



Strategies for ensuring consistency in assessment



Department of Education,
Training and Youth Affairs



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*The project has been established to support high quality and consistent assessment
within the vocational education and training system in Australia.*

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FOREWORD

This guide is one of a suite of ten guides developed in the *Training Package Assessment Materials Project*. The project was one of several initiatives managed by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to facilitate the implementation of Training Packages and in particular New Apprenticeships.

The guides in this *Training Package Assessment Materials Project* aim to provide assessors and managers of assessment processes within the vocational education and training (VET) sector with a range of practical tools and resources for improving assessment practices in both on – and off-the-job situations. The ten guides are:

- Guide 1: Training Package assessment materials kit
- Guide 2: Assessing competencies in higher qualifications
- Guide 3: Recognition resource
- Guide 4: Kit to support assessor training
- Guide 5: Candidate's Kit: Guide to assessment in New Apprenticeships
- Guide 6: Assessment approaches for small workplaces
- Guide 7: Assessment using partnership arrangements
- Guide 8: Strategies for ensuring consistency in assessment
- Guide 9: Networking for assessors
- Guide 10: Quality assurance guide for assessment.

Each guide is designed to cover a broad range of industries and VET pathways, with relevance to workplace assessors as well as those working in off-the-job and VET in Schools programs.

The *Training Package Assessment Materials Project* was completed prior to the review and redevelopment of the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. The project managers and writing teams worked closely with National Assessors and Workplace Trainers (NAWT), a division of Business Services Training, to ensure that the material contained in these guides is in line with future developments in the Training Package. Consequently the guides do not make direct reference to the units of competency in the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training.

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1. CONSISTENCY IN ASSESSMENT – SETTING THE SCENE

What is consistency in assessment?

Assessment is a key component of the national vocational education and training (VET) system. The reforms to the training system associated with the introduction of the National Training Framework (NTF), especially Training Packages and the *Australian Quality Training Framework* (AQTF), have focused attention on the outcomes of the assessment process.

Consistency in assessment involves the achievement of comparable outcomes. For example, an assessment process would be considered to deliver consistent outcomes if assessors assessing candidates against the same unit of competency in different contexts made comparable assessment decisions.

Key to the drive to achieve consistency is the requirement for confidence in the assessment process. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) need to be confident that their assessment processes deliver comparable outcomes from assessments carried out by different assessors. Similarly, they need to be confident that the outcomes of assessments conducted by assessors within their own organisation are comparable with assessments conducted by assessors in other RTOs.

Achieving consistency starts with understanding – what is being assessed, what evidence is needed and how the assessment decision will be made.

Consistency can only be achieved when assessors share a common understanding of the unit(s) of competency which is being assessed.

While having a shared understanding is critical to the achievement of consistent outcomes, this does not imply that assessment arrangements and processes must be uniform. Clients and settings vary. Assessors must be able to employ assessment approaches that suit the candidate and the assessment context.

The development of a shared understanding is influenced by a number of factors, including the clarity of the relevant Training Package, the access which assessors have to professional development and support, and the availability and quality of materials designed to support the assessment process.

So what practical steps can assessors, RTOs and other organisations (such as industry organisations, unions and regulatory bodies) take to improve consistency in assessment? Without pre-empting other parts of this guide, some of the areas which may be addressed include:

- making sure assessors have access to the current version of the Training Package, including both the endorsed components (competency standards, assessment guidelines and the qualifications) and the support materials (learning strategies, assessment materials and professional development materials)
- ensuring assessors meet the qualification requirements of the relevant Training Package and have experience in

undertaking the assessments against the Training Package

- providing assessors with access to professional development activities and professional networks which facilitate structured discussion and exchanges of ideas about the implementation and interpretation of Training Packages
- establishing a formalised process for the development and maintenance of assessment tools
- monitoring the assessment process to ensure completeness and appropriateness to the task
- monitoring assessment outcomes to check for quality and consistency
- providing professional support for assessors which promotes critical self-reflection on practice, assists in identifying strengths and weaknesses, offers up-to-date information on assessment approaches and materials, and provides assistance in dealing with difficult or problematic assessments
- providing sound and defensible reporting and tracking processes to monitor assessments
- seeking client and industry feedback about the assessment process.

Why is consistency in assessment important?

The obvious answer is: for the sake of fairness. No individual wishes to be disadvantaged in relation to another person undertaking a comparable assessment.

The other major reason for RTOs striving to improve consistency in assessment is the need to generate and retain confidence in the training system.

Clients, whether individual, enterprise or industry, must have confidence in the robustness, quality and reliability of assessment.

The Training Packages which are at the heart of the national VET system provide guidance about the conduct of assessment. This guidance is pivotal, and the processes that an RTO or other organisation puts in place to support the achievement of consistency should be seen as supporting the Training Packages and their delivery. Training Packages identify the outcomes but the methods or pathways used by RTOs to achieve the specified outcomes are open and not prescribed. By focusing on achieving consistency in assessment, RTOs and other interested organisations are also working to demonstrate that multiple pathways can lead to the same outcomes.

The achievement of consistent assessment outcomes is critically important to the successful implementation of the NTF. Without consistent assessment outcomes, national mutual recognition, the portability of qualifications, and credit transfer and articulation arrangements may be undermined.

Make sure you are familiar with the latest news about the AQTF.

Check the ANTA web site at www.anta.gov.au

For these policies to operate effectively there must be confidence that all RTOs are delivering consistent outcomes.

This will be enhanced by the development and implementation of validation processes. Under the revised AQTF, all RTOs are required to establish processes for validation, specifically:

- 9.1 a *The RTO must develop and implement strategies for training delivery and assessment for each Training Package qualification and accredited course within the RTO's scope of registration.*
- b *The assessment strategies referred to in sub section 9.1(a), must be developed in consultation with enterprises/industry.*
- c *The delivery and assessment strategies referred to in sub section 9.1(a) should identify proposed target*

groups, delivery and assessment modes and strategies, assessment validation processes and pathways.

- d The RTO must document the strategies referred to in 9.1(a) on application for registration and on extension of scope.*

- 9.2 The RTO must validate its assessment strategies by:
 - i) reviewing, comparing and evaluating the assessment process, tools and evidence contributing to judgements made by a range of assessors against the same competency standards, at least annually; and*
 - ii) documenting any action taken to improve the quality and consistency of assessment.**

The establishment of processes for validating assessment tools, processes and outcomes will strengthen consistency, ensure assessors work within a sound framework and build the confidence of clients.

While RTOs are required to ensure consistency in assessment, they are joined by other groups such as enterprises, industry, community groups, professional associations, employers, unions and industry regulators that have an interest in ensuring the consistency of assessment outcomes.

The elements of consistency

Introduction

The delivery of consistent processes and outcomes in any organisation depends upon elements which impact on how that organisation operates. Consistency should not be the result of one person's efforts in an organisation. It should be part of the structure and processes of the organisation. Consistency should be a direct result of the organisation's quality arrangements and processes and not an incidental by-product.

The elements within an RTO which impact on the delivery of consistent assessment are the same elements which impact on the consistency of outcomes of any organisation – whether it be a manufacturer of goods or a provider of services.

The '5Ps' to ensure consistency in assessment

A number of external factors impact on the achievement of consistency in assessment outcomes. These include the quality of the competency standards that provide the benchmarks for assessment, enterprise policies and practices, the regulatory environment and the participation of key stakeholders (such as unions and employers) in the design of assessment policy. The quality of the assessment policy and procedures adopted by RTOs is another major influence on the delivery of consistent assessment outcomes.

This guide attempts to support organisations, including RTOs, industry bodies and regulatory agencies, that are concerned with promoting consistency in assessment both within and across RTOs.

The approaches described in this guide focus on five main aspects of the assessment system:

- **the people** includes assessors, managers and other staff associated with the assessment process
- **the process** describes the planning, conduct and review of assessment
- **the products** are the items used in planning, conducting and reviewing assessments
- **the perspective** ensures that the assessment service addresses the requirements and expectations of industry, employers and candidates
- **the policy** is the stated intention about how the assessment process will be managed and implemented.

People

The people within any organisation are integral to how it operates.

Assessors contribute directly to the assessment process. However, there are many others who either directly or indirectly contribute to the process. These include:

- managers
- administrators
- candidates
- industry experts
- industry regulators
- union and employer representatives
- members of professional associations.

Consideration needs to be given to how all these people contribute to the consistency of assessment processes and outcomes.

In doing this organisations need to consider the following questions:

- Do staff have appropriate skills and knowledge in relation to the assessment process?
- Do the assessors have the qualifications specified in the relevant Training Package?
- Are appropriate professional development opportunities provided for assessors?
- Are assessors and other staff given opportunities to contribute to decision making about the assessment process?
- Are assessors linked in with appropriate assessor networks and other professional support services?
- Are assessors given the opportunity to discuss the relevant Training Package with a view to developing a shared understanding of the requirements of the Training Package?

Process

The process focuses on how assessments are planned, conducted and reviewed. Ad hoc processes tend to lead to inconsistent assessment outcomes. Formal processes are more likely to produce consistent outcomes.

Prior to establishing assessment processes, organisations need to be clear about the purpose of assessment. In addition, organisations need to consider the following questions:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the key people involved in the assessment process?
- Is the process documented and agreed to by staff and stakeholders?
- Have the necessary resources been identified?
- Are the steps in the assessment process clear?
- How is the assessment process monitored?
- What recording mechanisms have been established?
- How is the assessment process managed?

Product

Products are the items that are used in planning, conducting and reviewing assessments. These may be developed by individual assessors, key groups such as Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) or commercial organisations.

Products include candidate information, assessor manuals, assessment tools, assessment guides, log books and professional development resources.

Organisations need to consider the following questions:

- What products are needed to support the assessment process?
- What processes are used to develop assessment products?
- What processes are used to identify appropriate assessment products?
- What strategies are used to trial and validate assessment products?
- Is professional development provided for assessors on the development of assessment products?

Perspective

The perspective focuses on whether the assessment process responds to the needs of candidates and other key stakeholders.

Organisations need to consider the following questions:

- Are there strategies in place for determining the current and future requirements of candidates and other stakeholders?
- Are these strategies adequate?
- What strategies are in place to manage relationships with candidates and other stakeholders, including customer contact, relationship management processes, customer perceptions of quality and customer feedback?
- Are these strategies adequate?

Policy

A clear policy will inform assessors, candidates and stakeholders about the purpose of the assessment process.

The policy should address the following:

- What is the purpose of the assessment process?
- Does the assessment process address the requirements and expectations of candidates and other key stakeholders, such as employers, unions and other industry bodies?
- Who are the key people involved in the assessment process? What are their roles and responsibilities?

- What structures and procedures are in place for the planning, conduct and review of assessments?
- What products have been developed and should be used in the assessment process?

The 5Ps of consistency are further outlined in Section 3 of this guide. This section includes a diagnostic tool which organisations may use to evaluate their assessment process.

Who should use the guide?

This guide is intended to be used by a range of organisations:

- RTOs seeking to ensure that assessment outcomes undertaken by different assessors within their organisations deliver comparable outcomes (this could include RTOs that operate multiple sites and have different assessors conducting assessments against the same qualifications at different locations)
- industry groups and associations wishing to promote the use of Training Packages and enhance assessment consistency within their industry
- industry regulatory bodies that use the outcomes of Training Packages to underpin licensing and registration systems
- groups of RTOs seeking to ensure comparable assessment outcomes across member organisations
- lead RTOs in partnership arrangements with non-registered organisations, such as schools and enterprises, who wish to ensure that assessment undertaken on their behalf delivers comparable outcomes.

Throughout this guide the word organisation refers to any of the above types of organisations. Where an organisation is

being served by an RTO, it is referred to as a client or customer.

How to use this guide

This guide has been prepared to assist organisations to establish mechanisms for attaining consistency in assessment.

The guide is not designed to identify the 'one right' approach but rather to acknowledge that different organisations have varying needs and require different approaches.

The guide, provides a four step process for identifying the most appropriate approach. This involves:

- developing an understanding of the factors which impact on the achievement of consistent assessment outcomes
- canvassing, in Section 2, a range of models and techniques that can be used to facilitate consistency in assessment
- applying a self-diagnostic process, in Section 3, to identify major needs and requirements and to determine which models and techniques are most likely to meet those needs and requirements
- selecting the appropriate model and techniques and establishing an overall strategy for promoting consistent assessment.

