

TVET AUSTRALIA

supporting the national training system

Validation & Moderation in Diverse Settings

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY
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DISCLAIMER

This work has been produced on behalf of the National Quality Council with funding provided through the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and state and territory governments. The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or state and territory governments.

The recommendations are under consideration by the National Quality Council but it should not be assumed that they will necessarily be implemented in the future.

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SECTION I: BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Work-based Education Research Centre at Victoria University (namely Shelley Gillis and Berwyn Clayton) in collaboration with Bateman & Giles (Andrea Bateman) conducted a research investigation for the National Quality Council to identify the role of validation and moderation processes in the VET sector. The study was undertaken to address concerns that had been raised by some stakeholder groups in relation to the perceived quality and consistency of assessments being undertaken by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). That is, there were concerns that assessment standards in the VET sector were often not comparable. Ensuring the comparability of standards had become particularly pertinent in the VET sector, as assessments could be made across a range of contexts (e.g., vocational education, educational and industrial contexts) by a diverse range of assessors using highly contextualised performance based tasks that required professional judgement by assessors.

Gillis, Bateman & Clayton(2009) identified a number of different quality management processes that could be used to help achieve national comparability of standards, whilst still maintaining flexibility at the RTO level to design and conduct assessments (NQC, 2009a). Their study resulted in the following products being published by the NQC:

- A Professional Code of Practice for Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009a);
- An Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009b); and
- A Guide to Developing Assessment Tools (NQC, 2009c).

The NQC (2009a) Code contained a set of high level principles designed to provide guidance on how to conduct assessment validation and moderation within a vocational education and training (VET) setting.

The NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide was designed to be a practical resource for training organisations intending to implement and/or review validation and/or moderation involving consensus meetings. It provided guidance on how to implement the NQC (2009a) *Code* within one's own organisation. The Guide provides practical suggestions for:

- Adhering to the Principles within the (NQC, 2009a) *Code of Professional Practice* (i.e., transparent, educative, equitable, tolerable, confidential and representative);
- Designing assessment tools (which was subsequently published by the NQC as a separate resource for assessment tool developers (see NQC, 2009c));
- Establishing a validation and/or moderation system at the RTO level, including a set of templates for conducting a consensus approach to validation and moderation.

The National Quality Council noted the aspirational nature of these publications, recognising that it provided a way forward within a complex and difficult area where misunderstandings had been common.

To assist with dissemination of the research findings and raise awareness of the products, the NQC also funded the research team to undertake a series of interactive information sessions in all states and territories (see NQC, 2010). The NQC noted, however, that the focus of the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide* had been on consensus meetings as a way of conducting moderation or validation, and that uptake would therefore be most likely limited to larger RTOs.

Aims

Given the limitations of the NQC (2009b) *Guide*, in 2010 the NQC commissioned the research team to undertake further follow up work to:

- Develop additional guidelines and support materials for alternative approaches to consensus meetings as a validation strategy as might be used by diverse RTOs which deliver and assess in a range of contexts; and
- To undertake national case studies which focus on validation of specified qualifications as a means of enhancing consistent assessment outcomes.

The specific aims of the current study were therefore to undertake a series of case studies to provide qualitative insights into the implementation of validation and/or moderation processes being implemented (or intending to be implemented) within diverse RTO settings. In particular, the case studies were undertaken to:

- Explore the contexts in which validation and/or moderation processes occur;
- Document and compare assessment quality management processes and procedures currently being implemented;
- Identify potential barriers and/or facilitators (e.g., structural, process and/or personal factors) that may impact on the design and maintenance of assessment quality management processes within diverse RTO settings; and
- Identify further resources to be developed to support RTOs conducting validation and/or moderation activities within RTOs within diverse settings.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

The investigation was undertaken by the research team comprising:

- Shelley Gillis – Work-based Education Research Centre, Victoria University
- Andrea Bateman – Bateman & Giles Pty Ltd
- Chloe Dyson – Chloe Dyson & Associates Pty Ltd

STRUCTURE OF THE OUTPUTS

The outputs of this study have been presented within three reports.

The Research Report describes the methodology and findings of the study. It includes the following sections:

- Section 1: Background
- Section 2: Methodology
- Section 3: Case study Reports
- Section 4: Synthesis and Recommendations

An Assessor Guide: Validation and Moderation, which comprises a series of frequently asked questions for developing assessment tools as well as establishing and maintaining systematic validation and/or moderation processes within and/or across RTOs. This document was designed for VET practitioners and coordinators who conduct assessment and/or validation activities in a range of diverse settings (e.g., small RTOs, partnership arrangements, school-based traineeships, networks of assessors).

Fact Sheets (x3) which was designed to provide a quick reference to assessment tool development, systematic validation and assessor partnerships. Note that the content of these documents have been produced in accordance with the template approved by the NQC.

Assessment Fact Sheets which were designed to provide a quick reference to assessment tool development, systematic validation and assessor partnerships, in:

- Assessor Partnerships
- Quality assuring assessment tools
- Systematic validation

These have been separately published by the NQC together with other Assessment Fact Sheets developed in 2010.

SECTION 2. THE METHODOLOGY

There were five phases to this investigation.

- Project Establishment
- Instrument Development
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Reporting

PROJECT ESTABLISHMENT

The research team was commissioned to undertake five case studies. Of these five case studies, three were to focus on RTOs operating within diverse contexts and the final two were each to focus on a network of RTOs involved in validation of a nationally recognised VET qualification(s). The project was managed by the National Quality Council's Quality of Assessment Action Group (QA-AG). In an attempt to ensure diversity of the case study sites, the QA-AG identified the following criteria for selection of the case study sites: geographic location; size of RTO, type of RTO and partnership arrangements. The ultimate aim was to select five case study sites that would provide representation of:

- ♦ Metropolitan, regional and rural-based RTOs;
- ♦ RTOs from different states/territories;
- ♦ Small and medium sized RTOs;
- ♦ Enterprise, community and private RTOs;
- ♦ Professional and/or industry organisations; and
- ♦ Delivery of VET in School programs, where possible.

Based upon such criteria, eight sites were nominated by the research team for consideration by the QA-AG (see Appendix A). Prior to their consideration, all eight organisations had expressed willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. Appendix A formed the basis of discussion by the QA-AG to identify the final five cases study sites to participate in the study. The following five case study sites were selected by the QA-AG:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Qualification Network | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The TAE10 – network of Victorian VET practitioners• Beauty Training Package – network of South Australian VET practitioners |
| RTO operating within a diverse context | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School based traineeship – partnership between school, TAFE and enterprise• A small regional private RTO operating across states• A large public RTO |

Table 1 displays the characteristics of the five sites that were selected by the QA-AG to form the focus of the case study investigations. Note, to ensure confidentiality of the participants, the names of participating organisations and individual participants have been removed from this report.

An information letter outlining the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, the expected roles and responsibilities of participants and the perceived benefits of the study was then sent to each site (see Appendix B for a copy of the written invitation). Once voluntary consent for participation was obtained, a convenient time for site visits was determined.

Table 1: Characteristics of case study sites selected by the QA-AG

Focus	Description	Location	Training Package	Qualification	Justification	Criteria
Training Package Network	State –based Network of VET Practitioners	VIC	TAE 10	TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment	Membership includes 17 TAFEs and University TAFES in Victoria and some private RTOs Commenced in 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Network Represents private RTOs and TAFE Membership includes regional, rural and metropolitan RTOs
Training Package Network	State based network of VET practitioners	SA	Beauty Training Package	Various	New network includes various types of RTOs across the state delivering the Training Packages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of RTOs Range of sizes Range of geographic locations represented
RTO operating within diverse context	School based Traineeship	NSW & QLD	Health Training Package	Certificate III in Health Services Assistance	Partnership arrangement between Schools, TAFE and private enterprise to deliver school-based traineeships involving on and off the job assessments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise RTO Partnership arrangement between enterprise, TAFE and Education Department Delivery of school-based traineeship High risk associated with incorrect judgements
RTO operating within a diverse context	Small regional private RTO working across states	VIC, SA, QLD	General Construction	Certificate I-III in general construction, floor and wall tiling, solid plastering, bricklaying/blocklaying and carpentry	Focus on trades in remote regions, apprentices and skills in demand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small RTO Regional
RTO operating within a diverse context	Large public RTO with multiple sites	Withheld to maintain confidentiality	Various	Various	Various campuses, small number of assessors at remote sites. Range of qualifications. Includes VET in Schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large RTO Large youth cohorts VET in Schools Multiple campuses Regional and rural campuses

The establishment phase also included a desktop analysis to review the NQC reports and materials relevant to validation and moderation. The findings from the analysis were then

used to inform the development of the interview schedule for the case studies (see next section).

INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

To ensure the case studies fulfilled the research requirements and were undertaken in a consistent manner, a semi structured interview questionnaire was developed to provide the reporting framework for the investigation.

Questionnaire

There were four main sections to the questionnaire:

1. Characteristics of the Organisation/Network.
2. Assessment Current Practices.
3. Assessment Quality Management Strategies.
4. Feedback on the Code and Guide.

Sections 1 and 2 were designed to document the background characteristics and assessment practices of the organisation/network. In relation to Section 3, a series of semi-structured questions was developed by the project team that addressed the following design issues that underpinned by the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*. That is, the

- Assessment Quality Management Processes (e.g., quality assurance, quality control and/or quality review processes) that had been implemented (and/or intending to be implemented);
- Purpose of establishing and maintaining a validation/moderation system;
- Staffing considerations – roles and responsibilities of key players;
- Level of authority to act upon the decisions/recommendations of the validation/moderation process;
- Scheduling of activities (how is this determined?);
- Strategy employed to sample units, assessment tools;
- Financial considerations to establishing and maintaining the system;
- Processes to handle complaints and appeals;
- Records management (who, where, when and duration);
- Types and processes for reporting the validation and/or moderation outcomes;
- Internal review processes that have been established;
- Perceived barriers and facilitators to successful implementation of the validation and/or moderation system.

The final section of the questionnaire comprised a series of items to gather feedback on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the existing NQC publications on validation and moderation. Such items were designed to identify further support materials that could be developed, which would assist RTOs and/or networks of assessors to establish and maintain validation and/or moderation processes within diverse VET settings.

See Appendix C for the detailed version of the questions developed for both types of case studies (i.e., those RTOs working within diverse settings and the networks of assessors).

Professional Development Materials

For each case study site, a professional development workshop was conducted by a member of the research team at the first face-to-face visit. The workshop was designed to provide opportunity for the participants to become familiar with both the NQC's (2009a) *Code* and the *Implementation Guide* (2009b). Whilst the workshops were similar in content to the information sessions delivered in 2009 (see NQC, 2010), they provided opportunities for greater interaction and workshop activities. For example, participants within each workshop were encouraged to supply copies of their assessment tools and where possible, judged candidate evidence to enable a simulated moderation/validation activity to be undertaken during the workshop, using the templates provided within the Guide.

DATA COLLECTION

Each case study site was coordinated by the following members of the research team:

Type of Case Study	Description of case study	Case study coordinator
Assessor Network	• The TAE10 – network of Victorian VET Practitioners	Shelley Gillis
	• Beauty Training Package – network of SA VET practitioners	Chloe Dyson
RTO operating in diversity context	• School based traineeship – partnership between school, TAFE and enterprise	Shelley Gillis
	• A small regional private RTO operating across states	Andrea Bateman
	• A large public RTO	Andrea Bateman

The case study data was collected on two occasions. The first involved the case study coordinator delivering a Professional Development workshop to the RTO/network members

to introduce the new definitions, principles and approaches that underpinned the *Code* and *Guide* (NQC, 2009a & 2009b, respectively). In addition to the workshop, the coordinator also conducted an interview with the key personnel from the organisation/network on its current approaches and perceptions of validation and/or moderation.

The second meeting occurred four to six weeks later when members of the RTO/network had had the opportunity to review and use aspects of the *Code* and *Guide* within his/her context. The purpose of the follow-up discussions was to obtain more in-depth feedback about the:

- ♦ Perceived usefulness and relevance of *Guide*;
- ♦ Perceptions of potential factors that may impact on the design, implementation and maintenance of a validation and/or moderation process within his/her context;
- ♦ Recommendations for improvement to *Guide*; and
- ♦ Suggestions for development of further support materials.

For each of the three RTOs, the second meeting was held face-to-face. However, due to the logistical and financial costs associated with bringing the state-based network of practitioners together, the follow up discussions with each assessor network entailed a combination of telephone and email exchanges with the case study coordinator.

Throughout the data collection period, the case study coordinators documented the questions being raised by participants. Such information was used to inform the development of the support materials (see Reporting).

DATA ANALYSIS

The case studies were analysed to identify:

- Similarities and differences in design and implementation of assessment quality management strategies.
- Potential barriers and facilitators of assessment quality management strategies, according to structural, process and personal factors.
- Implications for customisation/amendments to the Implementation Guide to assist networks and RTOs conducting assessment and validation activities within diverse settings.

REPORTING

The findings from the case study analyses was used to produce three types of reports:

- *Research Report* documenting the aims, methodology, case study findings and recommendations from the study.
- *An Assessor Guide: Validation and Moderation* which was a support document comprising a series of frequently asked questions for developing assessment tools as well as establishing and maintaining validation and/or moderation processes within and/or across RTOs. This document was designed for VET practitioners and coordinators who conduct assessment and/or validation activities in a range of diverse settings (eg small RTOs, partnership arrangements, school-based traineeships, networks of assessors).
- Fact Sheets (x3) which provided a quick reference to assessment tool development, systematic validation and assessor partnerships and were designed to provide a quick reference to assessment tool development, systematic validation and assessor partnerships, in:
 - Assessor Partnerships
 - Quality assuring assessment tools
 - Systematic validation

These have been separately published by the NQC together with other Assessment Fact Sheets developed in 2010.

SECTION 3: CASE STUDY REPORTS

CASE STUDY A: *TAE10 - NETWORK OF VET PRACTITIONERS*

THE TRAINING PACKAGE

The TAE10 Training Package specifies the competency standards and nationally recognised qualifications for those working within the VET sector. In 2010, it replaced the TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package (with the exception of the TAA50104 Diploma of Training and Assessment), which was itself a replacement for the BSZ98 Assessment and Workplace Training Package.

THE NETWORK

In Victoria in 2001, a peak network for VET practitioners delivering accredited qualifications in training and assessment was established. Members were initially drawn from all Victorian TAFE institutes and Universities with TAFE Divisions. Initially, the main objective of the network was to provide collegiate support for the public TAFE providers in their delivery of the Diploma of VET and the BSZ98 Training Package. This objective was subsequently extended to include the Diploma of VET Practice and the TAA04 Training Package by providing a forum for:

- discussion around the development of the teaching skills of TAFE teachers;
- the sharing of resources;
- dissemination of information about delivery strategies; and
- validation of assessment tools.

Although the network members share teaching and assessment resources within these qualifications, provision of such qualifications is at the individual RTO level, often supported by employers at worksites.

Whilst the establishment of the network has provided a valuable source of shared information and resources for delivery and assessment of VET teacher education qualifications, the introduction of the AQTF audit requirements for conducting validation across institutions has been another major driving force behind its continual operation. Other benefits of forming a collective group of assessor practitioners has included increased opportunities to have input into the development of new teacher education qualifications as well as discuss the issues of resources and validation of assessments for the related qualifications. For example, the network has been used as a forum to review the content validity of using the TAA04 assessment tools for application to the TAE10 using the

competency mapping template provided in the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation* (see Appendix A.2).

MEMBERSHIP

There are approximately 100 members within the network, representing 17 RTOs. When the network was first established, it was designed for TAFE providers only, but it has recently increased its scope to include membership from within private and community-based RTOs. Membership has been via invitation. All members must have had at least Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and numerous members also possess higher level teaching qualifications and other vocational qualifications.

THE ASSESSMENT QUALITY MANAGEMENT APPROACH

QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

The network has introduced a number of quality assurance processes such as establishing minimum requirements for its members (e.g. having the TAA04 Cert IV qualification). Another example of QA processes implemented was the development of a standardised reporting format for the teaching practicum requirements of the Diploma of VET Practice, including the development of guidelines for the way the various aspects should be conducted. This was subsequently reviewed across time and implementation. The network has also conducted a series of professional development type programs/workshops through its conferences and at its quarterly meetings.

QUALITY CONTROL (QC)

Quality control, in the sense of making adjustments (where necessary) to students results to bring each RTO member's standards into alignment, has not been undertaken by the network. To date, the network has only implemented face-to-face quality assurance and quality review processes. The restrictions on not being able to moderate has been argued to relate to timeliness (as each member RTO operates under different timeframes) and the costs associated with coming together as a network in a timely manner. The network plans to pilot a process to validate assessment tools electronically in the near future. This may also provide an opportunity to further explore the possibility of implementing timely moderation meetings via an electronic medium.

QUALITY REVIEW (QR)

The review and validation of assessment tools, processes and outcomes to identify future improvements to assessment practices, is the most common activity undertaken by the network. A range of assessment methods tend to be validated by the network with the most frequently reported to be:

- Classroom based products
- Workplace based products
- Simulated/classroom demonstration
- Completion of activities in learning materials
- Written/assignment/test/projects.

The network has yet to validate assessment tools that comprise interview schedules, group projects and portfolio specifications. It has occasionally validated on-line assessment tasks but some members still see this as a challenge yet to be overcome.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are two major parties involved in the validation process:

- The network coordinator
- Individual members of the network

It is the network coordinator who is responsible for promoting and coordinating the network validation meetings in collaboration with the host institution. This typically entails working with the host institution (e.g. a member RTO or the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA)) to arrange the layout of the rooms (including break out rooms), catering, advertising etc. The network coordinator is also responsible for preparing a timetable/schedule for the units to be validated by the network throughout a year.

In relation to the validation functions of the network, individual network members are responsible for:

- Attending and participating in regular validation meetings;
- Providing samples of assessment tools for purposes of validation;
- Disseminating the recommendations arising from the validation meeting to the relevant tool developers within one's own RTO;
- Monitoring whether the actions arising from the validation meeting have been acted upon within their own RTO, where appropriate;
- Adhering to the Principles underpinning the Code of Professional Conduct for Validation and Moderation.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The major financial consideration for establishing and maintaining the network has been associated with each member RTO's costs associated with teaching relief to allow participants to attend a central meeting; as well as the time it takes for participants to both travel and attend the meetings face-to-face. It was also acknowledged that the coordination of the network would need to be financially supported in some way if all the requirements specified within the *NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation* were to be adhered to.

The coordination role of the network has been a voluntary position, funded by the in-kind contribution of one of the member RTOs in which the network coordinator has been employed (note that the coordinator has been allocated 3 hours per fortnight from his/her RTO's workload model to coordinate the network). As there has been no formal structure or process for succession planning, the same individual has coordinated the network since its inception. Although the initial arrangement was for each institute to call and host meetings when required, in the absence of external funding for supporting and maintaining the network, the initial coordinator has retained the role by default.

The network pays a fee to the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) to provide the administration support for the conference. The VTA also allows the network to use their meeting rooms and supply tea and coffee; this location has been found to be the most convenient for regional and rural members to attend meetings via public transportation.

Members are charged a small fee to attend meetings and conferences etc to cover the costs of venue hire, guest presenters and catering etc. Each RTO covers the cost of teaching relief, travel and accommodation (if applicable) for its members to attend. Member RTOs, particularly those within inner metropolitan regions, are also encouraged to host validation meetings and conferences.

SCHEDULING OF MEETINGS

Typically, four network meetings are held each year in which validation of assessment tools forms the focus. To encourage greater participation and reduce travel costs of its members, one of the four validation meetings are held at the same time as the annual conference. The network also hosts a one day conference for VET practitioners about the issues faced in the delivery and assessment of VET practitioner qualifications. The network's role also includes facilitating professional development activities for its members.

THE VALIDATION PROCESS

The network has developed a Validation Checklist for reviewing the quality of Assessment Tools using a consensus panel approach to validation. The checklist provides a series of questions for a small number of assessors (around 5 or so members of the network) to review as a panel. The purpose of the Checklist was to establish a shared understanding of the assessment tasks, strategies and methods that members of the network were using for the delivery of the Cert IV in Training & Assessment and with a particular emphasis on the units that have been amended to include more specific reference to recognition of prior learning. The questions tend to cover the following aspects of the tool:

- Transparency
- Currency
- Validity
- Reliability
- Flexibility
- Fairness
- Sufficiency
- Authenticity
- AQF requirements
- Key competencies
- Dimensions of competency

It was however acknowledged by many of the network members that the templates within the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide* (i.e., the A.1 Self Assessment and the C.3 Item Record Form) were very useful templates for reviewing assessment tools.

Within a network meeting, a number of small panels are formed (e.g. 10 panels with 6 or so members) which are responsible for reviewing the assessment tools that have been tabled by the panel member. Each panel has its own table at the meeting. Note that each panel reviews the assessment tools supplied by members from within that panel. That is, there is currently no requirement or process for sharing or reviewing each assessment tools outside each panel – this is largely due to the logistic challenges of:

- Trying to coordinate all members to participate in a validation exercise at the same time (e.g., in some instances 60 or so members can be present at one meeting); as well as
- Not having a process or finances in place for making duplicate copies of the tools for each panel to review at the same time.

The panel reviews the assessment tool and makes recommendations for improvements etc. To date, only the assessment tools have been reviewed in terms of content validity, clarity of the assessment procedures and reviewing the evidence requirements with the ultimate aim of the process to establish and maintain a shared understanding of assessment tool related issues.

The network has yet to check the appropriateness of assessor judgements in accordance with the decision making rules specified within the assessment tool. Members of the network however considered such evidence as a valuable component of the validation process and will be incorporated into future validation meetings, where such evidence is available for review.

SAMPLING

Although the network does not currently have any formal policy and/or procedures for conducting validation, it does implement a systematic approach to sampling units of competency and uses standardised templates for validating its member's assessment tools etc.

AUTHORITY

Individual members of the network take responsibility for acting upon (or not acting upon) the decision of the panel when they return to their RTO. There is neither a follow-up process by the panel nor any level of accountability to report the outcomes/actions undertaken by the RTO at any subsequent validation meeting.

RECORD KEEPING

Whilst the network has actively been involved in validating assessment tools, the network itself does not retain any records of the validation process in terms of the process nor the outcomes. The responsibility for maintaining such records is the individual member whose RTO 'owns' the tools. Each member is responsible for selecting which assessment tools s/he will bring to the validation meetings, although at times, members have been encouraged to focus on selective units associated with either training and/or assessment. It should be acknowledged that in most instances the assessment tools being reviewed have been developed by the network member. As such, the assessment tool developer is also the panel member where all members of the panel are aware of authorship of the assessment tool. This has implications for maintaining confidentiality. There was general agreement that the use of de-identified assessment tools was a way in which maintaining confidentiality could be enhanced in future validation meetings.

The network does not have any reporting requirements, and again, it is up to the individual participants to report the outcomes etc to their own institutes as part of their quality review requirements.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

As the onus is on individual participants to make any recommended changes at their own RTO, there have not been any complaints and/or appeals about the validation/moderation process from any network members. If the network continues to only conduct validation, there was general agreement among the members that it was unlikely that any appeals would arise in the near future. This is largely due to the fact that the network does not have any authoritative power or desire to follow up on any network panel's recommendations.

INTERNAL REVIEW

There is currently no formal process for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the network. Only anecdotal feedback has been collected from participants. Furthermore, as attendance and follow-up actions are voluntary for members, ensuring comparability of standards across the network RTOs cannot be assured. Instead, the network aims to achieve continuous improvement in its assessment practices as its major aim.

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

The main aim of establishing the network was to create a 'sharing atmosphere' among its members. That is, it was hoped that members would see the network as an opportunity to collaborate and improve its assessment practices for all members. There was strong belief that the network has been very successful in creating this atmosphere among its members. Furthermore, members of the network reported that from their experience, whether one is validating their own or others tools, participants come away saying how much they learn each time they get together to discuss and share understandings.

However, the major barrier to successful implementation of validation and/or moderation meetings within the network was thought to be associated with the geographic distances of its members and opportunities to come together face-to-face. Although the network meets four times a year to conduct validation, such days are also used to provide professional development opportunities and forums for discussion. There was strong agreement that more regular and timely validation meetings (which focus only on validation) are required. It was also acknowledged that such meetings may not necessarily have to be undertaken face to face meetings. The network plans to try to conduct validations electronically using Elluminate which has been designed to support e-learning (see www.illuminate.com). It was further acknowledged that moving toward an electronic process might assist with timely moderation activities, if the network extends its functions to also include moderation activities.

CHALLENGES

The major challenge of the network was thought to be associated with ensuring that the equity principle within the Code was adhered to; and in particular, ensuring that all types of RTOs are represented and part of the process. One possible approach to addressing this issue would be via introducing electronic validation meetings and having a dedicated website/blog/wiki for sharing resources and tools etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO THE GUIDE

Whilst the members of the network expressed positive feedback in relation to the NQC (2009a, 2009b) *Code* and *Guide* as being useful resource materials, it was recommended that any future developments include:

- Summary tables and diagrams to reduce reading load for assessors who are time poor;
- Examples of completed competency mappings;
- Examples of benchmark/exemplar assessment tools;
- A quick reference guide that explains in non-academic language some of the key issues that underpin the Guide and Code (e.g., Frequently asked questions and answers);
- Development of a checklist for panel members to refer to prior to the validation meeting, outlining roles and responsibilities for selecting and tabling assessment tools and candidates' judged work.

Discussions were also raised as to the level of detail required in the competency mapping. For example, the question was raised as to whether it was necessary to map all components within the unit of competency to the sub-components of the tool (e.g., whether it should be at the element versus performance criterion level). If an atomistic approach was desirable by auditors under the AQTF, then concerns were raised about the workload implications, even if it was only carried out during the development phase of the tool. At the same time, it was appreciated by numerous members that such a mapping exercise would be crucial in high risk assessment (e.g., which may provide safety risks to the candidate) or high stakes assessment environments (e.g., for selection purposes in which the supply was much greater than the demand). Consequently, it was suggested that greater guidance be given on the mapping exercise in any future support materials to ensure the process was manageable but at the same time, satisfying the requirements of demonstrating content validity of the tool.

Finally, a number of the network members raised concerns with the inconsistency of the terminology and definitions used within various national and/state policy and/or support documents. For example, concerns were expressed with the different definitions used within

the NQC publications and the Training and Education Training Package (TAE10) as well as the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (2010) Guidelines for VET providers. This led to some confusion as to which definition should hold precedence.

CASE STUDY B: *BEAUTY TRAINING PACKAGE - A NETWORK OF ASSESSORS*

BACKGROUND

Service Skills South Australia convened the Hair and Beauty Network in 2010 to assist with a DFEEST VET Innovation project, which was designed to support the implementation of the Beauty Training Package, endorsed in September 2010. The network members have worked closely with Service Skills SA over a number of years; including work on a Reframing the Future project on the AQTF in 2007 and a Workforce Development project in 2007 - 2008.

There are 11 Registered Training Organisations in the network and it is comprised of private RTOs and a multi campus Institute of TAFE. All of the RTOs have bases in Adelaide but some also operate in regional centres.

The network has not met to conduct assessment validation but some of the member RTOs have met to informally review assessment in the past. Despite the network's best intentions to establish a validation panel, there has been little consensus as to how this may operate in South Australia. At this stage it is more than likely that Service Skills South Australia will work with the Hair and Beauty Association to determine if this could eventuate.

The purpose of the network is to maintain a collaborative network of Beauty Registered Training Organisations that are prepared to invest time and effort into ensuring that the standards of the delivery and assessment of Beauty competencies meets the needs of the Beauty industry in South Australia. Services Skills SA is fully supportive of this process. Network members felt that the network could have a very strong role in increasing the way in which the Beauty industry is viewed in South Australia, particularly in relation to its professionalism. The recent introduction of new technologies such as Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) and laser technologies has exposed the Beauty industry to substantial risk as the use of these technologies is not regulated. Members felt that this risk could be reduced by RTOs sharing resources to collaboratively develop their knowledge of these technologies and to develop robust assessment tools. A higher level of quality assurance may also have the effect of reducing what the network felt were burdensome insurance requirements placed by insurance companies on RTOs delivering training in the new technologies.

The Network members considered that the Hair and Beauty Association and Service Skills South Australia had a pivotal role in facilitating and supporting the process of establishing a validation network and that this role required further exploration. This could result in the establishment of satellite validation groups, in which the authority for validation rested,

while the Hair and Beauty Association and Service Skills South Australia provided overarching support and coordination, facilitating adherence to timelines and the sharing of good practice, where it was warranted. However, while this model is the preferred one, the ability of the network to sustain this activity when Service Skills South Australia withdraws its support is questionable. Systemic support is required to facilitate this.

THE NQC ASSESSMENT VALIDATION MATERIALS

Most of the network members were aware of the NQC suite of validation resources published in 2009. Network members were satisfied with the design of the NQC materials in their current form if they were to conduct consensus validation face-to-face. However, the members also felt that as it was very difficult to meet that they would be well served by support and resources to assist them to conduct validation online. In order to develop and sustain an online validation network, the network members felt that a number of issues would need to be addressed. The network suggested that a guide to online validation or an addendum to the existing NQC validation and moderation materials could be developed.

ONLINE VALIDATION MATERIALS

The network members felt that the current NQC validation materials could be adapted for use online but that some specific online materials, as addenda to the existing materials, would be welcome.

TEMPLATE

A template for a code of conduct/rules for operation for an online network would be required to develop an E network. This template would guide members in articulating the central purpose for the network and the validation processes to be used. The template would assist E network members to determine how the NQC principles of validation and moderation would be operationalised. For example, with the principle 'Confidentiality' the members discussed the need to assign codes to RTOs in order to facilitate open feedback.

It would assist members to determine the roles and functions of each of the network members and provide guidance on how external validators would be used by the network. For the Beauty Industry, this might include manufacturers of new technologies such as IPL and laser technologies.

The template would assist in the development of meeting protocols, including guidelines for individuals or small groups making responses via the Internet; and timeframes for responses.

The network members stressed the need for guidance regarding how to confirm each member's commitment to the validation process.

GUIDE

The network also suggested the development of a guide on how to develop and sustain an E network. This guide would include suggestions for how to establish an E network, including development of a promotional strategy. Suggestions could be included about the technology that could be exploited to develop and conduct an online network. For example, network members felt that Moodle might be insufficient and that an E –network using an electronic platform might be more effective. Options for systems design could also be included in the guide, including options for log on and enrolling in the network. It was also suggested that the guide should provide options for structuring an E network. These options could include, for example: setting up buddy systems using an E platform; creating an E portfolio environment to form partnerships or small groups which could then post back their findings to a digital drop box.

The information in the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide* could be adapted to describe the role of the Chair in an Electronic environment. Members stated that validation is often not successful where the assessor does not know how to prepare adequately and as a result feels some antipathy to the process. It was felt that while the NQC *Implementation Guide* provided information about the assessor's role in validation and how to prepare for validation that it could be re-stated in plain English and adapted to an E environment.

The guide could also include information about how to close the cycle of quality review and to build this into an online validation process. Members felt that validation consensus meetings often lead to suggestions for improvements in assessment tools but that the implementation of these suggestions is seldom tested. This could lead to guidance about how to create an online resource of exemplar assessment tools as well as protocols for accessing and using these materials.

CONCLUSION

There is a great deal of impetus for the Hair and Beauty Network to formalise its assessment validation processes but the Network is keen to develop a model where members can collaborate online to share good practice. This model relies on the development of strategies to promote the sustainability of the network when external support is withdrawn.

CASE STUDY C:

A SCHOOL BASED TRAINEESHIP – PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL, TAFE AND AN ENTERPRISE

THE SCHOOL-BASED TRAINEESHIP

In NSW, the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance can be offered as either a school based traineeship (SBT) or a VET course. In relation to the school based traineeship, the Certificate III is part of the Human Services Curriculum Framework within the NSW HSC. School based trainees are provided with the opportunity to gain a national VET qualification as well as the NSW HSC.

The Certificate III in Health Services Assistance is from the Health Training Package (HLT32507). There are 15 units of competency that must be completed over the two year HSC period to achieve the qualification. Students also undertake 100 days of a clinical work placement within an acute health care facility (i.e., hospital) which is also spread over the two year period.

In addition to achieving the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance, students undertaking the SBT gain credit toward the HSC for the School-based formal training component of their traineeship. That is, 6 of the 22 units required for the HSC are achieved by the SBT. Furthermore, students may elect to complete the Board Endorsed Stage 6 Industry-based Learning Course enabling them to gain HSC credit for the on-the-job training component of the school-based traineeship. This is equivalent to an additional 4 units within the HSC. As such, those students who elect to have their work placement formerly recognised as part of their HSC can use the SBT to contribute toward 10 of the 22 units required by the HSC.

In 2011, a new cohort of students in NSW will begin the school-based traineeship in which they will have the option to undertake an HSC examination in 2012. Students who elect to undertake the HSC examination can have the results of the examination contribute toward their Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank Score (ATAR score).

THE PARTNERSHIP

In 2008, a partnership was formed between the NSW Department of Education, TAFE NSW and a private hospital to deliver a school-based traineeship as part of the NSW HSC. Three cohorts of school-based traineeships have undertaken the program (with 7 in each cohort since 2008) and another new cohort of 9 students is to commence in 2011. To date the

partnership arrangement has largely concentrated on the design of the program and the delivery of training (eg in terms of sequencing of units, selection of students, determining pre-requisite units for the work placement).

The TAFE and the hospital would like to expand their partnership to include the monitoring of assessments, standards and outcomes of students across the two institutions.

THE NSW DEPT OF EDUCATION

The NSW Education Department (via the local schools) is responsible for promoting the school-based traineeships to its Year 10 cohort and for handling application forms to be reviewed by both the TAFE and the hospital. Potential students receive details about the program through information sessions which are organised with the schools. The Education Department, via the Board of Studies, is also responsible for designing, administering and assessing the HSC examination. The HSC examination will be designed to assess the HSC content of the Health Services Curriculum Framework (i.e., health and wellbeing; industry context; safety; and work) as well as the employability skills for the Certificate III qualification. It should be acknowledged that the HSC examination will be independent of the competency based assessments undertaken as part of the school-based traineeships by the TAFE and the student's performance on the exam will have no impact on his/her eligibility for the AQF VET qualification. In relation to those students who elect to have their workplacements formerly contributing toward their HSC (via enrolling in the Board Endorsed Stage 6 Industry-based learning course), the school is responsible for reviewing the portfolio and reflective journals maintained by the students whilst undertaking the clinical placement.

THE TAFE

The Certificate III in Health Services Assistance is under the scope of registration of the TAFE. TAFE delivers all of the 15 units of competency that comprise the qualification. It is also responsible for

- Selecting students into the program (but it performs this role in collaboration with the hospital);
- Designing the off-the-job assessment tools;
- Conducting competency based assessments against the entire set of units within the Cert III;
- Designing the assessment logbooks that are used to record the on-the-job assessments conducted by the hospital staff;
- Delivering the HSC Content (focus areas) which comprise of a number of units within the Health Training Package; and
- Satisfying the assessment requirements specified within the AQTF standards.

THE HOSPITAL

The hospital is a large private RTO with multiple sites both nationally and internationally. It delivers and assesses against a range of qualifications from Certificate III to Graduate

Diploma levels. The work placement provided by the hospital has been designed to provide opportunities for the trainees to enhance the learning acquired at TAFE. In addition to using the assessment logbooks developed by the TAFE, the hospital also designs its own assessment activities and record sheets to monitor the students' progress throughout the two year work placement. The hospital has a responsibility – duty of care (to patients, other staff and to the students) to ensure that the school-based traineeship students are clinically sound and clinically safe. This is an important responsibility as it was acknowledged that the students have varying levels of competence when coming from a simulated/TAFE environment into the workplace.

THE STUDENTS

The school-based trainees spend one day per week at the hospital, 4 hrs at TAFE and 3.5 days at school. Note that whilst at school, they are completing the remaining 18 units required for the HSC which are outside the school-based traineeship. In 2011, the students will be required to sign a learning contract, to be established jointly by the hospital and TAFE, which will specify the two organisations requirements and expectations of the students whilst undertaking the work placement. The Learning Contract will be designed to clearly articulate that the clinical work placement is a significant component of the course and if not carried out successfully, the students will not receive the Cert III qualification (even if they have completed all the 15 units at TAFE). That is, it will be explained that the placement will require them to exercise their theoretical knowledge in the workplace/clinical setting to the standard specified in the industry competency standards.

ASSESSMENT

The competency based assessments undertaken as part of the school-based traineeship are conducted by the TAFE. Although the hospital conducts its own assessments, assessment against the units of competency for certification purposes is the responsibility of TAFE. In the past, the assessment tools have been established centrally by NSW TAFE through the form of student log books. In December 2012, the development of such log books and other assessment tools is to be decentralised, providing greater autonomy for both the local TAFE institute and the hospital to design and implement their own assessment tools.

Both the TAFE and hospital used a range of assessment methods to assess the trainees.

Table 2: Assessment methods utilised across TAFE and the hospital.

Method	Hospital	TAFE
Work-place observation	Yes	
Work-place products	Yes	
Simulation/classroom demonstration		Yes
Classroom based products		Yes
Completion of activities in learning materials		Yes
Role plays	Yes	Yes
Oral questioning	Yes	Yes
Oral Presentations		Yes
Written assignment/test/projects	Yes	Yes
Group projects	Yes	Yes
Portfolio	Yes	

To date, the assessments conducted on and off-the-job are separate activities. Both organisations would like to establish a formal partnership arrangement to:

- Formally review assessment tools used in the two different contexts; and
- Establish assessor panels and/or validation partnership arrangements comprising exchange of staff across both contexts to conduct joint assessments.

ESTABLISHING A FORMAL VALIDATION AND MODERATION PROCESS:

Although each organisation currently conducts a number of internal quality assurance and quality review processes, establishing a formal collaborative process for conducting consensus validation and moderation would be the ideal approach to continuously improving the assessment practices within the school-based traineeship. To achieve this, it was agreed that a formal Quality Assessment Management Group (QAMG) be formed to:

- Panel new assessment tools being developed in either contexts;
- Validate existing tools and/or any customisations using a consensus approach;
- Identify 'at risk' students to provide early intervention (monitor adequate student progress);
- Monitor the students' adherence to the Learning Contract specifying the work placement requirement and expectations;
- Facilitate and coordinate the establishment of assessment panels across the two organisations (i.e., via staff exchange); and
- Conduct consensus moderation to resolve discrepancies between the on and off the job assessments in relation to competence prior to the finalisation of results.

STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

It was agreed by the two organisations that the QAMG would comprise:

- A small number (i.e. 4) of nurse educators who are employed within the education unit of the hospital (all of whom have Cert IV within the TAA04); and responsible for managing the learning and assessment of the school-based trainees;
- The TAFE teachers who are teaching the 15 units of competency (in this case, there are only two TAFE teachers across two campuses);
- The TAFE Course coordinator; and
- An independent Chair, who was employed within TAFE but not directly involved in health but had assessment tool design expertise.

There was strong belief that a chair was required for the successful coordination and organisation of the meetings.

As the HSC exam was seen to be a totally separate activity to the RTO based assessments, there was an agreement that there was no need to include the NSW Education Dept as a member of the QAMG.

AUTHORITY

The QAMG would adopt a consensus approach to decision making in which formal minutes of decisions including action plans would be recorded. Subsequent meetings would then include the review of evidence of the actions undertaken within the given timeframes etc.

SCHEDULING AND SAMPLING

It was thought that scheduling was more about the timing of the meetings than the sampling of students, tools and/or units because the cohort (n=16) and course units (15 units) was so small within the qualification. However, it was acknowledged that there was a considerable amount of development work to be undertaken to establish the QAMG and as such, it was recommended that six weekly meetings be scheduled in the first instance. It was also thought that regular meetings would assist with identifying students at risk which would enable the QAMG to adopt a preventative model as opposed to a reactive model for monitoring student progress.

It was however acknowledged that a sampling strategy may need to be employed to manage the selection of units, assessment tools and/or students to be undertaken as a joint panel of

assessors, given the human resource costs associated with staff exchange/relief across the two organisations.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Maintaining comparability of standards across the two contexts would require a commitment of both institutions to:

- Attend and prepare for the QAMG meetings;
- Participate in staff exchange and joint assessment panels;
- Develop and/or customise assessment tools; as well as
- Design validation processes and products.

Despite such human resource costs, particularly in the establishment phase, the costs were seen to be justified by all parties as there was strong belief that it would improve the program's processes and outcomes for all.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

There was strong agreement from all parties that there would not be a need to develop a specific complaints and/or appeals process for the operations of the QAMG, as any complaints/grievances could be accommodated under the RTO's existing assessment appeals policy. It should also be noted that both institutions thought that it would be unlikely that there would be a need for such a process as the QAMG would:

- Make decisions through a consensus approach;
- Maintain formal minutes about students outcomes and progress;
- Ensure all processes and outcomes are documented to ensure transparency;
- Include membership of the assessment tool developers;
- Be chaired by an independent member of the RTO; and
- Provide mechanisms for feedback/comment by the tool developers on any recommendations arising from previous meetings

INTERNAL REVIEW

It was agreed that the internal process would be a continuous process where the principles underpinning the Professional Code of Practice would be an agenda item at all meetings in which evidence of adherence would be reviewed.

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

The major facilitator for ensuring the success of the operations of the QAMG is that there is close proximity between the two organisations, which have shared students and will have shared tools.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that the major challenge would be to improve the communication channels to receive timely reports/updates of student achievement/progress. This was thought to be achieved via scheduling regular meetings (i.e., 6 weekly)

It was also acknowledged by the hospital that it will be a challenge to bring other workplace colleagues on board to provide greater opportunities for students to acquire and demonstrate a greater breadth and depth of skills and knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO GUIDE

Whilst there was strong agreement that the *NQC's Guide* and *Code* were both useful materials for assessment quality managers, there was an acknowledgement that such materials may be a little daunting for VET practitioners and workplace assessors. As such, it was recommended that any future developments include

- simple guidelines and examples of the ideal characteristics of an assessment tool (in particular the competency mapping with guidelines on how not to be too atomistic but at the same time, establish content validity);
- a template for establishing partnership arrangements (eg a Term of Reference that features the Design features in Table 7 of the NQC (2009b) *Guide*; and
- case study examples of application in diverse settings.

CASE STUDY D:

A SMALL REGIONAL PRIVATE RTO WORKING ACROSS STATES

BACKGROUND

This small regional private RTO has been registered for 10 years, and has focused its training services on trade apprentices in rural and regional Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. The RTO manages a scope across 3 states, ranging from Certificate I to Certificate III in the areas of carpentry, joinery, wall and floor tiling, roof tiling, painting and decorating, solid plastering and wall and ceiling lining.

The RTO is managed by two Directors and employs 18 sessional trainers, who are all practising tradesmen and have been selected from within their region to provide training services. All tradesmen have their own business and hence training is not their core business.

Not all trainers have the requisite Certificate IV in Training and Assessment but supervision and co-assessment strategies are deployed. Additional quality assurance arrangements also include provision of developed training materials and standardised assessment tools.

The trainers that have the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (9) play a more significant role as trainers and assessors and provide the generic units of competency as well as the specialist trade units. Trainers who do not have the Certificate IV are confined to specific skills units in their trade.

Trainers are encouraged to undertake their Certificate IV qualification and two have done so in the last six months. They are all aware of the need to upgrade to TAE10 within the next two years and it is likely that this organisation will provide some supplementary funding to achieve this.

ASSESSMENT

The competency based assessments usually occur in a simulated work environment in conjunction with the classroom as well as in the workplace. The assessment methods utilised include a mix of theory assessment which is generally an assignment or a test, simulated practical assessment conducted at the RTO's various premises and workplace observation and workplace products as well as third party confirmation.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES/AUTHORITY

The two directors take responsibility for the management of the RTO. The first director (Training Manager) coordinates the training and assessment and provides the supervision and co-assessment presence for subject matter experts as required under the AQTF. The second director (Resources Manager) is responsible for administration; ensuring sufficient resources are in place for training and assessment; and ensuring compliance with apprenticeship contracts in three states.

The Director (Training Manager) in conjunction with second director is responsible for ensuring the development, monitoring and reviewing of the assessment tools. The management team aims to minimise the work impact on the tradesmen and utilise them to confirm the assessment tools or review key aspects of the assessment tool.

ASSESSMENT QUALITY MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The RTO takes a mixed approach to validation:

- Once a year the training teams meets as a team building exercise and includes professional development, operational business and also review of training materials and assessment tools
- An informal assessor partnership approach to validation is utilised amongst delivery teams (only if distance allows) but it is not formally recorded nor managed by the leadership team.

Currently the two directors are undertaking the bulk of the work to ensure that assessment tools are well documented and set out (in other words 'user friendly' for a tradesman trainer and assessor) and then undertake consultation with assessors for subject matter input. Given the number of units of competency on the scope, the management team makes the decision as to whether the changes to be made to the assessment tools are significant or critical enough to be altered and also make the decision which assessment tools have priority. Currently the focus of any validation activity is the assessment tool and there has been no focus on the assessment evidence provided by candidates. There is no process in place to monitor the effectiveness of validation processes.

The management team considers that validation activities not only inform continuous improvement but also encourage collegiality amongst trainers/assessors who are separated by distance.

The management team considers that given that the assessors are scattered across various regional town and cities, that the assessor partnership model should become more formalised, and be managed by the directors. It is envisaged that the assessors would meet

in pairs in conjunction with one of the directors to ensure that the validation activity is both productive and recorded to inform continuous improvement.

The management team also considered that including an external party for validation would be suitable; however it would depend on the suitability of the external validator, ensuring confidentiality and commercial in confidence information and that it provides a positive process for the assessment team.

SCHEDULING AND SAMPLING

The Resources Manager ensures that the assessment tools are scheduled for validation (consensus approach), and the focus recently has been on the revised Training Package and ensuring that the current assessment tools meet the changes created by the transition. Given this there has been a focus on reviewing all assessment tools rather than a sampling approach being taken. The management team sees the introduction of the new Training Package to be an excellent opportunity to review all assessment tools. The involvement with this National Quality Council exercise enhances this opportunity.

The two managers noted that a sampling approach and scheduling units of competency for review over a period of time once the initial review of all assessment tools would be appropriate. This sampling and scheduling could occur for both the consensus approach and assessor partnership.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The RTO currently funds the annual meeting of the delivery team, including families, and validation of assessment forms part of this meeting. Any other professional development or assessor partnership arrangements (regardless how informal) are also funded by the RTO.

For this RTO a one day meeting can require up to three days allocation to an assessor to travel, additional costs include travel, accommodation and salary. For the assessors, as they all run their own businesses, then there is a significant time commitment from them as well.

The management team however acknowledges the time commitment of the assessors, and currently fund the annual meeting and are prepared to fund the assessor partnership approach or external validation approach if it could be easily managed and improve the training services provided by the RTO.

It was suggested by the management team that this financial burden for the process of assessment validation is one that is particular to rural-based RTO's delivering over a large geographical area.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The RTO has a brief policy and procedure related to validation which has recently been adjusted (as a consequence of this project) to incorporate assessor partnerships. It does not have a complaints and appeals process or procedure specifically related to validation, and did not consider it particularly relevant to validation, only to moderation.

Both directors considered that there was very little need for a specific complaints and appeals process as:

- Assessment tools were developed by the management team from pre-existing public domain assessment tools, and reviewed by the subject matter experts.
- Decisions to make changes to assessment tools would be made by the directors in conjunction with the assessors.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The RTO manages its student data using an AVETMISS compliant database and keep all hard copy records of apprentices. However, validation activities have not been well recorded, as many discussions and changes made are between the two managers and hence not formally recorded.

Formal review and validation of assessment tools at the annual meeting are recorded, but not on any specific form or template. All RTO records are maintained indefinitely.

REPORTING

Given the size of the RTO reporting requirements are not a focus. It is one of the directors who makes notes from meetings, and reporting is for continuous improvement purposes only.

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

The most significant barriers for the RTO are:

- Time

- Distance and geographic spread
- Encouraging development of assessment knowledge of assessors.

The management acknowledged the significant time allocated to undertake an annual meeting (that includes validation) and the time for all assessors to travel.

The geographic spread also poses its own problems, with assessors in similar fields being separated by significant distances.

Finally, as all assessors conduct their own businesses training and assessment is not their core business; hence demands of their businesses can affect the level of their participation. As some are not qualified assessors, the level of professional development required to implement the strategies suggested in the Implementation Guide should not be ignored.

The managers indicated that key facilitators would include:

- Revised and simplified Implementation Guide, with forms and templates
- Financial assistance
- Development of a culture within the RTO to accept the importance of validation and its impact on quality assessment and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO THE GUIDE

The RTO had a significant number of comments to make regarding both the Code and the Implementation Guide.

THE CODE

The Principles had variable applicability:

- **Transparent:** Noted that the managers would provide verbal communication to inform assessors
- **Representative:** Once transition processes were completed, the managers stated that unit selection would be based on risk factors
- **Confidential:** The managers noted that samples of candidates' work used in Validation would be de-identified, and that should any sensitive circumstances arise confidentiality will be maintained as appropriate. However, it had little focus for assessment tool developers. Intellectual property would also be of concern if external validator approach or other parties were utilised.
- **Educative:** Validation/moderation processes would support the professional development of trainers/assessors and the RTO as a whole.
- **Equitable:** Although the principle was considered important it was considered that this had little applicability to validation.
- **Tolerable:** This pre-supposes quality of training and assessing staff and internal processes. Professional development opportunities made available through Validation/Moderation will highlight quality versus 'potential to improve' outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

It was considered that the Guide was confusing, and difficult to digest for basic assessors. The managers, noted that the tradesmen were not experts in assessment and were confused with the language, it was considered that the words such as 'exemplar' were too 'TAFEish' and required revision. Finally, the RTO suggested that the information be simplified, and the number of forms lessened.

It was considered that the most useful item was the basic information pertaining to assessment tools (not the samples for each model as they provided too much information) and the template for self-assessing the assessment tools. The Item Record Form was also considered useful but the RTO suggested that the text be revised to make the language more accessible for assessors.

The RTO suggested that if an additional Guide was developed that this include information only on how to develop assessment tools and how to participate in validation – this would focus the material for the assessors rather than the system managers.

The RTO considered that assessor partnerships would become a major strategy and that resources to facilitate this process would be useful; as well as resources for an external validator approach.

CASE STUDY E: A LARGE PUBLIC RTO

BACKGROUND

The focus of the case study was on a particular assessing group within a large public RTO that has had significant experience in conducting consensus validation over a number of years, both as a network and now as an internal team. The field of study was horticulture with a particular focus on Certificate III in Horticulture. However, the case study also incorporated the views of personnel responsible for quality assurance and professional development including teaching and learning development.

The large state public RTO has undergone significant change over the last 19 months. The RTO includes up to 22 campuses state-wide with about 1,000 staff and over 315 qualifications on scope (not including senior secondary courses). As an organisation the quality assurance team considers that teams across campuses need to have a robust validation process that it is clear and provides sufficient direction for teams; it is critical to the quality of assessment services.

The RTO has in place a range of strategies to quality assure and quality review assessment. The RTO:

- Requires assessing staff to have a minimum qualification as per NQC requirements and aim to develop a set of professional teaching standards and develop a graduate diploma in teaching that will embed lesser qualifications i.e. the TAE10.
- Has developed a policy and procedure related to assessment.
- Has developed draft validation guidelines and forms.
- Has a self-assessment and review cycle, to be undertaken by each teaching team both at the beginning of the year (self-assessment) and end of year (review). This review informs a team specific continuous improvement action plan which is facilitated by a quality assurance team.

The horticulture team noted that strategies employed to quality assure assessment in addition to validation included professional development and the returning to industry program.

ASSESSMENT

The program relies on employers for practical placement. The competency based assessments where practicable occur in the workplace, supplemented by a simulated environment. Not all of the RTO's courses include a workplace component. Assessment methods include workplace observation or products, simulated work assessment and written assignments, test and projects. Finally, testimonials from workplaces are used to confirm competence in the workplace.

The teams have developed assessment tools for their units of competency and have been revising them over the years. A focus for this group would be on comparability of assessment tools across teams.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES/AUTHORITY

The RTO assumes a consensus validation approach and considers that this should be a formal process. The RTO has developed validation guidelines which outline the process to be undertaken for the teams and links to the schedule to be used and the validation record form. The policy and procedure at this stage does not provide guidance on how to conduct consensus validation, and it is up to each team how these meetings are conducted.

The horticulture staff noted that for validation meetings there is a chair nominated but that the decision making processes include all staff present and that they agree to the validation decisions and what changes (if any) need to be made to assessment tools. The team indicated that there is a report generated from the meeting and passed to all participants. In most instances the focus of validation is on the assessment tool, however over the years candidate generated evidence has also been used in the validation process.

Both the staff responsible for quality assurance and the horticulture team noted that assessor partnership approach is also utilised but is undertaken on an informal basis. It was considered by quality assurance personnel that the assessor partnership approach reflects reality as to how assessors work together and would be a practical way of managing coverage of training package units and the schedule. It was considered that although assessor partnerships should be encouraged, that given the size of the RTO that the formal process should be consensus validation approach. The interviewees did not consider that the external validator approach would be suitable for their RTO.

SCHEDULING AND SAMPLING

The RTO does not provide specific guidance to staff as to sampling and scheduling of units of competency, however it is an expectation that there is a schedule for validation (a sample is provided to teams), that validation is undertaken annually and that findings are recorded

and inform continuous improvement of assessment. The guidelines state that validation should be integrated with the continuous improvement cycle so that improvements made to assessment as a result of validation are subject to review in order to maintain quality. The main focus for the staff responsible for quality assurance is ensuring that quality assessment outcomes are achieved, good practice assessment is promoted, assessment meets training package requirements and validation is undertaken 'systematically'.

The horticulture group undertake validation activities twice a year and address 4 -5 units of competency each time, however given the level of discussion it may be that not all units are fully addressed in the validation process. The team undertakes a sampling approach generally based on units of competency that are high risk e.g. chemicals, use of machinery.

The institute quality assurance personnel noted that they aim to revise the validation guidelines to provide groups with clear guidance as to 'what they have to do' so to facilitate implementation.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The RTO acknowledged that some staff have in the past and/or may view the major driver for validation as compliance. The quality assurance personnel believe the focus of validation is on achieving quality outcomes, demonstrating continuous improvement, quality assuring assessment services and in doing so meet compliance requirements. The horticultural team considered that the main driver was consistency of assessment decision across the state.

The RTO has established semi autonomous teams and it is their responsibility to allocate funds accordingly. Funds are provided to the RTO teams for professional development. For the horticultural team, validation is generally conducted on student free days, or teacher time is 'backfilled'. Assessing staff may not attend if there are classes being conducted. Other teams may undertake validation as part of *dott* (duties other than teaching) time and this would vary according to teaching teams.

The RTO acknowledged that with any activity that involves staff, travel and logistics has financial considerations, and the cost of validation must be costed into team expenditure.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The RTO has an assessment policy, a student complaint and appeals policy as well as a staff complaints and appeals policy. There is also a validation policy.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The RTO manages its student data using an AVETMISS compliant database. The horticulture team stated that it keeps all hard copy records of students for 7 years, and approximately 10% of assessment evidence is copied for audit purposes. Initially these records were kept in hard copy but are now scanned. The horticulture team stated that it has used the assessment evidence for 'post-assessment validation'.

REPORTING

The validation process is linked with the RTO's self-assessment and review cycle and the yearly review/continuous improvement processes, hence reporting processes are currently in place. However, it was noted by the quality assurance staff that it is not sufficient just to record the required actions but that as part of the continuous improvement cycle it is important that they are actioned.

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

The interviewees noted that key facilitators to successful implementation of validation would be:

- Additional resources to be developed to support the process (e.g., a guide with minimum expectations of the teams).
- Attitudinal change to encourage continuous improvement focus not a compliance focus, encouraging professionalism and the importance of validation and good practice assessment.

In terms of barriers the interviewees indicated that

- Financing the activity across the organisation was a major issue.
- There was a need to change attitude of teams, that validation is not something that they have to do but that it is worthwhile and is important for team building and team cohesiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO THE GUIDE

The RTO had a number of comments to make regarding both the *Code* and the *Implementation Guide*.

Code

The Principles had variable applicability:

- **Transparent:** The RTO considered that they model this principle quite well by establishing assessor networks, quality assessment community of practice, and a common understanding through policy documents and guidelines. However, interviewees stated that it could do more about publicising information about teams who have had success with validation and make information and strategies available to other teams; and another suggestion was to engage story tellers to work with teams to train and transfer knowledge.
- **Representative:** The RTO considered that the processes currently established and the requirement to utilise a validation schedule drives the notion of sampling. However it was suggested that the RTO validation guidelines could be adjusted to include how to undertake sampling based on risk factors. The interviewees also considered that such factors as new assessors, new team leader and new training package would also affect sampling.
- **Confidential:** The interviewees indicated that this is a single organisation so the need for confidentiality is less important; however they noted that if validation is to occur with other external parties then confidentiality would take on greater importance and also that protection of intellectual property would be an issue.
- **Educative:** The interviewees considered that the validation process must be educative and that it is important that it has a continuous improvement focus. One interviewee also noted that it is important to make it clear that validation is not necessarily confirming the assessment tool but a 'really tough process' and people need to have the skills to manage conflict.
- **Equitable:** The personnel responsible for quality assurance noted that this principle was the least applicable as it seemed to take a moderation focus and hence not relevant to validation.
- **Tolerable:** The interviewees noted that the RTO does not address this requirement particularly well and the requirement could be built into the current validation checklist. One of the interviewees noted that a range of factors come into play when considering tolerability including lack of meeting critical aspects of evidence or other unit requirements as well as the level of risk attributed to the unit. It was considered that the team needs to decide the priority of changes; and one interviewee proposed a decision making tree. However, the horticulture team stated that as it is moving to a new training package that all assessment tools require review.

Implementation Guide

Aspects of the Implementation Guide which the team thought were useful were the:

- Glossary (although the definitions of the forms of validity and reliability were considered inaccessible).
- Distinction made between moderation and validation.

- Definition of an assessment tool and the notion that the information does not need to appear in one document.
- Assessment Tool Self Assessment form, the Item Record form and the Summary Validation Record form.
- Advice that is provided to quality assurance and management teams to establish validation processes, but is not relevant assessing teams.

One interviewee noted that the Implementation Guide would be useful as teaching materials.

The RTO considered that for the *Implementation Guide*:

- The language was dense which made it difficult to access information.
- That the assessment tool information (Table 1) was useful but that the additional method samples were not needed.
- That the Guide needs to be 'stripped back' to provide clear guidance for the assessor team.

SECTION 4: SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report synthesises the major findings from the case studies to:

- Determine the similarities and differences in the design of the assessment quality management system being implemented (or intending to be implemented).
- Identify potential barriers and/or facilitators (e.g. structural, process and/or personal factors); and to
- Identify further resources to be developed to support RTOs conducting validation and/or moderation activities within RTOs within diverse settings.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Whilst ensuring AQTF compliance was a major incentive behind the establishment and/or maintenance of systematic validation processes for each of the case study sites, there was also a strong appreciation of the following potential benefits:

- Promoting collegiality among staff;
- Continuous improvement to the assessment processes and outcomes;
- Raising the assessment literacy and self efficacy of staff;
- Enhancing the comparability of standards within the network/RTO; and
- Minimizing the costs associated with tool development (as there was potential for sharing of resources).

Although all five sites had some form of quality assurance processes (e.g., minimum requirements for assessors, establishment of an assessment policy, development of assessment tools) and quality review processes in place (e.g., assessor partnership models, consensus moderation, participation in AQTF audits), only one of the five case study sites (i.e., the school-based traineeship) was intending to implement a moderation process as part of its assessment quality management system. The rationale behind the need for such quality control processes was to have a formal process in place to resolve any discrepancies between the on and off-the-job assessments. Furthermore, regular moderation meetings were also seen to provide valuable opportunities to identify 'at risk' students in a timely manner. Unlike the remaining four case study sites reviewed, the school based traineeship example involved three partner organisations who were all:

- within close geographic proximity
- shared the same, small cohort of students (i.e. less than 10 students per year level)

Such circumstances were thought to facilitate the process. Furthermore, it was argued that there were potential financial as well as health and safety risks to the student, patients

and/or hospital staff if an incorrect judgement of competence was made (i.e., assessing someone as competent when in actual fact they were not yet competent). Consequently, the costs associated with maintaining a consensus moderation process was seen to be justified. Whereas, with the remaining four case study sites, the additional costs associated with establishing and maintaining an effective moderation process could not be justified, and therefore validation processes was seen as the more viable long term solution.

It should also be noted that of the five case studies explored, only two had existing systematic processes in place for conducting consensus validation activities on a regular basis. That is, the large public RTO and the TAE10 state-based network of assessors. Whilst the small private regional based RTO hosted an annual internal validation meeting with its assessors, it relied on an informal assessor partnership approach to undertake more timely validation activities. This was due to the perception that the consensus approach was too expensive to undertake more than once a year across three states, and that the assessor partnership approach would complement its annual consensus meeting approach. A challenge for this small RTO was to make its assessor partnership processes more formalized, systematic and transparent so that it could satisfy AQTF requirements. It also reported willingness to explore the possibility of external participation in its validation processes if an enterprise and/or professional association would be willing and capable of taking on that role and financing its involvement.

The Beauty Network of Practitioners and the school-based traineeship case study example were both in the process of developing systematic validation processes that could be applied across their network and/or partner organisations, respectively. As such, many of their responses were in relation to future practices and processes to be implemented at the network/partnership level.

Although some of the sites did not have formalized, regular processes in place at the time in which this study was conducted, all sites had a number of other activities in place for assuring and reviewing the quality of their assessments. For example, all reported using panels of assessors within their own to review their assessments (i.e., assessor partnerships approach).

Table 3 displays a summary of the assessment practices, quality assurance, quality control and quality review processes being implemented (or intending to be implemented) for each of the five case study sites.

Table 3: Comparison of the assessment quality management processes currently being implemented (or proposed)

Case study	Assessment Roles and Responsibilities	Quality Assurance	Quality Control	Quality Review Approach
The TAE10 – network of VET Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments are conducted at the individual RTOs. Role of network is to simply provide opportunities for continuous improvement by providing opportunities for sharing of resources and good practice, validating tools and disseminating information across RTOs within the state delivering the same qualification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum requirements for network members Establishment of a standardised checklist for tool review Establishment of a network validation coordinator Delivery of professional development on assessment and validation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No processes in place due to logistical challenges and costs, would however like to explore e-moderation options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of a validation network across RTOs (using consensus approach) Meetings quarterly At this point in time, only the tools have been reviewed, not evidence of judged candidate's work – network is looking to expand its role to include this activity At network level, no authority to follow up on any recommendations nor any requirement to report back to the network any actions undertaken, onus is entirely on individual members to implement changes to the tool in its own RTO No formal process for internal review of the validation network
Beauty Training Package –network of practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments are conducted at the individual RTOs, where there is no joint delivery of assessment or training across the member RTOs. Role of network is to provide opportunities for continuous improvement by providing opportunities for sharing of resources/good practice, validating tools and disseminating information, using a collaborative approach to raise perceptions of the Beauty Industry in SA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum requirements for network members Establishment of a Network Coordinator, a role currently undertaken by the SA Industry Skills Council Accessing professional development opportunities for assessment and validation Proposed establishment of terms of reference and operation for the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No processes in place due to logistical challenges and costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment proposed of a process for quality review of assessment online Proposed participation in validation by industry experts, not connected to an RTO Only informal assessment validation between network members currently
School based traineeship – partnership between school, TAFE and enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each partner organisation conducts its own assessments of the same cohort of students against the same units of competency (or a subset of the units) but come together to validate tools and outcomes. Planning to introduce assessment panels through staff exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of an Assessment Quality Management Group (QAMG) with representation of all partner organisations. Minimum requirements for partnership members Introduction of assessor exchange to facilitate the establishment of assessment panels across the workplace and classroom contexts. Establishment of a term of reference between partner organisations Paneling of new tools being developed in either contexts prior to use Establishment of a Learning Contract for the student outlining roles and responsibilities in both workplace and classroom contexts. 	<p>Using a consensus approach to moderation, the panel will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify at risk students to provide early intervention (monitor adequate student progress) Monitor the students' adherence to their Learning Contracts Resolve discrepancies between the on and off the job assessments in relation to competence prior to finalisation of results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the establishment phase of the QAMG, meetings will be monthly, with the long term view of expanding the timeframe throughout the maintenance phase. Validate existing tools and/or any customization using a consensus approach Minutes recorded of both moderation and validation activities and outcomes with subsequent meetings requiring the review of evidence of the actions undertaken within the given timeframes. Introduction of an internal review process in which the principles underpinning the NQC (2009a) Code would form the focus of the review.
A small regional private RTO across three states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments are conducted by a small number of sessional trainers who are all practicing tradesmen and have been selected from their own region to provide training &/or assessment services. All have their own business and hence training & assessment is not their core business. The RTO uses a mix of simulated and workplace assessments, underpinning knowledge assessment and third party reports. The Director, if required, provides supervision and co-assessment processes for those trainers/assessor without the requisite training and assessing competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Panels formed to meet minimum requirements as a collective group (eg trade and/or Cert IV TAA04) Procedure for validation Procedure for assessment and record keeping Complaints and appeals procedure Standardized assessment tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No processes in place due to logistical challenges and costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal Assessor Partnerships among delivery teams where distance allows (RTO is aiming to formalize this process to satisfy AQTF requirements) Annual validation meeting to deliver professional development and review training and assessment tools/materials internally.
A large public RTO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers participate in practical assessment where there is a workplace component RTO conducts simulated assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum requirements for assessors Intends to develop a set of professional teaching standards and develop a graduate diploma in teaching that will embed lesser qualifications (eg TAE10) Policy and procedures on assessment Draft validation guidelines and forms Development of standardized assessment tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No processes in place due to logistical challenges and costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal Consensus validation approach as well as informal assessor partnerships In past, focus has largely been on the assessment tool, but moving toward reviewing judged candidate evidence. Self assessment and review cycle to be undertaken by each teaching team both at the beginning of the year (self-assessment) and end of the year (review)

POTENTIAL BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

The study revealed a number of potential barriers and facilitators that could impact on the design and maintenance of an assessment quality management system within a diverse setting. These have been classified according to whether they were **structural** (i.e., the organizational and resource aspects), **process** (i.e., that practices and activities that take place) or **personal** factors (i.e., the attitudinal, assessment literacy and expectations of the key players). Each has been dealt with next.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

The financial implications of establishing and maintaining a consensus approach to assessment validation/moderation was acknowledged by all sites as a potential structural barrier. This was particularly an issue when the RTO/network had assessors who were geographically dispersed as the costs for travel, accommodation and staff replacement/relief could be quite high if participants had to attend face-to-face meetings. This was found to be an issue irrespective of the size of the organisation. The need for further research and development into alternative modes of delivery (e.g., distance, e-validation) was raised by both networks of assessors (i.e., the Beauty and TAE10), as well as the small private provider who had staff based within regional areas across three states.

Recommendation 1: Further research and development activities be undertaken into e-validation in terms of :

- Appropriate platforms for delivery
- Mechanisms for managing the logistics of e - validation
- Ensuring security and confidentiality of processes and outcomes
- Alternative models for design and maintenance

Another structural barrier that was identified by participants within this study was associated with the inconsistencies in definitions used throughout the sector at both the national and state/territory levels. For example, a number of the definitions used in the NQC (2009a; 2009b) *Code and Guide* were different to that of the *Training and Education Training Package (TAE10)* and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA 2010) *Guidelines for VET Providers*.

In relation to the TAE10, the Training Package has yet to incorporate the revised definition of assessment tool into its assessment related units of competency. In an attempt to differentiate between designing simple versus complex tools, the TAE10 Training Package has separated the functions of designing assessment procedures from designing assessment

instruments. For example, in the TAEASS401A Plan Assessment Activities and Processes, the unit refers to only designing assessment instruments; whereas in the TAEASS502A Design and Develop Assessment Tools, there is reference to both assessment instruments and procedures. It is however uncertain as to how an assessment instrument (even a simple instrument) could be designing and implemented in a standardised way (to enhance validity and reliability) when there are no accompanying instructions to the assessor for its use (i.e., the procedures). This has caused some confusion and misunderstandings among the participants as to which components within the NQC definition of an assessment tool refer to the instruments and which refer to the procedures. Rather than making arbitrary distinctions, the definition within the NQC (2009c) *A Guide for Developing Assessment Tools* has tried to encourage a more systematic approach to assessment tool development across all stages of the assessment and reporting process, which will assist with enhancing its validity and reliability.

The Victorian Registration Qualifications Authority's (VRQA, 2010) *Guidelines for VET Providers* specifies that RTOs must demonstrate evidence of external moderation of student performance (e.g. Guideline 2.1). The term 'external moderation' has also caused confusion among some of the VET practitioners within the Victorian network as it has a specific meaning within the NQC (2009a) *Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation*. For example, some people were of the opinion that industry representation on a moderation panel would constitute external moderation. However, in accordance with the *Code* (NQC, 2009), an external moderation approach would typically be managed by an industry and/or professional association who would have the power to make changes to the assessment tools and judgements of the participating RTOs if deemed necessary. Under such circumstances, the authoritative person/panel (e.g., from the professional association/industry group) would not only review the way in which candidates' evidence was collected and judged, but if necessary, it would make adjustments to the RTO's assessment decisions if its standards were found not to be in alignment with those of the external agency. In contrast, having an external representative on a panel that has been coordinated/managed by an RTO or group of RTOs, would not constitute an external moderation process in the true sense. Instead, it would typically be classified as a consensus panelling approach to validation which has external representation.

Hence, despite the development of the *Code* and *Guide* (NQC, 2009) to help clarify the language and understanding of validation and moderation in the Australian VET sector, there still appears to be some confusion among policy makers, regulators, professional/industry associations and RTOs on the terms 'assessment tools', 'moderation versus validation' and 'external moderation versus external representation.'

<p>Recommendation 2: IBSA be asked to update the assessment related units of competency and accompanying assessment guidelines within the TAE10 to reflect</p>

the definition of an assessment tool used within the NQC (2009 & 2010) publications.

Recommendation 3: The Victorian Qualifications and Regulations Authority (VRQA) be advised of the report and requested to clarify its intent of the term 'external moderation' in accordance with the definitions used within the NQC (2009a) *Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation* and the AQTF (2010) *Users Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for RTOs*.

It is also interesting to note that Skills Australia's (2010) latest discussion paper canvasses the notion of introducing an external moderation approach in the VET sector, whilst the OECD (2008) Review of VET in Australia recommends the introduction of common assessment procedures which would enable statistical moderation to occur. Although there appeared to be little support for external and statistical moderation processes among the participants within this study, further research on the feasibility of introducing alternative models within the VET sector should be undertaken.

Recommendation 4: A feasibility study be undertaken to examine the measurement, human resource, financial, industrial relations and logistical implications of establishing and maintaining external and/or statistical moderation processes within the VET sector, in particular for those qualifications deemed to be 'high risk'.

PROCESS

In relation to moderation, a number of process factors were identified as potential barriers to implementing a consensus approach. For example, the type of enrolment was found to impact on the timing and scheduling of meetings. Where there were rolling enrolments, the logistical challenge of coordinating timely meetings was seen to be a major barrier to introducing moderation processes. In such instances, validation was seen as the more favourable alternative in which the primary purpose of the exercise would be continuous improvement. It was also acknowledged among those RTOs who had partnership arrangements that effective moderation would be dependent upon establishing and maintaining clear and timely communication channels with its partner organisations.

Another issue raised was the perceived difficulties associated with managing the assessment workloads of staff to participate in assessment and validation activities when their core business was not training and assessment.

PERSONAL

The need to raise the assessment literacy of assessors was seen as a major priority by many of the participants interviewed. It was thought that having a thorough understanding of the technical implications of assessment (e.g., validity and reliability) was necessary for effective validation and therefore, access to more resources and professional development opportunities in assessment tool design was required.

Recommendation 5: An on-line database of ‘quality checked’ assessment tools be developed that demonstrates the ideal features within the NQC (2009c) *Guide for Developing Assessment Tools* and which should be made available free on the web for VET practitioners.

In addition to raising the assessment literacy of assessors and validators, it was also reported that there needs to be an attitudinal change across the sector to encourage:

- A continuous improvement focus to validation as opposed to a compliance focus; and
- Professionalism and the acknowledgement of the importance of validation and good practice.

This would entail the development of a culture within the RTO to embrace the importance of validation and its impact on quality assessment and services. This would then serve as a facilitator for success.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

The current investigation revealed a strong need to develop further support material in establishing systematic validation processes, particular for VET practitioners and workplace assessors. All five case sites agreed to participate in the study as it was seen as an opportunity to gain assistance with establishing and/or improving their assessment quality management system in accordance with the processes specified within the NQC (2009) publications. For example, despite the fact that the TAE10 state-based network of assessors had been conducting validation activities for nearly 10 years, their process was limited to reviewing the assessment tools without considering evidence of judged candidates’ work.

That is, the network had not established any formal procedures to check the appropriateness of assessor judgements against the decision making rules specified within the assessment tools. With the introduction of the NQC (2009) *Code* and *Guide*, the network will be expanding its roles and responsibilities in the near future to include such evidence into its consensus validation processes. Interestingly, the network however had no intention to expand its roles and responsibilities to include individual member accountability for actions arising from the validation meetings. The onus was (and will remain) entirely on individual members to implement changes to his/her tools in their own RTO. Whereas, with the remaining four sites, it was seen as important and necessary to ensure some level of accountability for monitoring actions arising from the validation process.

In addition to seeking guidance on ways in which to improve current validation processes, all five case studies sought greater guidance on how to design and review assessment tools, particularly in terms of the ideal components of an assessment tool such as:

- Competency mapping;
- Establishing decision making rules;
- Making reasonable adjustments; and
- Documenting evidence of validity and reliability

For example, a number of participants raised the issue of the level of detail required in the competency mapping. That is, questions were raised such as “was it necessary to map all components within the unit of competency to the sub-components of the tool (e.g. whether it should be at the element versus performance criterion level)?” Some argued that if an atomistic approach was desired by auditors under the AQTF, then concerns were raised about the workload implications, even if it was only carried out during the development phase of the tool. At the same time, it was appreciated by numerous participants that such a mapping exercise would be crucial in high risk assessment (e.g. which may provide safety risks to the candidate) or high stakes assessment environments (e.g. for selection purposes in which the supply was much greater than the demand). Consequently, it was suggested that greater guidance be given on the mapping exercise in any future support materials to ensure the process was manageable but at the same time, satisfying the requirements of demonstrating content validity of the tool.

There were also some concerns with the technical language used within the NQC (2009) *Code* and *Guide* and many participants suggested that whilst the materials were valuable for system managers and assessor trainers etc, the language used and amount of reading required would prohibit access by many VET practitioners and workplace assessors. Hence, there was general agreement that further resources be developed which provide short and simple guidance on issues that were commonly raised throughout the case studies such as:

- Designing assessment tools in accordance with the ideal characteristics specified within the NQC (2009b) *Guide to Developing Assessment Tools* (e.g., level of detail required for competency mapping).
- Establishing systematic processes for consensus validation (e.g. level of accountability)
- External validation (e.g., how does this differ to external representation on a consensus panel?).
- Formalizing assessor partnerships (e.g., in accordance with AQTF requirements).
- How to satisfy AQTF auditing requirements of systematic validation when operating within diverse contexts (e.g., small RTOs, geographically dispersed assessors).

Whilst the need to provide additional support material was raised by a number of participants to provide greater uptake among VET practitioners and workplace assessors, the importance of maintaining the integrity and technical soundness of the *Code* and *Guide* was also acknowledged. As such, there was general agreement among the participants of the study that any additional material should complement the Code and Guide rather than replace the original documents. It was decided by the research team that the support resources should be a complement to the original documents and users would be encouraged to refer to the original sources for further clarification.

Recommendation 6: To ensure greater access and up-take of the NQC (2009) publications on validation and moderation, it is recommended that the National Quality Council publish the following support materials that have been produced from the current investigation:

- A short, easy to read guide to validation and moderation, comprising a series of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers designed for VET practitioners and workplace assessors.
- Three Fact Sheets on Developing Assessment Tools, Systematic Validation and Assessor Partnerships in accordance with the NQC template.

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APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF NOMINATED SITES FOR REVIEW BY QA-AG

Type	Location	Training Package	Qualification	Justification	Criteria
Private RTO	NSW, VIC	Hairdressing	Certificate III in Hairdressing/Diploma of Salon Management	Key sites in Melbourne and Sydney. Target group is apprentices and fee for service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small RTO Two campus in different states Combination of work-based and classroom based
Small regional private RTO working across states	Vic, SA, QLD	General Construction	Certificate I-III in general construction, floor and wall tiling, solid plastering, bricklaying/blocklaying and carpentry	Focus on trades in remote regions, apprentices and skills in demand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small RTO Regional
Industry / Professional Organisation	National	Public Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificate II in Public Safety (Aquatic Rescue) Certificate III in Public Safety (Aquatic Search and Rescue) Certificate IV in Public Safety (Leadership) Certificate IV in Training and Assessment 	National network with each state surf life saving club an RTO. Within each member organisation, staffing based on volunteers and thus has particular issues in terms of quality assurance burden on individual.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry/Professional Association National membership Staffing based on volunteers
Partnership arrangement (enterprise, TAFE and Education Department)	NSW & QLD	Health Training Package	Certificate III in Health Services Assistance	Network of hospitals in NSW and QLD, auspiced by Sydney Institute of TAFE to deliver Cert III and are involved in the delivery of school-based traineeships. High risk associated with incorrect judgement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise RTO Partnership arrangement between enterprise, TAFE and Education Department Delivery of school-based traineeship High risk associated with incorrect judgements
Community Based RTO	VIC	Range of training packages and curriculum	Various (large scope of registration)	Community Provider Network with a large scope including business, community services (aged care, children's services, HACC etc), Sport and Recreation, as well as also curriculum based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small RTO Community Provider Diverse range of qualifications delivered
Large public RTO with multiple sites	Not disclosed due to confidentiality issues	Various	Various	Various campuses, small number of assessors at remote sites. Range of qualifications. Includes VET in Schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large RTO Large youth cohorts VET in Schools Multiple campuses Regional and rural campuses
State based Network of assessors	VIC	TAE 10	Cert IV Dip o f VET Practice	Membership includes 17 TAFEs and University TAFES in Victoria and some private RTOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Network Represents private RTOs and TAFE Membership includes regional, rural and metropolitan RTOs
State based Network of assessors	SA	Beauty Training Package		Network includes various types of RTOs across the state delivering the Training Package.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of RTOs Range of sizes Range of geographic locations represented

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION TO CASE STUDY SITES.

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPATING RTOS OPERATING WITHIN DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the National Quality Council funded project entitled “Best Practice in Validation and Moderation within diverse settings.” The project is being conducted by a research team led by Shelley Gillis at Victoria University, in collaboration with Andrea Bateman and Chloe Dyson.

Background to the Project

In 2009, the research team undertook a project for the National Quality Council designed to identify the role of validation and moderation processes in the VET sector. This resulted in the following products being published by the NQC:

- ♦ The Professional Code of Practice
- ♦ The Guide for Developing Assessment Tools
- ♦ The Implementation Guide for Validation and Moderation

These products may be downloaded from
http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/nqc_publications

The National Quality Council noted the aspirational nature of this work and that it provided a way forward within a complex and difficult area where misunderstandings have been common. Late last year, the NQC funded the research team to undertake a series of interactive information sessions in all states and territories to enable dissemination of the findings.

The NQC also noted, however, that the focus of the work has been on consensus meetings as a way of conducting moderation or validation, and that uptake would therefore be most likely to be limited to larger RTOs.

In 2010, the NQC has commissioned the research team to undertake further follow up work to:

- ♦ Develop additional guidelines and support materials for alternative approaches to consensus meetings as a validation strategy as might be used by diverse RTOs which deliver and assess in a range of contexts; and
- ♦ To undertake national case studies which focus on validation of specified qualifications as a means of enhancing consistent assessment outcomes.

The aim of this project is therefore to seek feedback from RTOs delivering VET within diverse contexts on the perceived appropriateness, flexibility and usefulness of the Guide for conducting moderation and validation of assessments.

To assist with reviewing the Implementation Guide and developing new support material, we would like to visit your organisation on two occasions at a convenient time to be negotiated.

The first visit would involve one member of the research team delivering a Professional Development workshop to your staff and colleagues to introduce the new definitions, principles and approaches that underpin the Code and Guide. It would also involve the researcher conducting a small number of interviews with key personnel (from both within and across your partnering organisations) on current approaches and perceptions of validation and/or moderation.

The second visit would be scheduled four to six weeks later when you and your colleagues have had the opportunity to review and use aspects of the Guide within your context. The purpose of the follow-up visit would be to obtain more in-depth feedback about the

- ♦ Perceived usefulness and relevance of Guide;
- ♦ Perceptions of potential factors that may impact on the design, implementation and maintenance of a validation and/or moderation process within your context;
- ♦ Recommendations for improvement to Guide; and
- ♦ Suggestions for development of further support materials.

Please note that confidentiality of responses will be assured at all times and each individual will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

What will you be asked to do?

Prior to the Visit

- ♦ Organise a convenient time with the researcher to deliver the professional development workshop (approximately 4 hours)
- ♦ Organise a venue for the workshop
- ♦ Organise a room to conduct interviews (approximately 2 hours)
- ♦ Advertise and promote the workshop to your assessors and validators and any of your partner organisations to attend
- ♦ Liaise with the researcher in relation to venue, attendance etc

At the First Visit

- ♦ Attend the workshop along with your colleagues (i.e., assessors and/or validators both internal and external to your organisation)
- ♦ Participate in an one hour interview with the researcher
- ♦ Provide copies to the researcher on any relevant policies, procedures, templates etc that your organisation uses to conduct either validation and/or moderation

- ♦ Organise for some of your partner organisations (if any) to also attend the workshop and undertake a short interview with the researcher (eg employers, VET in School Teachers, other RTOs) on the same day as the workshop

Between Visit 1 and Visit 2

- ♦ Review the Guide with your colleagues, make suggestions for improvements
- ♦ Apply the Guide within your context
- ♦ Maintain notes/records of what worked, what didn't work etc
- ♦ Arrange a convenient time for follow up visit with researcher and partner organisations

At the Second Visit

- ♦ Participate in a follow-up interview with the researcher to provide feedback on the Guide
- ♦ Arrange for follow-up interviews with your partnering organisations.

What will my organisation gain from participating?

The findings of the research will be used to inform future developments of support material for applying the Professional Code of Practice in Diverse VET Settings. All participating sites will receive a copy of the support materials for use within their own organisation. Your organisation will also receive \$2200 for arranging the workshop and interviews with your colleagues.

Who is the research team?

The following individuals are conducting the study. If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any one of them.

Associate Professor Shelley Gillis

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INFORMATION TO THE PARTICIPATING NETWORKS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the National Quality Council funded project entitled “Best Practice in Validation and Moderation within diverse settings.” The project is being conducted by a research team led by Shelley Gillis at Victoria University, in collaboration with Andrea Bateman and Chloe Dyson.

Background to the Project

In 2009, the research team undertook a project for the National Quality Council designed to identify the role of validation and moderation processes in the VET sector. This resulted in the following products being published by the NQC:

- ♦ The Professional Code of Practice
- ♦ The Guide for Developing Assessment Tools
- ♦ The Implementation Guide for Validation and Moderation

These products may be downloaded from
http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/nqc_publications

The National Quality Council noted the aspirational nature of this work and that it provided a way forward within a complex and difficult area where misunderstandings have been common. Late last year, the NQC funded the research team to undertake a series of interactive information sessions in all states and territories to enable dissemination of the findings.

The NQC also noted, however, that the focus of the work has been on consensus meetings as a way of conducting moderation or validation, and that uptake would therefore be most likely to be limited to larger RTOs.

In 2010, the NQC has commissioned the research team to undertake further follow up work to:

- ♦ Develop additional guidelines and support materials for alternative approaches to consensus meetings as a validation strategy as might be used by diverse RTOs which deliver and assess in a range of contexts; and
- ♦ To undertake national case studies which focus on validation of specified qualifications as a means of enhancing consistent assessment outcomes.

The aim of this project is therefore to seek feedback from RTOs delivering VET within diverse contexts on the perceived appropriateness, flexibility and usefulness of the Guide for conducting moderation and validation of assessments. As part of this study, we are also looking at networks of RTOs who are responsible for validating specific qualifications.

To assist with reviewing the Implementation Guide and developing new support material, we would like to meet with members of your network at a convenient time to be negotiated.

The first meeting would involve one member of the research team delivering a Professional Development workshop to your members to introduce the new definitions, principles and approaches that underpin the Code and Guide. It would also involve the researcher conducting a small number of interviews with key personnel from your network on current approaches and perceptions of validation and/or moderation.

The second meeting would be undertaken by telephone and/or email and would be scheduled four to six weeks later when you and your colleagues have had the opportunity to review and use aspects of the Guide within your context. The purpose of the follow-up discussions would be to obtain more in-depth feedback about the

- ♦ Perceived usefulness and relevance of Guide;
- ♦ Perceptions of potential factors that may impact on the design, implementation and maintenance of a validation and/or moderation process within your context;
- ♦ Recommendations for improvement to Guide; and
- ♦ Suggestions for development of further support materials.

Please note that confidentiality of responses will be assured at all times and each individual will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

What will you be asked to do?

Prior to the face to face meeting

- ♦ Organise a convenient time with the researcher to deliver the professional development workshop (approximately 4 hours)
- ♦ Organise a venue for the workshop
- ♦ Organise a room to conduct interviews (approximately 2 hours)
- ♦ Select a qualification to form the focus of the workshop
- ♦ Advertise and promote the workshop to your members
- ♦ Liaise with the researcher in relation to venue, attendance etc

At the face to face meeting

- ♦ Attend the workshop along with your network members
- ♦ Participate in an one hour interview with the researcher
- ♦ Provide copies to the researcher on any relevant policies, procedures, templates etc that your network uses to conduct either validation and/or moderation

Between Meeting 1 and Meeting 2

- ♦ Review the Guide with your members, make suggestions for improvements

- ◆ Each member to apply the Guide within his/her context
- ◆ Each member to maintain notes/records of what worked, what didn't work etc
- ◆ Provide telephone contact details to the researcher of members willing to participate in the follow-up meeting

At the Second Follow-up Meeting

- ◆ Participate in a follow-up interview with the researcher to provide feedback on the Guide

What will my network gain from participating?

The findings of the research will be used to inform future developments of support material for applying the Professional Code of Practice in Diverse VET Settings. All participating networks will receive a copy of the support materials for use by their own members. Your network will also receive \$2200 for arranging the workshop and interviews with your members.

Who is the research team?

The following individuals are conducted the investigation. If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any one of them.

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APPENDIX C: CASE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRES

SITE VISIT 1: NETWORK - QUALIFICATION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section 1: Network Characteristics

1. How many members are there in your network?
2. Approximately how many RTOs do they represent?
3. What types of RTOs belong to your network?
Tick all applicable boxes
 - ☐ Private
 - ☐ Public
 - ☐ Enterprise
 - ☐ Community
 - ☐ Other, please specify _____
4. Which of the following AQF qualification types do your members validate as part of the network?
 - ☐ Senior Secondary Certificate of Education
 - ☐ Certificate I
 - ☐ Certificate II
 - ☐ Certificate III
 - ☐ Certificate IV
 - ☐ Diploma
 - ☐ Advanced Diploma
5. What is the breadth of your membership's delivery?
 - ☐ National
 - ☐ TAS
 - ☐ VIC
 - ☐ NSW
 - ☐ QLD
 - ☐ ACT
 - ☐ NT
 - ☐ SA
 - ☐ WA
6. What provision arrangements for delivering qualifications does your membership have?
 - ☐ Provision provided solely by RTO
 - ☐ Provision includes support by employers at work sites
 - ☐ Provision includes partnering arrangements with other organisations
 - ☐ Provision includes auspicings arrangements with schools
 - ☐ Other, please specify _____

Section 2: Assessment practices

1. For each summative assessment method listed below, indicate how often they are validated or moderated within your network.

Method	Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4
Work-place observation	1----2-----3----4
Work-place products	1----2-----3----4
Simulation/classroom demonstration	1----2-----3----4
Classroom based products	1----2-----3----4
Completion of activities in learning materials	1----2-----3----4
Role plays	1----2-----3----4
Interviews	1----2-----3----4
Oral Presentations	1----2-----3----4
Written assignment/test/projects	1----2-----3----4
Group projects	1----2-----3----4
Portfolio	1----2-----3----4

2. Are there any other assessment methods not listed, that are predominantly validated or moderated by your membership? If so, please list.
3. To what extent does your network validate member-based assessments that have been administered on-line, in the workplace and/or within the classroom setting?
4. What challenges does each of these different delivery modes bring to your network?

5. What type of validation/moderation records are kept by your network? How long are they kept for and what are they used for? Who is responsible for maintaining such records and where are they stored?

Types of records	Frequency <i>Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4</i>	Location	Storage time	Retrieval purposes
Sampling framework employed	1----2-----3----4			
Coding system used to maintain confidentiality	1----2-----3----4			
Instructions to network members	1----2-----3----4			
Attendance forms	1----2-----3----4			
Validation outcomes and decisions	1----2-----3----4			
Samples of assessment tools reviewed	1----2-----3----4			
Samples of judged candidates work	1----2-----3----4			

6. Please describe any other records that are kept and maintained by the network?

7. What are the reporting requirements of the network in relation to validation and/or moderation?

8. Does your network have an assessment protocol or guide? If so, can we have a copy?

Section 3: Assessment Quality Management

9. Given the definitions of quality assurance, quality control and quality review within the Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009 p.4 & p.5), what strategies does your network implement to assure quality assessments amongst its member organisations?

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Strategies Implemented</i>
Quality Assurance	
Quality Control	
Quality Review	

10. Given the definitions of validation & moderation in Code (NQC, 2009, p.7 & 8), which of the two best describes your network's current approach? Please describe this approach.

11. To what extent does your network use the following type of approaches to validation and/or moderation?

Validation	Frequency <i>Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4</i>
Assessor Partnerships	1---2-----3---4
Consensus Meetings	1---2-----3---4
External (validators or panels)	1---2-----3---4
Moderation	Frequency <i>Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4</i>
Consensus Meetings	1---2-----3---4
External (moderators or panels)	1---2-----3---4
Statistical	1---2-----3---4

12. What barriers are there within your network, for successful implementation of validation and/or moderation? What factors are likely to facilitate its success?
13. Is there a formal network policy and procedure for validation and/or moderation? If so, can we please have a copy? Do you have any templates or supporting documents that you use? If so, can we also have a copy? How helpful are these? What improvements can you recommend to such documents?
14. If validation/moderation processes are in place, what was the main driving force behind establishing the processes?
15. What do you see as the key purpose of conducting validation and/or moderation within your network?
16. Who participates in the validation and/or moderation process in your network? How are these people selected? What qualifications, training and/or experience must they have? What are their roles and responsibilities?
17. Who manages the validation and/or moderation process in your network? What are their responsibilities?
18. How are the final decisions/recommendations/outcomes from the process determined? Who makes the decision and how much power do they have? What records does the network keep of validation and/or moderation outcomes and subsequent action?
19. What level of accountability should be associated with the process? For example, should the outcomes of the process be discretionary for the network member (eg are the members able to take responsibility for their own continuous improvement of their assessment tools) or should there be some corrective action to be monitored (if so, by whom?) or should it be mandatory and accountable at the system level? Please explain why.
20. How often does the validation and/or moderation process occur? When does it occur? What recommendations do you have for improving this process? Do you use a sampling

methodology? If so, what are the key factors that assisted you in selecting the sample? If not, how do you manage the number of units you moderate/validate at one time?

21. How often do you carry out the validation and/or moderation process? How is this determined? How do you determine what to validate and moderate and when?
22. Do you validate the assessment tools as well as the assessor judgements? What are the strengths and limitations of your approach?
23. What are the financial considerations associated with establishing and maintaining the process?
24. Have there ever been any complaints and/or appeals about the validation/moderation process from the network membership? How have you handled such complaints/appeals? Do you have any documentation that relates to this? If so, can we have a copy, without identifiers? If you have never had any complaints, how would you handle any in the future?
25. What are your internal processes for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the validation and/or moderation process?

Section 4: The NQC (2009) Code and Guide

26. Within your context, what processes and/or procedures could be (or have been) implemented to ensure that each principle specified in the *Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation* (NQC, 2009, p.16-18) can be met?

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Strategy</i>
Transparent	
Representative	
Confidential	
Educative	
Equitable	
Tolerable	

27. What are the strengths and limitations of using the following different types of moderation and/or validation processes in your context? Refer to Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009, p.11-14)

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Limitation</i>
Partnership		
Consensus		
External		
Statistical		

28. What components within the Implementation Guide are useful for your context?

29. What were the strengths of the *Implementation Guide*?
30. What were the weaknesses of the *Implementation Guide for use in your context*? How could these be overcome?
31. How useful was Section 1: Assessment Tools (p. 9-23)? What changes would you recommend?
32. For your particular context, how useful was the guidelines for establishing a consensus approach to validation and/or moderation (refer to pages 24-43)? What changes would you recommend?
33. To what extent would you find useful a set of additional guidelines for establishing external and/or partnership arrangements for validation and/or moderation? What issues would need to be addressed in such guidelines?
34. How useful were the Templates provided in the Appendix? What changes and/or additions would you suggest?
35. What recommendations do you have for future improvements to the *Implementation Guide* to meet the needs of diverse contexts?
36. To what extent could the *Code* and *Guide* be applied to your context? What would facilitate this? What would be some of the obstacles that would need to be overcome? Are there any structural (eg resources, equipment, staffing, storage requirements), processes (eg partnership arrangements, assessment methods, record keeping) or attitudinal factors (of staff, stakeholder expectations) that would need to be considered?
37. Could you please list three (3) critical issues for you with implementing the *Code* and/or *Guide* within your context that would need to be addressed?

SITE VISIT 1: RTOS OPERATING WITHIN DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Section 1: Organisational Characteristics

1. What is your RTO type?
 - ☐ Private
 - ☐ Public
 - ☐ Enterprise
 - ☐ Community
 - ☐ Other, please specify
2. How many students does your organisation enrol annually?
 - ☐ <200
 - ☐ 200-499
 - ☐ 500-999
 - ☐ 1000-4999
 - ☐ 5000-10,000
 - ☐ >10,000
3. Approximately many teaching/assessing staff does your organisation employ (including contractors)?

4. Which fields of study does your organisation offer qualifications?
 - ☐ Natural and Physical Sciences
 - ☐ Information Technology
 - ☐ Engineering and Related Technologies
 - ☐ Architecture and Building
 - ☐ Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies
 - ☐ Health
 - ☐ Education
 - ☐ Management and Commerce
 - ☐ Society and Culture
 - ☐ Creative Arts
 - ☐ Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
 - ☐ Mixed Field Programmes
5. Which of the following AQF qualification types does your organisation conduct assessments toward?
 - ☐ Senior Secondary Certificate of Education
 - ☐ Certificate I
 - ☐ Certificate II
 - ☐ Certificate III
 - ☐ Certificate IV
 - ☐ Diploma
 - ☐ Advanced Diploma
 - ☐ Associate Degree
 - ☒ Bachelor Degree
 - ☐ Graduate Certificate
 - ☐ Graduate Diploma
6. What is the breadth of your organisation's delivery?
 - ☐ National
 - ☐ TAS
 - ☐ VIC
 - ☐ NSW
 - ☐ QLD
 - ☐ ACT
 - ☐ NT
 - ☐ SA
 - ☐ WA
 - ☐ Internationally (off-shore)
7. How many campuses does your organisation have? _____
8. What provision arrangements for delivering qualifications does your organisation have?
 - ☐ Provision provided solely by RTO
 - ☐ Provision includes support by employers at work sites
 - ☐ Provision includes partnering arrangements with other organisations
 - ☐ Provision includes auspicing arrangements with schools
 - ☐ Other, please specify

Section 2: Assessment practices

9. For each assessment method listed, indicate how often they are typically used for summative assessments within your organisation.

Method	Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4
Work-place observation	1----2-----3----4
Work-place products	1----2-----3----4
Simulation/classroom demonstration	1----2-----3----4
Classroom based products	1----2-----3----4
Completion of activities in learning materials	1----2-----3----4
Role plays	1----2-----3----4
Interviews	1----2-----3----4
Oral Presentations	1----2-----3----4
Written assignment/test/projects	1----2-----3----4
Group projects	1----2-----3----4
Portfolio	1----2-----3----4

10. Is there any other assessment methods not listed, that is predominantly used for summative assessments within your RTO? If so, please list.

11. Where are your assessments mostly conducted?

Mode	Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4
On-line assessment	1----2-----3----4
Classroom based assessment	1----2-----3----4
Work-based assessment	1----2-----3----4

12. What type of assessment records do you keep within your organisation? How are they stored and how long for? For what purposes are they typically retrieved at a later time?

Types of assessment records	Storage Options (please tick)	Length	Retrieval purposes
Statistical (eg grades, marks)	<input type="checkbox"/> Electronic <input type="checkbox"/> Paper-based		
Anecdotal (eg logbooks, diaries, critical incident reports, qualitative reports)	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper-based <input type="checkbox"/> Electronically		
Folios (portfolios, products, work samples etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> Manually filed <input type="checkbox"/> Electronically		

13. Do you have an assessment policy and procedure? If so, can we have a copy?

Section 3: Assessment Quality Management

14. Given the definitions of quality assurance, quality control and quality review within the Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009 p.4 & p.5), what strategies does your organisation/association/network implement to assure quality assessments?

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Strategies Implemented</i>
Quality Assurance	
Quality Control	
Quality Review	

15. Given the definitions of validation & moderation in Code (NQC, 2009, p.7 & 8), which of the two best describes your current approach? Please describe your current approach?

16. To what extent do you use the following type of approaches to validation and/or moderation?

Validation	Frequency <i>Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4</i>
Assessor Partnerships	1----2-----3-----4
Consensus Meetings	1----2-----3-----4
External (validators or panels)	1----2-----3-----4

Moderation	Frequency <i>Never = 1, Sometimes =2, Often =3, Always = 4</i>
Consensus Meetings	1----2-----3-----4
External (moderators or panels)	1----2-----3-----4
Statistical	1----2-----3-----4

17. What barriers are there within your context, for successful implementation of validation and/or moderation? What factors are likely to facilitate its success?

18. Is there a formal policy and procedure for validation and/or moderation? If so, can we please have a copy? Do you have any templates or supporting documents that you use? If so, can we also have a copy? How helpful are these? What improvements can you recommend to such documents?

19. If validation/moderation processes are in place, what was the main driving force behind establishing the processes?

20. What do you see as the key purpose of conducting validation and/or moderation within your context?

21. Who participates in the validation and/or moderation process? How are these people selected? What qualifications, training and/or experience must they have? What are their roles and responsibilities?
22. How are the final decisions/recommendations/outcomes from the process determined? Who makes the decision and how much power do they have?
23. What level of accountability should be associated with the process? For example, should the outcomes of the process be discretionary for the assessor (eg are the assessors able to take responsibility for their own continuous improvement of their assessment tools) or should there be some corrective action to be monitored (if so, by whom?) or should it be mandatory and accountable at the system level? Please explain why.
24. How often does the process occur? When does it occur? What recommendations do you have for improving this process? Do you use a sampling methodology? If so, what are they key factors that assisted you in selecting the sample? If not, how do you manage the number of units you moderate/validate at one time?
25. How often do you carry out the process? How is this determined? How do you determine what to validate and moderate and when?
26. Do you validate the assessment tools as well as the assessor judgements? What are the strengths and limitations of your approach?
27. What are the financial considerations associated with establishing and maintaining the process?
28. Have there ever been any complaints and/or appeals about the validation/moderation process from students and/or staff? How have you handled such complaints/appeals? Do you have any documentation that relates to this? If so, can we have a copy without identifiers? If you have never had any complaints, how would you handle any in the future?

29. What validation/moderation records are kept and how long for? How do you use these records?

30. What are your internal processes for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the validation and/or moderation process?

Section 4: The NQC (2009) Code and Guide

38. Within your context, what processes and/or procedures could be (or have been) implemented to ensure that each principle specified in the *Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation* (NQC, 2009, p.16-18) can be met?

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Strategy</i>
Transparent	
Representative	
Confidential	
Educative	
Equitable	
Tolerable	

39. What are the strengths and limitations of using the following different types of moderation and/or validation processes in your context? Refer to Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation (NQC, 2009, p.11-14)

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Limitation</i>
Partnership		
Consensus		
External		
Statistical		

40. What components within the Implementation Guide are useful for your context?
41. What were the strengths of the *Implementation Guide*?
42. What were the weaknesses of the *Implementation Guide for use in your context*? How could these be overcome?
43. How useful was Section 1: Assessment Tools (p. 9-23)? What changes would you recommend?
44. For your particular context, how useful was the guidelines for establishing a consensus approach to validation and/or moderation (refer to pages 24-43)? What changes would you recommend?
45. To what extent would you find useful a set of additional guidelines for establishing external and/or partnership arrangements for validation and/or moderation? What issues would need to be addressed in such guidelines?
46. How useful were the Templates provided in the Appendix? What changes and/or additions would you suggest?
47. What recommendations do you have for future improvements to the Implementation Guide to meet the needs of diverse contexts?
48. To what extent could the *Code* and *Guide* be applied to your context? What would facilitate this? What would be some of the obstacles that would need to be overcome? Are there any structural (eg resources, equipment, staffing, storage requirements), processes (eg partnership arrangements, assessment methods, record keeping) or attitudinal factors (of staff, stakeholder expectations) that would need to be considered?
49. Could you please list three (3) critical issues for you with implementing the Code and/or Guide within your context that would need to be addressed?