

Dr Albert P Haddad
Harvest Bible College
1 Keith Campbell Court
Scoresby, VIC 3179
19th October 2016

Committee Secretary

Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

RE: Feedback on VET Student Loans Eligible Course List

Request to include *Diploma of Ministry and Theology* in Course List

This is a request to revise the VET Student Loans Eligible Course List, in order to include the *Diploma of Ministry and Theology* (10566NAT) provided by Harvest Bible College.

Harvest Bible College Details

Harvest Bible College Inc.

RTO Code: 0067

Postal Address: PO Box 9183, Scoresby, VIC 3179

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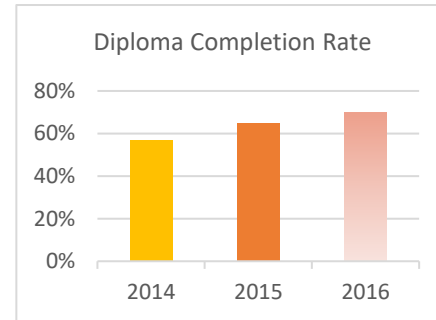
Contact Person: Dr Albert P Haddad, Chief Academic Officer

Rationale for this Request

Harvest Bible College has been operating as a high quality provider of Post-Secondary Education and Training for over 30 years, as our RTO Code evidences. Our graduate outcomes demonstrate that there has been a significant impact on the community in a very positive and transformative manner, which has considerable “public good”.

Completion Rates

In recent years, our Diploma course has had an increasing uptake due to the demands from our stakeholders and client groups. The completion rate in the last year has increased dramatically due to the improvements of our program design and delivery. Our VET program's 2014 completion rate was 57%, which continued to improve in 2015 to 65%. We are currently tracking well towards a 70% completion rate in 2016.



At Risk Rates

For the first part of the 2016 Academic year, our At Risk student rate was 11.5% - compared to the national industry standard of about 19%¹. This may be attributed to the high level of attention given to the progress of individual students and the considerable support offered to those who would perhaps struggle with their studies. This may also be due to the high level of student engagement with course material, and applications they subsequently draw out into work and life situations.

Graduate Outcomes

Most of our graduates are employed in a wide variety of churches, charities, and not-for-profit organisations in Australia and around the world. Feedback from our students through the *Quality Indicator Annual Summary Report* (reported to ASQA) indicates a high satisfaction regarding the student experience, student outcomes and preparation for vocational work in ministry areas.

Industry Needs and Consultation

Our Diploma training program has been designed after extensive industry consultation. We are consistently in contact with our stakeholders and community partners to monitor the level to which our programs are meeting the demands of our constituents. That is why we have an increasing reputation as one of the high quality education providers in the Ministry sector.

Our current *Diploma of Ministry and Theology* was established as a result of extensive industry consultation and in response to industry needs, as expressed by numerous churches and community leaders around Australia. The consultation process involved the following:

1. **Churches** – 15 overall (VIC – 8; QLD – 6; TAS – 1);
2. **Parachurch Organisations** – 6 overall, including Lifekeys (VIC), and Southport Church of Christ Professional Counselling Centre (QLD);
3. **Community Groups** – 6 in total, including Cornerstone Community (VIC), and Westside Community Care (QLD);
4. **Mission Organisations** – 3 organisations, including Action Love (QLD [dissolved in March 2014]);
5. **Education Groups** – 4 in total, including University of Divinity (VIC);

¹ Industry standard derived from p.5 of the **National Centre for Vocational Education Research** report: *'The likelihood of completing a government-funded VET program 2009-13'*, Adelaide, ©2015

6. **A Government Group** – West Australian Department of Environment and Conservation (now the Department of Environment Regulation), and;
7. **The Harvest Ministry Training Board** – An oversight with industry representatives

Many of these different organisations see the future need for people (young and old) to be upskilled, re-skilled and equipped to work in their faith communities and not-for-profit organisations. The required skills are varied, and complementary to many other technical skills that the community is also searching for. Moreover, the community and industry generally are looking for people to show care, counsel, and support for people anywhere in Australia. The skills needed by our stakeholders are based on faith and spiritual teaching. However, the teaching expectation is that graduates walk out with employment skills, life skills, ministry skills, leadership skills and the ability to minister and care for their fellow citizens no matter what their situation or background is.

The other side of this industry need is the demand for our courses. Over the last number of years, the demand for Ministry courses in various forms has seen a rising trend of more than 5% year-to-year since 2013. This only demonstrates that many people are demanding to enter this course at Harvest Bible College.

Employment Outcomes

Most of our *Diploma of Ministry and Theology (Social Justice and Church Ministry)* students are either employed in local churches or not-for-profit/charity bodies, and serve as active volunteers and interns. They study to learn new employment skills, validate their own skills, or upskill, to become eligible to apply for credentials as **Ministers of Religion** (Code 272211) within the Australian Christian Churches denomination (as well as many other denominations).

The Diploma course is a relevant and required qualification to the licensed occupation of Minister of Religion within the specific Australian Christian Churches denomination.

Unfair Treatment

We at Harvest Bible College feel that we have been unfairly treated by such drastic measures introduced last week. We agree that reforms needed to occur. However, we believe that excellent performing providers such as Harvest have been punished for the unscrupulous actions of others. Over the time we have been registered to provide Higher Education and VET courses, we have complied with the regulations, evidenced good governance, demonstrated high student completion rates, managed the At Risk and cared for our struggling students to finish their studies, consulted and met the needs of industry stakeholders, and graduated over 3,000 students to work in many churches, community and not-for-profit organisations.

If the Ministry courses are not included in the Eligible Course List, we feel that our sector has been discriminated against for no fault of our own, except producing well educated graduates who are positively impacting our communities and nation. If this is the case, then the current VET Student Loans reform is hurting the good providers of vocational education rather than weeding out bad operators.

Concluding Remarks

Harvest Bible College continues to be a high quality not-for-profit dual provider of Post-Secondary Education, with a good track record of student outcomes and positive impact on the community. Graduates have created, both in paid roles and in a volunteer capacity, immense social capital by investing inestimable hours of crisis care and community support for individuals, families, and communities around Australia and the world.

As one of the earliest approved VET providers (RTO 0067), we are proud of our heritage and are committed to continuing to service our industry with passion and the greatest attention to detail. We would therefore like to submit to the Minister for Education and Training that he would consider making the *Diploma of Ministry and Theology* an eligible course for VET Student Loans.

Kind regards,

Dr Albert P Haddad
Chief Academic Officer
Harvest Bible College