

Assuring the Quality of RTO Processes, Practices and Products

This Fact Sheet has been prepared to support RTOs maintain the quality of their services and demonstrate compliance with the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015*, particularly the requirements of Standard 2. This fact sheet does not provide specific instruction on quality assurance processes but is designed to draw attention to the obligations of the RTO with regard to quality assurance.

The primary focus of Standard 2 in the *Standards for RTOs* is monitoring and improving the quality of RTO services.

The requirement in Standard 2 goes well beyond the quality of training and assessment to include all aspects of the RTO. The glossary defines 'operations' as "including training, assessment and administration and support services relating to its registration, including those delivered across jurisdictions and offshore" (p11). The context statement for Standard 2 states that "The RTO is ultimately responsible for ensuring quality training and assessment within their organisation and scope of registration, regardless of any third-party arrangements where training and/or assessment is delivered on their behalf," and concludes by observing that "evaluating information about performance and using such information to inform quality assurance of services and improve training and assessment is sound business and educational practice. The information used to evaluate RTO performance must be relevant to the operating characteristics and business objectives of the RTO and will vary from one RTO to another." (p21)

There is no uniform strategy for quality assurance, and RTOs are expected to develop their own processes to reflect their clients, industry, operational modes and objectives.

Clause 2.1 indicates that the RTO must "comply with these Standards at all times", and again reminds us that this also applies "where services are delivered on its behalf." (p22)

Clause 2.2 provides some detail on process, indicating that the RTO:

- "systematically monitors the RTO's training and assessment strategies and practices to ensure on-going compliance with Standard 1"; and
- "systematically evaluates and uses the outcomes of the evaluations to continually improve the RTO's training and assessment strategies and practices. Evaluation information includes but is not limited to quality/performance data, validation outcomes, client, trainer and assessor feedback and complaints and appeals."

Clause 2.3 requires written agreements with third-party providers, leading to Clause 2.4 which requires the RTO to ensure that it “has sufficient strategies and resources to systematically monitor any services delivered on its behalf ...”

We can see from these references, that there are two parts to quality assurance:

- 1 Compliance with the Standards by the RTO and third-party providers across all the RTO’s operations; and
- 2 The continuous improvement of training and assessment strategies and practices.

The first of these parts is driven by the formal structure of the Standards, whereas the second is less well defined and there is no clear guidance on what would constitute ‘improvement’.

Compliance with the *Standards for RTOs*

The *Standards for RTOs* is a part of the national VET quality framework. This framework supports the overall quality of the national VET system. Within that framework, the Standards define sound business and educational practice and are a primary indicator of RTO quality.

Compliance with the Standards is a continuing responsibility of each RTO across all its operations, including services delivered on its behalf by third-parties. Issues of compliance might be revealed at audit, but it is required that an RTO declares continuing compliance on an annual basis (Clause 8.4a). This inevitably means that each RTO needs to conduct an internal audit of all its operations each year, and to assist with that obligation TAC has provided a [Self-Assessment Template](#) on its website. TAC also provides a [Users’ Guide to the Standards](#) and a number of [Fact Sheets](#).

As the provision of training and assessment services through third-party providers are a part of the RTO’s operations these also need to be routinely audited by the RTO (Clause 2.4) and may be audited by TAC (Clause 8.2). These understandings and processes including audit criteria need to be clearly specified as a part of the written agreement between the parties (Clause 2.3). These agreements should also include strategies to monitor the training and assessment services delivered by third-party providers to support continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement of training and assessment strategies and practices



Performance evidence

The core business of an RTO is the training, assessment and certification of units of competency and qualifications. The key stakeholders in the outcomes are industry, employers, and learners ... so our quality monitoring and improvements will draw heavily upon their impressions.

Industry engagement (Clauses 1.5 and 1.6) is an important way of identifying industry needs and gauging industry responses. This is addressed further in the [Vocational Competence and Industry Currency Fact Sheet](#), but it needs to be observed that this is a two-way process, with RTOs observing and learning from industry practices and standards, and industry observing and commenting upon RTO standards and practices.

Employer satisfaction can be ascertained through the [Employer Questionnaire](#). This can be administered to employers of learners including apprentices or trainees and to employers of graduates of the RTO. This comprehensive 30 question survey can provide important feedback on the relevance and application of the training in the workplace. Other evidence of quality can be gleaned directly from workplace site visits, the employment destinations of graduates, and the nomination of the RTO to provide training for apprentices and/or trainees.

Learner satisfaction must routinely be measured through the administration of the [Learner Engagement Questionnaire](#). This survey of 35 questions can provide very detailed information about the experience of undertaking particular courses at the RTO. Other evidence can be gathered informally by lecturers through feedback surveys and student

forums, and formally through issues raised in complaints and appeals (Clause 6.5b). Evidence of learner satisfaction should also be gathered where services are provided on the RTO's behalf by third-parties.

Those working within the RTO can also provide data on quality, including trainer feedback and assessor feedback, and feedback from those managing student services and administration. Competency and course completion are also indicators of the RTO's quality outcomes.

These quality indicators from industry, employers, learners and in-house need to be aggregated and recorded for action.



Interpreting performance evidence

In many ways, quality is elusive and intangible. Different observers will have different criteria and different benchmarks for quality. The indicators of quality will differ from RTO to RTO depending upon objectives and approach. What is important is that the RTO is self-reflective and strives to improve its processes and practices to achieve its goals.

Care must be taken to ensure that commentators on the RTO are fully informed about the operating characteristics and business objectives of the RTO. For example, an RTO delivering training to 'at risk' learners might follow a very different trajectory to another RTO; a critic of an RTO might not understand the AQF level of a qualification and be disappointed with the work of a Certificate 1 graduate, another RTO offering training to a pre-selected experienced cohort may have an apparently insufficient training program. For these reasons, in seeking feedback it

is important to make sure that the respondent is fully informed of the RTO's intent, and in responding to feedback it is important to consider how well informed is the critic.



Remedies

Feedback and analysis is pointless without follow-up action. Where the evidence indicates that the RTO is on track, this should be related back to those responsible for that achievement and where the evidence indicates that there are areas for improvement, these need to be acted upon.

Many RTOs maintain a record of required improvements, action to be taken, persons responsible, deadlines and outcomes to manage their quality improvement process. Where actions have been completed, follow-up monitoring is advisable to assess the effectiveness of the action in remediating the issue. This follow-up monitoring would generally involve returning to the original source(s) of the concern(s) to reappraise the situation after changes had been implemented.

In some circumstances, the issue may be remedied by refining the RTO's objectives

and expectations to ensure that they are clear, appropriate and reasonable. There may also be a need to revise and strengthen third-party arrangements.

Finally, there may be a call for individual or group professional development as a part of the remedy (Clause 1.16).



Compliance

Auditors look for documented evidence of a systematic process to monitor and improve quality across all the RTO's operations, including any third-party arrangements. This might involve evidence of:

- a statement of quality criteria for the RTO;
- formal and informal strategies to gather evidence of quality;
- strategies to collate and analyse quality evidence;
- strategies to act on quality issues, and to manage quality improvement; and
- strategies to monitor the impact of changes.

Auditors may also look for evidence that the [Annual Declaration](#) on compliance (Clause 8.4) has been submitted, and request to see the basis of the declaration, such as an internal audit.