



Higher Level Skills

Program Policy 2016–17



Higher Level Skills

Program Policy 2016–17

Policy owner:	Deputy Director-General Training and Skills
Approval date:	June 2016
Effective date:	1 July 2016
Related documents:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Pre-qualified Supplier Policy 2016–17</i> 2. <i>Vocational Education and Training Pre-qualified Supplier Agreement</i> 3. PQS marketing and disclosure fact sheet 2016–17 4. PQS Compliance Audit Evidence Guide for Pre-qualified Suppliers 2016–17
Version control:	1

All documents are available online at:
www.training.qld.gov.au/pqsagreementoffers.

Overview and objectives

The Higher Level Skills program provides eligible individuals with access to a subsidised training place in selected Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) certificate IV level and above qualifications or priority skill sets, with a pre-approved registered training organisation (RTO) of their choice — otherwise known as a pre-qualified supplier (PQS).

The principal aim is to help individuals gain the higher-level skills required to secure employment or career advancement in a priority industry or transition to university to continue their studies. The Higher Level Skills program also provides eligible employers or industry with the capacity to address current workforce development needs that are adversely impacting on productivity, where individual employees meet the program's eligibility requirements.

While it is primarily industry's role to train its workforce, there is a role for government to invest in training that meets emerging industry needs if it will benefit Queensland's economy and support industry to boost productivity.

Who is eligible to receive training?

To be eligible for the Higher Level Skills program, individuals must:

- be aged 15 years or over
- be no longer at school

- permanently reside in Queensland
- be an Australian citizen, Australian permanent resident (includes humanitarian entrant), temporary resident with the necessary visa and work permits on the pathway to permanent residency, or a New Zealand citizen
- not hold, and not be enrolled in, a certificate IV or higher-level qualification, not including qualifications completed at school and foundation skills training.

In addition to the standard eligibility requirements, specific restrictions and or exemptions may apply to participation in certain subsidised qualifications. Any additional eligibility requirements will be based on industry advice or requirements under the relevant national training package and will be detailed in the Queensland Training Subsidies List.

Other priority students

The Queensland Government may operate other cohort-specific programs or initiatives where participants will access their training through the Higher Level Skills program.

PQS must ensure these students are accessing Higher Level Skills program funding in accordance with the rules and any exemptions prescribed in the relevant initiative's guidelines.

How can employers participate?

For the program to achieve the desired outcomes for government and industry, participating employers would be expected to:

- undertake workforce development planning and identify skills needs and training requirements
- determine the qualifications or skill sets that match their identified skills needs
- identify if these qualifications or skill sets are subsidised under the program, and how many employees require the training and meet the program's eligibility criteria
- select a PQS that can best meet their training needs based on price, delivery mode and location, trainer experience, resource requirements or other identified needs
- support eligible employees to participate in the training and achieve the desired outcome
- make a co-contribution towards training costs which may include PQS fees, wages, supervisors, trainers or facilities.

What training is available?

Under the Higher Level Skills program, the Queensland Government provides a subsidy for selected certificate IV level, diploma and advanced diploma qualifications aligned to critical occupations for industry and the economy.

For all subsidised Higher Level Skills qualifications, see the Queensland Training Subsidies List.

Priority skill sets

The government recognises that sometimes a full qualification is not required to address the skills needed for a critical occupation in the workplace.

In some instances, addressing skills needs may only require training in a specific skill set to increase the productivity and/or safety within the workforce, while still providing transferable or portable skills within the industry.

Eligibility for accessing training in a priority skills set is the same as the standard eligibility requirements for the Higher Level Skills program, except where specific restrictions and or exemptions are identified on the Queensland Training Subsidies List.

To attract a subsidy under the program, skill sets must:

- target workers who already hold entry-level qualifications (certificate III level) in the industry and who require further training for career progression
- be an endorsed skill set within a national training package or approved by a Queensland industry body
- align with an occupation considered a priority by industry
- represent a viable market for government investment with sufficient numbers of workers requiring the skill set and a sufficient number of RTOs able to provide the training
- be approved for funding by the Queensland Government.

Skill sets that align with statutory or licensing requirements will generally not be funded under the program as industry and individuals are primarily responsible for achieving these outcomes.

For all priority skill sets subsidised under the Higher Level Skills program, see the Queensland Training Subsidies List.

Which RTOs can apply to deliver subsidised training?

RTOs must be pre-approved by the department as a PQS for the Higher Level Skills program to deliver training and assessment services in Queensland.

For information on the PQS application and approval process, see the PQS application fact sheet.

For information on the terms and conditions of funding, see the PQS Policy and PQS Agreement.

What level of subsidy is available?

The Higher Level Skills program will provide a government subsidy towards the training cost for eligible students undertaking a subsidised certificate IV, diploma level or advanced diploma qualification or priority skill set.

The size of the government subsidy will vary for each qualification (or skill set) based on the relative priority of the occupation aligned to the qualification, and the indicative value of the qualification (or skill set) based on relative length and complexity of training delivery.

The government will pay a higher concessional subsidy to encourage and support participation by disadvantaged students.

Concessional student status applies when:

- (a) the student holds a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card issued under Commonwealth law, or is the partner or a dependant of a person who holds a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card and is named on the card
- (b) the student provides the PQS with an official form under Commonwealth law confirming that the student, his or her partner, or the person of whom the student is a dependant, is entitled to concessions under a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card
- (c) the student is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- (d) the student has a disability
- (e) the student is an adult prisoner.

For concessional status, it is the responsibility of the PQS to verify at enrolment and hold evidence of a student's eligibility.

Loadings will also be paid to PQS to encourage delivery in country and remote areas in Queensland, and in Cape York and the Torres Strait. Locations attracting the loading, along with the corresponding loading amounts, can be found in the Localities and Location Loadings List.

What is a co-contribution fee?

A contribution to the cost of training and assessment services — called a co-contribution fee — must be made by students undertaking a certificate IV level and above qualification or priority skill set.

Given the increased benefits that students and industry accrue from higher-level training, there is an expectation of higher levels of co-contribution under the Higher Level Skills program.

The fee may be paid on behalf of the student by a third party, but cannot be paid or waived by the PQS. The fee amount is a decision for the PQS.

State subsidised VET FEE-HELP loans

Through the [National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform](#), the Australian and Queensland Governments are supporting expansion of the VET FEE-HELP scheme to improve access to higher-level qualifications.

[VET FEE-HELP](#) is an Australian Government loan scheme to assist eligible students studying diploma level and above qualifications to pay their tuition fees. It cannot be used for other study related costs such as accommodation or text books.

Under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, a student must be able to defer their entire contribution through VET FEE-HELP, but may elect to pay a proportion upfront and defer the remainder. As a result, through state-subsidised VET FEE-HELP arrangements, if the student and PQS are eligible, a loan may be available to the student. The loan may cover all or part of their contribution towards the cost of a diploma or advanced diploma qualification subsidised under the Higher Level Skills program.

The Queensland Government will pay the same level of subsidy for a qualification, regardless of whether the student accesses a VET FEE-HELP loan or not.

To offer VET FEE-HELP loans to students, the PQS must also be approved as a VET FEE-HELP provider by the Australian Government. For information about the application and approval process for VET FEE-HELP, and the conditions of the scheme, see the Australian Government [VET FEE-HELP](#) website.

The Queensland Government is required to manage state subsidised VET FEE-HELP loans to a weighted average of \$5000. As a result, a PQS that is an approved VET FEE-HELP provider must also manage the level of state subsidised VET FEE-HELP loans offered to an average of \$5000 or less. If a PQS breaches this requirement, their PQS Agreement may be suspended or terminated.

VET FEE-HELP Certificate IV trial

Through the [National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform](#), the Australian and Queensland Governments have been trialing an extension of the availability of state-subsidised VET FEE-HELP loans to selected certificate IV level qualifications.

These qualifications are:

- Certificate IV in Aged Care
- Certificate IV in Disability
- Certificate IV in Building and Construction (Building)
- Certificate IV in Engineering
- Certificate IV in Small Business Management.

This means an eligible student may be able to access a VET FEE-HELP loan if undertaking one of the above qualifications under the Higher Level Skills program.

This trial will not be extended beyond its scheduled completion date of 31 December 2016.

To ensure students are not disadvantaged at the end of the trial period, PQS must notify current and prospective students that only VET units of study that are commenced, and will end before 31 December 2016 (as determined by the PQS at time of enrolment) will be eligible to be included in the trial.

This information must be relayed to prospective students prior to enrolment in these qualifications, as it may change the fee structure for the student and influence their decision to study or access a VET FEE-HELP loan.

What can students expect from a PQS?

Individuals need access to a range of information to ensure they make an informed choice about a subsidised training place under the Higher Level Skills program.

To support this objective, each PQS must:

- inform prospective students they will no longer be eligible for a government subsidised training place under the Higher Level Skills program once they complete one certificate IV level or higher qualification or priority skill set
- disclose upfront to prospective students and clearly publish on its website, the co-contribution fee for concessional and non-concessional students for each qualification it is approved to deliver under the program, and if they are an approved VET FEE-HELP provider for a qualification. The fee must represent the total cost to the student to enrol, undertake training and be

awarded the qualification. It is not permissible to offer or publish fee-free training

- provide prospective students, prior to enrolling, with its refund policy outlining what the student is entitled to (full or part refunds)
- direct each student to the department's Higher Level Skills student fact sheet
- supply each student with a training fact sheet or written summary information for the qualification or skill set which includes:
 - a breakdown of all costs including how and when fees will be charged and collected at the unit of competency level
 - training timelines, delivery mode, delivery location, and vocational or work placement when this is a mandatory component of the qualification under the training package
 - support services available to assist students to complete training
 - a requirement to complete a student training and employment survey within three months of completing or discontinuing the qualification or skill set (see the student training and employment survey fact sheet and PQS Policy, performance standard 5 for more information).

What outcomes are expected?

As a result of participating in the Higher Level Skills program, the department expects students will:

- complete a higher-level qualification or approved skill set
- transition to the workforce, advance in their chosen career or transition to university to continue their studies.

In accordance with these objectives, the department will measure PQS performance against the following key performance indicators and benchmarks:

- Qualification / skill set completions — at a minimum achieve a qualification or skill set completion rate of 65 per cent of all enrolled students
- Employment benefit — at a minimum achieve 55 per cent of all students gaining an employment benefit as a result of the training. This means those unemployed before training gain a job, those employed before training receive some type of job-related benefit, and those successfully transitioning to university and enrolling in their chosen course.

More information

For more information on the Higher Level Skills program, phone 1300 369 935 or visit www.training.qld.gov.au/pqsagreementoffers.