



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?
 1. 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?
 1. 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?
 2. 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?
 3. Should the TAE Certificate IV and/or Diploma require a practical component? If so, how long should the practical component be?
 4. 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:

- **Part 1: Agree:** yes it is appropriate (see part 2)

Part 2: Disagree: We wouldn't support a reduction of RTOs in delivering the TAE. The essence of this question grapples with the reliability of TAE qualification and the negative impact poor quality RTO providers have on the integrity and stability of the VET industry. The underpinning cause is our current training system is not rigorous enough to maintain the integrity of RTOs issuing TAE qualifications, hence a large number of training providers. TAE is not an isolated occurrence, these same issues are echoed across other qualifications. Setting a precedence by reducing the number of RTO providers will have ripple effect to other industries who will demand the same reductions but not improve the quality of outcomes.

In order to retain public confidence in our nationally recognised training system and the reputation of the VET sector, systemic improvements are required that guarantee the integrity of all RTOs. This will guarantee consistent high-quality learning and assessment outcomes reflective of the training package.

The current training system allows any RTO to deliver any qualification without due diligence in justifying and ensuring high-quality learning and assessment outcomes.

- A practical example is the AQF volume of learning (VOL) specification for Certificate IV is 6 months to 2 years depending on the pre-existing knowledge and skills. Despite the VOL specifications, various RTOs currently deliver a TAE qualification ***within a 6 days intensive period***. Unfortunately not isolated and reflective of many other qualifications; unscrupulous RTOs are able to money grab without concern of the outcomes for the individual, industry and ultimately economic repercussions. Creating a flooded supply market place based on price point where quality RTO providers can not compete.

We would support systemic improvements to the system in managing poor providers out rather than a blanket reduction of RTOs delivering the TAE.

- **Agree:** No RTOs including Enterprise RTOs, should be able to issue any qualification to its own staff without prior approval from ASQA
- **Agree:** However, RPL is a central pillar to competency based training. The question highlights concerns regarding the integrity of RPL as a system. Is it the RPL system? Or understanding of the RPL system? Removal of RPL for one industry qualification has implications for flow on for removal of RPL from other qualifications. Perhaps the relevance and applicability of RPL should be considered in the context of AQF level eg. IV and above – no RPL allowed, as these levels require deeper assessment of knowledge that can not be ascertained by an RPL process.
- **Opportunities for improvement**
 - **Agree.** TAE qualification and skill sets should only be delivered by VET practitioners who can demonstrate a specific period..... Would recommend a 5 year period working in a competency based environment
 - **Disagree.** University degrees do not always cover areas such as competency based assessment development in detail. **Agree** that Assessor of TAE should hold at least a Diploma level qualification in TAE
 - **Agree:** Practical component of working within an RTO for a period of time. However, this would be open to fraudulent practices
 - **Agree:** This is currently reflected in some qualifications as vocational placement requirement. Issuing of the TAE Diploma recipients should have relevant work experience in the VET sector, with particular job tasks that involve assessment development and validation processes.

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?
 1. 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?
 2. 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:

- **Part 1 Agree in part:** The core needs to be the Advanced Assessor skill set (Diploma - TAESS0010) and Assessor Skill Set for (Cert IV -TAESS0011). Having the TAEASS502B as a core in isolation of the skill set would not expose students to the breadth of quality assessment processes.
- **Part 2 Agree in part:** Cert IV TAE is targeted to new entrants and have the lesser skill set as core units for the qualification.
- Too difficult to form judgements based on majority considerations as most VET specialists and VET workers have differing opinions and knowledge levels, along with Trainers and Assessors. Decisions should come from top down in this regard. This ensures integrity of the framework in line with VET sector requirements.

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?
 1. 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:

- **Agree:** A national professional association would be beneficial for the VET systems reputation. The Queensland Government introduced a legislation on 1 December 2015 to establish an independent Training Ombudsman as part of the governments plan to focus on quality training and reinvigorate the vocational educational and training (VET) sector in Queensland. This initiative could lead to the establishment of National VET Ombudsman for the Australia's VET system.
- Barriers would be funding, ownership and carriage of a National Professional Association. The governance structure would have to ensure a balance of government requirements, academic rigour, industry input, public and private training perspectives.

The purpose of the a national professional association is to ensure alignment of activities and professional direction with the national requirements for the system.

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:
 1. coordinate, approve or design professional development programs
 2. develop capability frameworks
 3. positively promote the profession of VET trainers and assessors as an employment destination and career path to attract professionals
 4. act as an advocate and voice for VET trainers and assessors
 5. interact with industry to respond to their emerging needs
 6. 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:** All activities listed including registration of VET practitioners.
- **Advantage:**
 - No variance between private and public providers
 - Less confusion as to compliance requirements
 - Government can direct 'best practice' and then ASQA regulates it
 - Would lead to public recognition that public and private providers are governed by the same body, require the same professional development and are audited under the same regulations
 - Single agenda addressing the needs of the national training system
- **Yes and No:** There are many separate well established organisations e.g. TAFE Qld, VELG & ACPET. However there is no single organisation that represents all providers of vocational education therefore there needs to be a neutral national professional association that could work to bring all Vocational providers together.

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:

- We would support a maturity strategy where by **Model A** is the preferred status quo, this model is more sustainable and responsive to emerging needs.
However to give Model A the structure and maturity to undertake the practice, Model B will be required in the interim to build up the capability of the sector to strongly support and sustain Model A. Model C, the VET sector would be dwarfed and lost by the large schooling system protocols and curriculum requirements. VET is unique and has different needs of the schooling system.
 - **Advantage** to this VET professional association would be as follows:
 - No variance between private and public providers
 - Less confusion as to compliance requirements
 - Government can direct 'best practice' and then ASQA regulates it
 - Would lead to public recognition that public and private providers are governed by the same body, require the same professional development and are audited under the same regulations
 - Provide a rigorous framework to support the improvement and professional integrity of the people supporting the system.
- Mechanism for sustainability: Membership fees from individuals and short term government funding during an incubator period. RTOs are already registered with ASQA, individuals could hide and not receive any professional development.
- Voluntary in short term with a view to make it mandatory in longer term. Similar to teacher registration.

6. Discussion questions – capability frameworks:

- What can be learnt or applied from the capability frameworks that have been developed or are currently being developed?
 1. Is there an opportunity to make better use of these frameworks, irrespective of proposals to develop a professional association?

COMMENT:

The framework proposes three (3) levels of practitioners providing training and assessment services. The levels are intended to describe the broad scope of activity of a VET practitioner who may be involved in any of the areas of learning services, instructional design, linking enterprises and RTOs, training and assessment (IBSA 2011).

The framework could be improved by articulating specific skills of the VET practitioners at each level and have an indicator of how many years of working experiences the VET practitioners need to have so that they can be allocated into the right level. One of the challenges with the current framework is the disconnect between the development of the frameworks and the target audience.

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?
 1. 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?
 2. Who should regulate the tests?
 3. Should such a test be a pass/fail dichotomy, or would it be more important to use the test to identify gap training?
 4. 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?
 5. Should the results of tests be made public at the RTO level?

COMMENT:

- Challenge with obtaining industry involvement is the identification of “who is industry” and subsequent industries understanding of the VET framework. There is no incentive for Industry to participate unless they have an arrangement with the RTO e.g. apprenticeship program for their worker etc
- The example provided of administering tests moves away from competency based training. We would not endorse an industry “test” mentality for competency based environment. The introduction of a test would also narrow RTOs and VET practitioners focus to ensuring students can pass “the test” rather than being competent and job ready. The underlying issue is in the integrity of the current assessment processes, tools and methods encapsulated by the training system. Implementation of systemic system changes could improve the rigour and integrity of the process. One systemic approach could be the endorsement and certification of assessment tools and methods. All RTOs tools and methods must be endorsed before use. This could be achieved via a peak body or the accreditation of individuals to certify assessment tools and methods of certain qualifications within their own proven expertise area (eg 5 years industry experience + 5 years VET experience + Diploma of TAE including or addition of the Advanced Assessor Skill set). The other approach is standardised endorsed assessment tools and methods for all RTOs to use, however this limits quality VET sector providers in exploration of innovative assessment tools and methods. Many assessment tools and methods are highly protected by RTOs. Significant monetary investments are made by RTOs in developing quality assessment tools and methods any system would have to ensure RTO intellectual property is protected.
- Other mechanisms could be published audit reports from ASQA , Star Rating Scheme, SkillsOne, Teaching Awards etc are some of the mechanisms that could be increase industry confidence.

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:

- The concept of what industry engagement is or constitutes is ambiguous, and organisations have different expectations of what "competency" is. We would support the clear articulation of the interpretation of 'industry' guidance is required perhaps from existing academic structures such as NCVET
- No: Many industries used by RTOs have little understanding of the national training system, competency based assessment, or the assessment tools they are endorsing.
- It is unreasonable to expect industry to voluntarily invest their time to build their understanding of a highly complex system such as VET. While it could be argued this ultimately improves the sector outcomes for their industry, it is not a cost burden shared by the industry rather it is a select few industries that generally have an altruistic outlook.
- Perhaps a more simplified approach with industry confirming high level questions such as..
Would completion of these assessment tools qualify the learner as being competent or not. Will this graduate be able to work with confidence and competence if hired by your organisation.
Would they hire the graduate on completion of these assessment tools?

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:
 1. 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
 2. mandatory requirement to lift quality in specific instances, for example, where a qualification is identified as high-risk
 3. 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?
 1. 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?
 1. For example, could existing regulators or other organisations (such as firms that specialise in assessing students) take on this role?

COMMENT:

- The overarching issue with these approaches is they are piecemeal. All undermine the integrity of being a Registered Training Organisation. What is being said is we can't trust the systemic model. Independent validation is one mechanism however this needs to be coupled with an endorsement and certification instrument and process to identify the validation was done to a set standard (discussed in Question 7 second dot point)
- All qualifications need to have quality reliable assessment practices, regardless of the nature of work being high risk or low risk. Do we keep putting in multiple reassessment points to check the integrity of the first? It is an unsustainable model and would make VET unappealing to students and the management of student data upon RTOs unmanageable. The solution lies in stopping the points of weakness at the initial assessment point.

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?
 1. 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:

- **Yes** Government, perhaps through a national ombudsman arrangement. This needs to be clearly disclosed in RTO handbooks.
 1. **Part 1 No** – the terminology "Competent" should remain in place. **Part 2: No** there is not a common understanding of VET system outcomes.

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?
 1. 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:

Yes, while the Standards for RTOs are very clear in the context of assessment, rules of evidence, principles of assessment we would support the strengthening of the standards and clauses to elevate processes and guidelines for assessment, such as the inclusion of endorsed and certified assessment tools and methods.

No, the current assessment samples retention is sufficient – no further change is required

Yes, ASQA should remain the main regulator to oversee this function.

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:

- We would support the strengthening of existing structures such as the Standards for RTOs Clause 1.8 and 1.9. to include evaluating assessment outputs
- ASQA has existing powers over non compliance to these standards, additional resources to ASQA to increase frequency of “checks” and increased powers to enforce actions.
- Response should be the same regardless of RTO characteristics, however in the event of monetary fines being imposed we would not support these measures.
- Response needs to be scaled up in the context of number of repeated non-compliant assessment practices. Also mediation should occur between auditors and the RTO where there are differing opinions on the adequacies of the assessment process. Repeat offenders must be de-registered to maintain the VET quality assurance in Australia
- National transparency and disclosure of the common areas of non-compliance and providing samples of these non-compliance issues to the sector can help other RTOs become more vigilant, promote quality training and delivery of assessment.
- Also publicly listing the deregistered training organisations

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:
 1. Are there any situations where a student should not be offered the chance to be reassessed, for example, student fraud?
 2. 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?
 3. 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?
 4. Who should deliver the reassessment? Are there any circumstances in which it would be appropriate for the original RTO to undertake the reassessment?
 5. 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:

- We suggest **YES** it should, but factors influencing the decision would include but no limited to
 1. It would be unreasonable to recall qualifications extending beyond a reasonable period of time eg. qualifications issued in past 1 year.
 2. Context of students current employment history
- Scheme
Yes the expansion of such schemes like Australian Student Tuition Assurance Scheme (ASTAS) to include cancellation or reassessment of qualifications. This should be mandatory scheme paid for as part of enrolment fees.
- Where there is a direct impact to loss of income as a result of the recall or reassessment students should be eligible for compensation