



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.

The Milner family own and operate Marjorie Milner College and have been associated with floristry for one hundred years and in hairdressing since 1931. The college commenced training in 1946 and is currently an industry provider training in the fields of floristry, hairdressing and Beauty Therapy.

All teachers are qualified, two with Masters in Education, three with Bachelor in Education and the lowest qualification is a Diploma in Education. We are a small RTO and industry training, especially apprenticeship training, is our area of expertise. We have trainees in Beauty Therapy and our hairdressing course is 99% apprentices only. In floristry we have more apprentices than any other provider in Australia. It is a very important fact to remember that employers select the RTO based on their quality input into their stores. It should be considered there is a vast difference between a provider who trains and then the student seeks employment against an RTO who is selected by industry and who must be answerable to industry at all times.

A provider, such as ourselves, must constantly liaise with our employers. It is firmly our belief that industry trainers should not be the only feature of this discussion paper but RTO's who deliver multiple days of training outside of daily industry contact to students or delivery practical skills wholly through online training. It is unbelievable the types of courses that can be completed online without well monitored practical training. Practical skills are a major aspect of VET training and should always be viewed by a qualified trainer.

In the days of 'trained teachers', rather than 'trainers', the training sector was better off.

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:

TAE qualifications are currently delivered poorly. The issues within the RTO space are systemic from the delivery of the TAE qualification. Less reputable providers are seemingly able to avoid the Volume of Learning standards expected within the AQF with this resulting in undertrained teachers.

To assist with the improvement of the training delivery within RTO's, every RTO should have an individual who directs the learning and assessment decisions of the business who holds a Bachelor Degree in Education.

Having an individual with this level of professional experience would ensure the practice of assessment delivery and training within the business would align more closely with the expectations of the relevant training package.

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 TAE Certificate IV as an entire qualification, in its current set-up, does not promote quality teaching within the VET framework. This is a combination of providers giving below-standard training to students as well as the fact that the qualification is the ‘ticket’ to training within RTO’s. This means that those undertaking the course have limited beliefs in the courses value as it is just seen as a means to an end. Teachers that undertake much higher qualifications in education are often much more adept at designing and developing assessment tools than those that simply undertake the course at Certificate IV level.

Changing one unit is not enough to fix this problem. It might produce a positive in the short-term with regards to assessment, but in the long-term it will fail to address the lack of knowledge of assessors and trainers that might otherwise be fixed with stronger regulation or higher qualifications.

A TAE Certificate IV does not give sufficient training in competency based learning. Many still teach qualification lock-step without the knowledge or class management skills to properly deliver competency based learning.

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:

The establishment of a VET professional association for educators within VET could be a positive and a negative change within the sector.

- Currently those teaching within the VET sector are often underappreciated for their professionalism and experience within the workforce. If a VET Professional Association was set up to promote these then it may be that this image would change but the association would have to be able to establish that those delivering training are at the standards expected of professionals within their relevant industries. If such an association is unable to determine this crucial information then they will fail to advocate for the professionalism of VET trainers.
- If the Association was to act similarly to the registration body that oversees school teachers then there would be the ability to enforce that trainers continually undertake professional development and the onus is put on individuals to continue their learning in the education space.
- It can be difficult to attract the appropriate personnel with respected industry knowledge, teaching qualifications and impartiality onto the association board itself.

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:

The role of a potential VET Professional association should extend to:

- Registering and Regulating trainers within the VET sector
- Regulating professional educational development within VET sector
- Ensuring a standard is maintained within the VET education sector

Currently it is solely the responsibility of the RTO to monitor the quality of trainers however under the proposed system the burden of responsibility could be extended to individual trainers. This role was carried out briefly by Service Skills who introduced the 'RightWay' program where trainers could become 'RightWay Approved'.

(Our teachers at MMC are 'RightWay Approved').

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:

From the models introduced in the discussion paper we see that there are a number of issues associated with each different system

Model A – for the smaller, niche industries, this system is inefficient as the industry knowledge expected of ‘expert independent advice’ that feeds into the creation of a framework needs to come from experts. These individuals most often work or run RTOs and so would not be able to be deemed ‘independent’. There is the potential in this scenario for the expert independent advice to come from persons who are not as knowledgeable as those that work within the RTO.

As a key example, Service Skills organised for an expert to travel around Australia to discuss matters relating to the new training package in Floristry with those in this training space. The expert was classified as ‘independent’ in this example, but was in meetings with individuals that had far superior knowledge of the industry and what the industry wanted from education. Although well respected in the industry, his knowledge and experience of the day-to-day operations in the industry was limited.

Model B – this also has issues as it relies on the notion of RTOs giving their knowledge and intellectual property to a ‘professional association’ which then makes the decisions and decides where funding is allocated. In this regard, RTO’s receive no compensation for their knowledge or intellectual property used by the professional association.

Model C – seemingly has the greatest possibility of lifting the standards in Vocational Education depending on how it is implemented. As an example of a similar system, Service Skills had the ‘Rightway’ program where trainers could become ‘Rightway Approved’ which tied in with the standards expected of trainers by ASQA.

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:

From the frameworks already in existence, it can be seen that there are a number of points for improvement.

1. Smaller, niche, quality RTO's are currently stretched to capacity in compliance. Our RTO has more staff in the office than on the teaching floor. This seems to be a contradiction in relation to what the RTO is actually trying to provide – quality training to students.
2. As an industry provider we dislike transfers from some providers (whose training is not answerable to industry) as often a students' training from these providers is below industry standards.
3. There are often large TAFE's who do not train a single apprentice in our industry fields. Industry will not support them as they will train anyone even if they complete with no possible employment opportunity in the industry.

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 not covered in the discussion paper is the idea of industry directly engaging in the validation of assessment. In our sectors we are often seen by industry as a leaders in training and experience. Employers within the industry often contact us for advice in regards to their special industry needs. There are sometimes instances where an employer in the industry is not qualified in their area and our training, of their apprentices, is a major factor to the success of their business.

The industry, in our case, directly engages in validating our methods through several different avenues.

1. Every employer is requested to sign (employer/manager signature) every unit of competency that their apprentice studies. It ensures the employer sees the unit, what their apprentice is doing and has the opportunity to provide feedback.
2. Before competency is granted the feedback from employers is considered for each unit to confirm their opinion of their apprentice's standard and our training.
3. Apprentices are paid to be at trade school and if any employer is dissatisfied they can withdraw their apprentice from a training provider at any time.

RTO's who train students out of industry for multiple days per week and speed through training often aren't recognised by industry. Would you employ a person who has obtained a certificate with little or no industry experience and pay them full rates? Industry frowns on this and funding should not be available where an employment outcome is not possible. A student who trains outside industry only knows what is taught to them in good faith. If they are below industry standards when they finish, it is unfortunately too late and their employability is dubious.

With apprenticeship the employer must sign the “on and off the job” training agreement. This shows when that employer, from industry, is satisfied with the training and prepared to pay the individual full wages.

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:

This area in our industries, particularly hairdressing and floristry, is fraught with problems. In the past we were involved with some workplace- based training in country Victoria. Both industries have varied methods and some employers do not want all categories taught if it is not relevant to their business. Clearly this is not appropriate but they can also favour a specific method not used widely by the industry. Apprentices can develop bad habits in the workplace and the RTO, guided by the Training Package, broadens the training to meet wider industry needs. Industry does not have the knowledge associated with the training package auditing requirements and the RTO is expressly responsible for meeting all auditing guidelines. This is further evident when you attend training package reviews and industry representation is almost nil. Therefore although industry are capable of determining when individuals meet the standards needed for their business, the mutualistic relationship with RTO’s ensures that students receive a range of skills applicable to multiple areas of industry.

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:

Who knows the training package inside out? A good RTO. Industry assessors are not always as familiar with all of the auditing requirements expected of the training package. Sections of the training package do not allow for Competency Based learning. One-on-one assessments can be at the cost of the rest of the class as it is only relevant to that student.

Independent validation is not applicable to a 'one size fits all' approach as there will always be a time where it fails. It was discussed earlier that in some instances, RTO's may have more knowledge and experience than those deemed to be 'industry experts'. This can also be applied to independent validation of assessment. For those RTO's who hold more industry knowledge and experience than an independent person(s) set to validate an assessment, how can that person truly judge that assessments validity? The same applies to having an external assessment situation. In some industries this would fall into the same trap where an external assessment is not delivered to the

same standard to meet the needs of industry or accurately identify the competency of students that if assessed within an RTO would be covered.

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:

We do not believe so. Industry knows what it requires of its workers and this is what should outline what is expected of graduates. Successful RTO’s train to industry standards or they lose industry support which negates the need to spell out graduate capabilities. It is simple to ask “Would I employ this student?” There is a common acceptance amongst industry that the VET system outcomes should meet their expectations.

If more RTOs trained for industry, then ‘competent’ in a training product would mean that the individual is also ‘job ready’ (competent = job ready). The fact that these have two separate definitions shows that there is a gap between accredited training and industry standards in some training providers which shouldn’t exist.

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:

In the VET sector there is a division between RTO's in regards to direct industry recognition of competency. A provider with trainee/apprenticeship focus has the employer selecting the RTO to best meet their needs. If the RTO fails to meet industry needs the employer can transfer the trainee/apprentice to an RTO that does. At the end of the day apprentices are paid to be at trade school and an employer is paying them to learn their trade.

An RTO that trains without the immediate industry link on multiple days may have students finishing faster but there is no workplace levelling or re-enforcement of their learning. Our industries frown on paying full wages to a person holding a certificate with no industry experience.

Online training is another issue in regards to assessment as mentioned earlier. Although many industries find it easier to receive their assessments electronically (especially for storage) in many cases the assessments can have a lower quality than those received in person. In the industries which we deliver training to, we always ask how can hairdressers, florists and beauty therapists complete a satisfactory level 'online?' These are practical qualifications and industry will not accept someone who has solely completed their training online.

Assessments in RTO's is a major problem that does not have an easy solution. Increasing the investigative powers of ASQA to 'test' whether an individual student holds the competencies deemed by the RTO may in some cases be appropriate, but as has been discussed previously, who is to judge this competency? If an RTO has a trainer more knowledgeable and experienced than the independent assessor, who is more qualified to judge competency? Industry also already makes a judgement on aptness when they decide to hire someone. The responsibility for the identification of inapt assessment then should be partly with a student and with the RTO who should be training to meet industry needs.

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:

Some large RTO's spend a fortune on advertising and smaller RTO's, who may deliver superior training, cannot compete. Many large RTO's also churn students out without viable job prospects. In these areas there should be increased evaluation and focus to monitor the job outcomes of students trained outside of traineeship and apprenticeship. RTO's should be made accountable for their training to match employment outcomes, especially if there is going to be government funding associated with the course.

The characteristics of the RTO should not influence the response. If there has been an incidence of inadequacy or wrongdoing in meeting the expected standards by the RTO, this should be addressed no matter the size or number of students involved.

The burden on RTO's of ongoing compliance should always be a consideration, however if an RTO fails to remedy a situation within a reasonable time-frame and after receiving clear instructions on how to fix an issue, regulators should have the ability to suspend or cancel that RTO's registration.

There are now a large number of RTOs with large scopes delivering a wide variety of accredited courses. This increased range of courses means that the expertise of these providers in each their respective field is potentially diminished or filtered as the focus is away from quality and put on quantity.

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:

If an RTO exercises poor delivery the student standard will not be accepted by industry. Where this has occurred, students should be reassessed or have the opportunity to have the unit or course redelivered. Students attending an accredited RTO have the right to expect the level of training to meet industry needs. Currently some students start training expecting that they will be given competency no matter the quality of their work. This mindset needs to change and students need to start with the awareness that they must attain the industry standard to receive competency. A good RTO will know this level that industry will accept.

There is also the responsibility of time in training. Currently Sydney TAFE are delivering a Certificate IV in Floristry online to Victorian students with a trainer delivering the practical assessments in Melbourne, one weekend a month, in association with Holmesglen TAFE. This commenced in December under the new training package and Sydney TAFE advertised this course code before the course's nominal hours were even announced. It is not possible to update learner guides, assessments, a TAS and a matrix in this time and the course is advertised as five months duration. Students are asked to provide photographs of their work as evidence of reaching the standard.

This type of practice undermines a quality RTO where the training length for the equivalent qualification is up to two years. Such practices, and their ability to go unnoticed need examination.

In addition, the Volume of Learning in such a qualification is questionable given the expectations usually associated with the respective qualification.