

What credentials actually mean

Qualifications, micro-credentials, badges and stacking — decoding the alphabet soup

The key idea: a credential is a claim — check who stands behind it

Job-seekers and employers alike drown in credentials: certificates, licences, vendor tickets, micro-credentials, digital badges. They are not equal. Every credential is a claim that someone can do something and its worth depends on **who assessed it, against what standard and how anyone can check**. Those three questions decode the entire landscape.

The main types, decoded

Accredited VET qualifications (Certificates, Diplomas): nationally recognised, delivered by registered training organisations, sitting on the AQF ladder. This is the regulated backbone. **Licences and registrations** (electrical licence, ACMA cabling registration): legal permission to do the work; non-negotiable where they apply. **Vendor certificates**: prove platform skills; valuable, but tied to one company's products. **Micro-credentials**: short, focused units; excellent for specific skills, meaningful only if transparently assessed. **Digital badges**: the delivery format. A badge is as good as the standard and verification behind it, no more.

Stacking: the idea that makes small credentials matter

Stackable credentials are designed to accumulate: focused units that build toward a larger recognised credential rather than expiring in isolation. Done properly, stacking lets a working technician build a qualification module by module. DII's published education framework, including the Digital Infrastructure Technician™ structure of base modules plus specialty endorsements issued as verifiable badges, is a worked example of the design pattern: each piece independently assessed, each stacking into a whole, each verifiable by an employer in seconds.

How to read any credential

Three questions, whoever issues it. **Who assessed it**: an accredited assessor, or a marketing team? **Against what**: a published standard with pass criteria, or attendance? **Verified how**: can an employer check it's real, current and unaltered? Credentials that answer all three cleanly are worth holding, whatever their size. Credentials that answer none are decoration.

What good practice looks like

- Every credential's standard, assessment method and verification route published.
- Employers state which credentials they actually recognise for which roles.
- Micro-credentials stack toward recognised qualifications rather than expiring in isolation.
- Training providers disclose RPL routes and credit toward the credential up front.

Questions to ask

Who assessed this credential, against what published standard? Can an employer verify it and how? What does it stack toward and which employers recognise it?

Want to know more? training.gov.au lists accredited qualifications; ASQA regulates training providers; DII publishes its credential framework and standards openly. This sheet is general information, not careers or training advice; check the named sources for current detail.