



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 Yes No website or otherwise be made publicly available?
 - 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:

It has become quite clear in our experiences that the TAE qualification is lacking in the assessment of competence for new trainers entering the VET training field. For a plethora of reasons there are large numbers of trainers who do not demonstrate the skills and understanding required to contribute to quality learning outcomes. This demeans the professional reputation of the sector and casts doubt on valid outcomes.

The number of RTO's delivering the TAE qualification should be restricted only to those who can demonstrate through results and a higher level of audit compliance that they are delivering quality into the industry. Too many RTO's award the qualification to meet business goals or internal needs.

Suggestions:

- New RTO's (adding TAE to scope) – RTO's who have achieved excellence in the eyes of the regulator be able to apply to deliver the TAE, for example RTO's with ASQA delegate status;
- Existing RTO's - a time period could be given to allow them to prove excellence; Excellence would include what is already in the VET standards with additional requirements, for example trainers of TAE to show continued professional development (CPD) on an annual basis, which would include industry placement or contact of some measure.

We support the increase in qualification required to train in the TAE sector. A minimum level Diploma should be held by any trainer delivering to the entry standard of Cert 4, along with 2 years practice. A university qualification would not meet the needs of the sector as the two training streams are not equitable and require different skill sets and practice.

A practical component required for awarding a Cert 4 qualification should be mandated, with appropriate checks and balances to ensure valid placements and Fair Work compliance.

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:

The Certificate 4 level qualification is an entry level standard. The design and development of assessment tools is a specialist area that requires significant experience in delivery to a broad cross section of industry and candidates.

For this reason we would recommend the *TAEASS502B* be made a core unit for Diploma study and removed from the Cert 4 option altogether.

Any judgements on updates to the TAE should be based on student outcomes, The RTO network are the ones who should set a 'gold standard' for assessment and consistency across all disciplines.

Majority considerations should always be considered, strong weight should always be granted to key stakeholders – it is the nature of the argument put forward that should have any impact on changes. In recent times we have been too quick to change and 'update' at a pace that does not allow for sound measurement of our training packages and their standards.

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 association for Australia's VET practitioners would be a positive step forward in providing support, guidance and some degree of accountability across the industry.

Our support for the development has one considerable proviso:

The association should be flexible, transparent and supportive and not become bogged down in obtuse bureaucratic process and with a prosecutorial mindset.

In Australia, there are many professional associations that already exist. Most RTO trainers and assessors belong to some professional association or group. In the main, it is a way of keeping yourself current with what is important to your role.

For a VET professional association to work and give value to its members it would need to be linked closely with the custodians of the training packages and industry, whom VET practitioners exist for.

It could should not be used as another tier for regulation and compliance.

The debate around the title 'teacher' or 'trainer' needs to be discussed further. Are we VET teachers or VET trainers? What is the difference, other than a qualification?

It should also be an organisation that represents the whole of the VET practitioner sector, not just a vehicle for large government funded organisations.

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:

We support the ideals of developing an association as outlined in the discussion paper. Raising the standard and collective voice of all involved.

Giving credibility to the VET training sector as an aspirational career path to tradepeople in particular.

Rather than reinvent another level of governance and bureaucracy we already have ASQA which could competently fill the role with some modifications and extensions.

Other Groups such as Adult Learning Australia and VELG could fulfil the role.

Some government moderation would be required.

The advantage of conducting this at a national level gives further benefit of likeminded professionals working together to improve our practices, nationally. We are not then restricted by borders and the system becomes more cohesive and strong in a national VET approach.

The institution of engineers, Australia is a good model.

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 demonstrates a good balance between compliance and simplicity of structure to ensure the process does not start restricting the practice.

We believe that the trainers should contribute some of the funding as an investment in their own professional credibility, with RTO's further contributing through fees for membership.

The balance should be contribute by a combination of Federal and State Governments as part of their ongoing correction of the many compliance issues that are currently plaguing the system.

Reasonable priced, membership fees should be how it is funded, long term.

Membership should be voluntary whilst as a student enrolled in the TAE, which could result in mentoring and greater exposure to VET professionalism at an early stage. Once they have attained their qualification is should mandatory for the individual.

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:

The frameworks are useful, but difficult to apply effectively due to ambiguity and complexity.

The professional Association's role could include the development of a simple tool for RTO's to use when hiring trainers, and/or for industry to use when selecting RTO's.

They are a useful tool when reviewing RTO's HR planning and development. They could be incorporated into the proposed Prof. Assoc as part of the code of conduct and used to develop leadership potential in ROT's nationally.

To improve RTO practice, a principles-based model and best practice guide could support the VET workforce to identify the most appropriate technique to validate assessment. This approach would also see the release of updated tools and resources to support RTOs to understand assessment and validation.

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:

A key ingredient to increasing industry confidence is to deliver highly skilled trainers who can produce highly competent students.

Educational Living operate in the Engineering Sector and have long been working with industry to improve the standard of tradespeople entering the sector.

The use of a test developed by a combination of Skilled Trainers and Industry groups is a positive move when applied to all trades in particular. Other sectors would almost certainly benefit as well to ensure retention of the knowledge over a period of time.

A robust examination process at key points during an apprenticeship demonstrates competency as well as any production of a project or observation of on the job skills. All three produce the level of craftsmanship required and should be standard across the trades.

There is no valid reason to make the results public on an individual level, but generic publication of data through NCVET (or a MY School style system) as currently occurs is useful for industry to assist in selected competent RTO's.

Another approach would be to encourage public RTO & private RTO relationships within the RTO sector. This would help bridge the divide between the two sectors in the VET community. TAFE have and organisation gone some way in making this happen The engineering senate and the electrical senate, however these groups are skewed heavily by TAFE as they have more resources, in time, personnel and money, available to enable attendance and organisation of these senates. Private RTO's typically do not have these resources always available.

Also, relationships with other RTO's not in your immediate sector would also help with continuous improvement of validation. For example a group of RTO's – one in Finance, one in Engineering and one in TAE, meets 3 or 4 times a year to discuss their take on validation and how each of them are complying. This results in shared information and skills, without compromising intellectual property rights and each shares only what they feel comfortable with.

The Skills Service Organisation (SSOs) could be a good way to possibly further assist with this.

Regulation of this type of testing would create another level of bureaucracy, compliance and expense for the tax payer. Good working relationships with industry, the SSO's and other RTO's is a good way to ensure that the competency standards are met and exceeded.

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:

Without Industry input the Vocational Training System becomes just a training system.

Industry must have a role to play and does in the majority of on-the-job style training programs.

The Skills councils should be supported to increase their ability to not just consult, but to actively engage with industry and produce the resources required to build valid and robust assessment protocols on a national level.

This is a communication issue and is based on the relationship an RTO has with its clients. The ASQA standards speak to this.

RTO's should work closer with their SSO's and get involved with their clients more.

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?

Industry should be involved in assisting RTO's determine the how of assessment – the way in which it will work on the shop floor. They can also assist as the subject matter expert (SME) level with regard to specific workplace competence. For example: The employer might want an apprentice to be able to read and interpret an engineering drawing after a year in the apprenticeship. The scope of the engineering drawings to be read and interpreted would be based on the competency standard, but would also include specific drawing that are used on the shop floor at each individual employer.

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:

The concept of Independent validation should not produce fear in the RTO community where robust systems are in place and sound results are consistently delivered.

It may however introduce another heavy compliance burden that would disproportionately affect the viability and productivity of the smaller RTO operators.

High risk work should require a higher level of assessment validation and control, and it does in the majority of trades training.

The profiling model within the electrical trades is something that could be developed across other skilled areas to ensure students are being given appropriate experience and exposure to the skills they need to master. It further ensures they given access to those within the workplace that can mentor them to achieve the highest level of proficiency

Where existing regulators exist they would be the most likely overseers within the high risk areas.

Where ever a student is found to be lacking in the required competency for any qualification a reassessment process should be undertaken, but definitely in the trades and public safety sectors.

RTO's that are found to be non-compliant should be thoroughly investigated.

Funding should be linked to consistent quality outcomes.

The quality of the RTO's operating in our sector is key to maintaining and building industry and public confidence in our training outcomes.

The cost of reassessment where required should ultimately be the responsibility of the RTO. The reassessment needs to be independent. The current system allows for RTO's to investigate themselves in many instances, this should never happen.

There are sufficient organisations operating with the VET training sector that could fulfil the role of assessment regulation and validation if developed and funded appropriately

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:

There has to be a role for industry and the issues regarding the determination of competency do need some review.

The VET system has become quite complex in its terminology and compliance protocols. This is often leaving these assessments to trainers and RTO's as those in the workplace struggle to find meaning in the bureaucracy.

Some review and simplification would be welcomed, without ‘dumbing down’ of the processes.

We do not believe there is a role for Government in this process. There is sufficient regulation at most levels.

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:

The mechanisms regarding evidence collection and storage are in place and robust.

The measures for quality assurance are clear and generally well observed.

Increasing these rules will not improve valid assessment outcomes, merely increase the cost and burden on all RTO's.

Increasing the accountability of poorly performing and non compliant RTO's is a key factor in improving student outcomes.

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:

It is not the size of the dog, but the size of its bite that matters most.

The size of the RTO should not matter, but the disproportionate allocation of preferences to the Government backed TAFE system for funds does.

Urgent investigation into apparent lack of accountability, audit and redress for poorly delivered courses within much of the TAFE system is required.

The resulting lowering of vocational standards across the board is of serious concern to the whole sector.

ANY RTO that is repeatedly found non-compliant in the delivery of low skills and poor competency outcomes should face deregistration. Swiftly, immediately and publicly.

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:

Where inadequate assessment has occurred, reassessment should be the first offer. Cancelling of qualifications disadvantages the students who in most cases are victims of poor quality training.

The establish of funding scheme for reassessment is a noble concept. Better however to prevent the need for reassessment in the first place.

Better trained and registered trainers, professional development independent of their current RTO employer, better monitoring and follow up where issues are identified with specific RTO's.

An easy to use support/investigation process for student/employers and other professional RTO's to access when incidents of poor quality are uncovered.