

**Quality of Assessment in Vocational Education
and Training – Discussion Paper**

A Submission from Group Training Australia Ltd

March 2016

Introduction

1. On behalf of the national network of group training organisations (GTO) Group Training Australia (GTA) Ltd welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the quality of assessment in vocational education and training.
2. We propose to confine our response to discussion question 10 and more specifically to the assessment of competence for apprentices whose training is divided between an institutional setting and the workplace, generally more so than for VET students who are not being trained under a contract of training. This means that there will be both an institutional trainer and a workplace trainer, who is very often the apprentice's employer, who may approach assessment with a different perspective.
3. The comments we make have been made by us on several occasions in responding to discussion papers or enquiries dealing with various aspects of competency-based training and assessment.

Competency and Proficiency

4. The experience of many group training organisations (GTOs) is that the institutional assessors tend to take a narrower view of competency than many employers or on-the-job trainers and supervisors. While an apprentice might arguably be technically competent against the performance criteria and range of variables in the minds of some assessors, they may not necessarily be proficient or productive in the minds of their employers. The difference is in the ability to deliver a certain level of output while maintaining competency.
5. In the push to implement early completion and competency-based wage progression this distinction is all too easily overlooked. It is arguable that it serves no good purpose to complete apprentices too soon if employers learn to doubt their level of productivity and the validity of the assessment and question their value given the relevant tradesmen's rates of pay. It ill-serves an apprentice's employment prospects and is certainly not in the interests of the national skilling effort.
6. What this highlights is the need to ensure that there is close collaboration between institutional assessors and workplace supervisors who will often also be the workplace trainer and assessor. In the case of small business where many traditional apprentices are trained the employer will fulfil all these functions. Practical assessment and observation in the workplace provide the best opportunity of ascertaining the true level of proficiency of the apprentice and is the ideal role of the workplace trainer and assessor.

Online Delivery

7. Another factor which is giving rise to some concern about the quality of assessment is the extension of online learning in the traditional trades. This method of training for the acquisition of trade skills often meets with scepticism though there are in fact now a couple of examples of award-winning RTOs that appear to have managed to combine online delivery of theory and practice with a rigorous reinforcement of practical skills in the workplace where they are assessed in conjunction with employers.
8. However there are still too many examples of online learning in some trade areas where the assessment of practical skills and notions of proficiency are deficient to say the least. This problem can probably largely be attributed to the promotion of online courses purporting to equip jobseekers with various trade skills without the need for a contract of training with an employer who will provide on the job training. Graduates of such course are often disappointed when they apply for jobs only to find that employers do not hold their qualification in high regard.

Possible Remedies

9. As we have already stated where the assessment of apprentices who under a contract of training is not taking account of important considerations like proficiency and productivity it should be possible for this to be largely remedied by ensuring that employers or workplace trainers and supervisors are closely involved. The protocols for assessment in Training Packages may need to be more explicit on this point.

Where trade skills are being taught without the student being an apprentice under a contract of training with access to substantial workplace training there may be a need for additional assessment protocols to be specified in the relevant Training Package. State Training Authorities may need to introduce special measures in relation to practical assessments when approving trade courses from Training Packages for use exclusively in institutional or online settings where no contract of training is required.

Conclusion

10. GTA has offered these observations which are based on feedback from the staff of member companies who experience these issues in the field. GTA would be pleased to assist the enquiry into the quality of assessment in VET in any other way within our means.

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