

Executive Summary

GRA believes that the application of high quality, industry driven certification programs, built and operated to meet extant international standards and administered by industry-driven professional associations and institutions, will greatly support the assessment of migrant skills, knowledge and attributes.

Certification outcomes, in particular those linked through professional bodies operating in different countries, have the potential to provide a more meaningful basis for comparison than foreign qualifications which may not necessarily meet coverage, content or quality levels required in Australia.

Licensing Link project:

GRA is currently managing a national project to link Certification, Licensing and Training Package functions and processes, using the emerging Finance Broking certification structure as the core Pilot group. This project should provide benefits to Certification bodies, Licensing Agencies, Industry Skills Councils and other related stakeholders, through the encouragement of a higher level of dedicated industry involvement within all aspects of quality-based skills recognition.

Authority Level:

This submission is authorised at the level of Chair and Board of GRA.

Basis for Submission:

The Global Recognition Agency Limited (GRA) is the membership body in Australia for agencies which provide professional recognition to individuals across specific industry areas.

GRA is committed to the implementation of high quality certification processes in Australia, designed to meet the international Standards and to provide benefits to the individuals, their professional bodies and to the Australian economy.

We believe strongly that there is an opportunity for high quality certification to be used as a basis for recognition of local and international professionals, seeking employment here in Australia. GRA sees benefit from the linkage of Australian professional bodies with their international counterparts and to generate a consistency of approach and outcome from professional certification processes, across borders.

We agree with the statements of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition regarding the shortage of skilled workers in Australia. For this reason, we have recently discussed the issue with the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, the Hon Gary Hardgrave MP.

We have also responded to the recent Queensland Department of Employment and Training Research Paper and Green Paper regarding Skills for Jobs and Growth, released for comment in June 2005.

Skills Assessment:

The introduction of consistent, quality-based certification structures would assist the process of skills assessment, either directly carried out by professional bodies, or as guided through NOOSR.

GRA believes that the following points should be noted with regard to the application of certification outcomes as a basis for the support of skills confirmation – either for migration applications or for returning Australian citizens:

- Certification processes should be driven by industry and structured to meet the international standards for accreditation of certification programs – either those published by ISO or NOCA (USA).
- Where recognised international certifications are held by an applicant, these should assist in meeting at least some, if not all, of the required Australian assessment criteria, thus reducing the required level of local assessment.
- Where international certifications do not exist or do not meet the international standards, an Australian certification will list the required criteria to be met, as established and agreed by the Australian Certification Agency.

- High quality certification programs will establish three dimensions of criteria covering knowledge, performance and a range of personal attributes required for recognition, rather than rely solely on qualifications gained.
- Some professional certification programs which do not cover the required levels or breadth of criteria may benefit from re-design to meet the international standards, prior to their application.
- Providing support to Australian-based bodies involved with the assessment of GSM applicants' skills, through the use of processes based on internationally applied standards, should result in consistently higher levels of reliability and quality of assessment outcome.
- Where assessment is involved for Employer Nominated / Sponsored Migration applicants, internationally consistent certification processes, where they are being applied, are expected to provide more reliable measures than overseas conferred qualifications in many cases.
- Certification outcomes, agreed by cross-border, industry-based professional associations would support the processes and findings of NOOSR assessors.
- Close alignment of industry-driven professional certification processes with related, legislation-based licensing structures will ease barriers to work, by facilitating effective assessment of the skills, knowledge and attributes held by migrants seeking to enter these protected areas of work.

GRA supports professional bodies in Australia which are currently providing, or intend to provide certification services to their members.

The more professional bodies offering certification programs which are based on industry requirements and meet high levels of quality, the more effective the assessment of the skills, knowledge and attributes of the Australian workforce, including migrants to our region.

Global Recognition Agency Limited

The Global Recognition Agency (GRA) was created in Australia to provide independent quality management support for member-based professional associations / institutes, industry groups and other organisations, which provide recognition of the competencies of their members or staff through certification, registration or licensing programs.

In order to provide international coverage, GRA has formed a linkage with the National Organisation for Competency Assurance (NOCA), operating within North America. NOCA has accessed its large member base to create the Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs, applied by GRA in Australia.

Core GRA Activities:

- Facilitation of assistance to professional associations and institutes to determine, develop and implement appropriate standards, policies and procedures for the formal recognition of the competencies of their members through industry-driven certification programs
- Support for independent accreditation of certification programs to internationally applied standards
- International and Australian linkages to support the recognition of national and cross-border certification outcomes
- Provision of guidance to certification agencies in operational and strategic areas of activity and development
- Ongoing professional development opportunities for personnel involved with certification, registration and licensing processes and activities
- Facilitation of support for regulatory and licensing bodies, seeking to establish processes enabling individuals to work in recognised industry areas
- Provision of support for effective linkages between Certification, Licensing and Training organisations across areas of individual recognition and development.

Membership:

Members of the GRA can include:

- Member-based professional associations or institutes, either seeking to offer, or already providing, their own certification programs
- Government Registration or Licensing Authorities
- Large and / or strategic organisations, seeking to recognise and support their own employees or associates, through in-house certification / development programs
- Industry-based Lead, or Peak agencies, associated with the support or development of professional bodies within their areas of industry coverage
- Suppliers of services and products to certification / licensing bodies.

External Support Services:

Through its network of quality-managed suppliers, GRA facilitates a range of support services for its members, including:

- design, development and implementation of three dimensional competency standards and other, industry-associated evaluation criteria and measures
- design, development and conduct of assessment and examination procedures, systems and networks to meet specific certification requirements
- consistent and quality-managed implementation of certification systems and processes
- collection, validation, storage and management of certification outcome information, and other associated data, associated with certification programs
- management of research in areas of certification, licensure, competency and assessment
- reviews of available assessment and evaluation techniques and tools
- continuing professional development activities for certification bodies and associated assessment professionals
- direct management and support of internal / external assessor, trainer and quality management networks.

Further contact:

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Committee Terms of Reference:

1. Investigate and report on current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for:
 - a) Skills stream migrants who obtain assessment prior to migrating
 - b) Families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants who seek assessment/registration/upgrading after arrival
 - c) Temporary residents who need skills assessment/recognition
 - d) Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas, with overseas qualifications.

2. Consider how Australia's arrangements compare with those of other major immigration countries.

3. Identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved including in terms of:
 - a) Communication of processes to users
 - b) Efficiency of processes and elimination of barriers
 - c) Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading (e.g. bridging courses)
 - d) Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers
 - e) Achieving greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators
 - f) Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications.

Note:

Within this submission, from the Global Recognition Agency Limited, we refer to issues which may be linked to the following Terms of Reference items:

- 1 a, c, d
- 2
- 3 b, c, d, e, f