

CATALOGUE NO. 1263.0
EMBARGOED UNTIL 11.30 A.M. 14 SEPTEMBER 1992

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS CLASSIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS — ABSCQ

This paper provides an introduction to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Classification of Qualifications (ABSCQ). This includes a summary of the concepts used in developing the classification, an overview of the classification structure and a brief discussion of the relationship of the classification to other classifications of educational qualifications. Forthcoming publications relating to the ABSCQ are also described.

2. The ABSCQ was developed for use in the 1991 Census of Population and Housing. It is now being adopted as an ABS standard for use in the production and analysis of data on post-school educational qualifications. To enhance comparability of educational statistics from different sources, use of the classification by other agencies involved in the production of statistics on post-school qualifications and courses is encouraged.

3. This classification is designed for use in the collection and presentation of data on qualifications held by the population of Australia at the present time. Although it is based on qualifications currently available, qualifications previously awarded or awarded overseas may also be classified to the nearest equivalent contemporary Australian qualification.

4. The major objective of the ABS in developing the classification was to foster the production of statistics on qualifications which will provide policy makers with data to assist in planning and meeting the need for a better educated and more highly skilled population.

5. Since analysis of education in the context of the labour market typically involves the use of statistics on qualifications in conjunction with statistics on occupation, efforts have been made to ensure that, when appropriate, data coded to the classification can be related broadly to data on occupations coded to the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO).

Scope of the classification

6. For the purposes of the ABSCQ an 'educational qualification' is considered to be an award for attainment as a result of formal learning, from an accredited post-school institution. Such institutions include TAFE

colleges, universities and some private education and training providers. Also included are professional bodies which authorise people to work in particular occupations, such as the various medical colleges which provide training in the post-basic medical specialties. Hospital based nursing awards are also included.

Structure of the classification

7. The attributes of qualifications which are of primary interest to users of ABS statistics are level of attainment and field of study. Therefore the ABSCQ has been designed to classify an educational qualification according to two main elements:

- level of attainment; and
- field of study.

8. As a result, statistics can be presented by level of attainment alone, field of study alone in varying degrees of detail, or by level and field together. However, if the classification was regarded as a matrix for level of attainment and field of study it would be evident that not all fields of study relate to all levels of attainment, nor can all levels of attainment be related to all fields of study.

9. Whilst it was important to achieve comparability between qualification and occupation data in designing the new classification, to ensure that the qualification data were meaningful in a range of contexts it was necessary to avoid classifying qualifications purely according to their occupational focus. Therefore, the ABSCQ classifies qualifications according to the facts and theories learnt, and according to the broad purpose for which the learning is undertaken.

10. Two qualifications belong to the same broad field of study if the theoretical knowledge which underpins learning is broadly the same. For practically orientated qualifications which do not generally require large amounts of theoretical learning, factual and practical learning are considered.

11. A test in applying these criteria involves determining whether the factual and theoretical content of a practically orientated qualification would provide individuals with

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- for more information about the contents of this publication, contact Wendy Piper on Canberra (06) 252 5757 or any ABS State office.
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some assistance in obtaining a qualification at an intermediate level, and whether this intermediate level qualification could provide assistance in obtaining a qualification at a higher level. For example, a trade certificate qualification in electrical mechanics could articulate to an associate diploma course in electrical drafting which in turn could articulate to a degree course in electrical engineering. By applying the model previously described, a trade certificate in electrical mechanics and a bachelor degree in electrical engineering would be classified to the same broad field.

Criteria for developing the Level of Attainment

12. Level of attainment is a function of the quality and quantity of learning necessary to obtain that qualification. The award of a qualification is, therefore, an indication that a person possesses knowledge and/or practical ability of a certain quality and quantity. The quality and quantity of learning, for level of attainment, are measured operationally in terms of three criteria. These are:

- the minimum amount of prior education needed to undertake the course of study at that level; that is, the minimum entry requirements for the course;
- the duration of the course; and
- the theoretical orientation of the course measured in terms of theoretical, factual and practical learning.

The Level of Attainment

13. The Level of Attainment Classification has a non-hierarchical structure and each category is denoted by a 1-digit code. The categories are:

- 1 Higher Degree
- 2 Postgraduate Diploma
- 3 Bachelor Degree
- 4 Undergraduate Diploma
- 5 Associate Diploma
- 6 Skilled Vocational Qualifications
- 7 Basic Vocational Qualifications

Summary definitions for Levels of Attainment

Higher Degree

Qualifications at this level are primarily master degrees and doctorates. The minimum entry requirement for a master degree course is usually the completion of an honours degree. The entry requirement for a doctorate is usually the completion of a master degree or a first class honours degree. The lengths of the courses are a minimum of two years full-time for master degrees and two to four years for doctorates.

Postgraduate Diploma

The entry requirement for a Postgraduate Diploma course is the satisfactory completion of a Bachelor Degree or Undergraduate Diploma course or its equivalent. Postgraduate Diploma courses normally require six months to one year of full-time study or two years of part-time study. Postgraduate certificates are included at this level.

Bachelor Degree

Entry to courses at this level require the student to have successfully completed Year 12 at secondary school or equivalent. A Bachelor Degree usually comprises three to four years of full-time study. There are some exceptions such as Medicine, Law and Engineering which range from four to six years in duration. Honours degrees are also included at this level.

Undergraduate Diploma

The entry requirement is usually the completion of Year 12 schooling or equivalent. Undergraduate Diploma courses normally require three years of full-time study and aim to develop the student's knowledge and skills for professional or para-professional practice.

Associate Diploma

The entry requirement for a course at this level is the completion of Year 12 or the completion of basic vocational or skilled vocational qualifications. Technician and advanced certificates are included at this level. The duration of courses at this level is usually one or two years of full-time study.

Skilled Vocational Qualifications

The minimum entry requirement for these courses usually is completion of Year 10, although this varies. The majority of courses at this level are designed to be completed over a period of two to three years and incorporate on-the-job training. This level includes trade qualifications and non-trade qualifications which are equivalent in terms of the classification criteria for level of attainment.

Basic Vocational Qualifications

Many of these courses have no entry requirements. Some, however, require a Year 10 Certificate or passes in specific subjects such as Science or Mathematics. The duration of these courses is relatively short, typically ranging from 200 hours to one year of full-time study.

Criteria for developing the Field of Study

14. Field of study refers to the subject matter taught in the course of study leading to the award of a particular qualification. In developing the structure of the Field of Study Classification the following criteria were used:

Theoretical content — this can be defined as that part of the subject matter which links facts together to explain other facts and predict outcomes.

Purpose of learning — this refers to the skills and knowledge gained from a course of study, that is, the application of the body of theory learnt.

Objects of interest — these are the things or phenomena studied.

Methods and techniques — these are the specific procedures for applying the knowledge gained in a course of study.

Tools and equipment — these are the instruments and implements used to apply the methods and techniques of a course of study.

The Field of Study Classification Structure

15. The structure of the Field of Study Classification has three levels:

Broad Field
Narrow Field
Detailed Field

Broad Fields are:

- the broadest level of the classification
- denoted by 1-digit codes
- distinguished from each other on the basis of the theoretical content of the course and the purpose of learning.

There are 9 broad fields.

Narrow Fields are:

- subdivisions of the broad fields
- denoted by 2-digit codes (the relevant broad field, plus an additional digit)
- distinguished from other narrow fields in the same broad field on the basis of the objects of interest (i.e. the main area of concern).

There are 46 narrow fields.

Detailed Fields are:

- subdivisions of the narrow fields
- denoted by 3-digit codes (the relevant narrow field, plus an additional digit)
- distinguished from other detailed fields in the same narrow field on the basis of methods, techniques, and tools and equipment.

There are 187 detailed fields.

The following example illustrates these conventions:

Category	Code	Title
Broad Field	4	Society and Culture
Narrow Field	48	Visual and Performing Arts
Detailed Field	486	Drama and Dance

Field of Study categories — Broad and Narrow Fields

1 BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

- 11 Management
- 12 Management Support Services
- 13 Sales and Marketing
- 14 Financial Services

2 HEALTH

- 21 Medicine
- 22 Nursing
- 23 Health Science

- 24 Dental Studies
- 25 Veterinary Studies
- 29 Other Health

3 EDUCATION

- 31 School Teacher Training
- 32 Post-School Teacher Training
- 39 Other Education

4 SOCIETY AND CULTURE

- 41 Behavioural Studies
- 42 Welfare
- 43 Librarianship
- 44 Language and Area Studies
- 45 Religion and Philosophy
- 46 Economics
- 47 Law
- 48 Visual and Performing Arts
- 49 Other Society and Culture

5 NATURAL AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES

- 51 Life Science
- 52 Physical Science
- 53 Mathematics and Statistics
- 54 Computer Science
- 59 Other Natural and Physical Sciences

6 ENGINEERING

- 61 Surveying and Cartography
- 62 Civil Engineering
- 63 Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- 64 Mechanical Engineering
- 65 Metallurgical and Mining Engineering
- 66 Printing
- 67 Automotive Engineering
- 68 Textiles, Clothing and Footwear
- 69 Other Engineering

7 ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING

- 71 Building Design
- 72 Building Construction
- 79 Other Architecture and Building

8 AGRICULTURE AND RELATED FIELDS

- 81 Agriculture
- 82 Horticulture
- 89 Other Agriculture and Related Fields

9 MISCELLANEOUS FIELDS

- 91 Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy
- 92 Food and Hospitality Services
- 93 Transport
- 99 Other Miscellaneous Fields

The code

16. Information on both the field of study and level of attainment can be provided in the one code (4-digits). The first digit in this code indicates the level of attainment and the last three indicate the field of study. Thus the code 5631 can be broken down in the following way:

- the first digit, 5, refers to the level of attainment (Associate Diploma)
- the next three digits, 631, refer to the field of study (Electrical and Electronic Engineering Science).

So the code 5631 is at the level and field of an Associate Diploma of Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

Relationship to other classifications of educational qualifications

1986 Census classification

17. The 1986 Census classification used level of attainment as the basic category in the classification with fields of study allocated to different levels of attainment. That is, the fields of study may be different according to the level at which they were studied.

The levels of attainment were:

- Higher Degree Level
- Graduate Diploma Level
- Bachelor Degree Level
- Diploma Level
- Certificate Level — Trade
- Other
- Not Classifiable by Level

18. The ABCSQ has maintained some degree of comparability with the 1986 Census classification. However, differences in the classification structure and coding process used in the 1986 Census may pose some practical difficulties when attempting any detailed comparison. A concordance table can be found in the Appendices of the *ABS Classification of Qualifications* (1262.0) (expected to be released in late 1992).

Field of Study Classification of Tertiary Education Courses (FOSCTEC)

19. FOSCTEC is a classification of courses used by DEET. The field of study groupings were determined by the similarity of potential vocations rather than similarity of content. That is, the concept of field of study is a function of vocational emphasis rather than subject matter content.

20. FOSCTEC does not classify level of attainment, so any comparability between the ABCSQ and FOSCTEC can only be done for field of study. A concordance table of this relationship can be found in the *ABS Classification of Qualifications* (1262.0).

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

21. ISCED is a classification of educational programmes, and not a classification of qualifications. It classifies courses, programmes and fields of education according to their educational content. This classification is used for

the promotion of international comparisons of educational programmes and is not particularly useful for the compilation of the qualifications of a population.

22. It is possible to compare ISCED and the ABCSQ but differences in terminology in some areas may cause some difficulties. For example, in ISCED, trade qualifications are referred to as 'trade, craft and industrial programmes' and treated as a field of study rather than as a subset of Skilled Vocational Qualifications as in the Australian context. This difference would limit comparisons. A concordance table for ISCED and the ABCSQ is also included as an appendix to the *ABS Classification of Qualifications* (1262.0).

Related publications

23. The following two publications are expected to be released in late 1992.

The ABS Classification of Qualifications (1262.0)

This publication will comprise an explanation of the conceptual basis of the classification, definitions of the level of attainment categories and the fields of study, and a set of conversion tables specifying the relationship between the ABCSQ and other relevant classifications of educational qualifications. Its primary purpose is to aid the interpretation of ABS statistics on qualifications. Users wishing to code their own qualifications data to the classification should refer to the *ABSCQ Classification of Qualifications — Manual Coding System* (1265.0) described below.

ABS Classification of Qualifications — Manual Coding System (1265.0)

This volume is intended primarily to enable users to assign ABCSQ codes to information about qualifications. It also will be useful for those undertaking detailed analysis and interpretation of data coded to ABCSQ. It will contain:

- coding indexes (alphabetical and field of study order); and
- a guide to using these indexes.

24. Both of these volumes will be available from all ABS bookshops. Copies may be ordered in advance of their release.

25. The ABS has developed a Computer Assisted Coding system for qualifications data. This system is available from the ABS as a consultancy service. For details, contact Wendy Piper, Assistant Director, Classifications, Standards and Dissemination Section on (06) 252 5757.

RICHARD MADDEN
Acting Australian Statistician



2012630012924

ISBN 0 642 17245 5