

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

## The Australian Quality Assurance System for Higher Education

### Context

Australia has an extensive national quality system for higher education. It is based on the activities of the higher education institutions themselves, and the Australian Universities Quality Agency is the over-arching body. Nationally, the main parts of this system are

- the Federal Government, through the Department of Employment, Science and Training (DEST),
- the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) which comprises the relevant ministers from the Federal Government, the six States and two Territories,
- the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), an independent company, created by MCEETYA,
- the Australian Qualifications Framework, also created by MCEETYA,
- the National Protocols, devised by MCEETYA and enacted by each state and territory, and
- the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, representing most of the universities

### Structure

The parts interact as follows:

#### ***Australian Qualifications Framework***

- the Australian Qualifications Framework covers both public and private institutions, specifying the characteristics of qualifications at 10 levels from school certificates through vocational diplomas to doctorates

#### ***National Protocols***

- the National Protocols for HE Recognition Processes have been agreed nationally and implemented in each state and territory
- the state and territory accrediting agencies  
Australia is a federation of eight states and territories and each of these has accrediting functions for education. These accreditors are responsible for implementing the National Protocols
- the Protocols specify
  - requirements for overseas students, reinforcing the requirement for state and territory governments to check that educational institutions within their jurisdiction comply with the ESOS Act (see below)
  - accreditation criteria for higher education institutions,
  - constraints on foreign institutions operating into Australia, and
  - responsibilities when institutions operate in partnership
  - the definition of and criteria for recognition of a university

#### ***State and Territory Authorities***

- each State and Territory has an agency that checks and enforces the Protocols within that State or Territory.
- when an institution has been found to satisfy the criteria for a university the university status is enacted by state, territory or Federal legislation, whether the university is public or private
- each state and territory has an auditor-general

who audits and reports publicly on the operations of all public universities in the jurisdiction, and carries out ad hoc thematic audits of many academic-related matters

### ***Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee***

- the term 'self-accrediting institution (SAI)' means that the institution has been authorised by the relevant government to initiate new courses and programs without requiring external approval. (Programs in professional areas may require accreditation by the relevant professional association also.)
- universities internal systems: universities are empowered to introduce new programs that are consistent with the definitions on the AQF (this power is called 'self-accreditation', a somewhat misleading term), and all have rigorous systems for doing this
- Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee criteria set out the characteristics required of a university for it to be admitted as a member of the AVCC; these are even more stringent than the Protocol criteria
- the AVCC Code of Practice in respect of international students, like the Protocols, requires Australian universities to provide support for foreign students over and above what is provided for Australian domestic ones

### ***Federal Government***

- the Institution Assessment Accountability Framework requires extensive reporting by each university to the Federal government each year, on the basis of which the government discusses with the university its intended and likely development
- the Educational Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 requires providers of courses to overseas students (whether within or without Australia) to satisfy certain conditions
- the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (the National Code) sets out the conditions that must be satisfied under the ESOS Act
- the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) records those providers that have been independently found to satisfy the National Code

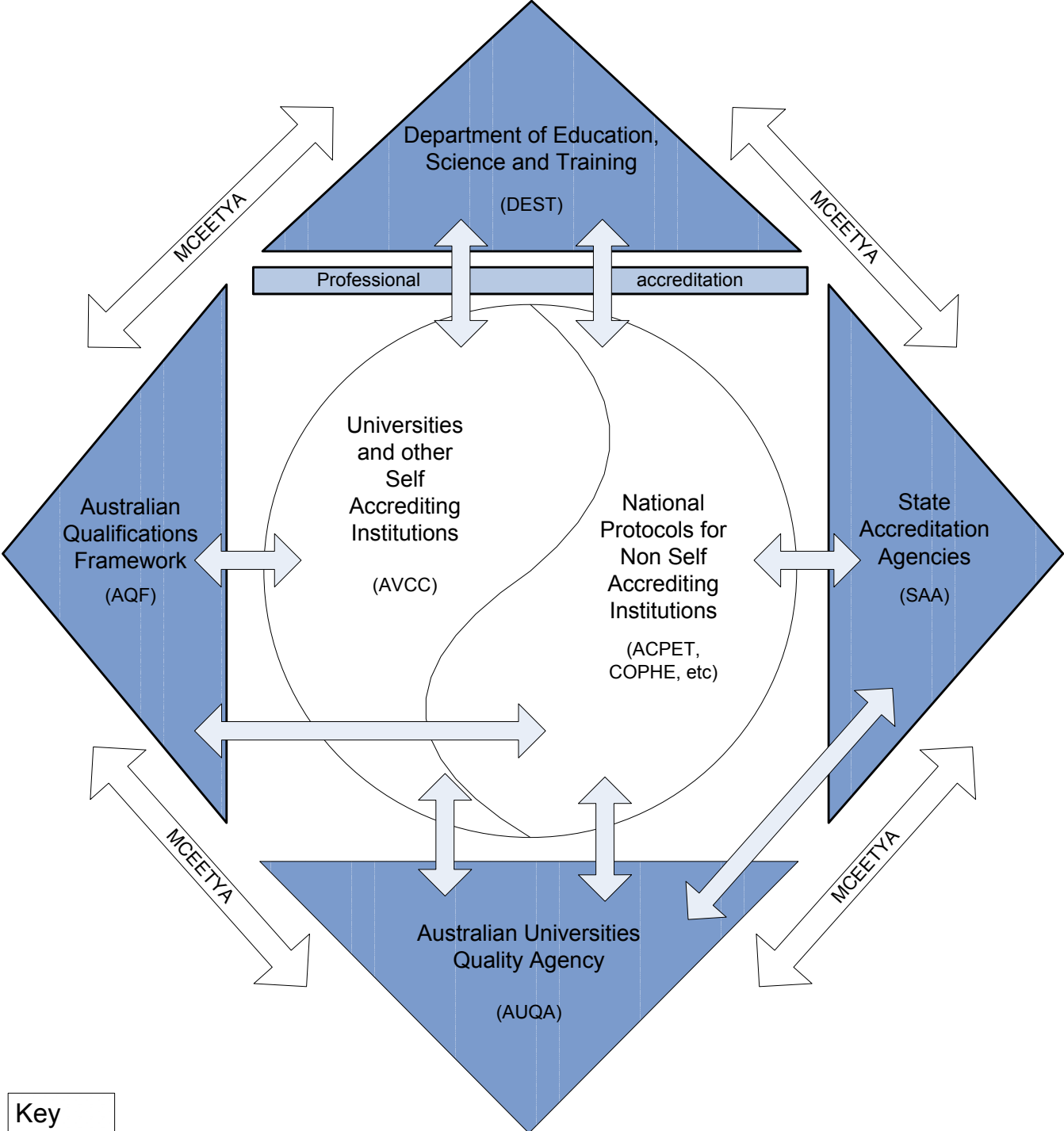
### ***Australian Universities Quality Agency***

- the Australian Universities Quality Agency:
  - like a capstone on the system, AUQA carries out quality audits of
  - all universities,
  - any other higher education institution that benefits from Federal funding, and
  - all the state and territory accreditation functions

### **Conclusion**

The above organisations and structures, interacting as indicated, form a comprehensive and thorough system for ensuring the quality of Australian higher education.

# The Australian Higher Education Quality System



**Key**

ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education & Training: Representing some of the independent post compulsory education and training sector
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework: Representing a national register of awards
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency: Audits the system
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee: Representing most of the self-accrediting institutions
COPHE	Council of Private Higher Education Inc: epresenting some of the private institutions in higher education
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training: Provides funding and monitors performance of institutions
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
SAA	State Accreditation Agencies: Responsible for implementing the National Protocols