

A guide to continuous improvement of assessment in VET

4th Edition 2013



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Training**
and **Workforce Development**

First published 2005
2nd edition 2008
3rd edition 2012
4th edition 2013

DISCLAIMER as at March 2014: A number of changes are underway within the National Training Framework, including a transition to the new Standards for Training Packages to be implemented by the end of 2015. See http://www.nssc.natese.gov.au/training_packages.

As the transition to the new standards will vary according to each Industry Skills Council's timeline, these publications will continue to address the content of the previous Training Package model. It is anticipated that content related to the new standards will be incorporated into the publications as they become more widely adopted.

While every effort is made to maintain their accuracy, currency and usefulness, the publications are edited only once a year and may not remain current with changes implemented at state and federal level. The publications are accurate as at the date of publication shown on this page. If in doubt, please check the many websites referenced within each publication.

TITLE: A guide to continuous improvement of assessment in VET (4th edn) 2013
ISBN 978-1-74205-722-4

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A guide to continuous improvement of assessment in VET

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Introduction

Although as lecturers we do our best to develop effective, high quality assessment strategies, we always need to be open to the possibility of further improvement. All aspects of assessment need to be regularly monitored, reviewed and improved. This is driven partly by our need to improve as professional lecturers, partly due to changes and improvements in our understanding of assessment processes, partly to meet changes in outcome standards, and partly to respond to changes within industry itself.

Continuous improvement is about applying good business practices to ensure the best outcomes for our clients, namely: students, industry and the community. Our vigilance must extend beyond our own appraisal of the assessment systems we have established. We must therefore seek and incorporate feedback and advice from industry, employers, other assessment professionals and the people we assess.

This resource:

- is designed to provide lecturers with strategies to regularly improve the quality and effectiveness of the assessments they conduct;
- is written primarily for lecturers who are responsible for the design, development and management of the assessment process;
- relates to all forms of on the job or off the job assessment, and simulations;
- describes a comprehensive range of validation process including moderation;
- involves all stakeholders in quality assessment; and
- is consistent with the regulatory standards.

Continuous improvement is based upon **assessment validation** which is defined as follows on page 6 of the 2009 *NQC Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*.

Validation is a quality review process. It involves checking that the assessment tool¹ produced valid, reliable, sufficient, current and authentic evidence to enable reasonable judgements to be made as to whether the requirements of the relevant aspects of the training package or accredited course had been met. It includes reviewing and making recommendations for future improvements to the assessment tool, process and/or outcomes.

Assessment moderation is defined as follows on pages 6 and 7 of the 2009 *NQC Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*.

Moderation is the process of bringing assessment judgements and standards into alignment. It is a process that ensures the same standards are applied to all assessment results within the same unit(s) of competency. It is an active process in the sense that adjustments to assessor judgements are made to overcome differences in the difficulty of the tool and/or the severity of judgements.

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¹An assessment tool includes the following components: the context and conditions for the assessment, the tasks to be administered to the candidate, an outline of the evidence to be gathered from the candidate and the evidence criteria used to judge the quality of performance (i.e. the assessment decision making rules). It also includes the administration, recording and reporting requirements.

This guide is designed to provide lecturers with strategies and information to help them develop their own assessment validation procedures. It does not prescribe any specific process as each registered training organisation (RTO) will need to develop strategies that reflect its industry and delivery scope, stakeholders and client group.

This guide is made up of the following sections:

- Section 1 – Principles of continuous improvement;
- Section 2 – Strategies for continuous improvement;
- Section 3 – Gathering the evidence for continuous improvement;
- Section 4 – Recording the outcomes of continuous improvement; and
- Section 5 – Useful links and resources.

Section 1 – Principles of continuous improvement

The purpose of a continuous improvement process

Why do we need to get involved in continuous improvement?

The quest for continuous improvement is a defining characteristic of professional practice. There are many reasons why lecturers need to engage in the continuous improvement of assessment systems as professionals in the VET sector. These include:

- confirming the credibility and recognition of certification;
- supporting the industry and community recognition of VET graduates;
- providing the best service for VET clients – learners and industry;
- ensuring assessments reflect changes in current industry requirements;
- improving the validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness of assessments;
- providing greater justice for students for assessment with improved relevance, transparency and support in assessment processes;
- ensuring more meaningful feedback and guidance for students after they have been assessed;
- supporting ongoing RTO quality assurance;
- enhancing the reputation and recognition of the RTO and its services;
- minimising risks associated with the assessment process;
- improving the management of assessment systems; and
- informing lecturer selection and guiding professional development.

The regulatory standards also specifically targets continuous improvement as a key requirement for RTOs.

Continuous improvement processes refer to the continual enhancement of an RTO's performance so that the changing needs of clients and industry continue to be met. Continuous improvement does not relate to actions to achieve compliance as such actions are considered rectifications. An effective quality system includes processes that encourage and achieve continuous improvement. For RTOs this means developing a planned and ongoing process to systematically review and improve policies, procedures, products and services through analysis of relevant information and collection of data from clients and other interested parties, including staff. Data from quality indicators provides a key tool for continuous improvement.

The value for RTOs of adopting a continuous improvement cycle is in its potential to create a stronger, more sustainable business that meets the needs of clients and stakeholders. Such a cycle also enables RTOs to adapt quickly to changing external environments, such as economic factors and skills needs.

Types of continuous improvement processes and tools are not prescribed and RTOs have the flexibility to consider their own business context and make improvements based on feedback from their clients and stakeholders.

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These are all good reasons for continuous improvement ... but what do **we** have to do?

The regulatory requirements for continuous improvement

The regulatory standards refer directly to the continuous improvement of training and assessment processes:

The RTO collects, analyses and acts on relevant data for continuous improvement of training and assessment.

Systematically collecting and analysing data

Systematic approaches support continuous improvement. They may include:

- planning where data will be collected from, how it will be collected, the form it will take, how often it will be collected, and how it will be collated, analysed and used;
- ensuring that data collection and analysis confirm good practice and show where improvements need to be made;
- making improvements where analysis demonstrates they are needed;
- regularly reviewing data collection to assess its usefulness for improving products and services; and
- giving feedback to those who have contributed to the data.

Ensuring that data is relevant and sufficient

The focus of qualitative data collection (for example, feedback from assessment moderation meetings) and quantitative data collection (for example, records of assessments undertaken and judgements made) could be informed by:

- prior continuous improvement activities;
- feedback from stakeholders such as students, employers, industry;
- quality indicator data;
- assessing the relevance of the collected data to the lecturer's training and assessment outcomes; and
- deciding which aspects of training delivery are most critical to the lecturer's quality training and assessment.

Data sources relevant to improving training and assessment could include:

- client satisfaction surveys/questionnaires;
- interviews, focus groups, and/or other data from consultation with students, enterprise clients, industry organisations and licensing bodies;
- records of staff/planning meetings and agreed actions;
- records of complaints and appeals, and their resolution;
- internal audit reports and organisational self-evaluation; and
- staff performance appraisal reports.

Demonstrating improvements

Improvements to training and assessment could be demonstrated by changes to:

- quality, currency, relevance and sufficiency of training and assessment resources, including reasonable adjustments made to meet the needs of students with a disability, or other valid reasons for adjustment;
- professional development activities and outcomes; and
- validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness of assessment processes.

For continuous improvement, revised practices are analysed in light of further data collection.

Ways of identifying opportunities for the improvement of assessment strategies could be through assessment system validation and the systematic improvement of processes set out above. Opportunities for improvement may also be identified through collaborative partnerships and risk management processes.

Aspects of assessment to be monitored

What aspects of assessment need to be monitored for continuous improvement?

The regulatory standard suggests that ‘systems, processes, tools and practices are improved’.

The TAE10 Training Package lists ‘assessment methods/tools, the evidence that was collected using these assessment methods/tools and the interpretation of that evidence to make a judgement of competence’. From these, the following five targets for validation can be identified:

- assessment systems;
- assessment processes;
- assessment methods and tools;
- assessment evidence; and
- assessment judgements.

Assessment systems include but may not be limited to:

- grievances and appeals processes;
- assessment processes;
- validation systems and processes;
- administrative procedures such as reporting/recording arrangements;
- quality assurance mechanisms;
- risk management strategies;
- acquisition of physical and human resources;
- identifying roles and responsibilities; and
- establishing partnership arrangements.

Assessment processes include but may not be limited to:

- providing RPL; dealing with appeals, complaints and grievances; managing resources and partnership arrangements;
- designing assessment methods/tools;
- selecting, managing and monitoring lecturers and providing them with professional development;
- managing the gathering of evidence, including third-party evidence gathering, workplace assessment, simulation and record keeping;
- making and recording judgements;
- providing students with information;
- providing students with feedback and guidance; and
- ensuring validity and reliability, flexibility and fairness.

Assessment methods and **tools** are used to gather assessment evidence, and may include but not be limited to **methods** such as:

- observation of performance through normal work activities or simulated workplace activities;
- examining workplace products produced by the student;
- questioning and/or conducting interviews;
- seeking third-party reports;
- structured activities (for example, role-plays, projects, presentations);
- examining portfolios;

and **tools** such as:

- observation checklists (for example, workplace and/or simulation);
- knowledge tests (for example, written and/or oral);
- third-party questionnaires; and
- the instructions provided to students and instructions for evidence gatherers.

Assessment evidence is information gathered which, when matched against the unit of competency requirements, provides proof of competence. Evidence can take many forms and be gathered from a number of sources. Lecturers often categorise evidence in different ways, for example:

- direct, indirect and supplementary sources of evidence;
- evidence collected by the student or evidence collected by the lecturer; and
- historical and recent evidence collected by the student and current evidence collected by the lecturer.

Quality evidence is valid, sufficient, current and authentic evidence that enables the lecturer to make the assessment judgement.

Assessment judgements involve the lecturer evaluating whether the evidence gathered is valid, sufficient, current and authentic in order to make the assessment decision.

The assessment decision will require using professional judgement in evaluating the evidence available about:

- the quality of evidence gathered using the assessment methods/tools; and
- the competency achievement of the student based upon that evidence.

Additional information relating to assessment, including RPL is set out in the *AQTF Users' Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration*.

Quality standards in assessment

Where do lecturers find the quality standards that tell them what they should be looking for in their assessment systems, processes, methods/tools, evidence and judgements?

The regulatory standards and the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package provide considerable guidance.

Assessment systems

Assessment systems are the controlled and ordered processes designed to ensure that assessment decisions made in relation to many individuals by many lecturers in many situations are valid, reliable, flexible and fair. Systems should have well-understood components such as validation processes, assessment appeal mechanisms, recording and reporting processes.

Assessment processes need to:

- be recorded;
- involve consultation with industry during development;
- be equitable and meet the needs of a diverse range of students;
- be regularly validated and improved;
- be efficient and effective (for example, clustering units of competency);
- be negotiated, integrated and monitored where a workplace is used;
- be negotiated, agreed and monitored where partnership arrangements are utilised;
- be appropriately resourced (staff, facilities, equipment, assessment materials);
- ensure that all participants in the process are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities;
- comply with the assessment guidelines of training packages or assessment requirements of accredited courses;
- lead to an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualification or a statement of attainment (including for skill sets);
- be valid, reliable, fair and flexible;
- provide for reassessment on appeal;
- be explained to all students on enrolment; and
- minimise time and cost to students.

Assessment methods and tools need to:

- be valid, reliable, fair and flexible;
- be regularly validated and improved;
- comply with unit of competency requirements (one or more if clustered) including employability skills, required skills and knowledge, and critical aspects of evidence;
- comply with contextualisation requirements;
- reflect the language, literacy and numeracy requirements of the unit(s) of competency;
- provide evidence gatherers with clear instructions about the application of the tools and assessment methods, including advice on reasonable adjustment;
- provide students with information about the context and purpose of the assessment and the assessment process;
- provide students with clear guidance as to the benchmarks that must be achieved in order to be judged competent;
- provide information and support to all students, including RPL students;
- provide information and support for online or distance assessment;
- reflect the four dimensions of competency (where relevant); and
- provide information about feedback and guidance to students.

Assessment evidence needs to:

- meet the rules of evidence (for example, be valid, sufficient, current and authentic);
- be regularly validated;
- reflect the requirements of the unit(s) of competency; and
- be accurately recorded and reported for each unit of competency.

Assessment judgements need to:

- be regularly moderated and validated;
- involve the evaluation of valid, sufficient, current and authentic evidence to enable professional judgements to be made about whether competence has been achieved;
- reflect the requirements of the unit of competency including any prerequisite and co-requisite units of competency;
- reflect achievement of relevant employability skills; and
- provide students with constructive feedback and guidance.

Stakeholders in quality assessment

Now that lecturers know what to look for, who will they ask?

There are many stakeholders in the assessment process who can provide valuable input to the lecturer's continuous improvement process. These stakeholders include the following.

- **Industry** – people who represent the industry as a whole, and may be identified through industry associations, employee representative organisations, industry skills councils, industry training advisory bodies or councils and regulatory authorities.
- **Employers** – people who deal with students in the workplace either through employment or work placement. They may include supervisors and managers. Such people can be located through local enterprises or employers with whom lecturers are delivering traineeships, apprenticeships, work placements or structured workplace learning.
- **Technical and subject matter experts** – people with vocational competencies who may be identified through industry groups, employers or unions.
- **Students** – either undertaking lecturers' programs or seeking RPL.
- **Trainers or teachers** – people who meet AQTF standards and deliver on the job or off the job training but do not necessarily assess. They may deliver as partners or peers. Lecturers may consult trainers within their own RTO or other RTOs.
- **Lecturers** – people who meet regulatory standards and conduct on the job or off the job assessments but do not necessarily assess. They may assess as partners or peers. Lecturers may consult trainers within their own RTO or other RTOs.
- **Evidence gatherers** – people who gather evidence on behalf of the lecturer and who supervise the student either on or off the job. They may include workplace supervisors and are commonly called 'third-party evidence gatherers'. Their purpose is to gather evidence – not to make assessment judgements.
- **Government authorities** – including the Training Accreditation Council (TAC), the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the Department of Training and Workforce Development, WorkSafe WA and regulatory/licensing authorities.

Some individuals may fit a number of categories. For example, a workplace supervisor may be able to provide industry input, technical expertise and an evidence gatherer's perspective. Many individuals will fall into a number of categories. For example, most trainers are also lecturers.

What will these people do? How can they contribute to the lecturer's continuous improvement process?

In the next section we will look at some strategies for continuous improvement of our assessment processes, then make suggestions as to the types of questions we can ask each group of stakeholders.

Section 2 – Strategies for continuous improvement

What strategies can we use to identify opportunities for improvement?

There are three fundamental processes to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. These are:

- reviewing;
- moderating; and
- evaluating.

Reviewing

This involves the inspection of processes and products to determine the ‘face validity’ of the assessment strategy. In effect lecturers are asking, ‘Does it look right?’ and ‘Does it meet the principles of assessment?’. Examples of this process include:

- mapping and matching assessment methods/tools to unit of competency and training package requirements;
- opinions of industry representatives about the proposed assessment process and assessment methods/tools;
- opinions of peers about the assessment process and assessment methods/tools; and
- compliance of assessment processes and assessment methods/tools with AQTF requirements.

These processes and other relevant indicators aid reviewing and support lecturers’ professional judgement when applying an assessment strategy.

Example of reviewing

The lecturers working for a small RTO meet regularly with an industry focus group to seek feedback on their assessment tools. These lecturers are particularly keen to be reassured that the assessment tools reflect current industry practice, and that industry is comfortable employing graduates who have been judged as competent after using these tools for assessments.

These lecturers also meet as a team to review the RTO’s assessment process documentation and each other’s assessment tools to ensure that they match training package and regulatory requirements. They document opportunities for improvement identified through these internal and external reviews, along with the name of the person responsible for addressing each issue, and a date for completion. Changes made are reported at the next assessment review meeting.

Comparing

Professional judgement involves comparing assessment documentation and assessment outcomes to determine content validity, reliability, consistency and reproducibility of the assessment judgements. There is no single model for assessment comparisons; however, assessment moderation is a commonly used comparison process, although it is not completely flawless. There may be variation in lecturers' judgements, but moderation works to ensure that the margins of variation are minimal.

Moderation includes comparing:

- the assessment methods/tools of two or more lecturers for the same unit(s) of competency;
- the observations of two or more evidence gatherers for the same student's performance;
- the judgements made by two or more lecturers based upon the same evidence; and
- the assessment results of two or more similar units of competency for the same student.

For example, two units covering different technical activities but involving similar application of problem-solving skills can be looked at to determine that this aspect of the student's competence is being validly and reliably assessed.

Example of comparing

Lecturers from a number of RTOs meet to carry out assessments of the competence of a student using a video recording of the student's performance and samples of the products produced by the student. The lecturers use their own assessment tools to assess the performance and products then compare their judgements and the evidence behind their judgements. Differences in the evidence gathered and in judgements are discussed to clarify the interpretation of the unit of competency until consensus is reached. Individual lecturers then modify their assessment processes to maintain that consensus in future. Each RTO records its own participation in the meetings and the improvements made as a result of the meetings.

Evaluating

This involves gathering stakeholder feedback to determine the predictive validity, impact, effectiveness and credibility of the assessment strategy. Lecturers can evaluate the following five kinds of impact.

1.	How it feels:	Does the person feel comfortable with the assessment process?
2.	How it works:	Can the person apply the competency in a workplace role?
3.	How it is used:	Is the assessment process properly applied?
4.	How it serves:	Does the assessment process contribute to industry and RTO organisational objectives?
5.	How it rates:	Is the assessment process the most time-effective and cost-effective option?

Examples of gathering feedback include:

- students' opinions of their assessment experience;
- evidence from assessment appeals, complaints or grievances about assessment;
- feedback from employers and industry representatives about graduates' competence;
- opinions of evidence gatherers about the assessment resources and processes, and their ease of use; and
- feedback from auditors about non-compliances or opportunities for improvement.

Example of evaluating

To identify possible improvements, an RTO routinely surveys its current students and the employers of its graduates to gauge satisfaction with its training delivery and assessment services. Students/graduates are surveyed by written questionnaires and employers are interviewed by telephone. Feedback relating to assessment processes is then provided to lecturers and action taken.

Section 3 – Gathering the evidence for continuous improvement

Just as lecturers use an assessment plan to map their evidence-gathering sources in assessment, they can also plan their evidence-gathering sources for continuous improvement using a simple table. This should help them identify what they need to ask each stakeholder group (by reading the columns in the table below) and who they need to consult for each aspect of continuous improvement (by reading the rows).

In the table below, the demands upon each stakeholder group are limited to those aspects for which each is best placed to contribute.

Continuous improvement activity	Primary evidence sources							
	Industry	Employers	Technical and subject matter experts	Students	Trainers and teachers	Lecturers	Evidence gatherers	Government authorities
Review assessment process.	✓	✓				✓		✓
Review assessment methods/tools.	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Review assessment judgement.						✓		✓
Review assessment evidence.		✓	✓			✓		✓
Compare assessment process.						✓		
Compare assessment methods/tools.						✓		
Compare assessment evidence.						✓	✓	
Compare assessment judgement.		✓	✓			✓		
Evaluate assessment process.	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Evaluate assessment methods/tools.			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Evaluate assessment evidence.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Evaluate assessment judgement.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

Based on this table, following are some questions lecturers may want to put to each group. It is important for lecturers to bear in mind that ‘assessment’ includes assessment associated with training delivery and assessment through RPL and to take into consideration that some stakeholder groups may not be familiar with all the VET terminology and, as a result, some questions may need to be reworded.

Industry

Suggested questions (before implementing the assessment process as part of a review process)

- ✔ Is the assessment process consistent with industry expectations?
- ✔ Do the selected assessment methods and tools reflect current industry standards and practices?
- ✔ Does the evidence meet the standards you would expect in industry?

Suggested evaluation questions

- ✔ Is the industry comfortable employing graduates who have demonstrated achievement through this assessment process?
- ✔ Do you think that this assessment process will preserve or improve workplace performance standards in your industry?

Employers

Lecturers could ask questions like these of employers of students who are employees, trainees or apprentices or students who have been placed through work placement or work experience and are being assessed in the workplace.

Suggested review questions

- ✔ Will the assessment process fit comfortably within your organisation's activities and workplace culture?
- ✔ Do the selected assessment methods and tools reflect current industry standards and work practices used in your business?

Suggested evaluation questions

- ✔ Has the assessment process had a positive impact on your organisation?
- ✔ Were supervisors able to use the assessment tools effectively?
- ✔ Did the assessment tools provide your organisation with useful information about your employees/trainees/apprentices?
- ✔ Does the evidence meet the standards you would require of your employees?
- ✔ Were the judgements made about the students' competencies consistent with your knowledge of these employees/trainees/apprentices?
- ✔ Have the students assessed as competent continued to perform at the appropriate level?

Technical and subject matter experts

Lecturers could ask questions like these particularly if assessing on a team basis, pairing an assessment expert with a vocational/technical/subject matter expert drawn from industry.

Suggested review questions

- ✓ Do the assessment methods and tools reflect the performance requirements of relevant units of competency?
- ✓ Do the assessment methods and tools reflect current industry standards and workplace practices?

Suggested evaluation question

- ✓ What impact do you think the use of these assessment methods and tools will have on the future performance of these students?

Students

Lecturers may ask questions like these through a forum, questionnaires or interview.

These are all suggested evaluation questions.

- ✓ Were you told that you had the right to an RPL assessment before you started this course?
- ✓ Were you given clear instructions about what to do in the assessment?
- ✓ Do you feel that you were given sufficient information about what was going to be assessed and how and when you were going to be assessed?
- ✓ Do you think that the assessment process was fair and equitable?
- ✓ Do you think that the person observing your performance was fair and unbiased?
- ✓ Do you think that the overall judgement about your competency performance was accurate and fair?
- ✓ Were you given adequate feedback about your performance after the assessment?
- ✓ Were you told about your right to an assessment appeal?
- ✓ Were you given useful advice about further learning after the assessment?
- ✓ Were you encouraged to monitor your own future progress?

Trainers and teachers

Trainers and teachers may also be lecturers. The following questions could be asked of trainers or teachers who are not directly involved in the assessment process other than through assessments used to monitor students' progress.

Note: The 'assessment process' relates to assessments used to determine competence.

Suggested evaluation questions

- ✔ Was the assessment process compatible with the training delivery program?
- ✔ Did students have a clear understanding of the relationship between the training they are receiving and the assessment processes?
- ✔ Did students understand the difference between assessments used to monitor their progress and assessments used to determine their competence?
- ✔ Did feedback from the assessment process help students to better direct their learning efforts?
- ✔ Was the final judgement of competency performance made through the assessment process consistent with your observations of each student?

Lecturers

Other lecturers from within the RTO or from another RTO will be the most informed observers of lecturers' assessment systems. They can contribute to all aspects of lecturers' continuous improvement processes. It is understood that a natural reluctance to reveal good ideas or weaknesses to a competitor means that this approach has some risk, but the returns can be considerable. It is best if lecturers form a working relationship with other lecturers in their field or from other industry areas where they can ask questions like those which follow. Lecturers may want other lecturers to sign a confidentiality agreement, or a reciprocal arrangement may be established regarding sharing materials to protect the interests of each party.

Suggested review questions

The first list of suggested questions applies more to planning and development processes; the second to implementation of assessment methods/tools.

- ✔ Is the assessment process consistent with the relevant training package assessment guidelines or accredited course assessment requirements?
- ✔ Do all lecturers involved in the process meet the requirements of the training package assessment guidelines or course assessment requirements and the regulatory standards? If not, are they properly managed as required by the assessment guidelines and the regulatory standards?
- ✔ Is the assessment process compliant with the regulatory standards?
- ✔ Are the roles of all parties in the assessment process clearly defined?

- ✓ Is the clustering of units of competency used appropriately in the assessment process?
- ✓ Does clustering confuse or enhance the assessment process for all aspects of each unit of competency? Why or why not?
- ✓ Does the assessment plan faithfully reflect all required components of the unit(s) of competency and the critical aspects of evidence?
- ✓ Do the assessment methods/tools (either developed or adopted) faithfully reflect the assessment plan and the requirements of the units of competency?
- ✓ Is any contextualisation of the unit(s) of competency compliant with training package requirements?
- ✓ Do the assessment methods/tools reflect current industry practices and workplace context?
- ✓ Do the assessment methods/tools reflect the level of complexity, responsibility and autonomy indicated by the employability skills and the AQF alignment of the unit(s) of competency?
- ✓ Do assessment simulations reflect current workplace practices and environment, and adequately show evidence of the four dimensions of competency?
- ✓ Can reasonable adjustment be made to the assessment tools?
- ✓ Have limits to reasonable adjustment been set, and are these limits consistent with the training package assessment guidelines or accredited course assessment requirements?
- ✓ Does the judgement process reflect the required performance outcomes and critical aspects of evidence of the unit(s) of competency?
- ✓ Is a form of version control in place to ensure that only current versions of assessment method/tools are being used?
- ✓ Do partnership agreements clearly specify the assessment roles and responsibilities of both parties, including quality assurance and record keeping?
- ✓ Are all the necessary assessment resources readily accessible?
- ✓ Have evidence gatherers been appropriately selected, briefed, managed and monitored to ensure sufficient quality evidence?
- ✓ Are evidence gatherers provided with clear instructions?
- ✓ Are students provided with clear instructions?
- ✓ Is the quality of evidence regularly reviewed for credibility and admissibility?
- ✓ Are judgements based upon sufficient evidence (a range of time, context and application)?
- ✓ Are the assessment records adequate to respond to appeals or complaints?

The following questions require lecturers to use the assessment processes and compare their results – a process usually described as ‘moderation’.

- ✔ Do different lecturers develop similar assessment strategies for the same unit(s) of competency?
- ✔ Do different lecturers record the same evidence when observing the same student's performance? (The tools and assessment process may need to be adjusted if they do not.)
- ✔ Do different lecturers make the same judgement based upon the same evidence for a unit of competency?

Evidence gatherers

Evidence gatherers are people who act on behalf of a lecturer to apply an assessment method/tool to gather evidence relating to a student's performance. Evidence gatherers do not make an assessment judgement; they simply record what they have observed using an observation checklist and a record sheet provided by the lecturer. All lecturers are evidence gatherers, accumulating evidence until there is sufficient to make a safe judgement, but anyone referred to as an ‘evidence gatherer’ is probably not a lecturer. The following evaluation questions are some that might be put to evidence gatherers.

Suggested evaluation questions

- ✔ Were your roles and responsibilities as an evidence gatherer clearly specified?
- ✔ Were you provided with clear instructions relating to gathering the evidence and recording the outcomes?
- ✔ Were workplace health and safety (WHS) and other regulatory issues adequately addressed in your instructions on evidence gathering?
- ✔ Were the assessment methods/tools easy to use and relevant to your role as an evidence gatherer?
- ✔ Were limits to reasonable adjustment clearly defined and applicable?
- ✔ Was there any perceived or actual conflict of interest between your role as an evidence gatherer and your relationship with the student (as a supervisor, client, colleague)?

Comparison task

- ✔ Do different evidence gatherers record the same evidence when observing the performance of the same student?

Government authorities

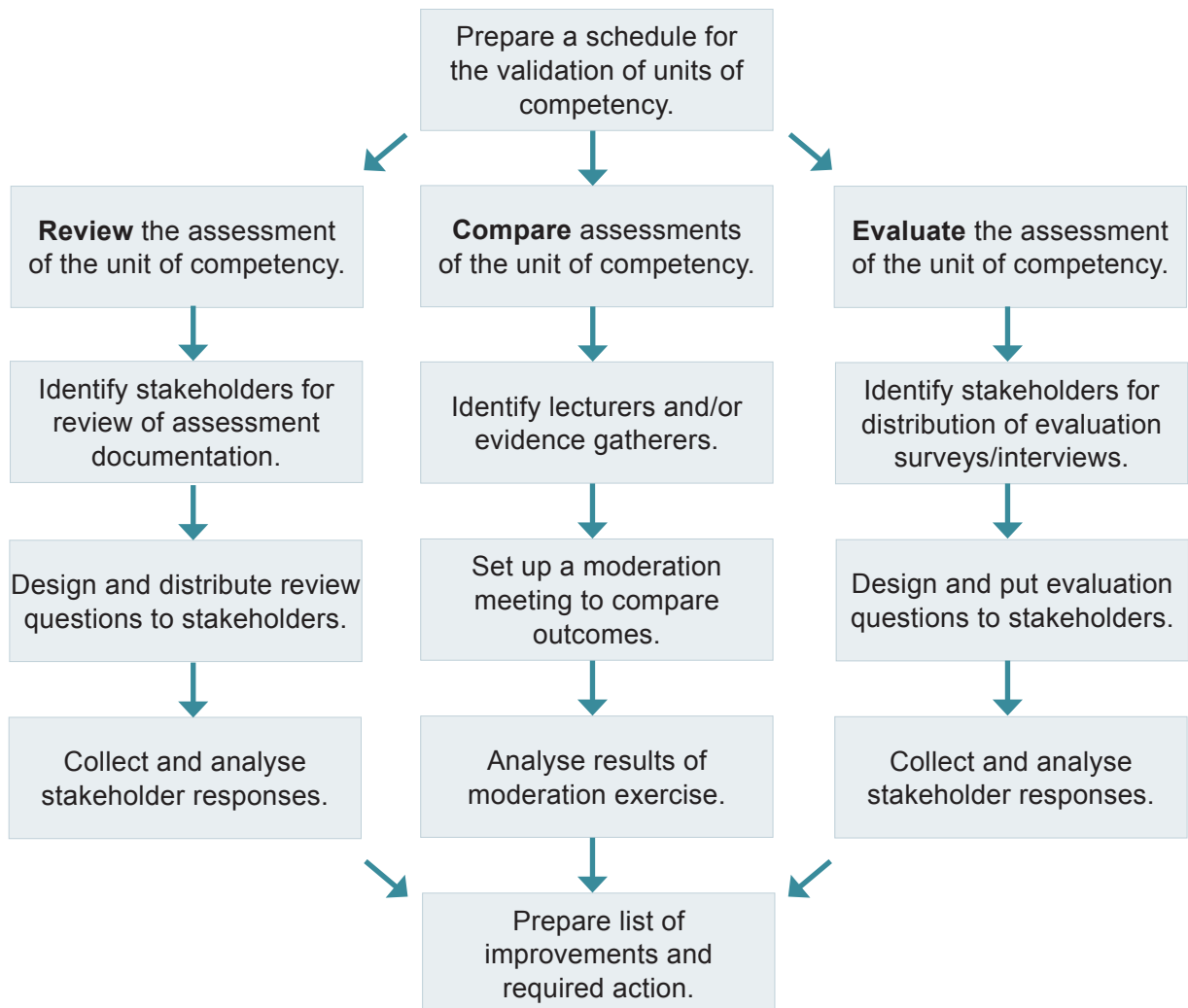
Government authorities will from time to time audit compliance of the RTO with various regulatory standards. For the most part, they will ask the questions, but their findings can contribute to lecturers' continuous improvement process.

The sort of question lecturers can ask is:

- ✔ What 'non-compliance' or 'opportunities for improvement' relating to assessment have been identified?

If a lecturer has been asking questions of the other stakeholders, it is unlikely that there will be any surprises, and an auditor will be impressed by the lecturer's diligence and professionalism, and by the improvements made. It is important that lecturers implement their continuous improvement processes and outcomes.

The three processes of reviewing, comparing and evaluating are shown together on the following flow diagram.



Section 4 – Recording the outcomes of continuous improvement

The investment of lecturers in the continuous improvement of assessment needs to be recorded for a number of reasons, namely:

- to monitor and improve the continuous improvement process itself;
- to provide for version control and reflect the underpinnings of current assessment resources; and
- to maintain a record of the improvements made to guide the development of future assessment resources and provide suggested remedies to address any future assessment concerns.

It is a good idea for lecturers to create a separate file for each unit of competency or cluster of units commonly assessed together (for example, skill sets) and to keep the following documents within each unit/cluster file:

- the complete unit(s) of competency;
- an assessment plan indicating how each component of the unit(s) can be assessed (including RPL);
- current assessment tools (for example, observation checklists, short answer tests, simulations) used to gather evidence, including instructions provided to evidence gatherers and to students;
- validation surveys/questionnaires for each validation source (for example, industry, students, other lecturers);
- a schedule for the administration of validation surveys/questionnaires showing past and future activities;
- a summary of evidence gathered to date from each validation source;
- who was involved with validation; and
- a summary of improvements identified and actions taken to implement them along with the supporting strategy documents such as the minutes of meetings confirming each decision.

If lecturers maintain comprehensive documentation on the outcomes and effects of assessment validation, there is no requirement for them to keep completed surveys/questionnaires, samples of student work or past assessment tools to be compliant with the regulatory standards. Depending upon the industry in which lecturers assess, there may be other legislative or regulatory requirements for the retention of these documents (for example, high-risk work).

Section 5 – Useful links and resources

Useful links

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

www.aqf.edu.au

Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)

www.nssc.natese.gov.au/vet_standards

AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration

AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Initial Registration

AQTF Users' Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration

AQTF Users' Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for Initial Registration

Employability Skills: From Framework to Practice – An Introductory Guide for Trainers and Assessors

Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)

www.asqa.gov.au

The national regulator for Australia's vocational education and training sector, this government authority regulates courses and training providers to ensure that nationally approved quality standards are met.

Western Australian RTOs which deliver courses interstate or overseas are required to register with ASQA.

Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE)

www.innovation.gov.au

Responsible for policy, national strategies and Commonwealth funding for all education and training sectors.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

Australia's principal provider of VET research and statistics which informs policy and practice in Australia's training system, including the following:

- How to become AVETMISS compliant
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/content/compliancefaq.htm>
- AVETMISS 6.1 for VET providers: what's new and why?
www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2401.html
- Booth, R et al 2002, *Maximising confidence in assessment decision-making: Resource kit for assessors* <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/780.html>

training.gov.au

<http://training.gov.au>

is the database on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia. It is the official national register of information on training packages, qualifications, courses, units of competency and registered training organisations (RTOs) and has been developed for experienced training sector users.

Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development

www.dtwd.wa.gov.au

This site contains information about training and workforce development as it applies to Western Australia, and links to training courses available in Western Australia as well as to ApprentiCentre and the Careers Centre.

Useful resources

Department of Training and Workforce Development publications

Apprenticeships and traineeships: Good practice guide for registered training organisations

Clustering units of competency: A guide on how to cluster for delivery and assessment

Designing assessment tools for quality outcomes

Guidelines for assessing competence in VET

Professional development framework for vocational skills in VET

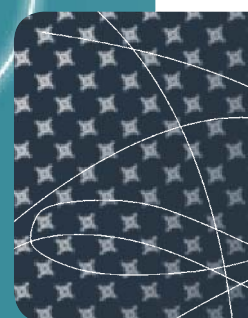
Reasonable adjustment: A guide to working with students with disability

Recognition of prior learning: An assessment resource for VET practitioners

Staying the course: A guide to working with students with mental illness

Troubleshooting guide: Assessment in VET

For electronic (PDF and Word) copies go to www.vetinfo.net.dtwd.wa.gov.au



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DTWD1973
A GUIDE TO CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT OF
ASSESSMENT IN VET
ISBN 978-1-74205-722-4



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