Reporting of student achievement in vocational education and training

May 2005
©The State of Victoria, Victorian Qualifications Authority, 2005. This publication is protected by copyright. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), no part of this publication may be reproduced or stored, whether electronically or by any other process, without the written permission of the Department of Education & Training Victoria.

This is a report produced for the VQA for consideration by the Board in June 2005. It does not represent the views of the VQA.
Contents

Purpose 4
Structure of the issues and options paper 4
Current approach to assessment and reporting in vocational education and training 4
Information requirements of employers and higher education providers about learner achievement 7
Responses to demand for enhanced reporting on learner achievement in vocational education and training 10
  Capstone assessment 10
  Skills passports / records of achievement 12
  Grading systems 13
  Reporting against employability skills framework 15
  External examinations 16
Key issues associated with providing enhanced information about learner achievement in vet qualifications 17
  Need to improve the consistency of existing certification 17
  Need to identify the purpose of providing enhanced information on learner achievement 17
  Need for a common approach and nomenclature for supplementary reporting on learner achievement 19
  Need to maintain the integrity of competent / not yet competent assessment outcome 20
  Need to assess the cost effectiveness of enhanced reporting on learner achievement 20
  Need to assess the impact on assessor workload of providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement 21
  Importance of ensuring that supplementary reporting is available for all learners 21
Options for providing enhanced information about learner achievement 22
  Option one - improved compliance with current aqf certification requirements 22
  Option two – statement of principles for RTOs on supplementary reporting of learner achievement 23
  Option three - a systemic approach to supplementary reporting of learner achievement 23
Recommendation 25
References 26

Enhanced reporting of learner achievement in VET 3
Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to provide the Victorian Qualifications Authority [VQA] Board with an overview of the issues and options associated with providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement in vocational education and training qualifications, including the potential for introducing graded assessment.

Structure of the issues and options paper
This paper describes the current approach to assessment and reporting in the VET sector in Victoria and outlines the issues and options associated with providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement.

This paper comprises six key sections.

- Section one is an outline of the current approach to assessment, certification and reporting in the vocational education and training sector
- Section two is an overview of the information requirements of employers and higher education providers about learner achievement
- Section three is an outline of the responses to demand for enhanced information about learner achievement
- Section four is a discussion of the key issues associated with providing enhanced information about learner achievement
- Section five is a set of options for providing enhanced information about learner achievement
- Section six is a set of recommendations for consideration by the Board of the VQA.

Current approach to assessment, certification and reporting in vocational education and training
The assessment, certification and reporting practices of Registered Training Organisations [RTOs] in Victoria and other jurisdictions, in relation to Training Package qualifications and accredited courses, are governed by three key documents. These are the

- Australian Quality Training Framework [AQTF] Standards for Registered Training Organisations
- assessment provisions in the relevant Training Package or accredited course.
Together these documents define the:

- assessment processes used by RTOs
- the quality assurance mechanisms that underpin the quality and consistency of assessment in the VET sector
- the certification arrangements in the VET sector.

The AQTF Standards for RTOs, specify the qualifications of assessors [Standard 7], the assessment processes used by RTOs [Standard 8] and the certification requirements [Standard 10].

Under standards seven and eight of the AQTF Standards for RTOs, assessments must:

- be conducted by qualified assessors
- comply with the assessment guidelines included in Training Packages or the assessment requirements in accredited courses
- lead to the issuing of a statement of attainment or qualification under the AQF
- be valid, reliable, fair and flexible
- provide for applicants to be informed of the context and purpose of the assessment and the assessment process
- focus on the application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace
- involve the evaluation of sufficient evidence to enable judgements to be made about whether competency has been attained
- provide for feedback to the applicant
- be equitable
- provide for reassessment on appeal

Standard ten of the AQTF Standards for RTOs, requires RTOs to issue qualifications and statements of attainment that comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook and the endorsed Training Packages and accredited courses. As such, RTOs must only issue certification:

- of qualifications or industry/enterprise competency standards from nationally endorsed Training Packages or qualifications, competency standards or modules specified in accredited courses.
- that meets the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook
- that identifies the units of competency from Training Packages, or competencies or modules from accredited courses, that the client has attained
- identifies the RTO by its national provider number.

The AQF Implementation Handbook states that:

…qualifications issued in the vocational education and training sector certify the achievement of competency. Assessment is the responsibility of Registered Training Organisations. These bodies must comply with the standards set in the AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organisations including Standard 8 Registered Training Organisations assessments and Standard 10.

The Handbook goes on to note that

...individuals issued with the qualification will also receive documentation that identifies the units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages). Individuals who complete only some of the requirements for the qualification will receive a Statement of Attainment. The Statement of Attainment will include, either on the Statement itself or as an attachment, the whole units of competency that have been achieved when training is based on nationally endorsed competency standards (such as those in Training Packages). The issuing body will be responsible for providing and maintaining records in relation to the above.

The AQF Implementation Handbook also defines the formats for qualifications and statements of attainment. Whilst these formats include a number of mandatory fields, there is no requirement for RTOs to adopt the suggested formats.

The other key source of guidance on assessment and certification in the VET sector is the assessment advice provided in national Training Packages and accredited courses. These documents provide more detailed information on the qualifications of assessors, the assessment process and the design of assessment materials. The Training Package Developer’s Handbook identifies the information that must be included in the assessment guidelines section of all Training Packages. Whilst this may be supplemented by Training Package developers none of the provisions of this text may be changed or deleted.

These three documents define the assessment and reporting processes used in the VET system. In summary, they provide for an assessment and reporting system that is based on the collection and evaluation of evidence by qualified assessors that leads to a judgement about whether a candidate has achieved the requirements.
specified in a unit of competency. This in turn may lead to the issue of nationally recognised:

- certificates or diplomas, or
- statements of attainment that specify the units of competency attained by learners.

Whilst it is generally accepted that reporting of learner achievement in the VET sector is based on a simple system of ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’ basis, it is interesting to note that there is no explicit requirement in the documentation for RTOs to report in this fashion.

**Information requirements of employers and higher education providers about learner achievement**

The current approach to reporting assessment outcomes in the VET sector, which at the most basic level require RTOs to document the units of competency that learners have achieved, has been the subject of considerable debate.

This was highlighted in *Moving On - The Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages* that was released in April 2004.

In this report, Schofield and Mc Donald argued that any enhancement to Training Packages should, amongst other things, address learner and industry demand for graded assessment.

Whilst confirming that assessment in VET is competency based and acknowledging that some would see any move to grading as being contrary to the principles of competency-based training and assessment, the authors concluded that:

> there is a clear demand for graded assessment, not simply from providers but from learners and industry as well. Despite its widespread nature there is no national policy around grading, and its application is highly inconsistent with a range of approaches and systems for assigning grades. We acknowledge the great passion on both sides of the debate about graded assessment, but frankly, we do not see it as a threshold issue likely to undermine the essential principles of CBT, as long as it remains as supplementary reporting, permitted under current policy. Coordination and leadership on this issue at a national level is, however, overdue, and we suggest that ANTA investigate the range of graded assessment models currently being implemented across Australia with a view to developing a model that allows for graded
assessments to be provided within Training Packages as supplementary reports.

In responding to the Review, the National Training Quality Council (NTQC), in *The High Level Review of Training Packages - It Happened... What Now?* committed to undertake an investigation of supplementary reporting systems.

While Schofield and Mc Donald identified a demand from some groups of stakeholders for more detailed reporting of assessment outcomes, they did not provide describe the nature of this additional information or how it may be collected and reported.

There are some situations where the provision of supplementary information on learner achievement in VET qualifications may assist with the selection of students for places in higher level VET and university courses. This is most likely to be of benefit to those involved in selecting students for places in highly competitive courses. In these cases, the provision of a graded or scored result may assist the student selection process. However, the demand for such reporting may become less important with the:

- development of articulated VET – higher education pathways, especially in dual sector institutions, that provide more effective linkages between VET and university programs
- development of selection processes for higher level VET and university courses that make greater use of interviews, portfolios and other forms of evidence rather than a simple reliance on ENTER scores
- diversification of higher level VET and university courses providing more options for learners and consequently less demand from VET graduates for places in a narrow range of highly competitive courses.

Similarly, some employers may find some form of supplementary reporting useful in making recruitment and selection decisions. This is most likely to apply in the selection of employees for entry level positions or where large numbers of similarly qualified candidates apply for a limited number of positions. In these cases, employers may require supplementary reports that range from a simple ranking of candidates to determine who is eligible for interview to a detailed breakdown of the relative skills and knowledge of potential employees.

Even in these cases, it is unlikely that employment decisions will be based solely on the basis of applicants’ VET qualifications. Other factors such as response at
Interview, previous employment history, response to personality and aptitude testing and the company’s perception of whether the candidate ‘fits’ the organisation are likely to be equally if not more important variables in the employment decision.

A group that is often overlooked in discussions about the need for supplementary reporting is the learners themselves. There is little doubt that some groups of learners, as acknowledged in the report of the high level review of Training Packages, demand more detailed reporting on their achievements. This demand however must be balanced against the needs of other groups of learners who may find supplementary reporting either unnecessary or in other cases demotivating and reminisce of their negative experiences of assessment and reporting in the school sector.

A further group that has expressed interest in enhanced reporting of learner achievement is industry regulators. Whilst the number of regulatory bodies has diminished significantly in Victoria as a result of deregulation, a number of the remaining bodies have assessment and reporting requirements that are linked to licensing. Examples of this are the Plumbing Industry Commission and Consumer Affairs Victoria that require the completion of external examinations as part of the licensing process for plumbers and real estate agents, respectively. At the national level, the electrical industry regulators have introduced a requirement that all apprentice electricians successfully complete a capstone assessment on electrical safety prior to being issued a licence.

Whilst there is demand for enhanced reporting of learner achievement from some groups of learners, employers, industry regulators and higher education providers, there is little agreement about the purpose, nature and ways of collecting and reporting the additional information. In addition, it needs to be acknowledged that there is a substantial number of other groups of stakeholders who believe that the existing assessment and certification arrangements provide a satisfactory level of reporting of learner achievement.
Responses to demand for enhanced reporting on learner achievement in vocational education and training

A wide range of education and training authorities, industry bodies and RTOs at both State and national level have sponsored initiatives designed to respond to this demand for enhanced reporting of learner achievement. These initiatives include the development of:

- capstone assessment systems
- skills passports / records of achievement
- grading systems
- ways of reporting against key competencies and the employability skills framework
- external examinations.

Capstone assessment

A number of industry regulators have expressed interest in the introduction of capstone assessments to complement existing assessment arrangements. As mentioned in the preceding section, the National Uniform Electrical Licensing Advisory Council [NUELAC], has established a national, uniform set of requirements for licensed electricians. These requirements identify sixty-six essential capabilities related to electrical safety that must be attained by electrical apprentices prior to being granted an electrical licence by the relevant State / Territory authority. Thirty-one of these essential capabilities, which are deemed by NUELAC to be critical, must be assessed through a capstone assessment at the completion of the apprenticeship.

The NUELAC requirements apply to all apprentices seeking an electrical license, including those who have completed qualifications under both the Electrotechnology and Metal and Engineering Training Packages. The capstone assessment arrangements have been widely accepted within the electrotechnology sector. However the metal and engineering sector has been less accepting of capstone assessment, claiming that it forms an unnecessary and expensive second layer of assessment. The metal and engineering sector has sought to establish alternative arrangements for recognising the thirty-one critical capabilities.
EE-OZ Training Standards, the predecessor to the national Industry Skills Council for the electrotechnology industry, developed a range of materials to support the implementation of the capstone assessment.

These materials were developed to provide Registered Training Organisations [RTOs] with guidance on the development of their own capstone assessment arrangements.

The materials included:

- advice on the conduct of the capstone assessment
- a model of the capstone assessment that comprises three components:
  - a knowledge test
  - a installation and planning scenario
  - a practical test
- a sample table of specifications to direct the design of the three part test paper
- a set of sample assessment items, recommended answers and a marking guide.

These assessment materials were not intended to be a national capstone assessment tool. Rather they were designed to provide a model that RTOs could apply in developing their own assessment items.

The sample capstone assessment materials have been adapted and are currently being introduced by a number of jurisdictions. At this stage Victoria has not introduced the capstone assessment as the industry has an existing end of apprenticeship testing arrangement.

The capstone assessment is a clearly defined method of gaining supplementary information on learner performance. In the case of the electrical industry, the capstone assessment is focused on clear criteria ie: thirty-one competency statements related to electrical safety, and includes provision for both practical and theoretical assessment.

The key strengths and limitations of this approach to gaining additional information on learner performance are outlined below.
## Strengths

- Relatively simple model to establish, operate and maintain
- Evidence gathering and marking techniques are conventional and reflect existing practices of many assessors
- Results complement outcome of competency based assessment
- Standardised assessment tools and marking schema support consistency of assessor judgement
- Capstone assessment is standards based

## Limitations

- Potential confusion if outcome of competency based assessment is different to outcome of capstone assessment
- Capstone assessment outcome may become a defacto qualification result
- Cost of development, security and maintenance of test items
- Capstone assessment only reflects performance on selected aspects of the qualification, not all the competencies in the qualification
- Involves a second level of evidence collection

### Skills passports / records of achievement

There has been considerable interest at the national level, particularly from the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA], to introduce a portable form of recording of learner achievement, which includes the outcomes of both nationally recognised training and other forms of achievement.

This was given its clearest expression in ANTA’s interest in introducing a skills passport. This involved developing a personal, lifelong record of learner achievement. It was envisaged that the skills passport, which could take the form of an electronic record, would hold:

- personal information on the learner
- a list of the units of competency and qualifications attained by the learner
- a list of non accredited training undertaken by the learner
- a list of other forms of achievement.

The notion of a skills passport or record of achievement was also canvassed in a report released by ANTA in 2002, titled, *Due Credit: Examining the potential to recognise the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs.*
This report identified a framework, which could be applied in the VET, schools and community sectors, for recognising the skills and knowledge that young people acquire through youth development programs. One of the options in the framework was a personal portfolio of skills. It was envisaged that the portfolio, which would be developed by learners, would illustrate the skills they achieved through participation in youth development programs. The portfolio of skills might include:

- a personal statement
- photographs of work performed
- testimonials from supervisors and peers
- copies of certification

Whilst less formal than the skills passport proposed by ANTA, the portfolio of skills suggested in the Due Credit report provides another example of how a skills passport or record of achievement may provide supplementary information on learner achievement.

The key strengths and limitations of this approach to gaining additional information on learner performance are outlined in the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Capable of holding a wide range of information on the outcomes of both recognised and non recognised training</td>
<td>• Information on learner achievement may not suit needs of some groups ie: higher education providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capture information from multiple providers</td>
<td>• Potentially costly to implement and administer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easy way of learner maintaining comprehensive record of achievements</td>
<td>• Potential to devalue qualifications and statement of attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compatible with lifelong learning</td>
<td>• Issues about integrity of contents of passport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grading systems**

As noted in Moving On - The Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages there have been a number of initiatives at both national and State level aimed at developing grading or scoring systems for use in the vocational education and training system.
In Victoria, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority has implemented a scored assessment system for VCE VET. The model stemmed from the review of the Victorian Certificate of Education that called for VCE VET subjects to be scored and included in the ENTER score calculations.

The model was implemented on a statewide pilot basis in a limited number of industry areas in 2000. The number of industry areas has been progressively expanded. This year the model is being used in twelve industry areas.

This model comprises a mix of coursework and external assessment. Students’ scores are calculated by aggregating the scores they receive for:

- coursework assessment – a set of three tasks implemented and assessed by assessors approved by the relevant RTO
- external assessment – an examination that is externally set and marked by assessors appointed by the VCAA.

Within this model students elect to receive a scored assessment. Those who do are required to undertake both the coursework and the examination.

The Study Score can contribute directly to the ENTER as one of the student’s primary four scaled studies or as the fifth or sixth study.

A key feature of this model is that scoring of the coursework component is based on a set of supplementary criteria derived from the Key Competencies and the AQF descriptors.

This basic approach to grading also underpins the *Graded Performance Assessment System* developed by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and the *Performance Level Assessment [PLA]* system developed by TAFE Queensland. A distinctive feature of the PLA system is that the scoring system generally only applies to qualifications at Certificate IV and above and to specified units of competency in these qualifications. The reason for this is that the PLA is primarily directed at enhancing TAFE – university articulation.

An alternative approach to grading, called *the Standards Referenced Model*, has been developed by the Assessment Research Centre at the University of Melbourne. This approach, which was sponsored by MCEETYA and ANTA, is designed to provide a way of scoring VET subjects undertaken in senior secondary school so that the results may contribute to a tertiary entrance score on an equivalent basis to non-VET subjects.
This approach has been trialed in selected schools across Australia and is still under consideration by MCEETYA and ANTA. The Curriculum Council in Western Australia has incorporated key elements of this model in its proposed new approach to assessing VET subjects in the Western Australian Certificate of Education.

Standards referencing is a form of criterion referenced assessment. In this approach, skilled assessors examine a unit of competency and identify levels or bands of performance at increasing levels of sophistication – in effect varying levels of competence. These levels or bands of performance are presented in the form of a hierarchal set of descriptions of the skills, knowledge and understanding underpinning the unit of competency. These levels or bands are then used to describe different levels of learner performance, such as: 'highly competent', 'competent' and 'not yet competent'.

Whilst detailed consideration of the benefits of the different approaches to grading is beyond the scope of this paper, the key strengths and limitations of using grading systems as a way of providing additional information on learner performance are outlined in the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Grading is based on public criteria</td>
<td>- Assumes skilled assessors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allows for a variety of evidence</td>
<td>- Expensive to design, implement and maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Scoring may be applied to specified qualifications and units of competency</td>
<td>- Require supporting infrastructure ie: moderation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consistent with competency based assessment</td>
<td>- Assumes different assessors consistently interpret criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Common reporting nomenclature</td>
<td>- Cost may outweigh benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reporting against employability skills framework*

The Key Competencies and more recently the Employability Skills Framework has been seen by some as an appropriate set of benchmarks for supplementary reporting of learner performance.

The generic nature of the employability skills framework means that it could provide a set of benchmarks for reporting learner achievement that is relevant across all qualifications and industry areas. It also identifies a set of
criteria that may be relevant to both industry and higher education providers for selection purposes. However the framework may not be as relevant to industry regulators and learners who are likely to require reporting on learner achievement of industry specific skills.

The key strengths and limitations of this approach to gaining additional information on learner performance are outlined in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relevant benchmarks for employers and higher education</td>
<td>• Need to identify clear performance levels for employability skills to distinguish levels of learner achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Benchmarks relevant to all qualifications and industry areas</td>
<td>• System development, operation and maintenance costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential to develop common assessment tasks to enhance quality of assessment and reduce cost of system implementation</td>
<td>• Need for significant professional development of assessors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential common language for reporting learner achievement</td>
<td>• Potentially less relevant to industry regulators and learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

External examinations

A number or regulatory bodies have established external examination systems that are linked to industry and occupational licensing arrangements to gain supplementary information on learner achievement.

The two main examples in Victoria are the Plumbing Industry Commission and Consumer Affairs Victoria, which have established external examinations for the licensing of plumbers and real estate agents, respectively.

The external examinations in both cases form part of the assessment requirements of the accredited course which learners must complete in order to gain the relevant VET qualification and industry licence.

In both cases the external examinations:

- apply to a selection of modules in the accredited course
- are conducted by an external examination authority, in this case VETASSESS
are conducted solely for the purpose of occupational licensing

are focused on critical aspects of competence, such as real estate legislation.

The key strengths and limitations of this approach to gaining additional information on learner performance are outlined in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relatively simple model to establish, operate and maintain</td>
<td>• Involves a second level of evidence collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence gathering and marking techniques are conventional and reflect existing practices of many assessors</td>
<td>• Cost of development, security and maintenance of assessment items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardised assessment tools and marking schema support consistency of assessor judgement</td>
<td>• Grading does not apply to all areas of the qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment only applied to critical areas of competence ie: consumer protection</td>
<td>• Grading focused on underpinning knowledge not performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key issues associated with providing enhanced information about learner achievement in VET qualifications

Need to improve the consistency of existing certification

There are significant variations in the format of qualifications, statements of attainment and statements of results issued by individual Victorian RTOs.

The Australian Qualifications Advisory Board [AQFAB] has attempted to rationalise the range of certification by providing guidelines in the *AQF Implementation Handbook* on the format of qualifications and statements of attainment issued in the VET sector.

For example, AQFAB requires all VET qualifications issued under the Framework to include the:

- name, code and logo of issuing body
- name of person receiving the qualification
- nomenclature as in the Framework, eg Certificate I, Diploma
• date issued
• authorised signatory.

In addition the qualification should include:

• industry descriptor eg Engineering
• occupational or functional stream, in brackets, eg (Fabrication)
• the words, ‘the qualification certified herein is recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework
• where appropriate, include the words, ‘achieved through New Apprenticeship arrangements’.

The qualification must also include the nationally recognised training logo and may include the State/Territory Training Authority logo.

The level of consistency in the format required nationally is restricted to the name of the qualification being indicated first, followed by the word ‘in’ (for Certificates I – IV and Graduate Certificate) or the word ‘of ’ (for Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Graduate Diploma) followed by the title. In the case of a general category and a more specific category the title should be written as: Certificate III in General Category (specific if required).

Similar guidance has been provided for the design of statements of attainment. No guidance is provided on the content or format of statements of results issued by RTOs.

In spite of this advice, the qualifications, statements of attainment and statements of results issued by RTOs vary significantly. This often makes it very difficult for employers, higher education providers and other involved in assessing Victorian qualifications to readily determine the equivalence of qualifications issued by Victorian RTOs. This is exacerbated by the continuing issue of other forms of certification such as Australian Registered Trade Certificates and Statements of Completion for apprenticeships.

Employers, higher education providers and others involved in assessing qualifications issued by Victorian RTOs would benefit from greater standardisation of the forms of certification issued by RTOs.

Need to identify the purpose of providing enhanced information on learner achievement

Stakeholders have different reasons for seeking additional information on learner achievement. These include to:

• reward excellence
motivate learners

provide information on learner performance to employers and other stakeholders

facilitate course entry, articulation and credit transfer.

Whilst these are all legitimate reasons for providing additional information on learner achievement, it is critical that the primary purpose for gathering and reporting such information is clear.

This is to ensure that the assessment and reporting system:

meets its stated purpose – for example the capstone assessment model in the Electrotechnology Training Package, provides a good example of how a clearly defined purpose, that is to meet a licensing requirement, results in a clearly defined assessment and reporting model which delivers understood outcomes.

is underpinned by adequate quality assurance arrangements – in some cases, the reason for supplementary reporting on learner achievement involves relatively little risk, such as to reward and motivate learners. However in other cases, the risks may be higher, such as when supplementary reporting is used for employment or course selection decisions. In these latter cases, there is a greater need to ensure the quality and consistency of the supplementary information and as such there is a greater need for quality assurance.

Any new arrangements for providing supplementary information on learner achievement must be underpinned by a clear statement of the purpose or range of purposes for providing that information.

Need for a common approach and nomenclature for supplementary reporting on learner achievement

There is no common approach or nomenclature for reporting learner achievement beyond ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’ in Victorian RTOs.

At present, virtually all public and private RTOs in Victoria issue certification that states whether learners have been assessed as being ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’ in relation to the units of competency or modules that they have completed.

However many RTOs also issue learners with supplementary information in the form of:

- letter grades
- percentage grades
- numerical grades
- alphanumeric grades
- descriptors ie: Performance with merit
- descriptive reports.

Some RTOs, such as the University of Ballarat, have developed organisational policies on supplementary reporting.

However, in other cases supplementary reporting is not based on clearly defined criteria and often focuses on aspects of performance which do not relate to the unit of competency or module, such as class attendance, punctuality and observance of dress codes. In addition, there is often little in the way of quality assurance measures to ensure the quality and consistency of such assessment and reporting.

This has produced a situation where some RTOs provide supplementary reporting and others do not. It has also created a situation where there is little if any comparability in the supplementary reports issued by different RTOs.

Therefore any new arrangements for providing additional information on learner achievement should be based, at a minimum, on a set of system wide guidelines or principles for supplementary reporting.

Need to maintain the integrity of competent / not yet competent assessment outcome

Any system of supplementary reporting should not impinge on the integrity of the basic 'competent' or 'not yet competent' decision.

There is a significant risk that the introduction of improved supplementary reporting arrangements may lead to a situation where 'competency' comes to be viewed as a minimum assessment outcome by employers, higher education providers and other stakeholders.

For this reason any system of supplementary reporting should be based on clear, relevant and easily understood criteria. It is also critical that key stakeholders are informed of the status and the criteria that underpin supplementary reports.

Need to assess the cost effectiveness of enhanced reporting on learner achievement

Any move to provide enhanced reporting of learner achievement must be affordable and sustainable.
There is a significant tension between developing and maintaining quality reporting arrangements and the cost of implementing, operating and maintaining such arrangements.

Cost effectiveness refers to the achievement of a reasonable balance between the desire for quality and consistent assessment reporting and the importance of minimising costs.

The principle of cost effectiveness has two dimensions:

- whether the benefits derived from supplementary reporting, such as improved learner motivation and better reporting of assessment outcomes, outweigh the costs associated with developing, implementing and maintaining the arrangements
- whether the grading arrangements are financially sustainable

Therefore the establishment of new arrangements for providing additional information on learner achievement must include consideration of the costs of establishing, operating and maintaining such arrangements.

**Need to assess the impact on assessor workload of providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement**

The introduction of new arrangements for providing additional information on learner achievement will have an impact on assessor workload.

Whilst the impact of any reforms will be greatest when the new arrangements are first introduced, it is likely that enhanced reporting arrangements will contribute to the longer term workload of assessors.

There is already evidence that the introduction of Training Packages and the Australian Quality Training Framework have impacted on the workload of trainers and assessors, any further reforms to assessment reporting should not exacerbate this situation.

Consideration should also be given to the impact that an increased emphasis on assessment reporting may have on both the quality and time allocated to training delivery.

**Importance of ensuring that supplementary reporting is available for all learners**

For reasons of fairness supplementary reporting should be available in all qualifications.
There may be an argument for limiting supplementary reporting to selected higher level VET qualifications and units of competency to support articulation and credit transfer arrangements. However this would appear to be inconsistent with two of the stated purposes of providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement, namely:

- to enhance learner motivation
- provide employers with information on learner performance to support recruitment and selection processes.

If these are genuine reasons for providing enhanced reporting of learner achievement then any new reporting arrangements should be able to be applied to all AQF qualifications.

However, given the diversity of VET learners and the varied reasons for their participation in training the issuing of supplementary reports should always be optional for the learner.

This raises the question of whether learners should be required:

- opt into the enhanced reporting arrangements – the learner must apply for supplementary reports. The RTO will not automatically provide a supplementary report unless the learner requests it, or
- opt out of the enhanced reporting arrangements – all learners will be given a supplementary report unless a learner requests not to be given such a report. The RTO will automatically provide a supplementary report.

Given the complexity of VET assessment and reporting arrangements, it would appear to be administratively convenient for all learners to be provided with a supplementary report unless they request not to be provided with such a report.

**Options for providing enhanced information about learner achievement**

**Option One - Improved compliance with current AQF certification requirements**

The Australian Qualifications Advisory Board [AQFAB] has attempted to rationalise the range of certification offered by RTOs by providing guidelines in the *AQF Implementation Handbook* on the format of qualifications and statements of attainment issued in the VET sector.
In spite of this advice, the qualifications, statements of attainment and statements of results issued by RTOs vary significantly.

This often makes it difficult for employers, higher education providers and others involved in assessing qualifications to readily determine the equivalence of qualifications issued by Victorian RTOs.

Such groups would benefit from greater standardisation of the certification issued by Victorian RTOs.

Under this option the VQA would provide RTOs with advice on:

- the recommended AQFAB format for qualifications and statements of attainment
- the design and nomenclature to be used in statements of results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Consistent certification provided for learners, employers, higher education providers and other stakeholders</td>
<td>• Does not address demand from some stakeholders for additional information on learner achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater compliance with AQF Implementation Handbook</td>
<td>• Cost to RTOs of re-engineering certification arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improved portability of assessment outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased public recognition of VET certification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Option Two – Statement of principles for RTOs on supplementary reporting of learner achievement

At present there is little guidance for Victorian RTOs on the provision of supplementary information on learner achievement.

As noted previously this has produced a situation where some RTOs provide supplementary reporting on learner achievement and others do not.

It has also created a situation where there is:

- no common nomenclature for supplementary reporting
- no comparability in the supplementary reports issued by different RTOs
- no effective system of quality assurance to underpin the supplementary reports issued by RTOs.
Under this option the VQA would develop a set of guidelines or principles for supplementary reporting on learner achievement in vocational education and training qualifications.

The proposed set of principles or guidelines would address:

- the purpose of supplementary reporting on learner achievement
- the integrity of the competent / not yet competent result
- the quality assurance measures required to ensure the quality and consistency of supplementary reporting
- the provision of supplementary reporting for all learners who require it
- the nomenclature and criteria to be applied in supplementary reporting
- the cost effectiveness of supplementary reporting arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Supplementary reporting better understood by stakeholders</td>
<td>• Different forms of supplementary reporting offered by RTOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced consistency in supplementary reporting</td>
<td>• Cost to RTOs of designing reporting arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced quality of supplementary reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Option Three - A systemic approach to supplementary reporting of learner achievement**

Under this option the VQA would establish a systemic approach to supplementary reporting on learner achievement. This option may involve:

- design of a grading system for VET qualifications. This could apply to all qualifications or selected qualifications and / or units of competency
- design of capstone assessments for specific qualifications, especially those leading to high demand VET or university courses
- design of a record of learning. This may be a portable form of recording of learner achievement, which
includes the outcomes of nationally recognised training, non-accredited training and other forms of achievement.

- design of a system for reporting performance against the Employability Skills Framework.

These sub options have been grouped together as they represent a major intervention in the assessment and reporting arrangements of RTOs. Further work would need to be undertaken on the relative advantages and disadvantages of these sub options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Consistent supplementary information provided across RTOs on learner achievement</td>
<td>• High cost of design, implementation and maintenance of assessment and reporting system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supplementary information designed to address a range of purpose ie: student selection and requirement</td>
<td>• Potential to devalue competent / not yet competent assessment outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System underpinned by clear quality assurance measures</td>
<td>• Potentially unnecessary intervention in RTO operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhanced quality of supplementary reporting</td>
<td>• Potential to demotivate some learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation**

Three possible options for providing enhanced reporting on learner achievement in vocational education and training qualifications were identified in this paper. These are:

Option one - Improved compliance with current AQF certification requirements

Option two - Statement of principles for RTOs on supplementary reporting of learner achievement

Option three - A systemic approach to supplementary reporting on learner achievement
It is recommended that the VQA Board proceed with:
Option One – Improved compliance with current AQF certification requirements
and
Option Two – Statement of principles for RTOs on supplementary reporting of learner achievement

These two options have the potential to:
- improve stakeholder understanding of existing VET certification
- improve the quality and consistency of supplementary reporting on learner achievement provided by RTOs
- enable RTOs to develop supplementary reporting arrangements which reflect the needs of their learners and other clients within agreed state wide guidelines
- provide a cost effective and sustainable way of improving the quality and consistency of reporting on learner achievement.

Option three is not considered to be viable due to the high costs associated with designing, implementing and maintaining any of the four sub options described in this option. In addition, there is a significant potential that a major assessment and reporting intervention of this type may serve to devalue the existing competent / not yet competent assessment outcome.

References


Australian National Training Authority, *Training Packages Developers Handbook*


Australian National Training Authority, *Due Credit: Examining the potential to recognise the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs*, 2002