VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE AND INDUSTRY CURRENCY

Training Accreditation Council
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Vocational Competence and Industry Currency Fact Sheet

Background

The VET sector has long required its practitioners to be dual professionals, specifically to be trainers and assessors as well as being an industry specialist. This requirement has been consistently supported by the sectors governing bodies and in essence is simply ensuring that the 'right person' provides the training and assessment to the learner. These requirements are about ensuring that quality training and assessment is delivered, it's not about focusing on compliance requirements.

Currently the National Skills Standard Council (NSSC) is responsible for determining the training and assessment competencies to be held by trainers and assessors in accordance with Standard 1.4a of the AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Initial and Continuing Registration and SNR 4.4 and 15.4 of the *Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations.*

These standards state that:

Training and assessment are delivered by trainers and assessors who:

  a) have the necessary training and assessment competencies determined by the National Quality Council or its successors; and
  b) have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered or assessed, and
  c) can demonstrate current industry skills directly relevant to the training / assessment being undertaken, and
  d) continue to develop their Vocational Education and Training (VET) knowledge and skills as well as their industry currency and trainer/ assessor competence.

Most VET practitioners now hold training and assessment competencies however there are an increasing number of questions around vocational competence and industry currency, particularly how to prove vocational equivalence.

This fact sheet aims to provide guidance on what these terms mean, the range of approaches that could be used within RTOs and what criteria the auditors use when they consider the approach taken by your RTO.

Standard 1.4b - What is Vocational Competence?

Within the VET sector vocational competency in a particular industry consists of broad industry knowledge and experience, usually combined with a relevant industry qualification. A person who has vocational competency will be familiar with the content of the vocation and will have relevant current experience in the industry.

Vocational competencies must be considered on an industry-by-industry basis and with reference to the guidance provided in the assessment guidelines of the relevant training package[1].

In most situations trainers and assessors will hold the qualifications and / or units of competence that they deliver or assess, but where this is not the case equivalence needs to be established. The NSSC has also provided advice to the VET sector about how to demonstrate equivalence on their FAQ page. The NSSC explain that:

"Evidence used to demonstrate equivalence of vocational competency may include consideration of relevant past training, including consideration of superseded and pre-existing industry qualifications, experience, and professional development. Equivalency is most commonly demonstrated by an individual through mapping his/her past training, experience and ongoing professional development against the unit of competency. This process may or may not identify gaps that require to be addressed.

Recognition is at the discretion of the employing RTO and is subject to AQTF / SNR audit."[2]

Why do I need to take a Unit by Unit Approach?

Many practitioners question why this needs to be done at a unit of competence level rather than at qualification level. The structure of most training packages encourages flexibility, and as a result a qualification can be made up of a wide range of units. People can hold the same qualification, but in reality have a completely different set of knowledge and skills.

Here are a just 2 examples of highly flexible qualifications.

BSB51107 Diploma of Management

The Diploma of Management has 8 elective units.

5 elective units must be selected from the Group A units. *There are 13 Group A units to choose from.*

3 elective units may be selected from Group A units or Group B units listed below, from this Training Package or from any current accredited course or endorsed Training Package at this qualification level. *There are 13 Group B units to choose from and 1000's of units available in other Training Packages*

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[1] This definition was drawn from the NCVER VET Glossary March 2013.
[2] This information was accessed from the NSSC frequently asked questions page March 2013.

One unit may be selected from either a Certificate IV or Advanced Diploma qualification. *Again there are 1000's of units available in other Training Packages*

This level of flexibility means that there are 1000's of possible combinations of units that could be chosen for a Diploma of Management qualification.

TLI30410 Certificate III in Transport and Logistics (Rail Operations)

A successful assessment outcome for a total 21 units, comprising:
5 units and up to 7 units aligned at AQF 3 made up of:

- at least 3 units and up to 7 units from those listed (aligned at AQF 3) *There are 75 units to choose from.*
- up to 2 suitable units (aligned at AQF 3) drawn with appropriate contextualisation from other Transport and Logistics Certificate III qualifications, other relevant endorsed Training Package or accredited course. *There are 1000's of units available in other Training Packages*

plus
7 units and up to 9 units at AQF 2 made up of:

- at least 5 units and up to 9 units from those listed for the Certificate II in Transport and Logistics (Rail Operations) (aligned at AQF 2) *There are 43 units to choose from.*
- up to 2 suitable units (aligned at AQF 2) drawn with appropriate contextualisation from other Transport and Logistics Certificate II qualifications, other relevant endorsed Training Package or accredited course. *There are 1000's of units available in other Training Packages.*

plus
7 units aligned at AQF 1 made up of:

- at least 5 units and up to 7 units from those listed for the Certificate I in Transport and Logistics (Rail Operations) (aligned at AQF 1) *There are 15 units to choose from.*
- up to 2 suitable units (aligned at AQF 1) drawn with appropriate contextualisation from other Transport and Logistics Certificate I qualifications, other relevant endorsed Training Package or accredited course. *There are 1000's of units available in other Training Packages.*

Again this level of flexibility means that there are 1000's of possible combinations of units that could be chosen for a Certificate III in Transport and Logistics (Rail Operations) qualification.

These examples illustrate clearly that in order to ensure that the RTO has appropriately qualified training and assessment staff, vocational competence and equivalence must be considered at a unit level.

Is the Demonstration of Equivalence the same as RPL?

Demonstration of Equivalence is not the same as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

RPL is defined as "an assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit (National Quality Council Training Packages glossary)"[3]

Demonstration of equivalence, on the other hand, is not a formal assessment process and therefore cannot be used as the basis for the award of a qualification or statement of attainment. As no certification is awarded, this judgement of equivalence can be made by any RTO.

Deeming Equivalence

It is expected that RTOs making judgements about demonstration of equivalent competencies will have a documented process for arriving at those judgements that is validated and moderated. Judgements should be in accordance with the rules of evidence and should be able to be upheld through peer or independent review.

Rules of Evidence

Evidence used to demonstrate equivalence should be:
- Current – verifies that the candidate can currently perform to the industry benchmark, which are the competencies as stipulated in the Training Package
- Valid – the evidence directly relates to the competencies in the Training Package
- Sufficient – evidence is demonstrated on a number of occasions, over a period of time and in a range of contexts sufficient to be confident that the evidence is representative of ability, retention and transfer.
- Authentic – the evidence is the candidate's own work

What Kind of Evidence could I use to Demonstrate Equivalence of Competency?

The audit practice of the regulatory bodies is informed by the information and guidance provided by the NSSC. As stated earlier the NSSC suggest that:

"Equivalency is most commonly demonstrated by an individual through mapping his/her past training, experience and ongoing professional development against the unit of competency."

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[3] Australian Qualification Framework Second Edition January 2013.

This is but one way of demonstrating the process that has been used by the RTO. Equivalence might be included as a part of the recruitment process and the judgement represented in that paperwork.

While an RTO will consider equivalence on a unit by unit basis this does not necessarily mandate that the evidence would be represented in the RTOs records in that way. For example there may be clusters of units in a qualification that reflect a complete workplace task, and may therefore be represented together.

Consider the following qualification: Certificate III in Children's Services. This qualification has 11 core units and 4 electives. The 11 core units are listed below

- CHCCHILD401A   Identify and respond to children and young people at risk
- CHCCN301B Ensure the health and safety of children
- CHCCN302A Provide care for children
- CHCCN303A Contribute to provision of nutritionally balanced food in a safe and hygienic manner
- CHCCS400B Work within a relevant legal and ethical framework
- CHCFC301A Support the development of children
- CHCIC301E   Interact effectively with children
- CHCPR301B Provide experiences to support children's play and learning
- CHCPR303D Develop understanding of children's interests and developmental needs
- HLTFA301C   Apply first aid
- HLTOHS300B Contribute to OHS processes

There are natural clusters of these units as they relate directly to whole work tasks that would be experienced on a daily basis in all care situations. Consider the following 2 clusters:

Cluster 1 - focused on providing developmentally appropriate experiences

- CHCPR303D Develop understanding of children's interests and developmental needs
- CHCFC301A Support the development of children
- CHCPR301B Provide experiences to support children's play and learning
- CHCIC301E   Interact effectively with children

Cluster 2 - focused on providing day to day care.

- CHCCN301B Ensure the health and safety of children
- CHCCN302A Provide care for children
- CHCCN303A Contribute to provision of nutritionally balanced food in a safe and hygienic manner

While it may look like the 2 clusters could sit together as one, the first cluster of units have a very significant focus on knowledge of childhood development, development benchmarks and the types of activities that will promote, physical, cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing and development in a range of different children. The second cluster is far more practically focused and reflective of carrying out the day to day activities of a carer in a long day care centre, a family day care environment or home based care (nanny).

It would be possible to provide evidence of vocational equivalence against these clusters rather than against the individual units because analysis of the units has established that together they reflect whole work tasks, and have very similar requirements for knowledge and skill and the knowledge and skill is to be demonstrated in similar contexts.

What are the auditors looking for?

Irrespective of the approach chosen by the RTO the auditors are looking to assure that the RTO has established the following[4]:

1. The RTO has a process in place to establish equivalent competencies if required.
2. Where trainers and assessors demonstrate equivalent competency there must be a clear and verified relationship between the trainers' and assessors' formal and/or informal training and experience and each of the units/modules they are delivering/ assessing.
3. Competence is verified by the RTO – this could be achieved by having the verification carried out by a vocationally competent person within the RTO or by carrying out referee checks confirming relevant and current industry experience and vocational competencies.
4. You have evidence of the above activities having been completed.

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[4] Drawn from the *AQTF User's Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration.*

Standard 1.4c - Industry Currency

'Industry currency' is the maintenance of a trainer's vocational technical skills and knowledge, put simply; it is keeping current with current industry knowledge, skills and practice. Industry currency enables trainers to deliver and assess vocational training relevant to industry and is central to the concept of being a dual professional.

There are many benefits to maintaining industry currency for the RTO and industry. These include[5]:

- the delivery of training that is relevant, based on real world examples and more tailored to industry needs
- improved confidence and an up-to-date and best practice image of trainers for students, industry and peers
- improved reputation of the RTO amongst employers
- enhanced industry confidence and goodwill - through being 'seen' in industry
- improved industry ownership, valuing and understanding of training.

Given the importance and increasing focus on industry currency, there is very little formal guidance available to assist RTO in establishing an approach that will work for them. Some training packages provide advice about what currency means in that industry, for example, the CPC08 Construction, Plumbing and Services Training Package states on page 361 that,

> "assessors delivering qualifications from this CPC08 Construction, Plumbing and Services Training Package should have the following minimum competency, recognition and industry experience, that is, workplace experience within the last two years in the competency area being delivered."

This statement provides very clear guidelines about what is considered current, by that industry. Most training packages however are silent on the issue of currency, so currency decisions are to be made by the individual RTO.

How do you determine the currency period for your scope?

This seems like a simple question, but the vastly different nature of various industries means that it is in fact quite a complex question. There are a number of factors that influence currency periods, these include for example:

- Technological innovation;
- Changing legislation and regulatory requirements;
- Changes to industry practice;
- New and emerging skills and specialisations as work practices change; and
- Technical skill degradation through periods of non-use.

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[5] *Keeping it real, Industry Currency of Trainers in Queensland*, DET 2010 pg. 8.

This means that each RTO has to consider the factors that are relevant to them and ideally in consultation with Industry determine what an appropriate currency period is. There will not be one consistent currency period, it will depend on the factors that are relevant to what the individual trainer and assessor is required to deliver.

What kind of activities could contribute to maintaining industry currency?

Just as there is no one currency period, there is no one specific activity or group of activities that represent the best way to maintain industry currency. The reality is that there are a range of activities that may work for the individual assessor / RTO. The activities that the individual uses need to be chosen to suit the kind of knowledge and skill they have to maintain.

The publication *Keeping it Real* provides the following list as some examples of activities trainers and assessors use to maintain currency:

- industry placement;
- concurrent employment in industry and the RTO;
- industry and professional association membership;
- attending conferences, professional workshops and industry specific development programmes;
- attending professional development activities run by industry skills alliances;
- researching best and new practice and general research;
- subscribing to professional journals and publications;
- applying for sponsored corporate teaching awards and scholarships;
- networking with industry mentors, employers and other trainers;
- talking to students about practices and job roles in their workplaces;
- industry specialist visits, industry site visits and study tours ;
- undertaking specific training courses in new equipment or skill sets;
- work shadowing; and
- fulfilling industry licensing or regulatory requirements.

The challenge for RTOs is determining what combination of activities will work, and once again, depending upon your industry the approaches will need to differ. Consider the following examples:

Approach	Can be effective when -	Can be ineffective when -
Membership of professional associations	• The membership requires you to demonstrate that you have maintained or continued to develop your professional expertise • You are seeking to	• The membership does not require you to demonstrate that you have maintained or continued to develop your professional expertise • You do not participate

Approach	Can be effective when -	Can be ineffective when -
	update your knowledge in a field and the association has a range of activities, that you participate in, that enable that	in activities • The activities are not closely related to the units of competence that you deliver and assess against
Work Shadowing Work Shadowing (cont)	• the shadowing experience allows you to participate in the work activities • you have the opportunity to practice your skills • you have the opportunity to refresh your knowledge by interacting with current practitioners	• The nature of the work prevents you from participating in the work (Confidentiality and safety issues) • The nature of the work is not closely related to the units of competence you deliver and assess against
Fulfilling industry licensing requirements	• the licensing outcome requires you to demonstrate that you have maintained a specified level of knowledge and skill • the specified level of knowledge and skill closely relates to the units of competence you deliver and assess against	• there is no requirement to demonstrate that you have maintained a specified level of knowledge or skill • the specified knowledge or skill is not closely related to the units of competence you deliver and assess against.
Talking to students about practices and job roles in their workplace	• You are seeking to update your knowledge of current practice • The students workplace is reflective of current industry practice • The students workplace is reflective of new and emerging industry practice	• You are seeking to maintain your technical skills • The students workplace is not reflective of current industry practice

Do I need to take a Unit by Unit Approach?

As with demonstrating equivalence, consideration of currency needs to be undertaken at a unit level. The RTO will need to consider what range of strategies will ensure that the trainers and assessors are current across the range of units that they deliver and assess against.

Does there need to be a consistent approach within the RTO?

In terms of the activities that are undertaken by the trainers and assessors, no – this is counter intuitive to all that has been discussed above, but there are a some more general principles that research has shown promote the effectiveness of currency activities.

Operating Principles that Promote Success

The NCVER is currently undertaking a research project into Upskilling VET Practitioners; the final results are due to be published by mid-2013. Part One of that project reviewed the research that related to professional obsolescence, or what we in the VET sector refer to as Industry Currency. The research found that there were consistent operating principles[6] in place in organisations where updating or currency activities were successful; they were:

- The RTO should have a strategic approach to ensuring they maintain the currency of their staff;
- All staff should be involved in activities around currency, not just those that want to do it;
- The RTO should enable staff to participate in currency activities by having policies and practices that are clearly supportive of and endorse continuous professional development, as well as actively promoting up skilling activities;
- The RTO should encourage staff to collaborate and share their currency experiences;
- The RTO should provide individuals with work that stretches the individual, ie. project work and complex job assignments together with work that represents a distinct shift from the day-today routine; and
- The individual's current job is a primary motivator for development, therefore development activities need to be highly practical, relevant and designed to meet job-specific short-term objectives.

What are the auditors looking for?

Irrespective of the approach chosen by the RTO the auditors are looking to assure that the RTO has established the following:

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[6] Drawn from the 2010 paper *Upskilling VET practitioners: technical currency or professional obsolescence?*

1. You have established what currency means in your industry;
2. You have established what knowledge and skills have to be kept up to date;
3. You have a program of development activities that is best suited to your currency needs; and
4. You have evidence that you have participated in the planned development activities.

References

- NQC Special Bulletin July 2010 - New NQC policy for AQTF trainer and assessor competencies
- National Skills Standards Council Meeting Communiqué December 2011 - Training and Assessment Competencies to be held by Trainers and Assessors
- *AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Initial and Continuing Registration.* www.nssc.natese.gov.au
- *Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012*. Commonwealth of Australia
- NSSC Website – FAQ March 2013. www.nssc.natese.gov.au
- ASQA Website – FAQ March 2013. www.asqa.gov.au
- TAC Guidance for RTOs and Practitioners on the NQC Policy for AQTF Trainer and Assessor Competencies 2011
- The State of Queensland (Department of Education and Training) 2010*, Keeping it Real - Industry Currency of Trainers in Queensland.*
- Berwyn Clayton, Regan Harding, Melinda Toze, Mark Harris, *Upskilling VET practitioners: technical currency or professional obsolescence*. Part one of the NCVER project into Upskilling VET Practioners.