



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:

Having a quota for RTO's to deliver TAE Qualifications could be considered as restraint of trade. Competition of quality providers should be encouraged and having a rigorous accreditation system would ensure that only high quality RTO's would remain in the market place.

RPL is a very subjective issue and RTO's should be at arms- length when considering an application for RPL. So having another RTO provide recognition services can ensure that there is no favouritism or familiarity.

Recognition of Prior learning is a valid method of assessment for practitioners who have a breadth of industry experience, however if they have not been involved with competency based training and have a proper understanding of assessment then only partial recognition should be given

As with any recognition of skills and knowledge, whether it be a trade or training assessment, the rigour of the process remains subjective and the amount of evidence required has to be related to the individual.

The ability to train and assess does not equate to a specific time frame, however a moderation of assessments undertaken by an assessor could be an indication of quality, and a probationary period (number of assessments) could help with quality.

TAE qualifications should be delivered by institutions that embrace competency based training and assessment – the understanding of skills and knowledge is paramount to the delivery of TAE qualifications.

Quality can only come from practice and having a probationary period or minimum term for progression from the Certificate IV to the Diploma could ensure that sufficient practice has occurred to cement the underpinning skills and knowledge required to undertake specialist learning.

Employment may not necessarily equate to experience – trainer and assessors may be working in a number of capacities that are not necessarily deemed as employment.

Competence is not necessarily time based. Quality and consistency of assessment should be proven before taking on other roles.

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 understanding needed to design and develop assessment tools can only come from a thorough understanding of the application of the assessment tool, prior to being able to design and develop such tools.

The understanding of levels of competence from the Cert IV to Diploma is often lacking and the application of the assessment tools is not done correctly thus a skewed outcome. The depth of the response is often lacking. If a practitioner cannot assess correctly then their ability to design appropriate tools is questionable.

Consideration of all stakeholders in any decision making is important, and forums should be undertaken before any major changes are made

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:

Most definitely

All professionals should have a national body, this gives validity to their professional abilities. One of the major concerns to trainers and assessors who value their professionalism is that there no "rating" system.

A professional body needs to have some government resources, so that it is accessible to all and not just the privileged few who can afford to finance its operations. As the registering body ASQA is a government funded body, so should a professional association.

A national professional association would give trainers and assessors an opportunity to differentiate themselves from the tick and flick RTO's and enable practitioners to have a pride in what they do.

The VET sector should not be a second cousin to the university sector, there is need to quality in both sectors.

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

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

COMMENT:

Activities should embrace all the recommendations above.

The professional association should be independent to existing or future RTO's, this will ensure that it meets the needs of the profession, clients and practitioners.

RTO's may not have the ability to distance themselves from good practice and their own practice.

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 A would best suit the majority of players in the VET environment, allowing for professionals associations to cater to the needs of industry. Accessibility and affordability would also be considered by having a number of professional associations (possibly having branches in regional areas).

Membership to the associations could be tiered, individual, RTO and industry.

Membership must always be consensual, mandatory membership is would not be in the best interest of the profession and would not be embracing EEO practices.

Having membership linked to accreditation could allow for a tiered level of practice eg; accountant, CPA

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:

Frameworks have benefits for guidance and benchmarking. Frameworks should take into consideration, industry, consumer needs and application.

Consultation needs to exist to ensure that any framework that is mandated meets the needs of the majority.

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:

The role of industry skills councils, was to encourage industry engagement in the development of competencies standards for their particular industry. However, not all ISC embraced the idea of inclusion and often there was a very narrow approach to consultation.

Getting buy in from industry is often difficult, having industry specific professional associations, could assist. The difficulty of getting industry to conduct assessment, could make the assessment process costly and time consuming.

Research has shown that exams are not a reliable assessment method for many learners. Relying on tests to deem competence is contrary to Rules and Principles of Assessment. If there needs to be any additional methods to be used to ensure industry confidence, then it must meet the Rules and Principles of Assessment. Accreditation, which could include a number of assessment tools, this could include presentation of a portfolio, practical demonstration, interview with professional association and questions and answers in a suitable format.

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:

Industry should be encouraged to assist in the validation of assessments, however practically this is very challenging. Understanding an assessment tools is, as previously discussed a specialist skill and not just anyone from industry would be suitable.

Industry can assist in providing benchmarks for the outcomes of the assessment. Alternatively the industry representative would need to have Diploma VET qualifications.

There is a case for having an industry group – perhaps as part of the professional association (as suggested in part 4) that would be able to assist in the validation of assessments.

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:

RTO's could have a quality rating system and to get such a rating they would need to have a prescribed number of assessment validation at national level.

In industry where there are licensing requirements, there may be opportunities for the licensing body to require particular accreditation. This would enhance consumer confidence not only in the abilities of the RTO but also the graduate.

In real estate there is a Qualification Order that specifies the unit of competency for entry level and licensing. Accreditation could also be done on a similar basis (remembering that exclusion could be deemed as Anti Competitive Practices).

Assessments methods need to be inclusive and therefore having just one method of assessment would be equitable.

As not every person who undertakes training in a particular training package is doing so to become licensed, there should be pathways for the completion of the qualification.

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:

The involvement of government and industry to develop resources is a sensible way to ensure that the outcomes of training and assessment meets the needs of industry and consumer. The Property Services Training Package should give sufficient advice and prescribe sufficient rigour for the RTO to develop training and assessment tools that would meet the required standards of industry and consumer.

Unless there is an understanding of AQF levels, and the developer of resources has an intimate knowledge of requirements of the training package, a government produced set of training products may not necessarily meet the needs of the RTO or associated bodies.

The term competent is not enough to give confidence to an employer or consumer. Whilst the concept of competence is, that the person can do the job, there is no room for excellence.

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 process of becoming an RTO and reregistration is somewhat flawed and can be subjective. Five years is too long if an RTO is not operating within the guidelines. The yearly statutory declaration is not rigorous enough to identify non compliant RTO's.

Accreditation could be part of the role of the Industry Association, with a reporting mechanism to ASQA for non – compliances. This is not the best option for those RTO's who do not see accreditation as a necessary option, but it could give more confidence to the outcomes of member RTO's.

Assessment should be the result of training and learner readiness, this should be in consultation with the trainer.

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:

If there was a mandatory requirement from ASQA that at least part of a qualification was audited yearly, then the assessment outcomes could be improved

There should be ASQA auditors that have Training Package specific knowledge and industry experience to make more informed judgements on the practices of RTO's and the quality of assessment tools.

The regulator should have civil penalties.

Regardless of the size of the RTO – there should be a minimum level of compliance and adherence to quality. A significant increase in number of students participating in a particular qualification could be a trigger for further investigation into the quality of outcomes.

The regulator should have greater powers to prosecute offenders. There should not be repeat offenders, the process should be rigorous enough to ensure that this does not occur.

ASQA should have a list and publish information about defaulters, particularly giving reason on why a registration has been cancelled

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 an RTO's has inadequately assessed a learner the qualification should be recalled and opportunity for the learner to undertake further assessment.

In any situation where there is fraud – it should be a disqualification, as with any other occurrence. Fraud is not acceptable in society.

Where there is a matter of safety or consumer protection then the qualification should be cancelled.

If an RTO's has been deemed as inadequately assessing, then there is no guarantee that further assessment will correct the situation. There needs to be moderation of the assessment result if the qualification is to be reissued by the same RTO, or recertification should be done by another RTO, the cost of which should be borne by the defaulting RTO

Consumers should be protected and a compensation fund would be suitable in the above circumstances. As with professional licensing fees, a proportion of the fee goes to a compensation fund, licensing fees paid to ASQA should also have this component.

Income support should be on a needs by needs basis.