

Distance and Online Training and Assessment

RTOs conduct training and assessment through distance and online delivery methods for a variety of reasons such as meeting learner demand in rural and remote areas, community or Government needs, or more recently to meet physical distancing measures introduced to minimise COVID-19 infection.

The Council is supportive of the use of distance and online training and assessment as long as the RTO continues to demonstrate compliance with the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015* (the Standards), the relevant training package and any industry and regulatory requirements, where applicable.

It is important for RTOs to ensure they deliver quality training and assessment to industry standards, irrespective of the mode of delivery.

This Fact Sheet provides guidance to RTOs to support compliance with the Standards and industry requirements when considering distance and online training and assessment, face-to-face delivery to small groups or a blend of these modes.

Distance and Online training and assessment

In contrast to traditional classroom delivery, in distance and online training and assessment, the learner and the instructor are separated by time and distance. The use of technology, such as email, discussion boards, audio and video conferencing replaces the physical presence in the classroom. Distance and online training and assessment can occur between trainer/assessor and a learner or a group of learners, or in a combination.

Blended Learning

When there is a blend of distance and online training and assessment and a physical presence in a classroom, this is known as blended learning.

RTO Preparedness for Distance, Online or Blended Delivery

Transitioning from a classroom-based training format to distance and online training and assessment presents its own unique challenges for RTOs. Often the training and assessment arrangements and materials need to be reviewed and revamped to suit the new medium.

At the same time, the training must continue to support learners, allow engagement and enable development of skills and knowledge to industry standard. Importantly, distance and online delivery must also provide opportunity for learners to demonstrate competency in accordance with all specified training package requirements.

A major consideration for RTOs when introducing distance and online training and assessment is whether the change is a temporary measure in response to a particular issue such as COVID-19 restrictions, or a transition to a longer-term delivery strategy. Simpler approaches such as establishing a virtual classroom using video conferencing may be all that is required for a stop-gap measure. A longer-term strategy will need to factor in other considerations, such as the size and nature of the market and costs involved in making the transition.

Availability of resources, equipment and skills to manage distance and online delivery

- Does the RTO have the computers and other equipment to support distance and online training and assessment?
- Is there reliable internet access to enable training and engagement with learners?
- Do trainers and assessors have the skills to adapt existing training material to audio or video content?
- Do trainers and assessors have the skills to use the software applications and technology needed to run virtual classes or host video discussions or conferences?

Can training be readily adapted for distance and online delivery?

- Review each of the knowledge and skills components carefully. Some content may be easily delivered by distance or online in text format; other content may be more appropriately delivered via audio or video.
- Consider how technologies such as video recording and other communication software would support training and assessment.
- Pay particular attention to assessment conditions described in the assessment requirements for each unit of competency. How will specified requirements and conditions be managed and complied with in an online training context?
- Consider sequencing training and assessment to bring forward theoretical components across single or multiple units for continued learning until practical components can be undertaken.
- Where training includes mandatory work placements, it may be necessary to defer them until such time that they can occur.

Where the training package or accredited course allows, consider the use of simulated workplace environments and how activities conducted in simulation could be recorded as assessment evidence.

Not all training is suited for delivery via distance or online learning. This could be due to the nature of the content, assessment or work placement requirements, or limitations to demonstrating competency.

Marketing Distance and Online Delivery

Information for prospective learners

- Be aware that not all learners have the same level of access to technology or the digital literacy required to engage in online learning.
- Prospective learners must be given timely, accurate and sufficient technical information to enable them to determine whether they have the computer technology and software to undertake the training. Some learners may need additional support to fully understand the technical requirements for the training.
- Distance, online or blended delivery could see a shift in the teaching–learning dynamic and learners may need to take on greater responsibility for managing their own learning. Pre-enrolment information should clearly spell out all training and assessment arrangements, including learners' obligations, deadlines for completion of assignments and assessments, and expected investment of time in self-directed learning.

Information for current learners

- Learners who have already commenced their regular face-to-face training will need to be advised of the modifications to their training. What are the implications for them?
- Do current learners have the skills and technology to make the transition?
- Will there be changes to training completion dates?
- Are there additional financial impost on learners? E.g., mail services, access to technology or additional internet bandwidth?
- What options could be available to learners who experience difficulty transitioning to distance, online or blended learning?

Responding to Learners' Needs

Be attentive to the needs of the individual learners who will be accessing distance and online delivery. Not all learners have the same level of access to technology or the digital literacy skills required to engage in online learning.

Key considerations:

- The way you usually assess the support needs of your learners may need to be adapted to suit the distance, online or blended environment.
- Digital literacy is critical to learners' ability to participate effectively in online training. Consider how you will assess your learners' digital literacy skills and what support they may need to participate effectively and successfully in the training.

- Some learners may not have the level of self-directed learning and study skills required, including time management, and may need additional support to manage their distance or online learning.
- Consider the IT support needed to support learners so technical issues that invariably arise in online environments can be quickly resolved.

For additional guidance on identifying and responding to learner needs, please refer to the [TAC Identifying and Meeting Learner Needs Fact Sheet](#).

Distance, Online or Blended Training and Assessment

Training and assessment strategies must clearly show how each component of the course will be delivered and assessed via distance, online or blended delivery. All knowledge, skills, assessment requirements and assessment conditions must be appropriately addressed.

Key considerations include:

- Revisit and revise current training and assessment strategy documents to reflect the new training and assessment arrangements.
- Review and recalculate the amount of training for the program to ensure it is consistent with the requirements of the training product and enables learners to meet the requirements of the training product they are enrolled in.
- Ensure revised assessment strategies comply with the **Principles of Assessment** (fairness, flexibility, validity and reliability) and **Rules of Evidence** (validity, sufficiency, authenticity and currency).
- Prior arrangements may need to be made to record activities conducted via audio or video technology, as it may be too late to do so after the event.
- Consider other contractual obligations and whether other parties (e.g. funding bodies) need to be advised of the modifications to training and assessment and changes to training completion dates.

Also consider strategies you could use to collect evidence of knowledge and of skills remotely, together with strategies to verify and authenticate evidence. In developing these, consider:

- Context for assessment – use of a local workplace, or a simulation at home, a local school or TAFE campus
- Observer – could be a local official, e.g. a teacher, police officer, pastor, post office manager
- Checklists/assessment instructions – could be contextualised for the observer and the context

- Verification of evidence – could be through the use of video recordings or live video links to confirm face-to-face the evidence presented is the learner's own work
- Verification of identity – could be through a driver's licence with photo to confirm the learner who is participating in the remote training/assessment is the same person who will be issued with the credential on completion.

Additional guidance on training and assessment:

- [TAC Fact Sheet on Assessment](#)
- [DTWD publication – Assessment in the VET sector](#)
- [TEQSA online delivery resources](#)

Maintaining Records for Distance, Online or Blended Delivery

Records management requirements in the Standards remain relevant and applicable to all VET training and assessment services, irrespective of the modes of delivery adopted.

At any subsequent audits, the Council would want to see evidence that:

- modifications to an RTO's training and assessment arrangements, including the rationale for the changes, are clearly documented; and
- Prospective learners and current students have been provided with accurate and sufficient information to explain the changes and to confirm they are able to participate fully in the modified training and assessment.

Additional guidance on records management is available via the [TAC Fact Sheet on Records Management](#).

Staying Up to Date – Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 varies for different industry sectors, and likewise the impact on training delivery will take many forms for different RTOs. Circumstances may change rapidly and some industry sectors are circulating information on alternative training arrangements and exemptions in response to COVID-19.

It is important for RTOs to stay connected to their networks and information sources to ensure access to up to date and accurate information.

Advice from bona fide sources, including WA and Australian Governments, the Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC), industry skills committees, industry reference groups and industry regulators will be circulated through TAC Special Bulletins as they are issued. Industry advice and TAC Special Bulletins issued to date are available on the [TAC website](#).

FACT SHEET

Websites for relevant government departments and industry stakeholders:

- [The Australian Industry Skills Committee](#)
- Updates to training package requirements in response to issues associated with COVID-19 can also be found on the [AISC website](#)
- [Service Skills Organisations](#) that work with Industry Reference Groups for the development and review of training products
- [Industry Reference Committees](#)
- [The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety](#)
- [Safe Work Australia](#)

The Council recommends RTOs investigating alternative arrangements for their students as a result of COVID-19 contact the TAC Secretariat on (08) 9224 6510 or via email tac@dtwd.wa.gov.au to discuss proposed arrangements. The Secretariat will work with RTOs on a case by case basis.