advisers, students and parents. The full list of forums is in Appendix 2 on page 29.

This consultation report draws on:
- comments made at the consultation forums
- written responses to the consultation paper from key stakeholders and providers
- comments received from recipients of the consultation paper from beyond Victoria.
THE RESPONSES

Analysis
Over 200 individuals and groups contributed to the consultation either through sending in a written response or attending one of the consultation forums.

A qualitative approach has been used in order to analyse the feedback and is presented below. The responses are presented against the key questions which were the focus of the consultation. Namely:

- how the design achieves the aims of the credit matrix
- the effectiveness of the level descriptors and points in describing learning across the range of post-compulsory qualifications; and
- advice and issues surrounding implementation.

As the main focus of the consultation was intended to be through the forums, the number of written responses received was limited. Overall, the views expressed in the forums were supportive of the design proposed for the credit matrix. This was consistent with the outcome of a content analysis of written responses, which showed that 83 per cent agreed the design could achieve the aims of the credit matrix, and 80 per cent responded positively to the question of whether the levels, level descriptors and points could adequately describe the range of units and qualifications in the post compulsory education and training system.¹

The positive response is similar to that of the 2003 consultation on the concept of the credit matrix. In 2003, respondents made the comment that although they supported the concept, the devil would be in the detail. In 2004, respondents have supported the detailed design, but have observed that the devil will be in the implementation!

The effectiveness of the design and its ability to achieve the five aims
Respondents were asked to consider how effectively the credit matrix design would achieve the five aims originally set out and endorsed in the credit matrix statewide consultation in 2003.

¹ In both cases 11 per cent of responses could not be coded, and the remainder were negative (6 and 8 per cent respectively).
Overall, stakeholders agreed that the design of the credit matrix would be capable of achieving the five aims. Many also reaffirmed the strong support shown in 2003 for the concept of the credit matrix, although this time, their views were able to draw on the detailed design proposed in the consultation paper as the basis for that support.

**Aim 1: Make the qualifications system easier to understand**

For students and parents, the greatest benefit identified was the credit matrix’s ability to provide a common language to compare different qualifications. The levels and points were seen as readily understandable. Student comments included:

“I think the points and levels make it easier to see what’s involved in doing the qualification.”

“It makes it easier to see what you’re getting yourself into, because you can easily see which units are the hardest and the biggest.”

“All the institutions have different systems and different ways of talking, so at enrolment time, people have no idea what is going on – a common system like this would make it so much easier to understand.”

The credit matrix’s ability to provide a common language was also recognized by education providers. For instance, some Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers observed that:

“The credit matrix levels and points will be helpful because many students don’t know what’s involved when they decide to enrol in a particular course or unit. It will be helpful to ACE providers, particularly in helping students plan their pathways.”

In one of the consultation forums, a participant from a university observed:

“I think the biggest benefit is to the individual, because although it doesn’t guarantee credit or entry to a course, it helps students know where they are at. There is
increasing pressure for standardisation to make comparisons between different education products easier, and the credit matrix is a positive step here.”

Aim 2: Make it easier to design more flexible qualifications that combine new and different mixes of knowledge and skills

Providers from both VET and Higher Education observed that the credit matrix levels and points as presented in the consultation document would be useful in designing or redesigning qualifications. This would enable them to build better pathways between the two sectors. The development of these better pathways could also provide a competitive advantage for those institutions who develop them.

Several individuals from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions observed that the credit matrix level descriptors and points could provide a useful basis to design courses and curriculum which link better to Higher Education courses.

Some TAFE respondents wrote:

“Providing that the higher education sector embraces the credit matrix system, the design may help to facilitate additional pathways from TAFE to higher education courses and from higher education courses into TAFE. At present there appear to be significant barriers to negotiating or enacting valuable pathways.”

A number of individuals who attended a consultation forum and who also participated in the trials observed that the descriptors and points would also help with improving unit outlines, which did not always clearly articulate the complexity of learning a student was expected to achieve by completing a unit. It was felt that with better unit outlines, it could help ensure that units would be delivered more consistently between different teachers and providers.

The VQA also received written responses from a number of interstate contacts in education and training, and these all made mention of the practicality of the descriptors and points as tools to compare qualifications and parts of qualifications from different sectors. It was observed that the descriptors could make the design of courses easier, particularly in the senior secondary area.
An interstate education organisation wrote:

“One of the very laudable aims of the new Certificate of Education is to increase the flexibility of offerings in senior schooling and of post-school pathways for students. The development of a workable credit matrix (or similar mechanism) to create some consistent base upon which to determine how different and varied units of work in senior school might contribute to an overall qualification would progress the generic aims of consistency and flexibility, thus helping to inform the similar debate in our state.”

**Aim 3: Provide a common and uniform approach to describing qualifications and recording achievement in them**

The credit matrix’s capacity to provide a common and uniform approach to describing qualifications and recording achievement in them, thus allowing students to build on their learning over time, was recognized by many as a valuable benefit of the credit matrix.

As one teacher from a regional secondary school wrote:

“The credit matrix provides an easier way of explaining to students ways of building on qualifications – and makes it easier for students to be flexible in their approach to gaining qualifications over time.”

Another group of school teachers felt the descriptors and points would be easy to understand and use and wrote:

“The simple definitions.....presented will make (it) easier to understand and for individuals/stakeholders to recognise their achievement/progress.”

An interstate government agency wrote:

“With the increase in demand for recognition of prior formal and informal learning as part of senior secondary qualifications, the credit matrix would be a valuable tool to describe and compare...learning recorded against different programs.”

One of the potential benefits of the credit matrix is that by describing units in a common way, it may be possible to develop an online student record similar to the record of learning in New Zealand. Students could log on to the internet to access complete details of achievement, regardless of where the units were completed.

In discussions, the idea of an online record of learning which is accessible to students was generally well supported. Students on the whole had no issue with logging on to a website to access their record of learning, as they already do so to access their school and university results. Further, they were quick to see the benefits:
“It could be good to show to employers, because they can then easily see how much learning you’ve achieved.”

A few parents, however, expressed concern about privacy and ensuring that such a record of learning is secure and only accessible to the student.

There were a number of comments about the details of developing an online database of units and qualifications and an online record of learning. These are discussed under the implementation section of this report.

**Aim 4: Make it easier to track and plan ahead – for individuals, providers and employers, as well as the system as a whole**

Parents observed that the credit matrix could be a motivator for students, because it enables students to see that they are building on their learning and can use it to set goals.

Parents, students, and providers, particularly in the Senior Secondary and ACE sectors, saw the credit matrix system of levels and points as useful for those students who do not follow the direct pathway from senior secondary education to university. The credit matrix could recognise all learning, and make it easier to plan possible study routes.

A group of teachers and careers counsellors wrote that the credit matrix could:

“Inform and demonstrate to students the possible pathways to a career goal and the value placed on a qualification.”

Another group of secondary teachers wrote:

“For the careers and vocational pathways coordination, the credit matrix will articulate pathway plans and options with increased transparency. Students who aspire to shift across and between educational systems/providers will be able to chart and map their destinations and outcomes. In the context of VCE VET in Schools cohort, it is felt that the flexible use of outcomes presented in the proposed credit matrix will provide clearer and more flexible articulation of achievement”

Finally, employers welcomed the credit matrix design for its potential to assist with planning training and identifying training gaps, particularly in large organisations. Several employers commented that this was increasingly important as the workforce ages. Further,

“The credit matrix could help identify skill and training gaps, which is important given there is demand for new emerging skills.”
However, it was observed that for small employers, the benefit of the credit matrix is more at the level of the individual, in that it would help employees with planning their own learning pathways.

**Aim 5: Help ensure learning already successfully achieved does not need to be repeated**

Students and parents were enthusiastic about how the credit matrix could provide a level of transparency to units and qualifications. They felt it could help with negotiating credit.

One student observed that she received credit for a previous course, but had no idea why:

“The credit matrix would have been good to understand why I received the credit I did.”

This was supported by comments by other students, such as:

“The credit matrix’s potential to help with negotiating credit is really important, especially when you are studying part-time and paying big fees for education.”

“I’m planning to move from TAFE to uni in the same field, and I think the credit matrix could help for that.”

Education providers also recognized the need for decisions on credit transfer to be improved, and the credit matrix’s potential to provide a starting point for making those decisions easier.

For instance, one person from a TAFE observed:

“We need better pathways between VET and Higher Education, and even if the credit matrix only provides a common language, it would be a good starting point, because at the moment we don’t know what the other is talking about.”

This point was supported by individuals in the Higher Education sector, one of whom said:

“The credit matrix could provide a starting point for a selection officer to discuss with a student whether or not they may be eligible for credit for prior learning.”

However, many stakeholders reminded us that the credit matrix will not, overnight and on its own, address the current low credit transfer rates and barriers which block movement between some qualifications and education sectors. For some education providers, funding arrangements discourage the provision of credit. For others, there is often a shortage of places and high
demand, which means institutions select students on grading or other criteria rather than measures of learning such as that provided by the credit matrix.

Some individuals commented on how the credit matrix might be used to recognise informal learning. While acknowledging that this is an important area which should be addressed, respondents felt that some clarification was needed as to how this would occur.

**General feedback on the aims**

The proposal that the credit matrix would build better linkages between qualifications across sectors was strongly supported in the 2003 consultation; a quote by a Victorian university Vice-Chancellor was included in the 2004 consultation paper as an example:

“As a basis for establishing greater common ground for decisions about credit transfer and comparability of achievement the matrix is a good starting point.”

However, as in the 2003 consultation, not all respondents agreed. Senior personnel from one Victorian university argued that the learning which occurs in VET and Higher Education is fundamentally different and hence not comparable.

“While the objectives as defined are commendable they are not considered to be achievable across sectors. The nature of the learning experience differs and in the case of Universities the process often is incremental with prerequisite study required and careful assessment by experienced assessors necessary before the granting of credit for prior learning.”

Among those who supported the proposal, a university respondent in the Higher Education forum observed:

“I think the credit matrix could be helpful for credit decisions at the VET – Higher Ed interface.”

Another commented:

“We have many more students moving from VET to a postgraduate coursework qualification after gaining work experience, and the credit matrix could be useful here for determining whether credit should be granted.”

The extent to which the credit matrix level descriptors can compare the learning outcomes in different education and training sectors is a question being explored through the trialling projects.

There were also, as in the 2003 consultation, a number of people in the VET sector who, considering the credit matrix for the first time, questioned the need
for such a system given that qualifications in the VET sector worked well and are nationally endorsed.

However the advantages of having a common language which applies in and beyond VET emerged clearly in the consultation forum for TAFEs. After attending it, a respondent wrote:

“I think the model for the credit matrix will provide a very firm basis to make often difficult judgements…the work done by the VQA on the credit matrix…should be supported by all in VET.”

Finally, a number of stakeholders emphasised that the success of the credit matrix in achieving its aims depends upon its acceptance by all education sectors.

**Advice on the level descriptors and the points**

There was general agreement that the overall design of the levels and points is easy to understand and useable.

However a frequent question which emerged through the forums was who would be responsible for allocating the points and levels. Many stakeholders also emphasised that the process of allocating levels and points had to be reliable and credible if the credit matrix is to achieve its aims.

**Levels**

Overall there was strong support for the level descriptors and their capacity to describe the learning outcomes available across the range of units in the AQF. This support tended to be based on a view that the descriptors were short, and hence easier to use, and that they were both easy to understand and accommodated the detail required to delineate how learning becomes more complex at each level.

One group of school teachers wrote:

“We have applied the Level 1 through to 8 descriptors in the contexts of our personal areas of familiarity with ease and understanding and feel confident that they apply smoothly. As ‘lay’ users of the proposed descriptors, we feel we can grasp an immediate understanding for the purposes of the application.”

One Industry Training Advisory Board respondent wrote:

“The credit matrix descriptors look capable of describing learning outcomes across the gamut of qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework, but in simpler more easily comprehended form. The construct of level descriptions against
the kind of knowledge, the kinds of issues and ways of addressing them, the context, and the degree of independence exercised (autonomy, including judgement, and supervision and management given and received) is simple to understand, yet with great potential to be comprehensive.”

A group of TAFE teachers wrote:

“They appear to be simple enough to be used easily by a range of practitioners but have sufficient depth of description to encapsulate a broad range of learning outcomes.”

A respondent from a dual sector institute wrote:

“As a dual sector institute, a mechanism to enhance and streamline articulation between the TAFE and Higher Education sectors is important...The descriptors appear comprehensive, however a review of the trial material will be valuable in identifying any gaps, or lack of clarity and specifications.”

There were a number of suggestions for improving the level descriptors. One person observed that the Level 3 and 4 Application descriptors were a little unclear, and that the terminology in the Knowledge descriptor at Levels 5 and 6 changes, making the descriptors harder to understand.

An individual from a regulatory organisation said that in the descriptors at the higher levels, there is an increasing focus on depth of knowledge in one field of study, at the expense of breadth. It was suggested that the Knowledge descriptor at this level should allow for “one or more fields of study” to accommodate the cross-disciplinary nature of many research theses.

Several commented through written responses or consultation forums on the Autonomy descriptors, with some people observing that they did not consider the Autonomy descriptor to be a very useful construct.

A number of respondents commented that it was important that the level descriptors were interpreted consistently, and some suggested that the allocation of levels should be subject to a process of moderation.

A comment from an interstate education body exemplifies this:

“The difficulty in such descriptors lies always in distinguishing the subtle implications of differences between, for example, ‘broad guidance’ and ‘broad guidance and direction’...Assigning the correct levels depends on a consistent and accurate interpretation of such descriptors, and the difficulty of developing and then interpreting adequately discerning descriptors must be acknowledged.”

Finally, a small number of people suggested that the term ‘level’ could cause confusion in the VET sector, where many practitioners reported that units are
often described, in practice, in terms of their ‘AQF level’. However, this view is contrary to formal AQF usage, as exemplified by the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ section of the AQF website which states that the use of the phrase “AQF levels” is “incorrect titling.”

**Points**

The idea of points indicating volume based on average designed learning time was largely understood and accepted.

However, average designed learning time is a new concept for the VET sector, and respondents suggested that this would take some time to be understood. In the VET sector, practitioners are much more accustomed to dealing with nominal hours, which are allocated at the state level for funding for delivery and which may vary significantly from state to state.

The relationship between nominal hours and ‘average designed learning time’ was the subject of considerable comment and discussion during the consultation.

For example, one respondent from a Victorian statutory authority within the Department of Education and Training portfolio wrote:

“*The credit matrix introduces a new concept of ‘average learning time’ that could challenge the national concept of nominal hours. Each State Training Authority (STA) sets nominal hours for each Training Package. These vary, sometimes dramatically, from STA to STA. Setting average learning time will highlight these anomalies….If average learning time varies greatly from the nominal hours set in Victoria this may undermine credibility in the minds of providers, students and other stakeholders and potentially affect provider income.*”

Another respondent from a division of the Victorian Department of Education and Training wrote:

“*As the credit matrix is an enabler tool (and non regulatory), this division does not envisage any additional cost pressures above those that already exist within the VET sector. Even at the most basic level, the formula for learning time is different to teaching time/delivery time in the VET sector. We do not see any grounds for the credit matrix not be implemented because of fears about changes to existing funding practices.*”

Further, while volume based on average designed learning time would be a new concept, it was, for some, a positive addition, given that nominal hours vary from state to state.
“This matrix could be used for benchmarking the equivalence of units. This will have particular use if adopted by the nation. It could lead to a base that might be used to provide another output value to units instead of nominal hours.”

One industry-based RTO respondent wrote:

“This industry views the assigned ‘notional teaching hours’ to units of competency within Training Packages by the different State and Territory VET Authorities with considerable scepticism. Our experience has been that these assignments have not reflected the complexity of the instructional task...nor the dimensions of the related workplace experience needed for competence....industry, and particularly enterprise RTOs, need to be part of the consultative processes followed in establishing and validating points assigned.”

Further, it was observed that it is important that the points are allocated by experts in the specific industry and who know the context in which a unit is completed.

**Advice on implementation**

The VQA received much useful information on how the credit matrix might best be implemented. However it is worth noting that while many endorse the design of the credit matrix, its implementation is still seen as a considerable challenge. A number of participants agreed:

“The design of the credit matrix is elegant, but the test will be in the implementation.”

The majority of people suggested that, given the large number of units and qualifications in the Victorian education and training system, the credit matrix could not be implemented all at once, so a phased implementation would be the best approach.

Many respondents in the forums suggested that the VQA begin by focusing on one or two industries and credit-rating units across their range of AQF qualifications. In terms of which industry would be best to focus on initially, there was a mixed response, with some recommending a focus on industries which may have barriers or inconsistencies in their qualification pathways. Others suggested that it was best to choose an industry that already had well-developed pathways and which had units which could be applied in different industries.

Many observed that the success of the credit matrix was dependent on the participation of Higher Education institutions. It was therefore emphasised that a university should be part of any initial implementation, so as to demonstrate
the benefits of the credit matrix to Higher Education providers early on in the process. Some respondents suggested a dual-sector university would most likely be interested in participating.

Allocating points and levels to VET units and qualifications developed at the national level was also raised as an issue which the VQA should address. While some people suggested that points and levels could be allocated through the Purchasing Guides, many observed that this would serve to confound issues, because Purchasing Guides are tied to funding and nominal hours. Others suggested that levels and points should be allocated at the point when the qualification is developed or redeveloped – that is, as part of the accreditation process and ideally at a national level. That way, the levels and points would be endorsed by industry and it would pave the way towards the credit matrix operating at the national level.

As in the first consultation in 2003, many emphasised that the credit matrix would be a far more useful tool if it operated at the national level, particularly given that VET qualifications operate within a national quality assurance and recognition framework. Many respondents observed that portability is very important to students, employees and employers.

Further, there were some respondents who felt that the credit matrix would have to be national in order to work. A TAFE provider wrote:

“We believe that an initiative such as the Credit Matrix will not succeed without strong backing from the Federal Government. It will require extensive policy and funding support from the Government and DEST to have any chance of success.”

Respondents also emphasised the importance of international portability of qualifications, and that the credit matrix levels and points should, as far as possible, be comparable with credit-based systems elsewhere. They were supportive of the approach taken to trial the credit matrix to see if it is comparable to the New Zealand system. Parents in particular, wanted to know why, if New Zealand already had a credit-based system, Australia didn’t already have one as well.

**Communicating with stakeholders**

Many stakeholders advised us that it is important to communicate what the credit matrix is not, and to be clear that the credit matrix “cannot be all things to all people”. In particular, we were advised to be clear to all stakeholders that the credit matrix is not a:
- replacement for ENTER, or a means to summarise the outcomes of graded assessment
• tool which guarantees or automates credit from one qualification to another, particularly given the disincentives in funding to provide credit for many Registered Training Organisations and universities
• tool which means that selection or credit discussions between a student and provider, involving the specific discipline/field of study and details of learning achieved, are no longer needed
• tool which guarantees entry into a qualification, particularly when there is a shortage of places in many courses
• system which will overturn or challenge existing Enterprise Bargaining Agreements
• system that lets users multiply points at different levels to get a grand total
• regulatory system.

Advice on support material
As part of the consultation questionnaire, it was suggested that the following might support individuals’ use of the credit matrix:
• guidelines
• information kits for different users
• websites
• help lines
• professional development
• case studies
• an online database of points and levels for all units.

Generally, respondents agreed that all of the above would be useful, however, an online database of points and levels for units, website information and case studies were the most strongly supported, particularly given that most students have internet access.

Amongst education providers and policy makers there was also support for guidelines, particularly to clarify who allocates levels and points, and professional development for all involved in delivery. Case studies and benchmark credit-rated units were suggested as potentially useful in order to build common understandings.

Many advised the VQA that the credit matrix needed to be supported by an effective communication strategy which informed all users of its existence and how it works. It was also suggested that as careers teachers in schools and career advisers in Centrelink assist many individuals with planning study pathways, these people should be well informed in the use the credit matrix.

Several students and parents also commented that it would be useful if the credit profile of qualifications was included in the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre Guide, in order to compare qualifications.
Databases

As mentioned above, there was strong support for the idea of an online database of qualifications showing their constituent units and each unit’s level and points. However, there were a number of concerns raised about such a database.

Firstly, stakeholders emphasised that the database should utilize and draw on existing databases rather than duplicate data already available, as this ensures that the database is accurate and means provider workloads will not increase. Many therefore observed that the database should be linked to NTIS, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s database (APS) and participating university databases.

There was also discussion during the consultation on the possibility of a student record of learning which summarised all achievements in a single record. Comments covered the need to show the date that a unit was achieved, particularly given that some units are only relevant for a certain period of time. The question of recency came up quite often in the consultation forums, as there was concern that units which had expired or which were completed too long ago to be recognised by a profession might appear on a student’s record of learning.

Some respondents also identified that an online record of learning would require a unique student identifier, and that appropriate measures to protect privacy and security would therefore be needed.

Many respondents emphasised that existing databases containing details of student achievement should be used as the basis for holding the data, so that providers are not required to report results to multiple organisations. Stakeholders again advised the VQA to link such a database to AVETMIS, APS and participating university databases.

Several stakeholders observed that it is vital that any online database and record of learning be easy to access and understand, providing a clear and simple lay-out which is user-friendly. Some parents emphasised that while a graph of achievement may provide a visual representation of achievement, the actual record of units studied is of primary importance.

Finally, many pointed out that the cost of building and maintaining a database of units and qualifications, and an online record of learning, would be a factor to consider in the implementation of the credit matrix.
General Advice
Many comments were made which were supportive of the approach the VQA has taken with the credit matrix project. However, some consultation forum participants commented that although the VQA has made a good attempt to consult with industry on the credit matrix through the establishment of the credit matrix industry forum, the views of unions could have been more systematically sought.

Many people within the education and training sector commented that the timing of the credit matrix was good, given that at a national level there is discussion over how to improve the credit transfer between VET and Higher Education, and also about how universities are to meet their equity targets. The VQA was therefore encouraged to work as collaboratively as possible with individuals and organisations operating at the national level.
CONCLUSION

The consultation showed strong support for the design of the credit matrix and its ability to achieve its aims. The suggestions on the level descriptors and points will be useful in refining the final design and the large amount of advice on how to implement the credit matrix will be invaluable for informing the next phase.

Advice which was critical of aspects of the design, or questioned the feasibility of its implementation is also invaluable. It helps ensure that the VQA addresses all of the most challenging aspects of the project, and that the final design and plan for implementation will make the credit matrix work for all those who have an interest in post-compulsory education and training.

Overall, the balance of comment on the design of the credit matrix, as proposed in the consultation paper, was strongly positive; this should provide the VQA with a mandate to move to the next phase of the credit matrix project and to consider implementation.

However the level of comment on the need to continue with the incremental approach to this development and on the need to ensure stakeholder support suggests that the implementation phase should not be rushed. A first stage might be to ensure that the strategy for implementation is tested with stakeholders before detailed proposals are finalised.
APPENDIX 1: CREDIT MATRIX CONSULTATION PRO FORMA

Consultation pro forma

Please complete and return this pro forma by 15 December to:

Victorian Qualifications Authority
41a St Andrews Place
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Fax: 03 9637 2422
Email: vqa@edumail.vic.gov.au
Tel: 03 9637 2806

It would help us when we analyse the responses if we know the viewpoint each response is written from (for example, a student at a TAFE college, a parent and the owner of a small business in a rural area, a lecturer in a large metropolitan university). It would also be helpful to know if the response is from an individual or a group.

Please complete the section below before you answer the questions.

This response is □ a group response
□ an individual response

It reflects the views of:

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Consultation questions about the design of the credit matrix
As a result of the first consultation, stakeholders agreed in principle to the concept of the credit matrix, and supported the development of the outline we provided in that paper into a detailed working design.

It was agreed that the credit matrix should be designed to:
- make the qualifications system easier to understand
- make it easier to design more flexible qualifications that combine new and different mixes of knowledge and skills
- provide a common and uniform approach to describing qualifications and recording achievement in them
- make it easier to track and plan ahead – for individuals, providers and employers, as well as the system as a whole
- ensure learning already successfully achieved does not need to be repeated.

Question 1
In what ways does the design of the credit matrix achieve these aims?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Question 2

How will the credit matrix design help to achieve the aims that are important to you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Consultation questions about the level descriptors

The results of the trials will provide us with information about the outcomes of allocating points and levels to units. In particular, we want to examine if the degree to which the allocation of points and levels is consistent from one practitioner to the next and whether the points and levels provide a picture of relationships between the various units and qualifications that is useful and makes sense.

Question 3

Do the level descriptors look capable of describing all the learning outcomes of units from senior secondary certificates to doctorates? If not, what’s missing?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Consultation question on future directions

The range of potential outcomes for users of the credit matrix are summarised in the diagram in the diagram on page 16. Consider the outcomes relevant to you as a potential user of the credit matrix.

Question 4

In what ways would you use the credit matrix to achieve these outcomes?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Consultation question on support
Question 5

In light of the uses that you have identified on the previous page, which of the following might support your use of the credit matrix?

- guidelines
- information kits for different users
- websites
- help lines
- professional development
- case studies
- an online database of points and levels for all units
- others – please list

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you
APPENDIX 2: CONSULTATION FORUMS

Targeted forums held between 15 November and 15 December 2004

Adult and Community Education Providers
Victorian Department of Education and Training
Education and Training Unions
Employee groups
Employers, Selection & Recruitment groups
Higher Education Providers
Industry Training Advisory Boards
Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network Youth Advisory Panel
Local Learning and Employment Network Executive Officers
Parents (sample obtained by Inner Eastern LLEN)
Parents (sample obtained by Nexus Research)
Private Registered Training Organisations
National and Victorian Regulatory and Research Bodies
Senior Secondary Schools
Students (sample obtained by Nexus Research)
TAFE providers
Training Package Developers from Industry Skills Councils
APPENDIX 3: RESPONDENTS

Verbal responses were received from individuals from the following organisations:

Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
Apprenticeships Plus
Australian Catholic University
Australian Council of Private Education and Training
Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch)
Australian Industry Group (Victorian Office)
Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
Australian National Training Authority
Australian Nursing Federation (Victorian Branch)
Australian Universities’ Quality Agency
Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE
Box Hill Institute of TAFE
Business Council of Australia
Business Skills Victoria
Career Education Association of Victoria Inc.
Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Chisholm Institute of TAFE
Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union (Victorian Branch) -Plumbing Division
Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council
Deakin University
Department of Education and Training, Office of Learning and Teaching
Department of Education and Training, Office of Strategy and Review
Department of Education and Training, Office of Training and Tertiary Education (VET)
Department of Education and Training, Office of Training and Tertiary Education (HE)
Department of Education and Training, Office of Training and Tertiary Education (ACFE)
Department of Health and Human Services, Workforce Strategy and Regulation
East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Education Centre Gippsland
Eltham College
Engineering Skills Training Board (Vic) Inc
Equity Research Centre Inc
Geelong Adult Training & Education Inc
Girton Grammar School - Bendigo
Goulburn Ovens TAFE
Group Human Resources, Telstra
Group Training Australia – Victorian Branch
Health Services Union of Australia (Victorian Branch)
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
Innovation and Business Industry Skills Council
John Paul College
La Trobe University
Light Manufacturing Training Australia
Manufacturing Industry Skills Council
Mediquest
Melbourne Grammar School
National Centre for Vocational Education Research
PRACE
Public Safety Industry Training Advisory Board
Qenos Pty Ltd
Resources and Infrastructure Industry Skills Council
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology - (TAFE Division)
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology – (University Division)
Service Skills Victoria
Services Industry Skills Council
Skilled Engineering
South West Institute of TAFE
Student Administration, Monash University
Swinburne University of Technology
Training At Work
Transport and Distribution Industry Training Board of Victoria Incorporated
University of Ballarat (SMB Campus)
University Of Ballarat-TAFE Division
University of Melbourne
VCA Secondary School
VETASSESS
Victoria University of Technology
Victoria University TAFE Division - Melbourne
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce
Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board Incorporated
Victorian Community Services and Health Industry Training Board Inc
Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Victorian Food Industry Training Board Inc
Victorian Furnishing Industry Training Board Inc
Victorian Independent Education Union
Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission
Victorian Primary Industry Skills Training Board Inc
Victorian Process Manufacturing Industries Training Board
Victorian Schools Innovation Commission
Victorian TAFE Association
Victorian Trades Hall Council
Western Heights College
William Angliss Institute of TAFE
Williamstown High School
Wodonga Institute of TAFE

Written responses from individuals or groups:

Australian Catholic University National
Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
Ballarat High School
Catholic Education Centre, South Australia
Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
Defence Education, Training and Development Branch, Department of Defence
Department for Victorian Communities, Office for Youth
Department of Education and Training, Office of Strategy and Review, Strategic Policy & Planning Division
Innovation in Education Unit, Swinburne TAFE Division
La Trobe University
Learning Resources and Services, Department of Education and Children’s Services, South Australia
Melbourne High School
NCVER
Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training
Ouyen Secondary College
Public Safety ITAB
Queensland Catholic Education Commission
Queensland Department of Education, Office of Higher Education
Queensland Studies Authority
Resources and Infrastructure Industry Skills Council
South West TAFE
Sunshine College
Telstra Human Resources
Victorian Adult, Community and Further Education Board
Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission
Victorian TAFE Association
Wodonga Institute of TAFE