

How to Prepare for an AQTF Audit

An integral part of the progression to become a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and maintain registration is participation in audits.

The following information has been compiled to assist you and your organisation to prepare for an AQTF audit.

Why is your organisation being audited?

AQTF audits are conducted when training organisations first apply for registration, within the first 12 months of registration for new RTOs and subsequently on an assessment basis during the five-year registration period.

The extent to which each RTO is monitored and audited by the registering body throughout its registration period is based on an assessment of risk to the quality of training and assessment outcomes and the national VET system. The registering body uses information about the RTO's performance and its operating context to undertake a risk assessment. The process is described in the *National Risk Management Guideline* (refer to www.training.com.au/aqtf2007).

Who will conduct the audit?

An audit may be conducted by a single lead auditor or by an audit team consisting of a lead auditor, one or more auditors and/or a technical adviser. The audit team is allocated by the registering body; in WA this is the Training Accreditation Council. On occasion, observers attend the audits to ensure that correct audit processes are being followed. Observers do not usually have an active role in the audit.

Auditors are selected on the basis that they meet a range of essential components which are generic to quality management systems and specific to the VET context. Minimum audit team competencies have been nationally set and these competencies include personal attributes, generic skills, audit qualifications, VET knowledge and qualifications, and work experience. The minimum audit team competencies are detailed in the *Audit Handbook* (refer to www.training.com.au/aqtf2007).

What will be the focus of the audit?

The focus of an audit is on the outcomes achieved by the RTO. Auditors will evaluate what the RTO has achieved against the *Essential Standards for Registration* and quality indicators based on evidence provided by the RTO. Evidence takes many forms and auditors will consider a range of evidence to determine if an RTO has met its required outcomes. The *Users' Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration* is a useful tool for RTOs to determine how best to inform the auditor about their operations, outcomes achieved, analysis and how these are driving continuous improvement in the RTO.

Given the less prescriptive nature of the current standards there is no one template or a "must do" checklist for RTOs to follow. RTOs are responsible for providing evidence and for the form that the evidence takes in an audit. Evidence will vary depending on the size and scope of operations and the context in which the RTO operates.

Where possible other audits may be integrated with AQTF audits to minimise disruption to your organisation. An example is where an RTO has been contracted to deliver training by the Department of Education and Training (DET) and an audit is required to confirm compliance with DET's *Delivery and Performance Agreement*.

You will be advised of the scope of the audit by your registering body prior to audit. As the audit unfolds the auditor may identify other areas that also require further inquiry.

What will happen during a site audit?

The audit will commence with an opening meeting that the auditor will conduct with senior staff of your organisation to outline the process.

During the audit, the auditor will talk with relevant staff, learners and end user clients such as employers, and review evidence to determine the extent to which your organisation is achieving quality training and assessment outcomes in line with the *Essential Standards for Registration* and the operating context of your RTO. The audit will identify opportunities the RTO has identified to improve on these outcomes.

For an initial registration, the auditor will only look for evidence that required systems are in place. Deployment will be confirmed at the post initial audit.

The auditor will report their audit findings and will take notes in some form during the audit to assist them with providing you with an accurate audit report. The audit report is based on a nationally consistent format utilised by all jurisdictions; the report template is available for information in the *Audit Handbook Guideline* (refer to www.training.com.au).

The audit will conclude with a closing meeting which provides the auditor with an opportunity to confirm the basis of their findings and the RTO with an opportunity to comment on the audit conclusions.

How can your RTO prepare for the audit?

- Be informed – review the intent and requirements of the audit as advised by your registering body. There are a number of resources available from your registering body and from the national website – www.training.com.au/aqtf2007.
- Consider evidence requirements - the auditor's role is to verify evidence that your organisation is achieving quality training and assessment outcomes and is using a continuous improvement approach to ensure the ongoing achievement of these outcomes.
- Conduct a self-assessment prior to audit – there is no magic checklist or template; use an approach that suits the context of your RTO. Refer to Section 6 of the *Audit Handbook* for possible approaches to audit which could inform the conduct of a self-assessment.

Whatever form your self-assessment takes, at the very least it will be important for you to determine if and how your organisation is achieving the following:

- delivering training to industry standards
 - meeting the learning needs of your clients
 - continuously improving the outcomes of these
 - Meeting the requirements of the national VET system
- Work with the auditor to help them understand your organisation. It is a good idea to provide the auditor with a snapshot such as your scope of delivery, number of students, modes of instruction, staffing, facilities, client groups, special features, etc.
 - Identify key contacts - staff, learners, clients
 - Decide which staff will be best placed to provide supporting evidence, and ensure they will be available.
 - Participation in an audit can be stressful. Work with your staff to help them feel more at ease with the audit process and let them know what is expected during the process.
 - It is most likely that the auditor will track the progress of learners and as a result will identify learners and where relevant clients such as employees to interview to determine the extent to which the RTO is achieving its outcomes.
 - Consider logistics for the audit – any special access requirements, etc
 - Allocate a staff member to be the auditor guide during the visit. The guide assists the process by maintaining the auditor, ensuring staff are available at planned times, assisting with auditor requirements and acting as the liaison between the auditor and the organisation's staff.
 - Allocate a workspace for the auditor to work at for evidence analysis and interviews and advise the auditor of any special access arrangements, such as safety clothing, security or parking arrangements.
 - Give consideration to the duration of the site audit — this will be dependent on the size and scope of the audit.
 - Many organisations use a consultant to assist them prepare for an AQTF audit. During an audit, it is necessary for the interaction to be between the auditor and your organisation, and not between the auditor and the consultant. A consultant may attend an audit to provide support to you but, can not provide responses to the auditor on your behalf, or enter into discussions regarding the conduct, progress or findings of the audit.

What will happen following the audit?

The auditor will prepare an audit report based on the findings of the site audit. Where non compliance has been identified, the report is sent directly to your RTO by the auditor, and a copy is sent to the registering body. Where non compliance has been identified you will be given opportunity to rectify this. This may include the opportunity to present extra evidence or to provide further information which will enable a better understanding of your RTO's position with respect to the reported non compliance.

For more detailed information about what happens after the site visit, including what to expect, the possible outcomes, and your responsibilities, access the brochure "What Happens Following an AQTF Site Audit?" from our website.

Your Case Manger will ensure that, following the audit, you are informed about any post audit requirements.

You will be provided with more information by your Case Manager following the audit to ensure that you are well informed about the post audit process.

Following a site audit, your organisation will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the audit process and the conduct of the audit. We will use this feedback to monitor and review the process, and where appropriate make improvements.

Is further assistance available?

Further details are available by contacting the VET Regulation Branch (formerly Office of TAC), Department of Education Services either by phone on (08) 9441 1910; or by email: tac@des.wa.gov.au.