



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:

- BCA National does not believe that the number of RTO's delivering TAE qualifications should be limited as all RTOs are expected to deliver high quality education based on regulatory standards regardless of their industry areas.
- RTOs should not be restricted from issuing TAE qualifications or skill sets to their own trainers and assessors. A number of BCA trainers have started working for us by undertaking their vocational qualifications with BCA, followed by their TAE40110. This has allowed BCA to support new trainers, ensure the quality of the TAE40110 qualification achieved by them and increase opportunities for students with new trainers available in specialist areas (for example Conservation and Land Management) and in remote and regional centres.
- TAE qualifications and skill sets should be treated – as they are currently – like all vocational qualifications with regard to recognition of prior learning. There is room to improve the rigour of RPL processes across all qualification areas, but training and assessment practitioners seeking recognition of their skills and experience in non-accredited or other learning frameworks should

not be singled out. BCA National believes there is room for a greater focus on practical application of the assessment aspects of the TAE.

The role of the RTO, and its monitoring, validation and moderation of assessment outcomes and tools, are crucial to the quality of training and assessment delivered by its trainers. RTOs should have an internal trainer/assessor at Diploma level or higher who provides guidance and mentoring to trainers and assessors to ensure good outcomes for students.

- There should be clear requirements for RTOs re the requirement for trainers to demonstrate current industry skills – in BCA's view, trainers must have worked directly in the industry within the last 3 years. Current arrangements imply that vocational training must be a part of the job e.g. a professor of social work cannot assess counselling or community services qualifications because they don't work in the industry. Having a professional association of trainers with ethical and behavioural standards is an essential first step. We argue that trainers 1) should be members of the association to practice 2) should be encouraged to increase and lift qualifications levels and 3) have CPD requirements for continuous learning.

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:

- Yes, the TAE40110 should include a core unit on the design and development of assessment tools. There is a gap in skills and knowledge for new trainers and assessors where the development of assessment tools is not delivered as part of the Certificate IV. Certificate IV graduates should at least understand the importance of well-developed and reliable assessment tools in ensuring the rules of evidence and principles of assessment are met. BCA National delivers the TAEASS502B as part of all Certificate IV TAE40110 programs.
- BCA recognises that not all TAE40110 graduates will create assessments. Additional units or skill sets in assessment design could be offered to those who do develop assessment tools, with higher level design units available at a Diploma level for specialist designers. It is important that RTOs ensure there are opportunities for continuous professional development of assessment skills for trainers.
- With regard to updates to the TAE - past consultation has not included a sufficient number of practitioners, and appears to have been done at a detached level based on theory without practice in part.

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:

- BCA National is supportive of the concept of a national professional trainers association for Australia's VET system, subject to broad sectoral and national agreement on its role.
- A number of our trainers have expressed support for a national professional association for VET trainers and assessors, which would focus on improving the quality of training and assessment and therefore outcomes for students, employers and broader industry. The key goals of such a body would be to set national standards and an ethical framework for trainers and assessors, provide PD support for trainers and a forum for discussing trends, challenges and opportunities. This body could provide an additional and valuable voice for trainers and assessors in the VET sector.
- If a national association is established, consideration will need to be given whether or not membership is compulsory, and if not compulsory, how trainers/assessors would be encouraged to join. A requirement for a practitioner certificate linked to ethics as well as skills would be a very good first step.

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:

- Industry engagement and interaction would be a beneficial activity, strengthening links between trainers and assessors, their industries and RTOs that employ them.
- Positively promoting the professionalism of trainers and assessors and encouraging continuous learning and career paths will be critically important. There are associations which can be encouraged to take up these roles. There can of course be more than one as long as there are qualification, behavioural and ethical standards and a disciplinary process.

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:

- Model B is BCA National's preferred model.
- A VET professional association could add value to the sector by working with assessors to ensure that they maintain currency in their key industry areas. Evidence of currency and PD activity should be required by the association for individuals to maintain registration.
- Fees for trainers and assessors – namely initial and continuing registration fees – should be used to establish and sustain any professional association. Fees should be levied on individuals, with membership attached to individuals.

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:

- A capability framework for the VET sector could be useful if it is championed by a professional association and can have broad application across the VET sector.

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:

- Engagement with industry bodies could be increased by consulting them on assessment tool design, with tool templates .
- BCA National's view is that assessment tools designed to better reflect industry skills needs are preferable to industry-endorsed externally administered tests. External skills tests are inconsistent with the premise of our competency-based training system.
- Validation and moderation are conceptually very sound, appropriate and constructive. In reality, they are time consuming, inconsistent, ineffective and hard to do. As mentioned above, adding an external re-assessor will make this much worse.
- The concerns highlighted in the Pilot (P18) are real. The sector is insisting more and more on individual and holistic assessment, but the sector is also demanding validation of assessment tools. These are mutually exclusive themes. Further, the validation process assumes that the system is not working. If the TAE process is better adapted, the quality of RTOs increased, the funding better allocated and the outcomes for training were better defined, the requirements and obligation for validation would lessen.
- Regulators should focus on non-compliant RTOs rather than system-wide changes. Regulators are typically not good at innovation or industry development. The two roles should remain separate and some room for innovation and development left for the market.

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:

- A clearer definition of 'industry' would assist in determining which representatives have a key role to play in the validation of assessment. Industry input re current skills requirements is crucial in ensuring that RTOs are training and assessing current skills.
- Industry representatives involved in assessment validation should hold the assessment skills set in order to take an active role in assessment validation.
- Industry representatives could assist in providing clearer direction with regard to the currency and sufficiency of evidence for some roles, including what the industry baseline is regarding RPL evidence and work placement requirements.

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:

- If independent validation of assessment is introduced in specific sectors, it should be a requirement of all RTOs regardless of their intention to apply for their access to government funding
- BCA supports the introduction of mandatory external assessment tools (as the only assessment piece) for industries where there is concern for public safety if a learner is incorrectly deemed competent, but does not support 'independent reassessment' of students. Mandatory assessment tools would be preferable to doubling up on assessment of the same skills.
- Where reassessment of qualifications is needed due to regulatory findings of non-compliance, the regulator should conduct such reassessment in collaboration with representatives of key industry bodies.

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:

- BCA National’s view is that there is a role for both Government and industry in ensuring both graduates and employers understand the outcomes of specific units of competence and qualifications. There is a lack of common understanding of what, for eg, a Certificate III graduate can/should be able to do in the workplace, and more information on skills expectations would assist both parties.
- A good place to start with definition is what is meant by the term quality. This should incorporate outcome benchmarks behaviours and ethics considerations.

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:

- Greater involvement of industry representatives in the development and validation of assessment tools will do more to improve the quality of assessment than changes to the Standards for RTOs.
- In BCA's view, retaining assessment samples for a longer period than currently required is an administrative change that will have no bearing on the quality of assessment.
- It is not clear how 'training-only' RTOs will improve the quality of assessment or address any current quality concerns with assessment practices across different sectors.

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:

- BCA National's view is that ASQA already has the power to sanction RTOs that fail to demonstrate compliance with assessment requirements. Sanctions – and suspensions – should be applied to non-compliant RTOs in line with the current Standards for RTOs, and published on the national register.
- It has to be accepted that compliance on process and quality education are two different concepts. They are related but not the same thing.

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:

- BCA National's view is that the cancellation of a graduate's qualification should only be considered in extreme circumstances. BCA would prefer to see a process implemented where there is an opportunity for students to be re-assessed – and if necessary retrain – with another provider. Focusing on improvements in assessment tools and regulation of assessment practices should assist in reducing the likelihood of graduates receiving a qualification where skills and knowledge requirements have not been met.
- The non-compliant RTO should bear the cost of reassessment and any gap training where assessment has not met regulatory requirements, regardless of financial viability. Reassessment should be conducted by assessors who meet the current requirements of the standards for assessors.