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## Vocational Competence and Industry Currency

The VET sector has long required its practitioners to be dual professionals, as trainers and assessors as well as industry specialists. This requirement is supported through the [Standards for Registered Training Organisations \(RTOs\) 2015](#) and through national training package requirements and ensures that the 'right person' provides quality training and assessment to the learner.

### Background

Currently the competencies that must be held by trainers and assessors are specified in Clauses 1.13, 1.14, 1.15 and Schedule 1 of the Standards for RTOs. Further information is available in the Fact Sheet: [Trainer and Assessor Regulatory Requirements](#).

These clauses state that training and assessment is delivered by trainers and assessors who have:

- a) vocational competencies **at least to the level** being delivered and assessed;
- b) current **industry skills directly relevant** to the training and assessment being provided; and
- c) **current knowledge and skills** in vocational **training and learning** that informs their training and assessment.

In some cases, special arrangements may be in place where a trainer and assessor may not have all of the above criteria, such as in the case of industry experts (Clause 1.13) or when an individual who is not a trainer and assessor is engaged for training purposes (Clause 1.17). In these instances, these individuals will be expected to work alongside or be under the supervision of a trainer and assessor who does meet all the requirements of the Standards. Further information on supervision arrangements is available in the Fact Sheet: [Trainer and Assessor Regulatory Requirements](#).

The majority of questions and instances of non-compliance regarding trainer and assessor requirements relate to vocational competency and industry currency and in particular, how to demonstrate vocational equivalence.

Therefore, this Fact Sheet provides guidance on what these terms mean, the range of approaches that could be used within RTOs and how an RTO can demonstrate compliance against these clauses.

## Clause 1.13a – What is vocational competence?

*“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.” (Naidu, R, Stanwick, J & Frazer, K 2017, Glossary of VET, NCVET, Adelaide.)*

In most situations trainers and assessors will hold the qualifications and/or units of competency that they deliver or assess, but where this is not the case, equivalence needs to be demonstrated. When you say someone holds equivalent vocational competencies you are assuring that they have all the knowledge, skill and depth of experience as if they held the actual unit of competency.

Evidence used to demonstrate equivalence of vocational competency may include relevant past training (including superseded and pre-existing industry qualifications), experience and professional development. Equivalence is most commonly demonstrated by an individual through mapping this evidence against the specific requirements of the unit of competency, which is then verified by the RTO. This process may or may not identify gaps that need to be addressed.

The determination of equivalence is the responsibility of the employing RTO and is subject to audit. Equivalence only holds value within the organisation that has granted it, it is not transferable if a trainer / assessor then works with a different RTO.

## Why do I need to take a unit-by-unit approach?

Many practitioners question why equivalence needs to be demonstrated at unit level rather than 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 is an example of a highly flexible qualification:

### CASE STUDY:

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## BSB50420 DIPLOMA OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Diploma of Leadership and Management has 12 units of which 6 are elective units.

- 4 elective units must be selected from the elective units list
- for the remaining 2 elective units:
  - up to 2 units may be selected from the elective units list

- if not listed, up to 2 units may be selected from a Certificate IV or above, from this or any other currently endorsed Training Package qualification or accredited course. There are thousands of units available in other Training Packages.
- Elective units must be relevant to the work environment and the qualification, maintain the integrity of the AQF alignment and contribute to a valid, industry supported vocational outcome.

This level of flexibility means that there are thousands of possible combinations of units that could be chosen for a Diploma of Leadership and Management qualification.

This example clearly illustrates that to ensure the RTO has appropriately qualified training and assessment staff, vocational competence and equivalence must be determined at unit level.

### Is the demonstration of equivalence the same as recognition of prior learning (RPL)?

Demonstration of equivalence is not the same as RPL.

### RPL

RPL is a formal assessment process where all unit requirements are addressed, and the judgement is made using evidence that meets all the rules of evidence. Through this process any person who can demonstrate the requirements of a unit of competency to the level of rigour required by the Standards for RTOs can be awarded that unit of competency (unit) without undertaking a training program.

Further information on RPL is available in the Fact Sheet: [Recognition of Prior Learning](#).

### Equivalence

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 an appropriate person (see below for more information).

### Deeming equivalence

It is expected that RTOs making judgements about vocational equivalence will have a documented process for arriving at those judgements. Judgements should be made 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: the evidence verifies that the trainer / assessor can currently perform to the industry benchmark, which are the competencies stipulated in the Training Package.

Valid: the evidence directly relates to the specific requirements of competencies in the Training Package.

Sufficient: the evidence is collected from 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 about the trainer / assessor and not someone else.

**Who is an appropriate person to deem equivalence?**

While it is not a requirement that the person who makes a decision about equivalence is a qualified trainer and assessor, you do want the person or people making the decision to have:

1. a thorough understanding of how a unit of competency is structured and the role of the assessment requirements; and
2. content knowledge and skill in the unit of competency and an understanding of how it is applied in the workplace. This will enable the person to appraise the relevance of workplace experience.

**What kind of evidence could I use to demonstrate equivalence of competency?**

As stated earlier, evidence used to demonstrate equivalence of vocational competency may include relevant past training, including superseded and pre-existing industry qualifications, experience, and professional development. Equivalency is commonly demonstrated by an individual through mapping past training, experience and ongoing professional development against the specific detailed requirements in the unit of competency. This process may or may not identify gaps that require to be addressed.

This is not the only 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 the evidence obtained from 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 RTO's 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.

## CASE STUDY:

**CHC30121- CERTIFICATE III IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

This qualification has 15 core units and two electives. The 15 core units are listed below:

CHCECE030	Support inclusion and diversity
CHCECE031	Support children's health, safety and wellbeing
CHCECE032	Nurture babies and toddlers
CHCECE033	Develop positive and respectful relationships with children
CHCECE034	Use an approved learning framework to guide practice
CHCECE035	Support the holistic learning and development of children
CHCECE036	Provide experiences to support children's play and learning
CHCECE037	Support children to connect with the natural environment
CHCECE038	Observe children to inform practice
CHCECE054	Encourage understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures
CHCECE055	Meet legal and ethical obligations in children's education and care
CHCECE056	Work effectively in children's education and care
CHCPRT001	Identify and respond to children and young people at risk
HLTAID012	Provide First Aid in an education and care setting
HLTWHS001	Participate in workplace health and safety

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. For example, the units could be clustered as follows:

<b>Cluster 1</b> - providing developmentally appropriate experiences:	<b>Cluster 2</b> - providing day to day care:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE034 Use an approved learning framework to guide practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE031 - Support children's health, safety and wellbeing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE035 Support the holistic development of children in early childhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE032 - Nurture babies and toddlers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE036 Provide experiences to support children's play and learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CHCECE033 - Develop positive and respectful relationships with children</li> </ul>

The first cluster of units has a significant focus on knowledge of childhood development, development benchmarks and the types of activities that will promote physical, cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing. The second cluster is more practically focused and reflective of the day-to-day activities of a childcare worker.

It would be logical to provide evidence of vocational equivalence against these clusters rather than against the individual units because together they reflect whole work tasks and have very similar requirements for knowledge and skills to be demonstrated in similar contexts.

### How an RTO demonstrates compliance?

Irrespective of the approach chosen by the RTO, auditors are looking for evidence that the RTO has systems in place to:

- Establish equivalent competencies if required.
- Demonstrate 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 and/or assessing.
- 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.
- Collect evidence of the above activities having been completed.

### Clause 1.13b - Current industry skills

'*Current industry skills*' means that the trainer/assessor has a thorough understanding of how the unit of competency to be delivered and/or assessed actually works within the workplace to current workplace standards.

The trainer and assessor must understand:

- how the competency connects with the other competencies of the learner to produce industry outcomes;
- how the competency of the learner relates to the competencies of co-workers to be an effective part of the workplace team; and
- how the competency relates to and meets the needs of clients in the workplace.

This needs to be a broad understanding across many different applications of the competency in many different workplaces, not just based on the personal experience of the trainer/assessor and needs to be kept up to date through continuing engagement with industry.

Having current industry skills means that trainers will be able to enrich the delivery of the unit of competency with the 'real feel' of current industry practices and be able to set the workplace context of assessments so that reliable inferences can be made about workplace readiness.

The publication (*Keeping it real, Industry Currency of Trainers in Queensland, DET 2010 pg. 8*) outlines many benefits for the RTO in maintaining the industry currency of its training and assessors.

- the delivery of training that is relevant, based on real world situations 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; and
- improved industry ownership, valuing and understanding of training.

Despite the importance and increasing focus on industry currency, there is very little formal guidance available to assist RTOs 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 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. Where the training package and the companion volume implementation guide are silent on the issues of currency, then currency decisions should be made by the individual RTO in consultation with industry.

### 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 a complex question. There are a number of factors that influence currency periods which could include:

- 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.

This means that each RTO has to consider the factors that are relevant to them, and in consultation with industry, determine an appropriate currency period. 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 and assess.

**What kind of activities could contribute to maintaining industry currency?**

There are a range of activities that may contribute to maintaining industry currency for the individual trainer/assessor and RTO. The activities that the individual uses should be chosen to suit the kind of industry knowledge and skill they have to maintain.

The publication *Keeping it Real* provides the following list as some examples of activities trainers and assessors can 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 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The membership requires you to demonstrate that you have maintained or continued to develop your professional expertise</li> <li>• You are seeking to update your knowledge in a field and the association has a range of activities, that you participate in, to enable that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The membership does not require you to demonstrate that you have maintained or continued to develop your professional expertise</li> <li>• You do not participate in activities</li> <li>• The activities are not closely related to the units of</li> </ul>



Approach	Can be effective when	Can be ineffective when
		competency that you deliver and assess against
Work Shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The shadowing experience allows you to participate in the work activities</li> <li>• You have the opportunity to practice your skills</li> <li>• You have the opportunity to refresh your knowledge by interacting with current practitioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nature of the work prevents you from participating in the work (Confidentiality and safety issues)</li> <li>• The nature of the work is not closely related to the units of competency you deliver and assess against</li> </ul>
Fulfilling industry licensing requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The licensing outcome requires you to demonstrate that you have maintained a specified level of knowledge and skill</li> <li>• The specified level of knowledge and skill closely relates to the units of competency you deliver and assess against</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no requirement to demonstrate that you have maintained a specified level of knowledge or skill</li> <li>• The specified knowledge or skill is not closely related to the units of competency you deliver and assess against.</li> </ul>
Talking to students about practices and job roles in their workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are seeking to update your knowledge of current practice</li> <li>• The students workplace is reflective of current industry practice</li> <li>• The students workplace is reflective of new and emerging industry practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are seeking to maintain your technical skills</li> <li>• The students workplace is not reflective of current industry practice</li> </ul>

The key idea is direct engagement with industry and the workplace to be immersed in the industrial context.

**Do I need to take a unit-by-unit approach?**

As with demonstrating equivalence, currency needs to be considered at a unit level or for a cluster of units that are related in the workplace. When establishing equivalence this is done to the detailed requirements in the unit of competency, but this level of detail is not needed for currency of industry skills ... you will still adopt a unit-by-unit approach, but not to the level of the "detailed requirements". 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 would be counterintuitive to all that has been discussed above, but there are some more general principles that research has shown promote the effectiveness of currency activities. These include:

- both the individual and the organisation accept responsibility for ongoing updating of knowledge and skill;
- getting the organisational climate right;
- adopting a strategic approach to upskilling;
- encouraging collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing; and
- ensuring that updating activities focus on the employees' current job and are embedded in the rhythms of daily work.

*Source: Clayton, B, Jonas, P, Harding, R, Harris, M & Toze, M 2013, Industry currency and professional obsolescence: what can industry tell us?, NCVET, Adelaide.*

## How an RTO demonstrates compliance?

The RTO needs to demonstrate that the trainer/assessor has been out in industry observing and participating in current industry practices relevant to the unit(s) being delivered.

This engagement with industry needs to be broad (many different kinds of workplaces) and deep (actual observation and participation in practices) and mostly firsthand. Inevitably this exposure will be reasonably local or regional so the trainer/assessor should seek wider industry exposure through texts, conferences, industry associations, and consultation with other trainers/assessors. All this needs to be documented, but most importantly the learnings from these exposures should be incorporated into the training delivery and assessment resources. The trainer/assessor needs to be able to describe their experiences within industry and how these have impacted on their work and be prepared to share these observations with colleagues so that the VET sector never loses contact and relevance with the industries it serves.

Regardless of the approach chosen, the RTO must establish the following:

- what currency means in your industry;
- what knowledge and skills must be kept up to date for each trainer and assessor;
- a program of development activities that is best suited to the trainer and assessors currency needs; and
- documented evidence that trainers and assessors have participated in the planned development activities.