

## An Assessor Guide: Validation & Moderation

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## Contact

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## Disclaimer

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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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## INTRODUCTION

This *Assessor Guide* is a practical resource material for assessors seeking guidance on how to conduct validation and/or moderation in accordance with the NQC (2009a) *Code of Professional Practice: Validation and Moderation*. It aims to support the continuous improvement processes implied within Element 1.5d (i.e., *Assessment, including RPL is systematically validated*) of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) *Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration*.

The Assessor Guide comprises a series of frequently asked questions that emerged from the recent investigation conducted by Gillis, Bateman & Dyson (2010)<sup>1</sup> which explored validation and moderation processes being implemented in a range of diverse contexts (e.g., school-based traineeships, networks of assessors, small RTOs, regional based RTOs) using case study methodology.

This guide comprises three sections of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers.

- Section 1: Developing Assessment Tools
- Section 2: Validating Assessment
- Section 3: System Considerations

**This Guide should be read in conjunction with the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*.**

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<sup>1</sup> Gillis, S., Bateman, A., Dyson, C., (2010). Final Report: Validation and Moderation in Diverse Settings. Report submitted to the National Quality Council, Melbourne.

## SECTION 1: DESIGNING ASSESSMENT TOOLS

### Q.1. WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL STEPS IN DEVELOPING AN ASSESSMENT TOOL?

Response: An assessment tool is described as containing the following components:

- The learning or competency unit(s) to be assessed;
- The target group, context and conditions for the assessment;
- The tasks to be administered to the candidate;
- An outline of the evidence to be gathered from the candidate;
- The evidence criteria used to judge the quality of performance (i.e., the assessment decision making rules); as well as
- The administration, recording and reporting requirements (refer to *NQC 2009b, p.9*).

Assessment tool developers need to be:

- Highly familiar with the unit of competency and the components of the unit;
- Highly familiar with the required context for assessment and the critical aspects of evidence;
- Have a clear idea of the cohort that will be assessed; and
- Have a clear picture as to what a competent person 'looks like'.

In addition, assessment tool developers need to:

- Choose the assessment methods that reflect the job task(s) embedded in the competency (face validity).
- Specify, for each assessment method, the information that will be given to the candidate to get them to say, do, write and/or build something (this becomes the tasks to be performed by the candidate).
- Ensure that the tasks developed for each assessment method reflects the scope of the competency. This will ensure that the assessment has content and face validity.
- Ensure that the tasks developed enable sufficient evidence to be collected to determine competence (sufficiency).
- Ensure that there is clear documentation describing how the candidate will be expected to respond to each task. This should include instructions to the candidate for how s/he should build, say, write and/or do something for each task (e.g. what should be included in a portfolio? How they should prepare and present their essay?).
- Ensure that there is clear documentation describing the expected response to the task (for example, answer guides, performance indicators, a description of the attributes of a completed product). This should never be simply a listing of performance criteria.
- Ensure that there are clear instructions as to how the assessor is to judge the evidence and make an overall judgement of competence.

As multiple methods are used, there needs to be decision making rules across methods. That is, how will the evidence from each method be synthesised to make an overall judgement of the candidate's performance?

When developing assessment tools it is important to think about what documents need to be provided to assessors and to candidates. These various documents could be attached to the assessment tool documentation and referred to in the assessment tool rather than duplicating information. The assessment tool should reference the accompanying documents.

The **ideal** characteristics of an assessment tool are included in the *NQC (2009b, p.11) Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*. It provides a guide to assessment tool developers to ensure that they have included sufficient information to assessors and to candidates. Remember that not all aspects are required to be included in one document, but may be included in an RTO's policies and procedures, training and assessment strategy etc.

Component	Description <sup>2</sup>	Hints and tips...
<b>The context</b>	The target group and purpose of the tool should be described. This should include a description of the background characteristics of the target group that may impact on the candidate performance (e.g., literacy and numeracy requirements, workplace experience, age, gender).	As assessment tools are specific to particular cohorts, and validity can be compromised if used for other cohorts and purposes, it is important that the cohort target group and the purpose of assessment are clearly stated. Most RTOs use assessment tools for recognition against units of competency, however assessment tools may be used within enterprises for selection, promotion or pay category purposes.
<b>Competency Mapping</b>	The components of the Unit(s) of Competency that the tool should cover should be described. This could be as simple as a mapping exercise between the components of the task (e.g., each structured interview question) and components within a Unit or cluster of Units of Competency. The mapping will help to determine the sufficiency of the evidence to be collected. An example of how this can be undertaken has been provided in Template A.2 (refer to the Appendix in the NQC Guide (NQC, 2009b)).	A competency mapping assists assessors to determine whether assessment tasks address all or part of a unit of competency. Mapping can be undertaken for a unit of competency or clusters of units. Even though methods or tasks can be mapped to a competency, it is important also to ensure that the tasks address the job tasks embedded in the unit of competency. Sample completed competency maps are included in Figures 2 and 3..
<b>The information to be provided to the candidate</b>	Outlines the task(s) to be provided to the candidate that will provide the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate the competency. It should prompt them to say, do, write or create something.	The tasks need to be described so that the assessor and the candidate are fully aware of the assessment requirements. This information could be included as a handout attached to the other assessment tool documentation.
<b>The evidence to be collected from the candidate</b>	Provides information on the evidence to be produced by the candidate in response to the task.	This section details how the candidate is expected to respond to the task. For example, it could include guidelines for both the candidate and the assessor on what is to be observed (e.g., in a role playing situation), as well as instructions for what is to be judged in a portfolio and/or essay. This should never be simply a listing of performance criteria but instead, document the

<sup>2</sup>Source: NQC (2009b). Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation, National Quality Council, Melbourne.



Component	Description <sup>2</sup>	Hints and tips...
<b>Decision making rules</b>	<p>The rules to be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• check evidence quality (i.e., the rules of evidence);</li> <li>• judge how well the candidate performed according to the standard expected (i.e., the evidence criteria); and</li> <li>• synthesise evidence from multiple sources to make an overall judgement.</li> </ul>	<p>key aspects of the performance to be judged.</p> <p>The expected performance needs to be documented to ensure that there is a common understanding across assessors to inform the decision of competence. Decision making rules need to be applied at various levels. For example, for each key aspect of performance that needs to be judged for each task, some form of rules and/or guidelines for judging the quality of that performance would need to be documented (e.g. what is an acceptable response to an open ended interview question). This is referred to as the evidence criteria. There would also need to be rules for synthesizing the performance across each of the key aspects of the task. For example, how many questions in an interview need to be answered satisfactorily and are there critical questions that must be answered correctly? There also needs to be a final decision making rule as to how to make an overall judgement of competence using evidence from multiple sources (e.g. an interview and a portfolio). For example, can high performance on one task (e.g. interview) be compensated by low performance on another task (e.g. portfolio) or is there a minimum level of performance required for each task? Rules for synthesizing evidence need to be made within and across methods. There are no hard and/or fast rules for establishing decision making rules as it will depend on which aspects of the competency each task is measuring (e.g., knowledge versus skills) but whatever decision is made, it should be defensible.</p>
<b>Range and conditions</b>	<p>Outlines any restriction or specific conditions for the assessment such as the location, time restrictions, assessor qualifications, currency of evidence (e.g. for portfolio based assessments), amount of supervision required to perform the task (i.e., which may assist with determining the authenticity of evidence) etc.</p>	<p>This section outlines any required conditions for assessment. This section needs to be self explanatory and provide clear guidance to assessors. Whilst some of the conditions for the assessment may be applied across the varying methods, others may need to be specified separately for each assessment method/task.</p>
<b>Materials/resources required</b>	<p>Describes access to materials, equipment etc that may be required to perform the task.</p>	<p>This list could be quite extensive, especially in the trades areas and therefore could be a separate list of items.</p>

Component	Description <sup>2</sup>	Hints and tips...
Assessor intervention	Defines the amount (if any) of support provided.	Assessor intervention needs to be considered as too much support provided may mean that the competency has not been demonstrated independently. In instances where safety or OHS issues are paramount, then guidance needs to be included as what assessors are to do in these instances.
Reasonable adjustments (for enhancing fairness and flexibility)	This section should describe the guidelines for making reasonable adjustments to the way in which evidence of performance is gathered (e.g., in terms of the information to be provided to the candidate and the type of evidence to be collected from the candidate) without altering the expected performance standards (as outlined in the decision making rules).	If the target group for assessment potentially includes students with background characteristics which may prohibit them from completing the task and demonstrating their 'true' competence level (for example, setting a written test for people with low literacy), the assessment tasks will need to be adjusted or alternative tasks developed. These adjustments must not alter the expected standard of performance specified within the unit/s of competency. For example, instead of responding to questions in writing, they may be permitted to respond to them orally. The guidelines for reasonable adjustment should describe what is permissible and under what conditions.
Validity evidence	Evidence of validity (such as face, construct, predictive, concurrent, consequential and content) should be provided to support the use of the assessment evidence for the defined purpose and target group of the tool.	<p>Questions to ask when checking the validity of the assessment tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the assessment tasks reflect work-based contexts and situations?</li> <li>• Do the assessment tasks within the tool assess all critical components of the unit?</li> <li>• Does the assessment tool confirm that the candidate will be able to transfer their skills and knowledge outside the assessment context?</li> <li>• Does the assessment tool have clear documentation as to the assessment purpose and stakeholder reporting needs?</li> <li>• Does the assessment tool provide adequate opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate competence?</li> <li>• Does the assessment tool reflect the level of literacy and numeracy required within the unit of competency?</li> </ul>
Reliability evidence	If using a performance based task that requires professional judgement of the assessor, evidence of reliability could include providing evidence of:	<p>Questions to ask when checking the reliability of the assessment tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there clear and standardised instructions on how to administer the tasks, collect evidence of performance, interpret the evidence, make a</li> </ul>

Component	Description <sup>2</sup>	Hints and tips...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of agreement between two different assessors who have assessed the same evidence of performance for a particular candidate (i.e., inter-rater reliability).</li> <li>• The level of agreement of the same assessor who has assessed the same evidence of performance of the candidate, but at a different time (i.e., intra-rater reliability).</li> </ul> <p>If using objective test items (e.g., multiple choice tests) than other forms of reliability should be considered such as the internal consistency of a test (i.e., internal reliability) as well as the equivalence of two alternative assessment tasks (i.e., parallel forms).</p>	<p>judgement of competence as well as record and report the assessment outcomes to the key stakeholders in accordance with the assessment purpose?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the assessment tool clearly state the required training, experience and/or qualifications of assessors to administer the tool?</li> <li>• Does the assessment tool provide model responses and/or examples of performance at varying levels (e.g., competent/not yet competent) to guide assessors in their decision making (i.e. clear evidence criteria).</li> <li>• Does the tool include clear instructions on how to synthesise the evidence collected from all methods to make an overall judgement of competence?</li> </ul> <p>Strong evidence of the reliability of the assessment tool is the capacity for another assessor to use and replicate the procedures without any need for further clarification by the tool developers. That is, it should be a stand-alone tool.</p>
<b>Recording requirements</b>	The type of information that needs to be recorded and how it is to be recorded and stored, including duration.	Each assessment tool should include a recording device/form either at assessment task level or at overall judgement level, or at both levels, depending on the purpose of the assessment and stakeholder reporting needs.
<b>Reporting requirements</b>	For each key stakeholder, the reporting requirements should be specified and linked to the purpose of the assessment.	In most instances, the key stakeholder is the RTO, and the assessor needs to report assessment outcomes according to the RTO's relevant policy and procedures. If an RTO does not provide such advice through a policy and procedure, then the assessment tool should include this information. The purpose of the assessment will determine the reporting requirements.

## Q.2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO STANDARDISE THE WAY IN WHICH EVIDENCE IS COLLECTED AND INTERPRETED?

Response: By using quality-assured assessment tools and reviewing the judgements of assessors RTOs are more likely to have in place assessment that is reliable and fair for assessment candidates.

## Q.3. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT?

Response: Formative assessment produces evidence that is concerned with how and where improvements in learning and competency acquisition are required. It therefore contributes to the learning process. For example, feedback can be provided to learners about how they are progressing when they complete the formative assessment tasks (for example, quizzes, activities) and the trainer can use such information to identify appropriate learning intervention strategies. The candidate can also use the feedback to monitor their own learning.

Summative assessment tends to occur at the end of a unit or module to determine whether the candidate has satisfied the requirements specified within the learning outcomes/units of competency. It is therefore used to certify or recognise candidate achievement against the unit(s) of competency.

Hence, in formative assessment, the outcomes are used to inform the learning/teaching process whilst the outcomes of summative assessment are used to inform the credentialing process (i.e., whether a Statement of Attainment should be issued). Although the process for collecting and interpreting evidence of candidate performance against units of competency will be similar for summative and formative assessments (e.g., both may require workplace observations, role plays etc in which performance is interpreted directly against the units of competency), the process tends to be more formalised for summative assessment. Other differences tend to include the:

- Timing (i.e., formative tends to be continuous throughout the instructional period whilst summative tends to occur at pre-determined times throughout the teaching period);
- Recording (e.g., summative assessment requires more detailed record keeping in case of appeals, audits); and
- Reporting requirements (e.g., formative may only require communicating assessment outcomes to students and workplace supervisors orally, whilst summative may require more formalised reports to be prepared and distributed to the key stakeholders).

Therefore, assessment tools should clearly distinguish between conducting assessment for formative or summative purposes. AQTF (2010) 1.5 refers to summative assessment.

## Q.4. WHAT IS THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF RPL?

Assessment for RPL purposes requires an assessor to review candidate evidence and make an assessment decision as to whether there is sufficient, valid, reliable and current evidence to recognise candidate achievement against the units of competency. RPL can therefore be classified as a summative assessment as its primary purpose is to inform the credentialing process. However, like any well designed assessment tool, the evidence arising from the assessment could also be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate, and therefore, could also serve a diagnostic function.

**Q.5. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO DESIGN ASSESSMENT TASKS TO MEASURE THE APPLICATION OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE SIMULTANEOUSLY?**

**Response:** Assessors sometimes like to set candidates knowledge tests before continuing on to practical assessment. This approach is adequate but assessors should also try to integrate the assessment of knowledge and skills application. Including knowledge questions in the practical assessment can do this. For example, *‘Why did you choose that material for this task?’*; *‘Why does the building foundation have to be that deep?’*; *‘Would you do the same haircut on someone with thin hair? Why/why not?’* Designing assessment tasks that measure different domains of learning (i.e., knowledge, skills and application) will also help to measure all dimensions of competence (e.g., task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills and job/role environment skills) as well as the notion of transferability.

**Q.6. CAN ASSESSMENT TOOLS BE MAPPED AGAINST EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS?**

**Response:** Employability skills are documented in each Training Package at the qualification level. It is possible to map assessment tools against the employability skills, however not all units of competency will address all employability skills as noted in the Training Package.

**Q.7. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAP ASSESSMENT TASKS AGAINST THE RELEVANT UNITS OF COMPETENCY?**

**Response:** When designing an assessment tool, it is essential that you map the components of your tool to the unit(s) of competency. Mapping helps assessors to check that the assessment tool address the whole unit of competency. This will provide evidence of the content validity of the tool<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> There are other forms of validity (e.g. face, predictive) that will also need to be checked as part of the validation process. Competency mapping however focuses specifically on establishing evidence of content validity. Refer to the definitions of validity in the *NQC (2009a) Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation* for further information about validity.



**Q.8.****WHAT ARE THE STEPS INVOLVED IN COMPETENCY MAPPING?**

Response: There are three steps to be undertaken when mapping:

Step 1: Unpack the unit of competency to identify its critical components.

Step 2: For each assessment method, list the tasks to be performed by the candidate.

Step 3: For each assessment method, map the critical components of the unit to each assessment task.

**Step 1** requires the unpacking of the unit of competency to determine the critical components of the unit. This step will help to identify the tasks to be performed, the standard to which they are to be performed, the skills and knowledge that are required, the dimensions of competency and the employability skills that apply as well as the critical aspects of evidence and the context in which assessment should take place.<sup>4</sup>

**Step 2** requires the assessment tool developer to document the tasks to be performed by the candidate for each of the selected assessment methods - for example, the questions (i.e., the task) to be asked in an interview (i.e., the method); the activities (i.e., the tasks) to be included in a role play (i.e., the method); the steps (i.e., the tasks) to be undertaken in a simulation exercise (i.e., the method).

**Step 3** is the last step in the process. Once each task has been documented, they should then be mapped against the critical components of the unit (i.e., map the outcomes of Step 1 to Step 2).

*The Guidelines for assessing competence in VET* (Department of Training and Workforce Development, WA 3rd Edition 2010) provides an example of a competency mapping. It relates to the unit 'MCMT671A Develop and manage sustainable environmental practices'. Note that for display purposes only, the example has been limited to mapping the tasks against the elements only (as opposed to the remaining critical components of the unit).

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<sup>4</sup> Note that it is not recommended that the competency mapping occur at the performance criterion level, as this will not only be extremely time consuming but it may encourage an atomistic approach to assessment in which the full dimensions of the competency may be ignored (e.g., task management skills, contingency management skills), as well as other aspects of the unit of competency. Furthermore, performance criteria cannot be considered in isolation but serve to provide the criteria against which the elements are to be assessed.

Unit Element	Critical Aspects of evidence	Method 1: Oral questions	Method 2: Project	Method 3: Simulation activity
Element 1 Analyse resource use	Evidence that a full analysis of all the materials and resources used in the relevant manufacturing process was conducted as the initial stage of the activity.	<b>Task:</b> What could be common causes of low efficiency of materials used in a manufacturing process?	<b>Task:</b> Choose and study a complex manufacturing process in your industry sector and develop a plan for more effective and sustainable resource use. Specifically identify production waste due to:	A detailed 4 week production schedule for an automotive component manufacturing process is provided.  <b>Task:</b> Analyse the resources used, the production process and equipment, projected component output and necessary waste estimates to develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more sustainable resource use</li> <li>• A strategy for the process with accost/benefit analysis</li> <li>• A plan to implement changes</li> </ul>
Element 2 Develop resource conservation plans	Proposed improvements made to maximise sustainability in the process must show how alternatives were considered and the best option chosen.	<b>Task:</b> How would you rank proposals for more effective use of limited resources in a manufacturing process based on benefit to cost?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excess or early production schedules</li> <li>• Delays</li> <li>• Movement and transport of materials</li> <li>• Inventory control</li> <li>• Inefficient processes</li> <li>• Defective items.</li> </ul>	
Etc.....				

**Figure 1: Establishing Content Validity: Mapping the assessment tasks to the critical components within the Unit<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup> Note that although this example provides a description of the actual tasks to be performed by the candidate, only the oral questions have been individually mapped to the critical aspects of the unit. If this was a high risk assessment, (see NQC 2009b), further breakdown of the project and simulation activity against the key components of the unit (including the Required Knowledge and Skills as well as the Evidence Guides) would be required to provide stronger evidence of content validity.

Next is another example of mapping provided by Victoria University in which a workplace project and an oral interview had been selected as appropriate methods for assessing against the unit TAEASS401A Plan Assessment Activities and Processes. In relation to the project, there were 14 tasks to be performed by the candidate. Each of these tasks have been displayed in Figure 2.

The 14 tasks were then mapped to the critical components of the unit and have been displayed in Figure 3. Note that in this example each of the tasks have been summarized by a key word bolded in Figure 2 (e.g., Specify). Furthermore, a similar mapping exercise would also need to be undertaken for the other remaining methods (in this case, the oral interview).

When mapping at this level of specificity, greater confidence can be placed on the assessment process in terms of its content validity and sufficiency of evidence. It provides the strongest evidence of content validity and is extremely important for high risk assessment to ensure all aspects of the unit have been adequately addressed in the tool. Although mapping at this level can be time consuming, it is only undertaken during the development phase of the tool and can be reviewed as part of the validation process.

1. **Specify** the unit of competency by code and title  
Summarise the 'specific evidence requirements' (aka 'critical aspects of evidence') from the unit  
Summarise the knowledge and skills required (*What*)
2. Outline the other units/competencies that could be assessed with this, for an **integrated** assessment approach (*What*)
3. Outline information on the **candidates** including
  - Special needs of individuals
  - LLN issues
  - Prior knowledge/experience
 Group size (*Who*)
4. Outline the **purpose** of assessment  
Outline the RPL procedure for candidates who have prior knowledge and experience (*Why, Who & How*)
5. Outline how the candidates will be informed about the assessment (pre & post assessment **information** and results) (*What & Why*)
6. List the proposed assessment **methods** to be used to gather evidence of competence and where they will take place (*How & Where*)
7. Specify the assessment **tools** needed for the proposed assessment methods (*How & What*)
8. List the material, physical and, if applicable, the human **resources** required to collect the evidence (*How, What & Where*)
9. List the **roles** and responsibilities of all those involved in assessment including workplace personnel who may be involved in organisational matters (*Who, What & Where*)
10. Outline the **appeals** process if the candidate disagrees with the assessment decision (*Who & What*)
11. Specify the timelines allocated for collecting the evidence (*When; may include Where & How*)
12. Outline the **reasonable adjustments** allowed or specialist support needed/provided for candidate/s (*Who, What & How*)
13. Outline how **feedback** will occur between the assessor and candidate
  - feedback to the learners/candidates on their performances, results and if relevant gaps and further action required
  - feedback from the candidates to the assessor on the assessment process & tools
 (*Who, What & How*)
14. Describe how, what and where assessment **records** will be maintained and by whom (*Who, What, Where, When & How*)

**Figure 2: Tasks to be performed (Step 2)<sup>6</sup>:**

<sup>6</sup> Example provided by Victoria University for assessment against the TAESS401A

Workplace Project: 14 tasks to be performed by the candidate														
TAEASS401A Plan Assessment Activities and Processes	1. Specify	2. Integrate	3. characteristics	4. Purpose	5. information	6. methods	7. tools	8. Resources	9. Roles	10. Appeals	11. Timelines	12. Reasonable adjustment	13. feedback	14. Recording
<b>Elements</b>														
• Determine Assessment Approach	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		✓		
• Prepare the Assessment Plan	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
• Develop Assessment Instruments					✓		✓			✓	✓			
<b>Required skills</b>														
• Cognitive Interpersonal skills	✓	✓		✓	✓							✓	✓	✓
• Research and evaluation skills	✓		✓		✓							✓	✓	
• Communication skills				✓	✓								✓	
• Interpersonal skills	✓		✓						✓		✓	✓	✓	
<b>Required knowledge</b>														
• ethical and legal requirements of an assessor									✓					
• competency based assessment	✓					✓								
• different purposes of assessment and different assessment contexts, including RPL			✓	✓										
• how to read and interpret the identified competency standards as the benchmarks for assessment	✓													
• how to contextualise competency standards within relevant guidelines			✓	✓										
• four principles of assessment and how they guide the assessment process									✓	✓	✓	✓		
• purpose and features of evidence, and different types of evidence used in rules of evidence and how they guide evidence collection	✓					✓	✓							
• different types of assessment methods, including suitability for collecting various types of evidence						✓								
• assessment tools and their purpose; different types of tools; relevance of different tools for specific evidence-gathering opportunities	✓		✓				✓		✓			✓		✓

**Figure 3: Detailed mapping: For each method, mapping the tasks to the critical components within the Unit.**



**Q.9.****HOW DETAILED DOES THE MAPPING HAVE TO BE?**

**Response:** It may not always be necessary to map the unit of competency to each individual task within each method. The level of detailed required in the mapping will depend on the level of risk associated with the unit of competency and the assessment.

In all instances however, it is vital that the unit of competency be unpacked as the first step in the mapping process. Once the unit has been unpacked, the assessment tool developer will need to make a decision as to whether to then map the unpacked unit to the:

- Assessment method (e.g., portfolio, interview, oral questions)- referred to as 'moderate mapping'; and/or
- Tasks within each method (e.g., the questions to be asked when using interview methods, the activities to be performed during the role play, the type of evidence to be included in a portfolio) – referred to as 'detailed mapping'.

It is extremely important to undertake detailed mapping for high risk assessments to ensure all aspects of the unit of competency have been adequately addressed in the tool. For lower risk assessments, it may only be necessary to map the critical components of the unit to each assessment method (as opposed to the individual tasks within each method).

Figure 4 displays an example of moderate competency mapping which would provide evidence of sufficiency. However, without examining the tasks within each method, it is still uncertain as to whether the assessment methods assess all critical components of the unit of competency. It therefore has its limitations in terms of providing evidence of content validity.

		Component of Unit(s) of Competency BSBITU201A Produce simple word processed documents		
	Methods	Elements	Required Skill and Knowledge	Evidence Guide
1	Practical demonstration	Elements 1.1	RS3, RK3	
2	Third party report	Elements 1 – 3	RS1-5, RK 1-4	CA1, CA2
3	Workplace documents	Elements 1-3 especially 1.1, 2, 3	RS1-5, RK 1-4	CA2

**Figure 4: Moderate Mapping: Mapping Methods to the Unit.**

There are a number of issues to consider when deciding the appropriate level of detail required in the mapping, and these have been summarized in the table below.

Level of specificity	Level of mapping to the unit	Strengths	Limitation	Primary Purpose
<b>Moderate</b>	Method level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple and relatively quick process to undertake</li> <li>• Useful when selecting appropriate assessment methods.</li> <li>• Provides evidence of Sufficiency</li> <li>• Can minimize duplication of evidence across methods.</li> <li>• Some evidence of content validity</li> <li>• Can provide a broad overview of the requirements of the unit prior to developing tools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates evidence of intent only, as still uncertain as to whether the actual tasks required for each method address all the critical aspects of the unit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of assessment methods.</li> <li>• Determine sufficiency of evidence and can identify potential duplication</li> </ul>
<b>Detailed</b>	Task(s) level (within each method)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides the strongest evidence of content validity</li> <li>• Important for high risk assessment to ensure all aspects of the unit have been adequately addressed in the tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be time consuming in the first instance (but with practice, can be streamlined)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongest evidence of sufficiency and content validity</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Moderate versus Detailed Mapping**

Regarding the level of detail required assessors should take a practical approach: where a unit of competency is high-risk (e.g., places the candidate at a health and safety risk if a wrong judgement is made), mapping should be more detailed. See NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide* for guidelines on determining risk levels.

## SECTION 2: VALIDATING ASSESSMENT

### Q.10. WHO SHOULD BE ON A VALIDATION CONSENSUS PANEL?

Response: This will depend on where validation is taking place. However there should be representatives who have subject matter expertise as well as those who have expertise in developing assessment tools. Some jurisdictions require external representation when carrying out assessment validation and this can be helpful in challenging entrenched thinking. For more information on putting together validation consensus panels refer to the *NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*.

### Q.11. WHAT IS EXTERNAL VALIDATION?

Response: An external validation refers to an assessment quality review process that is coordinated by an external body that has the authority to review and monitor the assessment processes and outcomes of an RTO. The external body has overarching authority to make recommendations for changes to the tool for future use and is responsible for monitoring whether such changes have been implemented. Typically, therefore, the external body/individual represents an organisation of authority and/or standing within the industry (e.g., an Industry Skills Council, a licensing authority, a professional association) where participation by individual RTOs within the industry/association would be mandatory. It is not a model commonly used in the Australian VET system in which assessments are conducted for credentialing purposes. Instead, RTOs tend to implement either assessor partnership and/or consensus validation meetings as part of its assessment quality review processes. The challenge for RTOs is to ensure that the processes are systematic (see Q.28).

### Q.12. IF AN RTO HAS EXTERNAL REPRESENTATIVES ON ITS VALIDATION PANEL, CAN THIS BE CLASSIFIED AS 'EXTERNAL VALIDATION'?

Response: Having external representatives on a validation panel that has been established and coordinated by the RTO does not constitute an external validation. Instead, it would be classified as a consensus validation approach to assessment quality review. By including external representatives on the panel however, an RTO can be confident that its standards are comparable to at least those organisations/individuals represented on that panel.

### Q.13. HOW DO YOU SELECT EXTERNAL MEMBERS TO JOIN A CONSENSUS VALIDATION PANEL?

Response: Unlike an external validation process, an external member of a consensus validation panel does not need to be in national/state position of authority/standing at the industry level. For example, the person could be the employer of a small local business. However, a person drawn from outside the RTO should be able to challenge assumptions made by assessors about the effectiveness of the RTOs assessment tools and processes. An external panel member should have subject knowledge and a good understanding of what constitutes a robust assessment tool. The external member should adhere to the requirements of confidentiality and

commercial in confidence requirements. RTOs may need to develop an agreement for such arrangements.

**Q.14. WHY IS THE USE OF ASSESSOR PARTNERSHIPS NOT SEEN AS A MODERATION ACTIVITY?**

**Response:** According to the NQC (2009a) *Code of Professional Practice for Validation and Moderation*, moderation is concerned with ensuring comparability of standards across RTOs. Whilst assessor partnerships can assist assessors to clarify whether assessment requirements have been met, they tend to be undertaken in a localised context and therefore, it is possible that they reinforce localised norms and misconceptions. However, assessor partnership arrangements can be viewed as a validation activity and would satisfy the requirements of the AQTF for continuous improvement, if the assessor partnership arrangements for internally reviewing assessment tools and judgements were planned, recorded and monitored in a systematic way.

**Q.15. HOW COULD AN RTO USE THE NQC (2009B) IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING AN ASSESSOR PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR VALIDATION?**

**Response:** When establishing a validation system using assessor partnerships, the following forms could still apply:

- A1: Self assessment tool
- A2: Competency mapping
- C3: Item record form (this could be adjusted to include participant names and date of activity, and also include option to record closure of the identified actions).

Under the AQTF, RTOs would need to demonstrate that assessment is systematically validated. A plan and the use of these documents could be utilised.

**Q.16. HOW CAN UNITS OF COMPETENCY/TOOLS BE ADEQUATELY SAMPLED FOR A WHOLE QUALIFICATION?**

**Response:** Refer to the *NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation* for information about sampling.

It may not be necessary to develop a plan to validate assessment that includes every unit of competency in a qualification, although the scope of the qualification should be covered. In addition, RTOs may find that if assessment validation is carried out effectively, improvements identified in assessment tools for one unit of competency will also apply to assessment tools for other units of competency. For example, validation for one unit of competency might identify that instructions for candidates are unclear. This would require the RTO to review the assessment tools for the remaining units of competency.

**Q.17. HOW CAN SMALL RTOs UNDERTAKE SYSTEMATIC VALIDATION?**

Response: Small RTOs will benefit from developing partnering arrangements with other RTOs that are not their competitors. Alternatively, small RTOs that do not deliver the same qualifications can review the format of each other's assessment tools and provide valuable input. Finally, small RTOs could attend assessment validation activities conducted by industry organisations or VET bodies or other validation networks within its industry.

**Q.18. HOW CAN AN RTO CONDUCT VALIDATION WHEN IT IS THE ONLY RTO WHO DELIVERS THE QUALIFICATION WITHIN THE STATE/TERRITORY?**

Response: The RTO might consider an external industry person to contribute to assessment validation. If this person does not have the assessor competencies they can provide advice about industry standards and industry expectations of graduates. Alternatively, the RTO could validate online, via Skype or telephone with RTOs in other States and Territories – remember that they need to validate too.

**Q.19. HOW CAN VALIDATION BE UNDERTAKEN WHEN ASSESSORS ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED?**

Response: The further away assessors work from the RTO (offshore or interstate) the more likely it is that their assessment will not be effectively validated. Given this, it is important to involve these assessors in assessment validation activities. They could send in samples of candidates' work for consideration by a panel leading to the adjustment of assessment tools where necessary; or, where assessors work remotely, participating in online validation. At a minimum, assessors who work remotely should be provided with assessment tools that have been validated by the RTO. Furthermore, if the assessment tool has been changed as a result of validation, they should be asked to implement the new assessment tools and inform further follow up reviews and validation activities (e.g., by written feedback to the assessment tool developers).



## SECTION 3: SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

### Q.20. WHEN IS VALIDATION MOST USEFUL?

- Response: Although validation should be an ongoing activity, it can be most revealing after assessment has taken place, as validators will have access to judged candidate evidence. By reviewing both the assessment tool and samples of judged candidates' evidence, the validators can consider whether the:
- Assessment judgements were made in accordance with the decision making rules (i.e., were they too harsh or too lenient)?
  - Decision making rules were appropriate?
  - Tools were strong enough to be applied consistently?
  - Assessment tools were usable?

### Q.21. HOW CAN AN RTO ESTABLISH PARTNERING ARRANGEMENTS WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS/INDIVIDUALS? WHAT AUTHORITY SHOULD THESE PEOPLE HAVE ON THE PANEL?

- Response: The RTO needs to identify what role the external organisation/individual is required to fulfil. For example, is their role to comment on how well the assessment tools reflect industry practice? If so, someone from an Industry Body could provide this input. Alternatively, their role might be to provide input to how well the assessment measures employability. Under such circumstances, someone from a local business could provide input to aspects of the assessment tool (e.g., reviewing the appropriateness of the time allocated to the candidates to complete the simulated task). The RTO may want input to the effectiveness of the design of assessment tools. If so, someone with expertise in assessment tool design could be helpful.

Ideally, partnering organisations/individuals will have a good understanding of assessment tool development, together with vocational competency or experience of the relevant industry.

When planning validation with external organisations/individuals the RTO will need to determine how often validation occurs, who will be responsible for organising validation and how decisions will be made about action to be taken as a result of validation. For example, the external organisation/individual might have just an advisory capacity, or they could determine action to be taken by the RTO.

It is helpful to have an agreement in place with the external organisation/individual. This agreement could include a schedule for validation, a description of how validation will be conducted, a discussion of the authority of the external party, commitments to maintaining commercial confidentiality and agreements for

payment, where this applies. The *NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide to Validation and Moderation* provides further guidance on system design.

## Q.22. HOW CAN INDUSTRY BE ENGAGED IN AN ASSESSMENT QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

**Response:** There are a number of ways in which an RTO can engage industry in its assessment quality management system. For example, industry could be involved in determining whether a qualification requires a moderation or a validation process. As part of this process, industry could be involved in determining the level of risk associated with conducting a false positive assessment (i.e., assessing someone as competent when in actual fact they are not yet competent). This may involve determining the critical nature of the competency, the financial/safety implications of making a wrong assessment judgement as well as the frequency of use of the competency in the workplace. The greater the risk, the more likely the need for moderation. Other ways in which industry could be involved in the assessment quality management system have been documented below.

<p><b>Quality Assurance</b></p> <p>Panelling of Assessment Tools to determine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance and realism to workplace (face validity)</li> <li>• Content validity (mapping of key components within task to curriculum/standards)</li> <li>• Technical accuracy</li> <li>• Appropriateness of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ language/terminology</li> <li>○ Literacy and Numeracy requirements</li> <li>○ Evidence criteria used to judge candidate performance for each task</li> <li>○ Range and conditions for the assessment (e.g., materials/equipment, facilities, time restrictions, level of support permitted)</li> <li>○ Any reasonable adjustments to evidence collection (as opposed to standard expected)</li> <li>○ Sufficiency of evidence across time and contexts (transferability)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Consultation with Industry/Community representatives to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmark examples of candidate work at both competent and not yet competent levels</li> <li>• Exemplar assessment tasks/activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quality Control</b></p> <p><b>Moderation consensus panel membership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying benchmark samples of borderline cases</li> <li>• Determining level of tolerance (in relation to risk assessment)</li> <li>• External moderation (if representing an organisation/association of authority or standing within the industry)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quality Review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panel representation on validation panel (e.g., check content and face validity of assessment tools)</li> <li>• Follow up surveys to determine predictive validity</li> </ul>
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## Q.23. HOW CAN AN RTO DEVELOP A TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A VALIDATION CONSENSUS PANEL?

Response: The Terms of Reference for a validation consensus panel are invaluable in supporting systematic validation and ensuring that participants know what their roles and responsibilities are. Terms of Reference could include a description of the purpose of validation, how decisions are made, who will participate, scheduling of meetings, sampling approaches, how validation is to be funded, complaints and appeals processes, how records will be managed and outcomes reported and how validation processes will be reviewed. A Term of Reference between the partner organisations could be developed using the key features of an assessment quality management system that have been specified in Table 7 (page 25) of the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide*.

**Q.24. HOW COULD VALIDATION AND/OR MODERATION ASSIST WITH IMPROVING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES WITHIN A SCHOOL BASED TRAINEESHIP?**

Response: Establishing a formal collaborative process for conducting consensus validation and moderation would be the ideal approach to continuously improving the assessment practices within school-based traineeships. To achieve this, the partner organisations may consider appointing a formal Quality Assessment Management Group (QAMG) to:

- Panel new assessment tools being developed in either contexts;
- Validate existing tools and/or any customisations;
- Identify 'at risk' students to provide early intervention (monitor adequate student progress);
- Facilitate and coordinate the establishment of assessment panels across the workplace and training environments (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).

Maintaining comparability of standards across the different learning environments would require a commitment of all partner organisations 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.

#### Q.25. WHERE DOES MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT FIT IN WITH THE AQTF?

**Response:** The AQTF states that validation is a quality review process – refer to the definitions in the *AQTF (2010) Users' Guide to the Essential Conditions and Standards for RTOs*. Moderation is described in the NQC documents as a quality control process. Within a moderation process, adjustments to student results should be made prior to the finalisation of the results if the judgements of the assessor have been determined to be too harsh or lenient. Similarly, moderation can lead to adjustments to student results if the assessment tools have been determined to be too easy and/or difficult. This process helps to bring standards across RTOs into alignment and therefore ensure fairness and comparability of standards across the sector. Although moderation is desirable within the Australian VET Sector, particularly in high risk assessments, moderation is not mandated under the AQTF as in many instances the benefits may not outweigh the costs, while external validation is mandated.

#### Q.26. HOW CAN AN RTO RECORD THE CLOSURE OF ACTIONS RAISED AT VALIDATION?

**Response:** RTOs could use Form C3: Item Record in the NQC (2009b) *Implementation Guide: Validation and Moderation*. This form could be adjusted to include specific actions, proposed dates for closure, who is responsible and date of actual closure. This record could be filed with the reviewed assessment tools, or with other evidence of continuous improvement.

#### Q.27. HOW DOES AN RTO SELECT THE MOST APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO VALIDATION/MODERATION?

**Response:** Below is a table that describes some of the issues to consider when selecting validation/moderation approaches:

Condition	Suggested approach
<i>Whenever my RTO conducts internal validation few opportunities for improvement arise</i>	Consider including external representation on your validation panel
<i>Our assessors are contractors and cannot come to validation consensus meetings because my RTO can't afford to pay for their time and some are located interstate</i>	Consider establishing assessor validation partnerships at your local level, but ensure that improvements identified are recorded and fed back to other assessors and formalised
<i>Our RTO conducts high risk units related to licensing, where the licensing authority has mandated the use of assessment tools it provides</i>	Consider consensus moderation, ideally with external representation on your panel.
<i>Our RTO is new and assessors do not have a lot of experience</i>	Consider inviting an external person with expertise in assessment tool design to validation consensus meetings

**Q.28. HOW CAN AN RTO DETERMINE WHETHER ITS VALIDATION PROCESSES ARE SYSTEMATIC?**

**Response:** Below is a suggested self assessment checklist for RTOs to determine how well its processes meet the requirements of AQTF (2010) Element 1.5d (*Assessment, including RPL is systematically validated*)

Indicators	Yes/No	Action
Is there a plan for assessment validation (including validation of RPL assessment) in place?		
Does your plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine the sample of units of competency to be validated over a set period of time</li> <li>• Provide dates for proposed validation activities</li> <li>• Include details about who will participate in assessment validation, including the Chair of consensus panels, if relevant</li> <li>• Include a strategy to ensure that all relevant staff are involved</li> <li>• Identify what processes and materials will be used for implementing and recording the outcomes of assessment validation</li> </ul>		
Does your RTO have terms of reference in place to guide the work of consensus panels?		
Does your RTO have validation materials (policy, procedure, forms) in place that cause participants to engage effectively in validation?		
Does your RTO have a process for monitoring the action taken as a result of validation?		
Does your RTO have a process and plan in place for reviewing the effectiveness of assessment validation?		

**Q.29. HOW DOES AN RTO KNOW IF IT IS UNDERTAKING VALIDATION WELL?**

**Response:** If assessment validation is effective it leads to substantive continuous improvement in assessment. If an RTO finds that assessment validation is not effective it may be necessary to change the validation processes used or to provide validators with professional development.



**Q.30. IS IT NECESSARY TO HAVE A SEPARATE APPEALS PROCESS IN PLACE FOR VALIDATION/MODERATION?**

Response: It may be desirable to have an appeals process in place as described in the *NQC (2009b) Implementation Guide* if a number of RTOs are conducting consensus validation/moderation (for example validation networks). However, where one RTO is conducting validation/moderation, the RTO's appeals policy and procedure should be sufficient, as this procedure is designed to manage appeals made about any decision made by the RTO.

**Q.31. WHAT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WOULD AN RTO TYPICALLY HAVE IF IT PARTICIPATED IN A VALIDATION NETWORK?**

Response: The roles and responsibilities of individual RTOs within a network would often depend on a number of circumstances including the:

- Purpose of the validation network;
- Responsibility for the coordination of the network (e.g., government, industry, professional association or a group of local RTOs);
- Level of authority of the network to implement actions arising from the process; and
- Funding arrangements.

If an RTO was involved in a validation network, in which membership was voluntary and the main aim was to improve practice and promote collegiality among its members, then an individual RTO may be responsible for:

- Attending and participating in regular validation meetings;
- Providing samples of assessment tools for purposes of validation;
- Ensuring confidentiality and intellectual property ownership of tools and candidate evidence submitted;
- 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.

Under such circumstances, it would be the responsibility of the individual RTO to determine whether or not to implement any changes recommended from the network. However, if the network had an authoritative power to monitor the recommendations arising from the meeting, then there would be an additional level of responsibility for the individual RTOs to not only implement the recommended changes, but also to document and report such changes back to the network within the given timeframes.

**Q.32. HOW MAY AN INDUSTRY LED OR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION NETWORK BE FUNDED TO UNDERTAKE CONSENSUS VALIDATION?**

Response: In the absence of external funding, it is more than likely that individual RTOs will be required to fund participation in a consensus validation network. For example, members could be charged a small fee to attend meetings to cover the costs of venue hire, photocopying and catering etc. Each RTO could also cover the cost of teaching relief, travel and accommodation (if applicable) for its members to attend meetings. Higher fees could also be charged to cover the cost of the network coordination or alternatively, this could be subsumed by the industry body and/or professional association and/or an individual RTO member.

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## TECHNICAL QUERIES

Any further suggestions or technical queries concerning this Guide can be made directly to the research team.

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