



Template for submissions to the *Quality of assessment in vocational education and training – Discussion Paper*

Key consultation areas

The Department of Education and Training (the department) seeks stakeholder input on the *Quality of assessment in vocational education and training – Discussion Paper* (the discussion paper). The paper covers the following broad themes to improve assessment in vocational education and training (VET):

Chapter 1: Foundation reforms

- ensuring the requirements for VET teachers and trainers provide the strongest platform for high-quality assessment
- ensuring those teaching VET skills are highly competent professionals with high-quality, contemporary skills in assessment.

Chapter 2: Reforms to the assessment of VET students

- assuring the quality of assessment through industry engagement with assessment review and control mechanisms as a gatekeeper before qualifications are issued
- ensuring employers have clear and realistic expectations of VET graduate capabilities which align with the assessment of students.

Chapter 3: Reforms to the regulatory framework

- improving the detection of poor quality assessment
- ensuring quick action can be taken against registered training organisations (RTOs) delivering inadequate assessment
- managing the consequences of inadequate assessment by removing invalid qualifications from the system where necessary and supporting students if this occurs.

How to provide feedback

To support the Training and Assessment Working Group to provide the Australian Government Minister for Vocational Education and Skills with recommendations on how to improve assessment, stakeholder consultations will begin with the release of the discussion paper in January 2016 and continue through to Friday 11 March 2016.

Respondents may provide feedback on some or all of the discussion paper's themes. To assist with the compilation and analysis of the views of all stakeholders, respondents are encouraged to provide feedback via this preferred submission template, with attachments as required. Submissions in alternative formats will also be accepted.

All written submissions to the discussion paper and queries on the consultation process may be directed to the department via email at trainingpackages&VETquality@education.gov.au.

All written submissions will be made publicly available on the department's website, unless respondents direct otherwise. See the [terms and conditions for public submissions](#).

Submission details

1. Submission made on behalf of: Individual Organisation

2. Full name:

3. Organisation (if applicable):

4. Please indicate your interest in this discussion paper:

(i.e. as a student, VET practitioner, RTO, third-party provider, peak body, business, industry representative, regulator or other government agency or community member)

5. Do you want your submission to be published on the department's website or otherwise be made publicly available? Yes No

a. If yes, do you want your name and organisation (if applicable) to be published alongside your submission, OR would you like for only your submission to be available and your details kept anonymous? Published Anonymous

b. If no, please advise the department upon submission that you do not want your submission to be published or otherwise be made publicly available.

1. Discussion questions – RTO limitations:

- Is it appropriate for relatively large numbers of RTOs to deliver TAE qualifications or skill sets? Should the number be reduced to a targeted number of RTOs focusing on high-quality provision?
- Should RTOs be restricted from issuing TAE qualifications or skill sets to their own trainers and assessors?
- Are TAE qualifications and skill sets so significant that evidence of competence should not—or cannot—be appropriately demonstrated via recognition of prior learning?
 - Is recognition of prior learning for TAE qualifications or skill sets granted with sufficient rigour to ensure the quality of student assessment? Should the practice be restricted?
- Are there opportunities to improve the assessment skills of the VET workforce through changes to the delivery and assessment of TAE qualifications and skill sets?
 - Should TAE qualifications and skill sets only be delivered by VET practitioners who can demonstrate a specific period of training and/or assessing employment history in the VET sector?
 - What circumstances would support a change requiring some VET trainers and assessors to hold university-level or higher-level VET qualifications, for example, practitioners delivering and assessing TAE qualifications and skill sets?
 - Should the TAE Certificate IV and/or Diploma require a practical component? If so, how long should the practical component be?
 - Should entrants to the TAE Diploma be required to demonstrate employment history in the VET industry before being issued with the qualification? Would this condition help to improve the relevance and validity of assessment? How long would this period of time be?

COMMENT:

Restricting the number of RTOs

It is not appropriate for a large number of RTOs to deliver TAE qualifications. The number should be reduced to a targeted number of RTOs that deliver against an additional level of quality control for these competencies. By restricting the number of TAE trainers and assessors it would allow for closer and targeted professional development and moderation activities to support and maintain high quality standards.

RTOs seeking to recognise the skills of their own trainers and assessors should work in partnership with one of the targeted group of RTOs to provide verification and maintain consistency in skills assessment.

2. Discussion questions – skills and qualifications of trainers and assessors:

- Should the TAE Certificate IV be changed to a core unit on the design and development of assessment tools? How would this improve assessment outcomes for students?
 - Should the core unit be the existing *TAEASS502B Design and develop assessment tools* unit of competency? Are there alternative approaches, such as developing a new unit on the design and development of assessment tools?
 - Is the *TAEASS502B Design and develop assessment tools* unit of competency a specialist unit that should only sit at the diploma-level on the basis the Certificate IV is currently designed for delivery to new entrants seeking to be trainers and assessors?
- In the case of making any updates to the TAE, is it appropriate to form judgements based on majority considerations? Or is it too risky to do so? Is it a better basis for decision makers to give strong weight to key stakeholders and the nature of the argument put forward?

COMMENT:

Design and development of assessment tools

A core unit on the design and development of assessment tools should be included in the TAE Certificate IV to facilitate the development of tools which would guide a robust framework for skills verification.

3. Discussion questions – benefits and purpose of a VET professional association:

- Is there a need to establish a national professional association for Australia's VET system?
 - Specifically, is there a clear role for Australian governments in assisting the development of professional skills of the VET workforce by funding a professional association?
- What are the barriers to establishing a national professional association? How could these be overcome?
- What would be the most useful guiding purpose of a national professional association?

COMMENT:

A national professional network for ongoing professional development

There is a need for a national professional network to share good practice and agree on standards for high quality assessments.

This network could include existing organisations for the professional development of trainers, assessors and RTOs such as VELG and ACPET. These activities should be expanded to maximise access for all VET trainers and assessors and ensure ongoing professional development by participation in training and workshops with a national professional association for the VET sector.

4. Discussion questions – potential activities of a VET professional association:

- What activities would be most beneficial for a national professional association to undertake? For example, would it:
 - coordinate, approve or design professional development programs
 - develop capability frameworks
 - positively promote the profession of VET trainers and assessors as an employment destination and career path to attract professionals
 - act as an advocate and voice for VET trainers and assessors
 - interact with industry to respond to their emerging needs
 - register VET practitioners?
- What advantages would there be to conducting these activities at a national level rather than through existing professional development undertaken through membership of existing groups, or that which is currently organised by RTOs?
- Are there any existing organisations that could fulfil this role?

COMMENT:

Activities of a national professional network

All the following activities would be beneficial for the members of a VET professional association.

- coordinate, approve or design professional development programs
- develop capability frameworks
- positively promote the profession of VET trainers and assessors as an employment destination and career path to attract professionals
- act as an advocate and voice for VET trainers and assessors, and
- interact with industry to respond to their emerging needs

Registration of VET practitioners is best done through each specific vocational industry. For example, Australian forestry industries currently have a scheme whereby training organisations can be endorsed as demonstrating competence in forestry skills and have the credibility to deliver training in these skills to new and existing operators. Practitioners need to be highly competent in both the skills required by industry for competence which includes specialist technical and generic skills and be competent in training and assessing in an adult learning environment.

5. Discussion questions – models for a VET professional association:

- Which of the suggested models for a VET professional association would be considered most preferable and viable in the current VET environment? Model A,B or C?
- What value would a VET professional association, or associations, add to the VET sector?
- What mechanism would sustain a professional association, for example, membership fees from individuals or RTOs?
- Should VET teacher and trainer membership with a professional association be mandatory or voluntary?

COMMENT:

Models for a VET professional association

Model B would be the most viable and effective option for a professional association in the current VET environment. This recommendation is made on the basis that this traditional model of industry association has worked and continues to be efficient in many other industries. The range of functions undertaken by the professional association is critically important. It should operate to foster currency and ongoing good practice through a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) arrangement.

6. Discussion questions – capability frameworks:

- What can be learnt or applied from the capability frameworks that have been developed or are currently being developed?
 - Is there an opportunity to make better use of these frameworks, irrespective of proposals to develop a professional association?

COMMENT:

Capability framework

Work done in the past has focussed on currency of skills based on a range of criteria to strengthen competence in facilitating adult learning. This approach is effective as it allows the full extent of skills and knowledge to be documented and explicit to guide trainers and assessors undertaking continuing professional development.

7. Discussion questions – increasing industry confidence:

- Are there alternative approaches not covered in this discussion paper on how industry can increase engagement with the conduct of assessment, but not specifically the validation?
- Are there other ways to ensure industry confidence in assessment without requiring independent validation of assessment? For example, are industry-endorsed, externally administered tests a practical alternative to ensure that VET graduates are competent?
 - What would be the benefits and drawbacks in requiring such tests? Under what circumstances would they be mandated, for example, for particular student cohorts? Should these be specified in training products?
 - Who should regulate the tests?
 - Should such a test be a pass/fail dichotomy, or would it be more important to use the test to identify gap training?
 - Is the concept of an externally administered test, such as a test required before receiving a qualification, inconsistent with the premise of a competency based VET system?
 - Should the results of tests be made public at the RTO level?

COMMENT:

Alternative approaches on how industry can increase engagement with the conduct of assessment.

Forest Industry Assessment Plan System

The forestry industry has improved engagement with skills verification through initiatives supported by ForestWorks.

ForestWorks is one of the few organisations to invest in industry engagement and nationally-moderated assessment practices and tools for many units of competency that serve key parts of the forest and wood products industry. These models provide alternative approaches to those considered earlier.

ForestWorks supports an industry-led Forest Industry Assessment Plan System (FIAPS) aimed at improving quality assurance in assessment. FIAPS provides transparent and moderated assessment practices. It allows members to develop a consistent approach to assessment providing industry with consistently high quality assessment standards.

The FIAPS model also includes the development of assessment tools that are industry approved. The objective is to ensure that RTOs and assessors use these assessment tools in all assessments against nationally recognised skills standards.

FIAPS is a membership-based model that allows members to become part of a national network of providers, assessors and enterprises. The members are committed to upholding the highest standards of skills development for the forest and wood products industry, through the development and promotion of reliable and consistent training and assessment outcomes to agreed industry standards.

The membership gives access to:

- a national support network of forest industry trainers and assessors
- active input into the continuous improvement of the assessment tools
- moderation workshops for assessors conducted in regional locations

Benefits for the FIAPS assessor members also include:

- Sharing the load of assessment tool development and maintenance
- Reassurance that assessment compliance requirements are being met
- Peer support amongst assessors
- Moderation as professional development for assessors

When developed by an industry body, assessment tools provide RTO assessors with clearly defined requirements to evaluate competence and ensure industry requirements for competence have been met providing greater consistency and quality in the assessment process.

ForestWorks also runs the FOLS scheme, a national electronic system of recording and verifying skills and qualifications to support the professionalism and safety of industry operators. It is a streamlined system for the management of the skills of workers. FOLS offers employers a method of demonstrating that appropriate nationally recognised training has been achieved to satisfy obligations and liabilities under national WHS Regulations. Quality assessment tools are integral to the integrity of this system and to the safety of workers in our industry.

Other ways to ensure industry confidence in assessment without requiring independent validation of assessment.

Holistic development of materials to support skills development

ForestWorks' experience shows the importance of developing assessment tools as part of, or closely aligned to, the Training Packages development systems and process.

By supporting the development of nationally consistent assessment tools for skills standards the industry should have a mechanism supported by the government that allows it to verify that the assessment outcome has met the skills standard.

Development of national assessment tools can be achieved through a joint process with the development/review of training packages. Existing processes for training package development involve an industry-led model for consultation and validation (guided by Industry Reference Committees and supported by Skills Service Organisations) that the VET system can capitalise on and extend its service for development and regular review of nationally endorsed assessment tools. This approach would address the requirement for independent validation of assessment practices.

Separation of training and assessment

ForestWorks recommends the separation of assessment responsibilities from provision of training. Currently training providers are funded on the number of successful outcomes of assessment.

We propose a model where a restricted number of organisations conduct assessments and issue qualifications.

Implementation of this model would significantly reduce the number of organisations requiring regulation. External moderation and assessment by industry accepted assessors, and through the use of nationally endorsed assessment tools, could reduce much of the regulation and oversight necessary to maintaining quality under the current system.

8. Discussion questions – the role of industry in assessment:

- What role should industry, for example, employers and industry organisations, play in validation of assessment? Does the varied interpretation of 'industry' inhibit a proper appreciation of the topic and should it be defined? If so, who would best define 'industry' when considering the practice of validating assessment?
- Do employers or industry groups have the skills required to fulfil this role in validating assessment? Is assessment such a specialised skill that industry and employers either do not want to get involved or should not get involved?
- Is there a need to build industry capacity and capability regarding involvement with training and assessment? If so, how might this be done?
- How can we ensure engagement with industry is appropriately targeted so it does not add undue burden and is targeted to those within industry with appropriate expertise required for validation of assessment?

COMMENT:

Role of industry in validation of assessment

The industry should play the role in the development and validation of assessment tools through the new assessment organisations as proposed in the previous comments. It is only by having industry led national assessment materials and processes that the quality can be assured without the need for massive and ineffective regulation as is the case now. This is not a reflection on the efforts of ASQA but on the design of the system that allows those who provide training to perform the assessment and only get paid if a person passes. This is a clear design conflict and in our view this should be apparent to the governments responsible for the system. We provided this feedback to the VET reform taskforce but this was seen as too radical a change. It is however a necessary change.

Development of training products including industry designed and mandated assessment tools would support, and ensure consistency in, the implementation of Training Packages.

9. Discussion questions – specific models:

- How can independent validation be best applied to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach? For example should independent validation of assessment be triggered by:
 - improving RTO practice, for example, through a principles based model and best practice guide to support the VET workforce in identifying the most appropriate technique to validate assessment
 - mandatory requirement to lift quality in specific instances, for example, where a qualification is identified as high-risk
 - funding requirement, for example, independent validation of assessment could become a requirement for RTOs seeking to access government funding.
- Should there be an increased role for external assessment by industry, and in which situations? For example, should it be mandatory for certain industries where there is a concern for public safety if a learner is incorrectly deemed competent?
- If independent validation of assessment is to be risk-based, then what factors should be considered in the assessment of risk, for example, public safety, RTO profile, student cohort?
- Should high-risk student cohorts be required to undergo independent reassessment of industry-agreed sets of competencies before being issued with their qualifications?
 - For example, particular qualifications; students undertaking qualifications with RTOs with high levels of non-compliance; or that conduct assessment wholly online or on-the-job; or in areas of public safety.
- Would the burden be too great if independent reassessments were required for an entire student cohort, and should independent reassessment apply to a sample of students instead? If so, how could such a sample be chosen?
- Who would be most appropriate to oversee the reassessment of qualifications?
 - For example, could existing regulators or other organisations (such as firms that specialise in assessing students) take on this role?

COMMENT:

Specific models

Our proposed model of nationally developed assessment tools through a consistent process led by Industry Reference Committees as outlined in response to question 7, would provide solutions to many of the issues as independent validation and assessment is built into the model.

10. Discussion questions – industry expectations and graduate capabilities:

- Is there a role for Government or industry to develop resources outlining VET graduate expectations for particular training products? If so, who should take this work forward?
 - Do higher order issues need to be resolved regarding terminology such as ‘competent’ (as assessed against the training product) and ‘job ready’ (ready to undertake all aspects of a particular job)? Is there a common understanding of VET system outcomes?

COMMENT:

Industry expectations and graduate capabilities

There is scope for the Government to develop approaches that support the expansion of learning so that more transferable skills are acquired by the student in the specialist training programs. The students also need to understand by the completion of his/her learning the skills that are transferable across different business areas or industries.

11. Discussion questions – evidence of assessment and graduate competency:

- Should the Standards for RTOs be revised to include strengthened and more specific rules around the conduct of and evidence to support assessment? Which elements that have a clear link to quality of student outcomes need to be strengthened?
- Would a more prescriptive condition of registration, such as a requirement for RTOs to retain all assessment samples for a longer period, improve the quality of assessment?
- How could the focus of regulation move to evaluating assessment outputs, such as samples of students' assessment pieces, without incurring excessive costs or imposing excessive burden on RTOs?
 - Is ASQA the appropriate regulator to oversee this function, or are there better placed agencies such as firms that specialise in assessing students?
- Are there other mechanisms that you would like to see added to the regulatory framework to prevent poor assessment? For example, should training-only RTOs be recognised as a formal part of the regulatory framework?

COMMENT:

Evidence of assessment

AQTF should be reviewed to include strengthened and more specific skills around conduct of evidence to support assessment. Elements which link assessment outcomes to assessment requirements outlined in skills standards would be valuable in strengthening the student outcome.

12. Discussion questions – enforcement:

- How could the focus of regulation move to evaluating assessment outputs?
- Which additional regulatory enforcement options should be considered in dealing with RTOs providing inadequate assessment? For example, should the regulator have an explicit administrative power to require a RTO to arrange and fund external reassessment, or should additional civil penalty provisions be created?
- To what extent should the characteristics of the RTO influence the response? Should the size of the RTO or the number of students involved matter?
- Given the need to balance procedural fairness with swift and effective enforcement action, what methods should be available to the regulator to manage RTOs that are repeatedly non-compliant with assessment requirements? How could such repeat offenders be defined?
- What role should regulators have in communicating their activities and findings? Does current regulatory practice provide adequate transparency and disclosure, or are there other approaches that should be taken?

COMMENT:

Controlling the quality of assessment outputs

To control the quality of assessment outputs, regulation should focus on a range of measures including:

- Provision of support for nationally developed assessment tools through a consistent process led by Industry Reference Committees, and
- Information on the statement of attainment about whether a learner has completed assessment in a workplace.
- Assessment being carried out by a smaller number of bodies (around 50) and these bodies are regulated and work with industry. RTOs only get paid if their students pass these independent assessments

13. Discussion questions – cancellation and reassessment:

- Where inadequate assessment has occurred, should the power to cancel qualifications be exercised more frequently than it has in the past? What factors should affect this decision (for example, potential impact on public safety) and how should they be balanced?
- Should a scheme for the reassessment of students be implemented? If so:
 - Are there any situations where a student should not be offered the chance to be reassessed, for example, student fraud?
 - Should there be a time period after which ASQA should not move to cancel an individual's qualification? Noting potential public and other safety issues, should a decision to cancel consider whether or not the person involved is reliant on the qualification for their current employment?
 - Who should bear the cost of reassessment and any gap training found to be necessary? If the cost is to be recovered from the RTO, should this be pursued regardless of the RTOs financial viability?
 - Who should deliver the reassessment? Are there any circumstances in which it would be appropriate for the original RTO to undertake the reassessment?
 - What should the qualifications be for those doing the reassessment, and what industry experience and currency would they need? To what extent should ASQA, industry or employers be directly involved in the reassessment process?
- Should a tuition assurance fund be set up to further protect students in Australia's VET sector, particularly in the context of any scheme of reassessment or cancellation of qualifications? Should membership be mandatory for all RTOs? Who should operate such a fund, and who should bear the cost of its operation?
- What linkages with income support eligibility should apply for graduates impacted by any recall of qualifications?

COMMENT:

Retraining and reassessment

The power to cancel qualifications does not provide benefits to the VET system. Cancelling qualifications has served to further undermine the credibility of the VET sector. Learners will be reluctant to invest money and time in a system where there is a risk that they will not have the skills for knowledge to be employed at the end of the process.

A scheme to provide further training and reassessment with a reputable provider needs to be considered as a safety net for learners impacted by non-compliant RTOs.