



POSITION PAPER

Licensing & Accrediting the Australian Fire Protection Industry

Presenting *Fire Protection Association Australia's* position in regard to licensing and accreditation in the Fire Protection Industry and models and pathways designed to achieve the outcomes presented

Acknowledgement

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KEY TERMS AS USED IN THIS PAPER

TERM	DEFINITION
Licence	A Licence is formal permission from a constituted authority to perform stipulated activities within the (fire protection) industry (that is, an authority constituted under Federal, State or Territory law).
Accreditation	<p>When used in terms of accreditation by FPA Australia: recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience of an individual such that they are able to perform stated activities to the standard required.</p> <p>When used in terms of Federal, State and Territory bodies: the formal recognition of a course by the state or territory course accrediting body in accordance with the <i>Standards for State and Territory Registering / Course Accrediting Bodies (ANTA 2001)</i>. (ANTA website)</p>
Occupational Licensing	An Occupational Licence is a license for a set of skills within a particular industry (for example, a carpenter has a prescribed set of skills that must be assessed at the appropriate level before being licensed in the occupation of 'Carpenter' within the building industry).
Class	<p>This is a set of six sub groups within FPA Australia's Occupational Licensing model based on 'clustering' together the type of work performed by the practitioner. The level of skills and knowledge required increases from group 1 through to group 6 :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restricted: covering practitioners with the lowest level of skills (Certificate 11 level) who must work under the supervision of those with a 'Tester' - or higher - Category of accreditation as well as catering for the overlap of non key vocational trades into the fire protection industry (eg electricians) 2. Tester: practitioner with the skills and knowledge required to test fitted and portable fire protection equipment and systems 3. Fitter/Technician: practitioner with the skills and knowledge required to install and perform maintenance on fitted and portable fire protection equipment and systems 4. Supervisor/Commissioner: practitioner with the skills and knowledge required to perform and /or supervise the installation and maintenance of fitted and portable fire protection equipment and systems and commission same. 5. Inspector: practitioner with the skills and knowledge required to inspect all aspects of the installation and maintenance and operation of fitted and portable fire protection equipment and systems. 6. Designer: practitioner with the skills and knowledge required to design fitted and portable fire protection equipment and systems.
Category	Categories are the set of 12 sub groups within the Class structure outlined above, based on types of equipment worked on or services provided by the practitioner.
Endorsement	Endorsements are a clause on a licence or accreditation further clarifying the work a practitioner is permitted to perform within each of the Categories outlined above.
Continuing Professional Development (or CPD)	A commitment to ongoing learning to improve the knowledge of practitioners (paraphrased from the Building Commission of Victoria).

Competency Standards
(sometimes just referred to as 'competencies')

Competencies are an industry-determined specification of performance which sets out the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to operate effectively in employment. Competency standards are made up of **units** of competency, which are themselves made up of **elements** of competency, together with **performance criteria**, a **range of variables**, and an **evidence guide**. Competency standards are an endorsed component of a training package (from ANTA website).

Unit of Competency

A Unit is a component of a competency standard. A unit of competency is a statement of a key function or role in a particular job or occupation. See also element of competency, performance criteria, range of variables (from ANTA website).

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

RTO's include TAFE colleges and institutes, adult and community education providers, private providers, community organisations, schools, higher education institutions, commercial and enterprise training providers, industry bodies and other organisations meeting the registration requirements (from ANTA website).

Accrediting Agency/Body

Accrediting authority is an organisation with the authority and responsibility for accrediting courses and training programs (from ANTA website).

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a nationally consistent set of qualifications for all post-compulsory education and training in Australia. That is, a single, coherent framework for qualifications from Senior Secondary Certificates through to Doctoral Degrees.

The framework links together all these qualifications and is a quality-assured national system of educational recognition that promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system.

It covers qualifications issued by secondary schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers and higher education institutions. All qualifications are nationally recognised.

Within the framework, there are six VET qualifications available: Certificates I, II, III and IV; Diploma and Advanced Diploma. (from ANTA website)

Training Package

The Training Package specifies the combination of competency standards required to achieve a particular qualification. Learners who complete some, but not all, standards for a qualification are awarded a statement of attainment. When they are assessed as competent in the remaining standards, they get the qualification (from ANTA website).

Vocational Education/Training (VET)
Recognition of Prior Learning (or RPL)

Education and training specifically designed and targeted to prepare practitioners to perform their occupation.

RPL is the acknowledgement of a person's skills and knowledge acquired through previous training, work or life experience, which may be used to grant status or credit in a subject or module (from ANTA website).

Recognition of Current Competence (or RCC)

RCC is the acknowledgement of competencies currently held by a person, acquired through training, work or life experience. More commonly known as recognition of prior learning (from ANTA website).

Preface

This paper seeks to provide an overview of FPA Australia's perception of the direction the fire protection industry should pursue over the next five years in regard to licensing and accreditation within the industry. The paper is intended to provide a focus for the fire protection industry and other stakeholder groups to build the licensing and accreditation system they need.

Having consolidated support for a system will assist greatly in influencing an outcome that is best for industry. To that end, the paper was circulated to the Association's members for comment and incorporates amendments suggested during the feedback period.

It should be especially noted that this paper focuses on licensing and accreditation in regard to **fire systems and fire equipment**. We acknowledge that fire safety engineers have been left out of the coverage of this paper. The reason for this omission being that fire safety engineers are currently licensed elsewhere.

Executive Summary

FPA Australia recognises that, generally speaking, the fire protection industry is unlicensed for most activities. A number of Governments have indicated following various inquiries into the Building Industry, moves to introduce occupational licensing. Queensland is one state where the Government is introducing occupational licensing as a component of post Childers legislation. Therefore it is imperative to have a position to influence the best outcome for industry.

The proposed licensing system provides States and Territories with the opportunity to maintain control of standards while incorporating existing essential components of the Australian Government's agenda on competency based training and assessment including the recognition of skills. The national focus of FPA Australia's system ensures uniformity for fire protection workers throughout Australia.

An advisory body from industry, government agencies and authorities will be established to guide and assist the administration of a fire practitioner licensing system. As well as having direct linkages with the Government Departments responsible for establishing accreditation bodies, the advisory body will also have a consultative role into the development of nationally endorsed competencies for training packages to meet AQF requirements.

The industry position paper promotes a sole occupational licence for fire practitioners with six classes of licence in 12 categories with a number of endorsements available. This is deemed preferable to having a system of many classes of licenses.

State Governments by means of enabling legislation through relevant Departments/Authorities are able to appoint an appropriately qualified organisation to act as their **accrediting agency**. Licence eligibility and the relevant endorsement can be determined by the accrediting agency based upon evidence that includes a qualification from a national industry-training package.

In the short term - over the next one to two years - it may be desirable to implement a *voluntary* accreditation system that would articulate into the mature State and Territory based licensing system. Action could therefore be initiated immediately, resulting in voluntary accreditation for individuals and companies with a State and Territory based licensing system eventually 'coming on line' as legislation and/or Governments priorities support the need.

FPA Australia is ideally placed to undertake the role of accrediting body for issuing occupational licences to fire practitioners.

Background

FPA Australia recognises that, generally speaking, the fire protection industry is unlicensed for most activities. The Association also believes there is strong support for 'tightening up' the fire protection industry through licensing and accreditation. The desire for increased rigour includes licensing and accreditation that is user friendly, transparent and consistent across all jurisdictions.

The development during 2004 of new Federal regulations on managing and controlling Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) and Synthetic Greenhouse Gases (SGG) provided an opportunity to again consider the benefits to the industry - and the Australian people the industry protects – of a national fire practitioner licensing system. The licensing system proposed in this paper provides States and Territories with the opportunity to maintain control of standards whilst facilitating the national framework for the recognition of training. In this paper FPA Australia presents a model that incorporates existing essential components of the Australian Government's agenda on competency based training and assessment.

Rationale for the Licensing – Accreditation System (Fire)

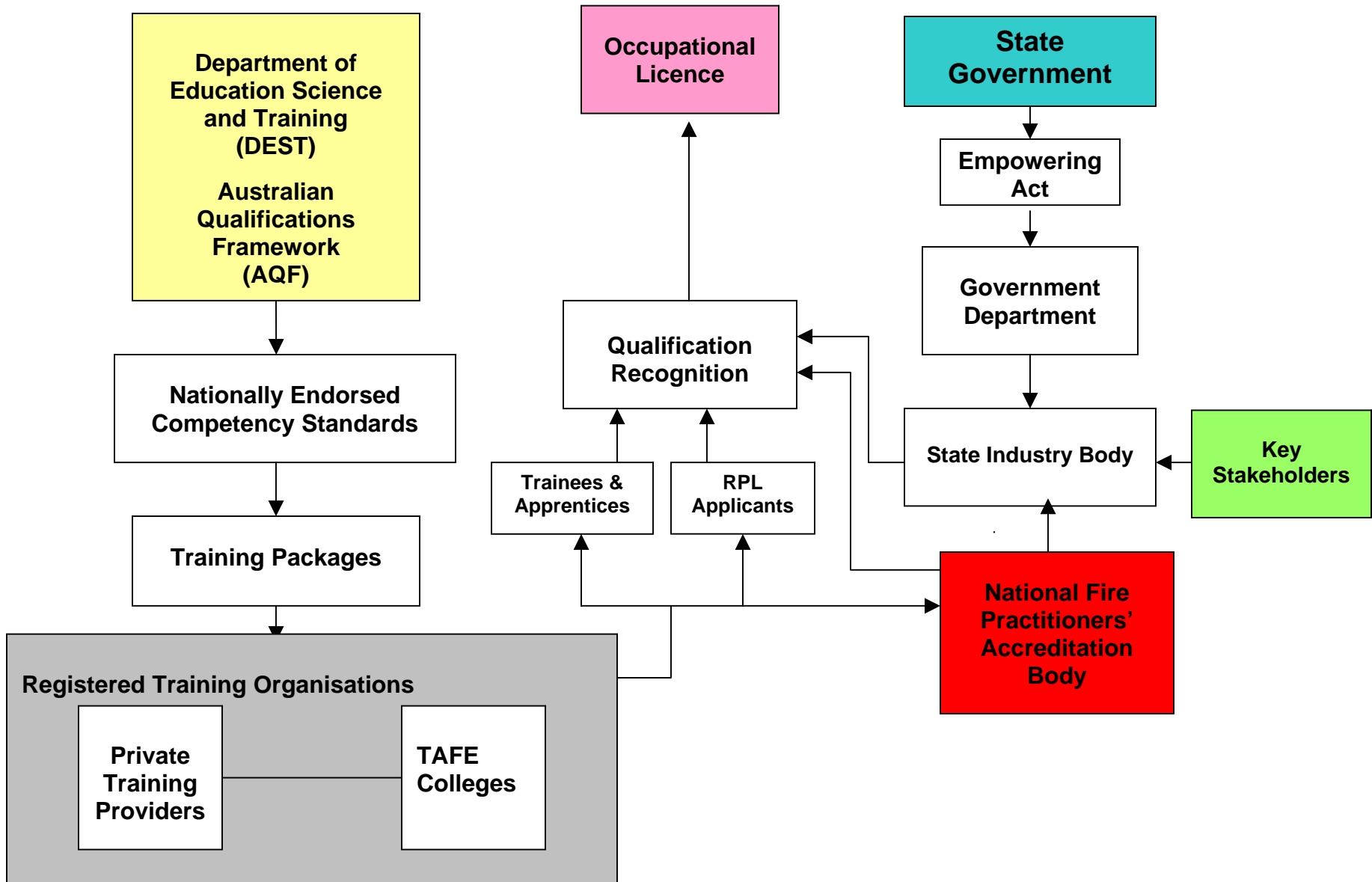
The rationale for this proposed licensing & accreditation system is to introduce a consistent approach to occupational licensing in the fire protection industry based on qualifications within training packages. It is intended that while the licensing system would be adopted and applied to individual States and Territories it will be implemented in a framework with reciprocal arrangement for recognising the qualifications of licensed practitioners from other jurisdictions.

The model brings together the need for occupational licensing in fire protection to meet the requirements of individual State Governments based on qualifications recognised by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) through nationally recognised industry training packages. Each training package is developed from an integrated set of nationally endorsed competency standards. FPA Australia has been actively engaged for a number of years in the review and updating of existing nationally endorsed competency standards and development of new units for training packages/qualifications in the fire industry. Many FPA Australia members have actively participated in the consultation process of reviewing and developing units of competency.

State Governments, through their relevant Acts and Government Departments can appoint an appropriately qualified organization to act as their **accrediting agency**. The accrediting agency would assess the documentation from individual applicants that has been attained through a recognised training package with a registered training organization (RTO). That is, licence eligibility and the relevant endorsement will be determined by the accrediting agency based upon evidence including a qualification from a national industry training package. The proposed Model is at Figure 1.

N.B. The activities of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), the Government Department responsible for the development of nationally endorsed competency standards and the subsequent integration into training packages, will become the responsibility of Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) from mid 2005.

Figure 1: Licensing – Accreditation System (Fire)



How the Model Operates

Government Role: Government support for the occupational licensing system will be through enabling legislation (Act) that will provide the relevant Department/Agency with regulations and accreditation requirements. That is, an industry sector occupational licensee (e.g. Fire) with endorsement to undertake work in the appropriate category (trade) of qualification.

Accreditation Body Role: An accreditation body will be established to process applications for occupational licences and determine approval or otherwise. The accrediting body may then either issue a licence on behalf of the Government Department or advise that Department to issue the license with the appropriate endorsements. The accrediting body will also be responsible for maintaining a register of the licences issued.

Application: The applicants will provide authenticated certification of their qualifications (statements of attainment) provided by RTO(s) and based on an industry-training package.

DEST/VET/AQF – System: Industry training packages consist of an integrated set of nationally endorsed competency standards from the Vocational Education Training (VET) system recognised under the AQF.

Stakeholder Consultation: The role and responsibilities of the accreditation body are overseen by an advisory board of key stakeholders that provide advice to the Government and also have strong linkages into the process of developing and endorsing national competencies standards/industry training packages.

Licensing Process

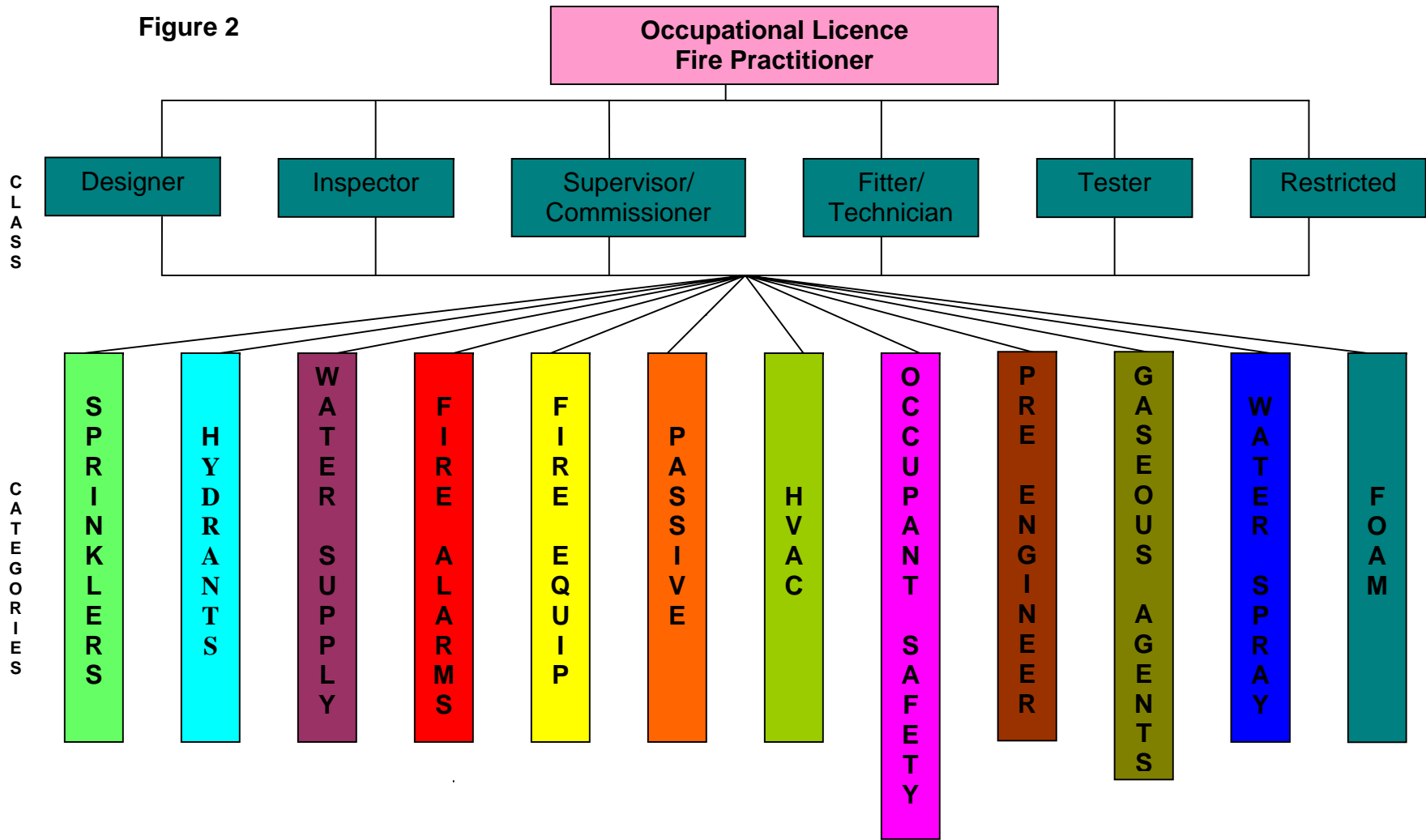
There will be a sole occupational licence for fire practitioners with six classes of licence in 12 categories with a number of endorsements available. This is deemed preferable to having a system of many classes of licences. The Licence template example provides for any combination of licence class, category and endorsement with a record of the scope of work, applicable Competency Standard, AQF level, other licensing requirements if applicable and applicable Australian Standards to also be recorded.

The Accrediting Agency will assess the certification provided in regard to the relevant endorsement(s) in which the applicant is seeking to be licensed. The applicant will need to provide authenticated copies of their certificates of attainment (or documentation recognising prior learning) in the relevant fire practitioner classes in which they seek endorsement. The Classes, Categories and Endorsements within the Licensing system are shown at Figure 2.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

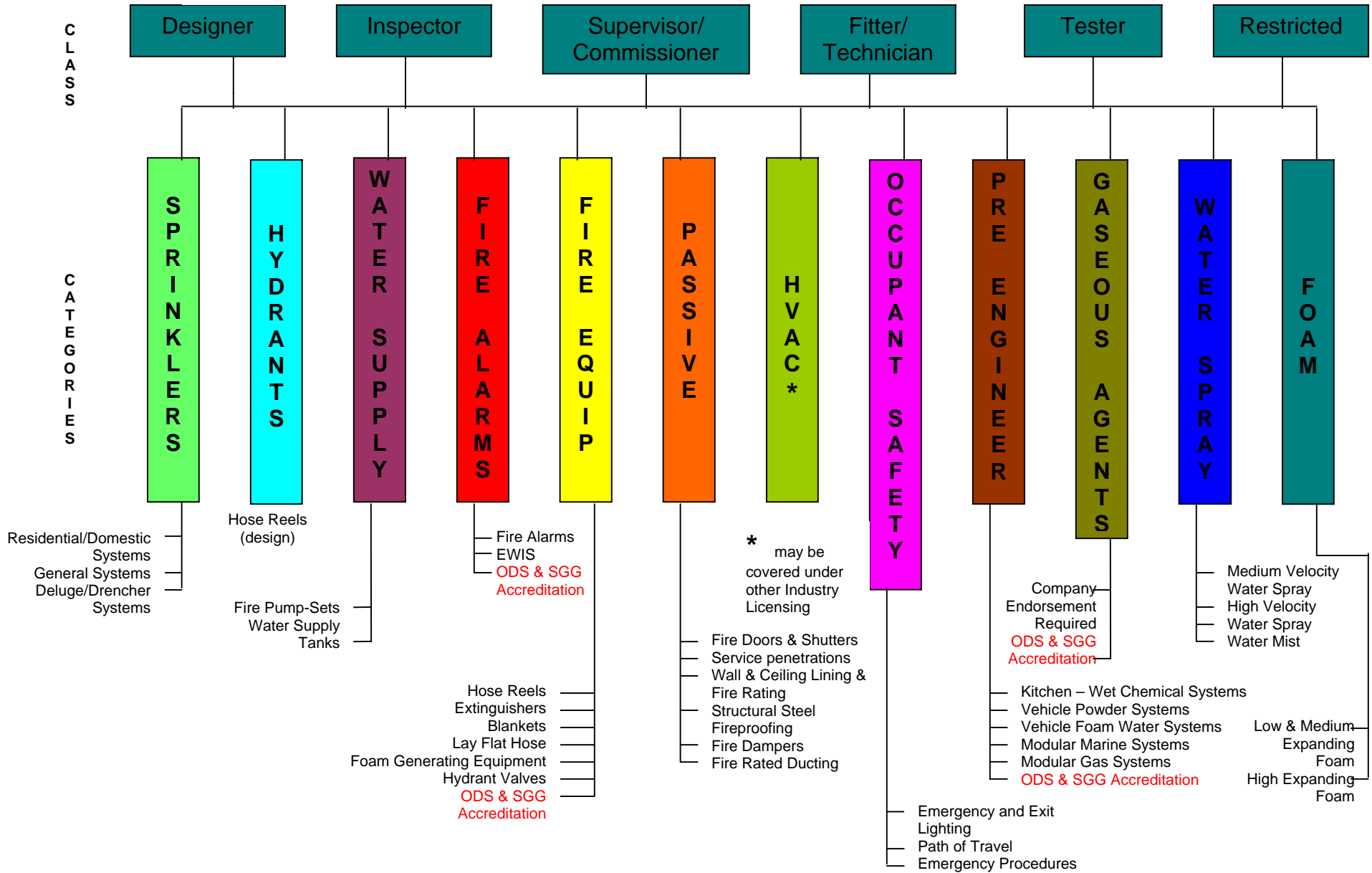
The term used for matching existing skills to existing competencies is recognition of current competencies (RCC) also known as RPL and will be incorporated within the accrediting process. This is a formal process to receive a qualification by acknowledging the competencies a persons holds through training, work or life experience.

Figure 2



See following page for breakdown by Category & Endorsements

Figure 2 continued



Licensing Endorsement Pathway (Fire)

Trade: An occupational licence for Fire Practitioners would be issued to applicants who demonstrate qualification in a relevant class based on nationally endorsed competencies within the AQF/VET system. The licence would nominate the endorsement(s) of the appropriate discipline (trade) in which the holder is qualified to undertake work.

Post Trade: The Pathway also provides for persons to build on trade qualifications and progress into occupations such as Supervisor/Commissioner, Designer and Certifier. For the licence holder to progress to these classes of licence they will be required to undertake post trade training in the AQF based on nationally endorsed competencies at Certificate level IV or V.

The Fire Practitioners occupational licence would also register any post trade qualification.

Tasks Permitted under an Occupational Licence with Endorsements

Each class (trade category) noted in the chart “Licensing Endorsement Pathway” (see Fig 2) will individually have a training package based on an integrated set of nationally endorsed standards. The individual competency standards matched and grouped to form a qualification are based on an industry specification of performance that sets out the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to operate effectively in the workplace.

The licence and subsequent endorsements will be linked to the competency standards that are grouped to form a qualification. Therefore the tasks permitted within the scope of the licence upon issue will be clearly defined with the qualification upon successful completion.

A sample facsimile of the Fire Practitioners’ Licence format illustrating the type of information that could be displayed on a licence card is shown at Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Example Only

OCCUPATIONAL FIRE PRACTITIONER LICENCE											
CLASS:											
CATEGORIES											
SPRINKLERS	HYDRANTS	WATER SUPPLY	FIRE ALARMS	FIRE EQUIPT.	PASSIVE	HVAC	OCCUPANT SAFETY	PRE ENGINEER	GASEOUS AGENTS	WATER SPRAY	FOAM
ENDORSEMENTS:											
Scope of Work			Applicable Competency Standards			AQF level		Other Licence Requirements		Applicable Australian Standards	

FPA Australia Voluntary Certification – Two Part Strategic Approach

The timeframe to achieve the steps necessary to attain uniform State and Territory based licensing in the fire protection industry may warrant consideration of interim arrangements for accrediting and registering individuals and companies. In the short term - over the next one to two years - it may be desirable to implement a *voluntary* Certification system that would articulate into the mature State and Territory based licensing system. Action could therefore be initiated immediately, resulting in voluntary Certification for individuals and companies, with a State and Territory based licensing system eventually 'coming on line' as implemented across the various jurisdictions.

Features of the voluntary accreditation system – that would eventually become requirements at State and Territory level - would be:

- **Certification at Individual Level** would be based on nationally endorsed training package already approved by the DEST/VET/AQF system or in the situation of such a package not being available under another training regime approved by FPA Australia, e.g. a state based competency program.
- **Certification at Business Level** could include providing evidence to meet predetermined criteria for third party certification

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Maintaining skills and knowledge in the workplace through CPD programs is being recognised as a prerequisite for practitioners and professionals in many fields. It is envisaged that CPD would also be a requirement for renewing an occupational licence. This would entail the licence holder gaining points/time from attending relevant and approved skills and knowledge programs over a predetermined time frame.

Accreditation Body - FPA Australia

FPA Australia is ideally placed to undertake the role of accrediting body for issuing occupational licences to fire practitioners. It is envisaged that in the mature State and Territory based licensing system an advisory body from industry, government agencies and authorities will be established to guide and assist the administration of a fire practitioner licensing system. As well as having direct linkages with the Government Departments responsible for establishing accreditation bodies, the advisory body will also have a consultative role into the Commonwealth system for developing nationally endorsed competencies to meet AQF requirements.

The Association is already appropriately qualified and positioned to implement and manage a nationally consistent licensing and accreditation system on behalf of all State and Territory jurisdictions. With its broad base of national membership coverage and involvement in all facets of developing nationally endorsed competencies the Association has both the experienced personnel and the

resources to develop and implement a licensing system for fire practitioners. The Association has been at the forefront in leading the development of fire protection industry competency standards within the Australian Quality Framework (AQF).

FPA Australia has also demonstrated the ability to conduct a national licensing system. Three years ago FPA Australia was appointed by the Australian Communication Authority (ACA) as a registrar of competent people to work as (nationally) licensed cablers. The Association has for a number of years managed on behalf of three State Governments' environment protection agencies (EPA) the accreditation and licensing of technicians working with ozone depleting substances and synthetic greenhouse gases. This role has recently been expanded to national responsibility with the appointed by the Australian Government (Department of Environment and Heritage) as Industry Board and Implementing Agency under the new *Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989* and associated regulations: *Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Amendment Regulations 2004*.

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) FPA Australia is well positioned to draw on the Australian Quality Framework to assess and accredit individuals through both recognition of current competence for existing practitioners in the industry or through competency based third party assessment. Additionally, the Association can facilitate access to Continued Professional Development (CPD) programs incorporating the Association's seminars. Structure and delivery processes for a skills maintenance program for accredited individuals will also receive the Association's attention to enhance industry skill levels.

Recommendations

It is recommended that FPA Australia – throughout 2005 - manage the roll out sequence of a project to implement a voluntary accreditation system leading to a State and Territory based licensing system as follows:

- Consultation within the fire protection industry through FPA Australia Committees, Special Interest Groups and members;
- Consultation with peak bodies such as the Property Council and peer industry bodies;
- Presentations to key Government bodies;
- Continuation of development of a comprehensive set of industry competency standards and training packages funded through appropriate skills councils; and
- Implementation of a voluntary, fee based Accreditation system administered by FPA Australia that eventually links into a uniform State and Territory based licensing system.