



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

ABDC submission: A More Joined-up Tertiary System: Discussion Paper

By email
28 July 2026

The Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation questions in ATEC's *A More Joined-up Tertiary System: Discussion Paper*.

As the collective voice of Australian business schools, the ABDC champions quality and impact in business education and research, driving excellence and innovation to benefit students, staff, industry, and society.

Our 36-member council of deans represents business schools across different university networks, with varied institutional missions, and student cohorts. The council has also established networks for senior leaders in research, education and employability, international education, and professional management portfolios. Through the council and networks, the ABDC has coordinated insight and expertise on existing pathway arrangements, credit recognition, quality assurance, and partnerships to inform this submission.

As the Discussion Paper observes, business and management is one of the leading fields of education for VET to HE transitions. Nearly a quarter of students who complete a Diploma of Business will progress to an HE program in the year following completion. Across our membership, we have a variety of examples of these transitions, supported by bridging and enabling programs to prepare students for university studies.

In this submission the ABDC focusses on those areas where business schools have prior experience and perspectives on the opportunities and challenges in creating a more joined-up tertiary system. Generally:

- The ABDC supports the objective of facilitating wider access to tertiary education, particularly for under-represented groups — stronger connections between the VET and HE sectors is an important part of realising the Universities Accord tertiary attainment target of 80% of working aged Australians by 2050.
- The work that ABDC business schools already do in supporting VET to HE transitions reveals challenges in credit recognition and partnerships. These challenges could be addressed by greater standardisation in VET programs, and common approaches to data collection and operational systems.
- System harmonisation needs to take account of the accreditation context that business schools operate in, both for entry into business professions such as accounting and financial planning, and as an internationally recognised quality marker for business education.
- While pathways provide critical access for students who are under-represented, policies supporting a more joined-up system should capitalise on the differing strengths of the two systems. There is an opportunity to communicate with potential learners about the advantages of each system.

Q1 What actions will be most effective for ensuring that learners are better informed of the depth and range of course offerings and occupations when deciding on career options and tertiary education pathways?

The roadmap presents an opportunity to implement communication strategies that address the general lack of community understanding about the different and complementary purposes of VET and HE qualifications. While pathways are important for access, it is important that students and prospective employers have a clear understanding that VET qualifications equip students with technical, job-ready skills and HE qualifications equip students with skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and specialised education to prepare students to enter professions.

Better communication would address misalignments in student expectations and could also support greater parity of esteem by fostering community understanding of the complementary purposes of each sector. Greater parity of esteem could also support transitions from HE to VET, and opportunities for HE graduates to gain add-on VET qualifications that enhance graduate employability.

Q4 What are examples of effective transitions, particularly for learners from underrepresented backgrounds? How can these be strengthened across the system?

Several ABDC business schools offer transitions through higher education diplomas for students seeking a pathway to second year studies in a bachelor program that do not have an ATAR.¹ There are also examples of business schools bundling VET and HE qualifications,² TAFE admissions pathways, including for secondary school students completing VET diplomas, and enabling programs.³ These programs are more straightforward to administer than credit recognition of VET diplomas contemplated by harmonisation proposals. The broad issue for credit recognition is competency-based assessment, which creates hurdles for universities to map performance. Additionally, VET to HE transitions have impacts on student experience that need to be navigated with additional supports.

While several of our member business schools have had success with these arrangements there are challenges for student experience, administration, and credit recognition that a joined-up or harmonised system should seek to simplify.

Credit recognition

The issue for business schools is not in the approach to developing credit recognition, where universities have reasonably standard approaches, it is the variability in the design of VET packages across TAFE and other providers. This makes it difficult for business schools to provide a standard amount of recognition of prior learning.

¹ For example, students seeking a pathway to second year studies in a Bachelor of Business or Bachelor of Tourism and Event Management at Western Sydney University can complete a Diploma of Business at [The College](#), a not-for-profit, wholly owned entity of Western Sydney University.

² An example of bundling qualifications is University of Wollongong's [Bachelor of Business — TAFE Diploma of Hospitality Management](#).

³ An example of these arrangements is Griffith University's [TAFE Admissions Pathway](#) and [empowerED](#) university preparation program.

ABDC members have partnership arrangements with TAFE observed the substantial amount of work in mapping competencies, maintaining partnerships and complexity arising from the misalignment of systems. These arrangements rely on a patchwork of memoranda of understanding between university business schools and state-based TAFE networks. This complexity and its impacts should be considered in prioritising reforms and building a shared agenda under the roadmap.

One thing that would help is a more standardised core in the design of VET programs, and less variability in electives to allow HE providers to develop a more stable approach to credit recognition. The ABDC would value the opportunity to have input into this exercise if it is undertaken.

Student experience

ABDC members note that the transition from VET to HE can be challenging for students — classes in the VET system are often smaller, with subjects studied in a modular format where one subject is focussed on at a time. University studies also require skills in research, critical thinking, and academic communication that students from VET may need additional supports and preparatory programs to succeed in.

There are also concerns regarding secondary school students completing VET diplomas putting pressure on both schools and students and creating expectations that students can finish degrees faster and cheaper, without the learning maturity that an additional year of study provides.

Q8 What are the challenges in developing and sustaining innovative qualifications, pathways and practices that span across the VET and higher education sectors? What does each sector need from government(s) to support their development and sustainability?

A significant challenge for business schools in developing and sustaining pathways is the accreditation context, and this will have impacts on the development of a more joined-up tertiary system. The business school experience is relevant to other disciplines where completing a university degree is an entry point to a profession.

Business school accreditations

Most ABDC-member business schools are externally accredited by standard-setting bodies such as AACSB (31 schools) and EFMD (14 schools). These accreditations are highly competitive, with less than 6% of business schools AACSB accredited, and just 1.5% of business schools EFMD accredited.

To maintain accreditation, business schools are assessed on a range of quality indicators including curriculum design, faculty qualifications, teaching quality, and research impact.

The standards set by AACSB, EFMD, and similar bodies, directly interact with credit recognition and pathway arrangements. This issue is not covered in the discussion paper and should be considered in developing priorities under the roadmap.

Professional accreditations

Another challenge for developing qualifications and pathways spanning the VET and HE sectors is in preparing students to meet the accredited course requirements for entry into professions such as



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accounting, actuarial, and financial planning. Consultation with professional associations should be part of developing priorities under the roadmap.

Q9 In which geographical locations, fields of education, industries or occupations would dual sector models be best suited? What are examples of work underway?

Notwithstanding the challenges raised in this submission, business and management is a field of education generally well-suited to dual sector models. This is evident in the number and type of arrangements already available, and data on the numbers of Diploma of Business students progressing into university programs. In refining the roadmap, it will be crucial to engage with accrediting bodies, industry and other external stakeholder to ensure that harmonisation meets the needs of the professions and industries that graduates will be employed in.

Q11 Which reform opportunities should be prioritised and why? Which ones are likely to have the highest impact? Are there any gaps that should be considered?

Besides greater standardisation to facilitate credit recognition and considering the accreditation context for business schools and other disciplines, there are further gaps not addressed in the discussion paper including regional models.

The ABDC's regional university members observe that students studying at regional business schools are the learners for whom harmonisation and co-location models could make the greatest difference, with a greater proportion of students that are from regional and remote areas, first-in-family, mature-aged, etc. In the discussion paper, the focus is on co-location models in metropolitan areas.

Standardising credit frameworks and collaborative models around metropolitan co-location infrastructure will inadvertently disadvantage the institutions best placed to serve the learners the roadmap is trying to reach.

Q12 What opportunities are there to improve Australia's data and information systems to better support learner pathways and outcome measurement across VET and higher education?

The challenges raised across this submission point to the need to improve data and information systems to support easier connections between the VET and HE sectors. This would benefit institutions and students in a more harmonised system.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering this feedback on the Tertiary Roadmap. The ABDC looks forward to engaging with ATEC in identifying the next steps to better support students to move into and between the VET and higher education sectors.

For any further inquiries, please contact me (president@abdc.edu.au), or via ABDC's Executive Director, Caroline Falshaw: office@abdc.edu.au

Regards,

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