

Overview

Understanding vocational education and training

To work effectively in the vocational education and training (VET) system, you need to understand its essential components, particularly training packages, since they are the backbone of VET. You also need to understand how to use training packages in a training delivery and assessment role.

To supplement the information provided here, it is recommended that you consult *Training packages@work: back to basics* (www.tpatwork.com/back-2-basics.aspx) for comprehensive information about the VET system and its many components.

Vocational education and training

VET develops skills and knowledge for work through a national training system that seeks to provide consistent training across Australia. The primary purpose of VET is to equip people with the knowledge, skills and attributes they require to be ‘work ready’ and/or to operate effectively in employment. The Australian VET system comprises two fundamental elements that help ensure quality and consistency in training:

- Training packages
- The VET Quality Framework (VQF), which includes the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

The National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) is responsible for the endorsement and quality assurance of training packages. It is also responsible for developing and maintaining national standards for the regulation of VET and advising on the operation of the regulators.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is the national VET regulator responsible for registering training providers and accrediting courses. It does this mainly through the VQF. (NB: Victoria and Western Australia have not referred their powers of regulation to the ASQA and continue to be subject to their respective state regulators.)

Training packages

Training packages are the foundation of Australia's VET system. A training package is defined as 'a set of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications used to recognise and assess people's skills in a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise' (*Training packages@work* 2009). Copies of individual training packages can be viewed by accessing the Training.gov.au website at: www.training.gov.au.

Training packages also provide the structure for competency-based training (CBT). A competency-based approach relies on outcomes that are judged against specific standards established in the endorsed components of a training package. Endorsed components are the various units of competency, the qualifications within which they sit and assessment guidelines that describe industry's desired approach to assessment and qualifications in a training package.

A unit of competency represents a discrete workplace outcome. It specifies the knowledge, the skills and the standard of performance expected in the workplace. In other words, it is a set of skills and knowledge that form part of a person's job role.

Units of competency are packaged as groups into qualifications and qualification levels in each training package. Each qualification has a descriptor that provides guidelines for performance at a particular level, including:

- information-processing capabilities
- problem-solving capabilities
- responsibility for a person's own work
- responsibility for the work of others
- the breadth and depth of skill and knowledge
- the operational environment in which the work is performed.

Non-endorsed components of a training package include resources used to support learning and assessment; for example, assessment materials and training support materials.

Registered training organisations

Training packages do not prescribe how training is to be delivered. They provide guidance on assessment and the methods of assessment that may be appropriate for each unit of competency. Registered training organisations (RTOs) are responsible for how training and assessment occur.

An RTO can also issue qualifications derived from training packages or accredited courses, or statements of attainment to recognise the completion of a unit of competency from a qualification or accredited course.

Industry skills councils

Training packages are developed and maintained by the relevant industry skills councils in consultation with industry stakeholders. There are 11 industry skills councils that are responsible for leading the development of industry-responsive training packages.

The VET Quality Framework

The VQF is a set of standards and conditions used by the ASQA to assess whether an RTO meets the requirements for registration. The *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* (Cth) established the National VET Regulator (NVR) and underpins the VQF.

The VQF comprises:

- the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations
- the Fit and Proper Persons Requirements
- the Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements
- the Data Provision Requirements
- the AQF.

Training leading to the award of an accredited qualification must be delivered and assessed by an RTO that satisfies the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations. The Standards include the Essential Standards for Initial Registration and the Essential Standards for Continuing Registration.

There are 11 standards to which RTOs must be able to demonstrate compliance by:

- providing quality training and assessment across all operations
- adhering to principles of access and equity and maximising outcomes for clients
- responding to the needs of clients, staff and stakeholders, and to the environment in which each RTO operates.

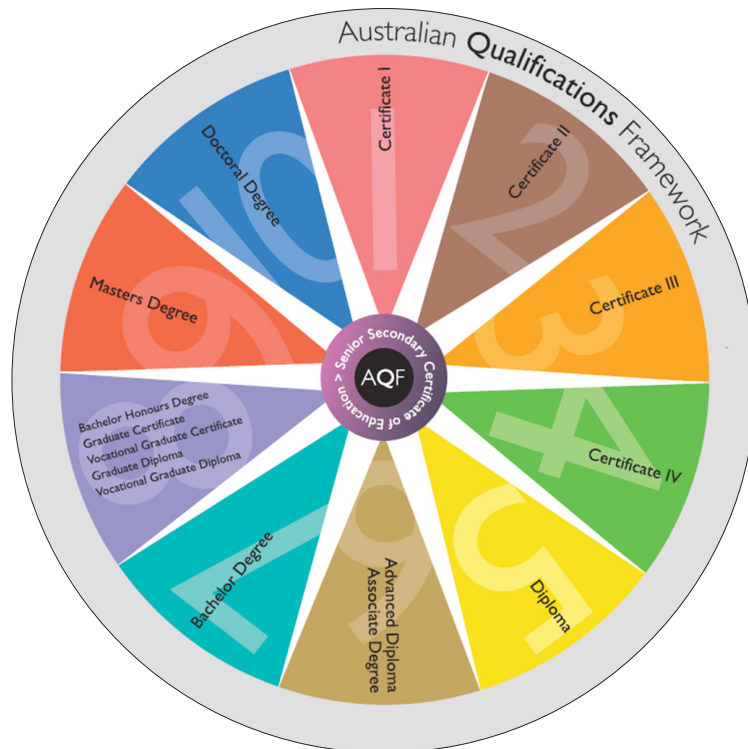
You should familiarise yourself with the VQF and the compliance requirements it places on RTOs; this compliance directly affects the work you do as a trainer and an assessor.

Registered training organisations in Victoria and Western Australia

Any RTO operating solely in Victoria and/or Western Australia will be regulated by those states' regulators (not the ASQA), and must comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Essential Conditions and Standards for Registration. The Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations derive from the AQTF standards.

The Australian Qualifications Framework

A component of the VQF, the AQF is a policy framework that defines the standards for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It specifies the learning outcomes for 16 nationally recognised qualifications. The following diagram represents the 10 levels of the AQF.



Used by permission of the AQF council, from *AQF First Edition July 2011*, p. 19.

An RTO must issue qualifications and statements of attainment that align to the AQF and meet the requirements of the AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy and the endorsed training packages within that RTO's scope of registration.

Training and assessment

The primary role of RTOs in the VET system is to deliver accredited training and assessment-based units of competency and qualifications. You may be employed by an RTO to facilitate classroom or blended learning, to deliver workplace-based training and assessment on-site to enterprise staff, or to coordinate and support enterprise trainers, coaches and mentors in their roles.

Alternatively, you may be an enterprise trainer whose role is to facilitate learning and carry out assessment in the workplace, perhaps based on national units of competency or internal enterprise standards. The work you do may or may not lead to a recognised qualification.

When working with training packages and before providing training or assessment services, there are two aspects of competency and units of competency that you need to understand:

- How to identify and 'unpack' the key features of a unit of competency
- The dimensions of competency and their role in ensuring that competency incorporates all aspects of work performance

Exploring a unit of competency

You should unpack a unit of competency and consider each part of the unit to form a picture of what a competent person looks like, how assessment should occur and what evidence is required.

The following table summarises the components of a unit of competency.

Component feature	What it relates to
Descriptor	The descriptor details the distinguishing features and characteristics of learning outcomes that people should be able to achieve on completion of the training or assessment.
Application of the competency	The application of the competency fleshes out the scope, purpose and operation of the unit of competency in different contexts; for example, its application in the workplace and/or its relationship to licensing outcomes.
Elements of competency	Elements describe the skills required to perform a work activity; they define the outcomes to be assessed.
Performance criteria	Performance criteria define the level of skill necessary to achieve the requirements of each element.
Evidence guide	The evidence guide provides essential advice for assessment of the unit and must be read in conjunction with the performance criteria, the range statement and the training package assessment guidelines.
Required skills and knowledge	Competency requires the application of skills and knowledge in the workplace. Required knowledge identifies what a person needs to know to perform the work in an informed way. Required skills describe how this knowledge is applied.
Range statement	The range statement allows for different work environments and contexts that affect performance. An individual unit of competency may be relevant to a wide range of workplace contexts.

Exploring dimensions of competency

Reviewing the dimensions of competency is an important part of unpacking a unit of competency. The dimensions of competency relate to all aspects of work performance in both routine and non-routine work situations. A competent person can successfully apply their skills and knowledge to work activities in a range of contexts.

The following table explores the four dimensions of competency in more detail.

Dimensions of competency	Meaning
Task skills	The candidate must perform the individual skills required to complete a work activity to the required standard.
Task management skills	The candidate must manage a number of different tasks to complete a whole work activity, such as working to meet deadlines.
Contingency management skills	The candidate must use problem-solving skills to resolve issues that arise when performing a work activity.
Job/role environment skills	The candidate must perform effectively in the workplace when undertaking a work activity by working well with all stakeholders and following workplace policies and procedures.

Incorporating employability skills

Employability skills are the non-technical skills that contribute to a person's effective workplace participation.

Employability skills are embedded in each qualification and unit of competency. Integrate assessment of employability skills with the assessment of technical skills within a qualification or unit of competency. You should understand the range of employability skills and how you can assist learners to gather evidence that they use these skills.

Assessment methods

Assessment is a focus of training packages and a key part of RTO responsibilities, since it involves forming and recording a judgment about a person's skills and knowledge, no matter how they are acquired.

The competency-based assessment system relies on an assessor making a judgment about a person's competence against performance benchmarks in a unit of competency, using methods such as criterion-referenced assessment, standards-based assessment or evidence-based assessment. An assessment candidate should be judged as either 'competent' or 'not yet competent' according to whether they demonstrate that they can meet the specified standards.

The recognition process

The recognition process allows candidates/learners to provide evidence that their previous training, work or life experience aligns to the required skills and knowledge described in a qualification or unit of competency.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is one form of this process. Recognition can also include recognition of current competency, trade recognition and credit transfer.

Evidence of competency may include work samples, journals, certificates of achievement and third-party testimonials. In addition, candidates/learners may be asked questions, observed undertaking set tasks or asked to demonstrate the authenticity of their work.

RTO staff must be able to provide clear, accurate information on assessment and recognition processes to candidates/learners. Your obligations could therefore include:

- advising and assisting a candidate/learner to apply for recognition
- determining the type of recognition for which the candidate/learner should apply
- assisting the candidate/learner to complete relevant documents
- processing recognition applications in a timely manner.

Candidates may apply for recognition before the learning program commences. In other cases it may become apparent as a learner progresses through training delivery that they have the knowledge, skills and competence to satisfy the critical aspects for assessment for a unit of competency (or part thereof) or a cluster of units.

There is a great deal more to the VET system and the delivery of training and assessment. Each learner guide for the units offered in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment provides suggested resources and points of inquiry that you can use to develop your knowledge and navigate through the VET maze.