



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:

The Ai Group believes the discussion around RTOs delivering TAE qualifications should be focussed on quality of provision, not the number of RTOs providing the TAE. The emphasis must be on strengthening the tools, supports and measures to ensure high quality provision by all RTOs, thereby removing the need for discussion of a reduction in the number of RTOs delivering the qualification.

Under a quality assured regime RTOs should be able to confidently issue qualifications to their own trainers and assessors. In a system which ensures RTOs are developing training and assessment strategies and practices that truly reflect the *Standards for RTOs 2015* (the Standards), including application of rigour and depth of training, use of the principles of assessment, compliant validation practices, and qualified staff, there should be no question around the issuing of qualifications within any industry area.

Further, whilst the Ai Group agrees that the TAE qualifications and skill sets are significant within the VET system, recognition of prior learning should apply as it does under any assessment process. As, as long as it follows the system detailed within the Standards, and is undertaken by qualified trainers/assessors, the assessment requirement benchmarks for measurement will be based on what competence looks like and on observable behaviours. RTOs can also use assessment requirements in the training package which detail performance and knowledge evidence, plus

assessment conditions. We believe that some RTOs and their practitioners need to improve their application of these areas, with strengthened compliance measures monitoring improved application.

Opportunities to improve the assessment skills of the VET workforce exist, however specific periods of training and/or assessing employment history in the VET sector should not be required beyond the guidelines stipulated under the standards. Guiding resources include volume of learning requirements, practising the skills in different real world contexts, and performance and knowledge evidence. The issue is ensuring that RTOs comprehensively follow and comply with the Standards.

The notion of a practical component for the Certificate IV / Diploma, and demonstration of employment history should already be built into assessment processes through the training package assessment requirements and effective assessment under the Standards. If these are applied properly, the time needed to apply and test the complex tasks involved with analysing and interpreting units of competency and contextualising units, for example, will be clearly apparent.

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:

Ai Group's view is that the existing *TAEASS502B Design and develop assessment tools* unit of competency be changed to a core unit in the TAE Certificate IV.

It is clear that in the current environment many trainers and assessors are not competent in this activity, and a change of this nature will become a foundation component in improving outcomes in all forms of assessment: formative, summative and recognition of prior learning.

Poor quality concerns will be alleviated if trainers and assessors are better able to use assessment tools to guide the collection of quality evidence in the assessment process; refer to information about assessment methods, contexts and the procedures to be followed in conducting the assessment.

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 Ai Group supports the establishment of a national professional association for Australia's VET system. Under the Standards, RTOs must ensure that all trainers and assessors undertake professional development in VET, however the support and development for practitioners beyond their initial training is ad hoc, with some informal networks in existence. Ongoing support and professional development is key to improving the quality and delivery of assessment.

A professional association, available for VET practitioners to join, and that encourages networking and sharing of skills and knowledge with peers and specialists, will assist with the commitment by trainers/assessors to their continued learning. The Capability Framework developed by Innovation and Business Skills Australia in 2013 includes a useful practitioner pathway to provide professional learning ideas, networks and supports around advancing VET careers.

We acknowledge that practitioners require access to industry to maintain currency, however the assistance by employers with return to industry needs to be balanced with business demands.

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 Ai Group sees benefit in a national professional association undertaking the activities listed under Question 4. Of particular importance under a VET system is the interaction such a body would have with industry. Ensuring access to high level intelligence around the changing needs of industry and the workforce will allow discussion of and appropriate consideration to changes in pedagogy.

It is considered a national body would assist in building consistency of VET practitioner quality, best assist in raising the profile and professionalism of the profession and more effectively liaise with related VET system agencies. The role of such a networked association would include sustaining capability uplift and actively supporting collaboration and peer learning.

IBSA, as the Industry Skills Council responsible for developing the TAE under the previous system, maintained an online VET community, conducted VET practitioner forums and developed the VET Practitioner Capability Framework. Aspects of these good practices, which were implemented to support the workforce development of the VET sector, could be reviewed and utilised where appropriate by a new body.

The VET Development Centre in Victoria is another example of a professional support body providing events, programs, resources and grants for VET practitioners.

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:

The Ai Group supports Model B, the single VET professional association, endorsed to undertake a range of functions including the development of professional standards and a capability framework, and design and promotion of professional development and practice. A professional association would assist in building consistency of VET practitioner quality, raise the profile and professionalism of the profession and provide a mechanism to effectively liaise with related VET system agencies.

The professional body for VET practitioners would be most effective and ensure consistent quality through a mandatory membership regime, sustained by membership fees from individuals.

6. Discussion questions – capability frameworks:

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

COMMENT:

The VET Practitioner Capability Framework developed by IBSA in 2013 provides a comprehensive structure, levels, domains and capabilities, along with an implementation guide that details advice on job design, recruitment and selection, skills reviews and development plans for both individuals and RTOs to use.

This Framework would provide one good resource in the establishment of a current capability framework by a new professional association. Even without a new association, VET practitioners could be made better aware of this existing resource, although activity would need to be supported by their RTO, industry or enterprise employer.

In reviewing existing capability frameworks, further work could focus on the demonstration of observable and measurable capability uplift within their future use.

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:

Seeking industry consultation in the development of training packages is seen as a central component of the VET system, and if this industry input is relevant then training packages will include appropriate assessment guidelines and tools. Using training package guidelines, and following the Standards, quality RTOs are then able to develop and deliver training and assessment strategies appropriate to learner and workplace needs. Further industry involvement needs only to be at the level of their involvement with individual learners, and to determine specific outcomes for employers' own workplaces and workforce needs.

Whilst standardised assessment can ensure consistency, and external assessment bodies exist in other countries¹, the Ai Group believes careful consideration is needed before externally administered assessment is introduced in Australia's VET system. Separating assessment from the training is not sound pedagogical practice. There are also questions around structure, expertise and funding. A new regime is likely to carry an additional cost burden for employers and students to be assessed through a user pays assessment system. A body of personnel to deliver this role will need to hold a great breadth and depth of vocational knowledge and skills across all industry areas and would benefit from being established with industry.

Best practice in the VET sector would see quality assessment of demonstration of competence, and adherence to the Standards and principles of assessment at the local level by a trainer working in concert with an employer. The introduction of new local level external assessments would require heavy resource commitments for the system without necessarily adding value, and with a risk of increasing costs for employers.

¹ Gerald Burke, Monash University, Funding, participation and quality in VET, 2015

Discussion of externally administered tests, and questions around pass/fails, must be cognizant of the fundamental premise of the VET system – that it is based on competence against industry/job standards, and must therefore be based on demonstration of skill.

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 definition of validation within the Standards is 'the quality review of the assessment process'. A system for quality review across all industry areas is supported. But this is only one component of a VET system that must first also include appropriate involvement by industry in the development of training packages (and their assessment guidelines), rigorous enforcement of the Standards to ensure RTOs provide quality delivery, assessment and flexibility, and ongoing professional development of VET trainers and assessors.

The current system needs some strengthening in the form of industry validation to improve the confidence employers have in VET graduates and in training undertaken for their existing workforce. The current standard only suggests that industry experts be involved in an RTO's independent validation process.

The key factor in establishing an independent validation system (whether internal or external) is to regard the involvement as a review to check quality, and not involvement in every assessment. Validating quality of assessment involves a check of 'observable behaviours' in 'different contexts and environments'. Such a resource intensive activity would be costly to establish for all assessments. Under good quality application of the current standards employers are consulted at the local level by RTOs anyway, in order to determine appropriate assessment and competence.

A newly established external system of quality review by industry could be coordinated by a national representative body or bodies, to ensure the relevant industry expertise was sourced for quality checks, but this involvement must not be onerous for industry representatives. This body would provide guidelines for the industry experts to ensure assessment principles were incorporated within quality reviews.

Industry experts may become involved with both the review of assessment tools and/or review of individual applications of the tools for learners in different contexts.

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:

As stated in the previous response, the definition of validation within the Standards is 'the quality review of the assessment process'. Validation needs to be strengthened in the VET system, both internally (but independently) for RTOs, and externally. The Ai Group supports improving RTO practice, as suggested, through a principles-based model and best practice guide to support the VET workforce in identifying the most appropriate technique to validate assessment.

With quality training package development, including industry representation and associated assessment guidelines tools, the assessment parameters for high risk qualifications should be sufficiently rigorous. Well enforced RTO adherence to independent validation of assessment standards will become a built-in component of an RTO's operations and as a consequence a pre-condition to receiving funding. The current standard requires a level of independence through the

use of persons not directly involved, and suggests the involvement of industry experts to ensure a combination of expertise.

Where training package development, through appropriate industry consultation, identifies particular qualifications that involve higher risk factors, for example, public safety, RTO profile, student cohort, this should be built into the assessment guidelines. This will identify to RTOs, through their delivery, assessment and independent validation processes, the higher level of risks to be taken into account.

The higher risk areas may also be the areas more closely monitored by an external industry validation body, that exists to undertake targeted quality reviews, not reassessment of all qualifications.

A system of reassessment of an industry-agreed set of competencies before a student is issued with a qualification would undermine a key component of the VET system and the central involvement of industry in the development of industry endorsed standards.

It is a more sustainable strategy to better build the capabilities of the VET workforce and RTOs. A VET system with better quality and more closely monitored components is less likely to require situations where total cohorts need to be reassessed in the case where graduates are found not to demonstrate competence. This is considered to be too costly a solution in any case. The existing regulators would need to take a sample from across all RTOs that include the relevant qualification on their scope.

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:

Essentially employers seek effective workers who can contribute to their productivity. Again this begins with relevant industry involvement in training package development, and continues with their involvement in the particular delivery and assessment strategies contextualised for existing workers. In cases where they are taking on new graduates as new workers, job readiness is expected and is more readily achieved if the graduates have been exposed to work during their studies.

Greater awareness by employers of the different technical applications, theoretical knowledge and levels of responsibility developed by VET graduates at different AQF levels will not necessarily assist employers. Some awareness raising around the fact that VET graduates may not be attuned to workplace cultures and that mentoring and support may be required could assist. However a more effective solution is for RTOs to ensure they build in workplace experience to their delivery and assessment strategies.

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 Ai Group supports a strengthening of the compliance mechanisms and identification of assessment issues against the Standards to ensure the current rules around the conduct of and evidence to support RTOs' assessments are effectively undertaken. The standard involving conducting effective assessment already states that the relevant training package assessment requirements must be complied with, and be conducted in accordance with the principles of assessment and rules of evidence. If these are effectively understood and implemented by RTOs and their trainers/assessors, then industry will be involved as appropriate, and graduate competency should be assured.

A greater focus on assessment outputs is also supported, with this specialist role being established as part of ASQA's functions, or via contract to a specialist body.

The notion of training-only RTOs is not considered to be a viable option. The training and assessment process is one that sits together in a competency based system. The competency development process integrates demonstration of competence as learning takes place. Training and assessment, when operating effectively, mutually strengthen the learning process and therefore the assessment outcome.

12. Discussion questions – enforcement:

- How could the focus of regulation move to evaluating assessment outputs?
- Which additional regulatory enforcement options should be considered in dealing with RTOs providing inadequate assessment? For example, should the regulator have an explicit administrative power to require a RTO to arrange and fund external reassessment, or should additional civil penalty provisions be created?
- To what extent should the characteristics of the RTO influence the response? Should the size of the RTO or the number of students involved matter?
- Given the need to balance procedural fairness with swift and effective enforcement action, what methods should be available to the regulator to manage RTOs that are repeatedly non-compliant with assessment requirements? How could such repeat offenders be defined?
- What role should regulators have in communicating their activities and findings? Does current regulatory practice provide adequate transparency and disclosure, or are there other approaches that should be taken?

COMMENT:

It is important for the confidence of industry in the VET system that a greater part be played by the regulator in evaluating assessment outputs and taking action against RTOs as appropriate. Regulatory enforcement actions should include powers to require external re-assessment where necessary by RTOs, and greater penalty actions should be implemented. This should not add an extra cost burden to industry.

Acknowledging that procedural fairness must be provided, the Ai Group supports the introduction of greater limits on RTOs that demonstrate repeated non-compliance with assessment. The severity of limits could be scaled up according to the number and regularity of non-compliance.

The Ai Group is also in support of broad publication of non-compliances with assessment requirements, of inadequate assessment, and of enforcement actions, in order that RTOs can use this information to review their own processes.

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:

The Ai Group believes that where inadequate assessment has occurred, a principle should apply to allow the opportunity for reassessment, prior to the cancellation of qualifications. The decision in each case should take into account the consequences to employers and individuals, as well as safety aspects.

We agree that the RTO and not the student must bear chief responsibility for risk of inadequate assessment, and that reassessment costs be met by RTOs. Provision should be made to allow RTOs to undertake their own reassessments in particular circumstances, but external reassessment procedures should also be established. Those involved with the reassessment process should hold the same qualifications as those required by the Standards, which includes the relevant industry experience and currency needed, as well as industry involvement.

The Ai Group supports the establishment of a mandatory tuition assurance fund for the protection of students, with contributions made to the fund by RTOs. We agree with linkages to the fund being

made for students affected by cancelled qualifications and suggest that the cost and productivity impact on employers of workers who may not be able to continue work also needs to be considered.