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Meredith Jackson Program Officer, Product Services

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WA Department of Education and Training A Guide to Continuous Improvement of Assessment in VET
NSW Department of Education and Training Good... better... best Validating your way to quality improvement in assessment

This resource was jointly funded by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
Although we do our best to develop effective high quality assessment strategies in RPL we always need to be open to the possibility of further improvement. All aspects of RPL assessment need to be regularly monitored, reviewed and improved. This is partly driven by our own need to improve as professional assessors, partly due to changes and improvements in our understanding of assessment processes, partly to meet changes in outcome standards, and partly to respond to changes within industry itself.

**What is Continuous Improvement (CI)?**

Fundamentally, continuous improvement is about applying good business practices to ensure the best outcomes for our clients; that includes candidates, industry and the community. Our vigilance must extend beyond our own appraisal of the assessment systems we have established and seek and incorporate feedback and advice from industry, employers, other assessment professionals, and the people we assess.
There are a number of models of continuous improvement – any one of which may be suitable for your RTO. They all share the following main steps, and are usually presented as a cycle, for example:

- **Planning** - what will be your approach – what are your goals, how are you going to measure their success?
- **Implementing** - what actions are you going to deploy to implement them?
- **Reviewing** – what goals have you achieved compared to the ones you planned?
- **Improving** – what have you learnt from the experience and how will you use the results to improve?
Why do we need Continuous Improvement?
RPL is one of an RTOs suite of assessment services. We engage in continuous improvement of assessment to:

- ensure assessments reflect current industry requirements;
- improve the validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness of assessments;
- ensure relevance, transparency and support in assessment processes for candidates;
- support ongoing RTO quality assurance;
- enhance the reputation and recognition of the RTO and its services;
- minimise risks associated with the assessment process;
- improve the management of assessment systems;
- inform assessor selection and guide professional development;
- support the industry and community recognition of VET graduates;
- provide the best service for VET clients – learners and industry.

Slide 5

Validation and Moderation as a CI strategy

- AQTF requirements
- Definitions of validation and moderation
- Skills required of assessors

Continuous Improvement and the AQTF
Continuous improvement is an integral component of quality systems and as such is a key requirement of the AQTF standards. For RTOs this means
developing a planned and ongoing process to systematically review and improve policies, procedures, products and services.

By adopting a continuous improvement cycle, RTOs can benefit from a client-focused and sustainable business that can adapt quickly to changing external environments such as economic factors and skills needs. (Adapted from: AQTF 2007 – Users’ Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration)

**Activity**

Consider the Continuous Improvement Cycle process in your organisation. List the benefits you derive from this process in the box below:
The AQTF Standards refer directly to the continuous improvement of training and assessment processes:

**The RTO collects, analyses and acts on relevant data for continuous improvement of training and assessment:**

**Systematic approaches** which support continuous improvement may include:

- planning where data will be collected from, how it will be collected, the form it will take, how often it will be collected, and how it will be collated, analysed and used;
- ensuring that data collection and analysis confirm good practice and show where improvements need to be made;
- making improvements where analysis demonstrates they are needed;
- regularly reviewing data collection to assess its usefulness for improving products and services;
- giving feedback to those who have contributed to the data.
Ensuring that data is relevant and sufficient

The focus of qualitative, (eg feedback from assessment moderation meetings) and quantitative, (eg records of assessments undertaken and judgements made) data collection could be informed by:

- prior continuous improvement activities;
- assessing the relevance of the collected data to your training and assessment outcomes;
- deciding which aspects of training delivery are most critical to your quality training and assessment.

Data sources relevant to improving training and assessment could include:

- client satisfaction surveys/questionnaires;
- interviews, focus groups, and/or other data from consultation with candidates, enterprise;
- clients, industry organisations and licensing bodies;
- records of staff/planning meetings and agreed actions;
- records of complaints and appeals and their resolution;
- internal audit reports and organisational self-assessment;
- staff performance-appraisal reports.

RTOs demonstrate improvement by:

- changes to training and assessment processes, practices and resources, including reasonable adjustments made to meet the needs of candidates;
- implementing and sharing professional development activities and outcomes;
- checking and following up on validation activity in relation to validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness of assessment processes and validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency of assessment evidence and judgements.
Definitions

**Validation of assessment...**
A process for ensuring that
- the way a unit of competency or group of units is assessed, and
- the evidence that is collected through these assessments, is consistent with the requirements of the unit or group of units of competency and of industry.

*From AQTF 2007 Users' Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration*

**Assessment validation** is defined as a process for ensuring that the way a unit of competency or group of units is assessed, and the evidence collected through these assessments, is consistent with the requirements of the unit or group of units of competency and of industry.

It includes validating the assessment process, the assessment tools and instruments, the evidence collected using tools and instruments, and the interpretation of that evidence to make a judgement of competence in relation to the same unit(s) of competency.

Validation may be undertaken before, during and after the actual assessment activity occurs and may include both formative and summative assessment. The latter includes assessment for the purpose of granting RPL. (*Source: AQTF 2007 – Users’ Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration*)
Definitions

Moderation of assessment.....

A process which involves assessors
• discussing and reaching agreement
• about assessment processes and outcomes
in a particular industry or industry sector.

From AQTF 2007 Users’ Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration

Assessment moderation is defined as a process which involves assessors discussing and reaching agreement about assessment processes and outcomes in a particular industry or industry sector.
It enables assessors to develop a shared understanding of the requirements of specific Training Packages, including the relevant competency standards and assessment guidelines, the nature of evidence, how evidence is collected and the basis on which assessment decisions are made. *(Source: AQTF 2007 – Users’ Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration)*

When assessors use moderation as part of their validation process they engage in a collaborative activity that ensures the professionalism of all participants is respected. They recognise validation as a ‘professional conversation’, a participatory process where stakeholders come together to learn from each other; to review, compare and evaluate their assessment processes, the tools and methods they use and the evidence they evaluated to make a decision.

**Why do we validate?**

For RTOs and assessors a rigorous validation process is important:

- from a quality assurance perspective to ensure continuous improvement;
- for individual assessors and RTOs to have confidence in assessment decisions;
- to ensure the integrity of qualifications that are issued across the VET industry as a whole.
Skills required of assessors

Activity
Reflect on the definitions of validation and moderation….

In groups, brainstorm the skills required of assessors to use moderation processes to effectively engage in validation activity

Categorise these skills into those related to:
• working in the VET environment
• engaging with Industry
• interpersonal skills

Activity
Record the results of your discussion in the box below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills required of assessors to use moderation processes to effectively engaging in validation activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working in the VET environment</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Planning RPL validation

- What will you validate?
- What principles/rules apply to validation?
- Who could you involve in RPL validation?
- What methods/approaches could you use to validate RPL?
- How could you record validation of RPL?
- What action needs to occur following RPL validation?

Validation may be undertaken at various times during the assessment process:

Validation **before** assessment may concentrate on:
- the interpretation of the unit(s) of competency to be assessed;
- establishing a common understanding of the standard to be achieved;
- the identification of the evidence required;
- evidence-gathering / assessment tool design.

Validation **during** assessment may concentrate on:
- the performance of the candidate whilst undertaking the assessment;
- the evidence collection process;
- the role of the assessor in the assessment process.

Validation **after** assessment may concentrate on:
- the effectiveness of the assessment tool(s) and process;
- the standard of performance achieved;
- the validity, authenticity and currency of the evidence collected;
- the judgement made by the assessor.
What will you validate?

There are four targets for validation:

- Assessment processes
- Assessment methods and tools
- Assessment evidence
- Assessment judgements

Assessment Processes

Areas included

Prepare assessor
Prepare candidate
Collect evidence
Provide feedback
Record/report
Process appeals
Assessment processes need to be valid, reliable, fair and flexible. Industry should be consulted during development of these processes and they should be regularly validated and improved. Assessment processes must comply with the Assessment Guidelines of Training Packages or the assessment requirements of accredited courses.

Assessment processes must be equitable and meet the needs of a diverse range of candidates. They need to be explained to all applicants on enrolment, and provide for reassessment on appeal. RTOs must ensure appropriate record maintenance.

Assessment processes include but may not be limited to:
- providing information to candidates;
- designing assessment methods/tools;
- selecting, managing, monitoring and professionally developing assessors;
- managing resources and partnership arrangements;
- dealing with appeals, complaints and grievances;
- providing RPL services;
- managing the gathering evidence, including third-party evidence
- appropriate record-keeping;
- making and recording judgements;
- providing feedback and guidance to candidates.
Assessment methods and tools are used to gather assessment evidence. They must meet the principles of assessment (be valid, reliable, fair and flexible), and reflect the four dimensions of competency. They provide candidates with information about the nature, context and purpose of the assessment and the assessment process. Assessment methods and tools must comply with unit of competency requirements (one or more if clustered) including Employability Skills facets, required skills and knowledge and critical aspects of evidence. Assessment methods and tools must be regularly validated and improved.

The language, literacy and numeracy requirements of the unit/s of competency need to be reflected in the methods and tools. Clear instructions about the application of the tools and assessment methods, including advice on reasonable adjustment must be provided to all stakeholders.
Assessment evidence is information gathered which, when matched against the unit of competency requirements, provides proof of competency. Assessment evidence needs to meet the rules of evidence, (ie be valid, current, authentic and sufficient). Evidence must reflect the requirements of the unit/s of competency and be accurately recorded and reported for each unit of competency.

Evidence can take many forms and be gathered from a number of sources. Assessors often categorise evidence in different ways, for example:

- direct, indirect and supplementary sources of evidence;
- evidence collected by the candidate or evidence collected by the assessor;
- historical and recent evidence collected by the candidate and current evidence collected by the assessor.
Assessment judgements involve the assessor evaluating the evidence gathered in order to make the assessment decision. The assessment decision will require using professional judgement in relation to the quality of evidence gathered and determining the competency achievement of the candidate based upon that evidence.

Slide 20

What principles/rules apply to validation?

- Assessment processes
- Assessment methods and tools

PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT

- Assessment evidence
- Assessment judgements

RULES OF EVIDENCE
Principles of Assessment

- Assessment processes
- Assessment methods and tools

- Validity
- Reliability
- Flexibility
- Fairness

We validate processes, methods and tools against the **principles of assessment**. To be **valid** the tools and/or methodologies must be **sufficient** to address the requirements of the unit/s (and not demand more than these requirements); they must do this at the correct AQF level and they must do this in a way that reflects current industry practice.

The methods and tools will be **reliable** if they yield consistent results, so the tools must contain clear instructions for use, and they must provide information about expected responses.

Tools must allow for **flexible** ways of assessing individuals and they must be **fair**. The amount of flexibility possible is limited to ‘reasonable adjustments’. These adjustments must still make it possible for the participant to demonstrate the requirements of the unit.
We validate assessment evidence and judgments against the **rules of evidence**. The rules of evidence are the rules by which an assessor justifies his/her judgements.

Evidence is **valid** when it:

- covers the broad range of skills and knowledge that are essential to competent performance;
- is gathered on a number of occasions and in a range of contexts using appropriate assessment methods.

To accept evidence as **authentic**, an assessor must be assured that the evidence presented for assessment is the candidate’s own work.

Competency requires demonstration of **current** performance, so the evidence collected must be from either the present or the very recent past.
There is **sufficient and consistent** evidence when there is enough appropriate evidence to ensure that all aspects of competency have been satisfied.

The rules of **validity**, **authenticity** and **currency** are applied to each particular piece of evidence. A piece of evidence must satisfy all three of these rules for it to be acceptable evidence.

In addition, overall there must be **sufficient** pieces of evidence to allow an assessor to make a judgement of competence. Linked to the sufficiency rule is a requirement that the assessor must be confident that the participant can perform the competency **consistently**.

**Who could you involve in RPL validation?**

- Industry
- Employers
- Technical and subject matter experts
- Candidates
- Trainers / teachers
- Assessors
- Evidence providers
- ???

There are many stakeholders in the assessment process who can provide valuable input into validation as part of the continuous improvement process. You must match the purpose of your validation activity to the most appropriate stakeholder involvement.

Stakeholders include:
• **Industry:** people who represent the industry as a whole (eg industry associations, employee representative organisations, Industry Skills Councils, Industry Skills Councils. regulatory authorities).

• **Employers:** people who deal with candidates in the workplace either through employment or work placement. (eg supervisors and managers involved in traineeships and apprenticeships, work placements or structured workplace learning).

• **Technical and subject matter experts:** people with vocational competencies.

• **Candidates:** people engaged in the RPL process.

• **Trainers or teachers:** people who meet AQTF Standards and deliver training on-the-job or off-the-job but are not necessarily assessing. (eg partner or peers, training deliverers, formal networks of peers).

• **Assessors:** people who meet AQTF Standards and conduct assessments on or off the job.

• **Evidence providers:** people who provide / generate third party evidence (eg workplace supervisors, who may assist the candidate gather the evidence but don’t make assessment judgements).

**Activity**

Can you identify any other relevant stakeholders??
**Activity**

It’s not appropriate to involve all stakeholders in every component of the assessment validation process. When you plan your validation activity you will have to determine **which** stakeholders to involve and **when** to involve them.

Consider who you might involve in the various targets for validation and complete the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation Activity</th>
<th>Which stakeholder/s will you involve in this phase of the assessment validation process?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment processes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment methods and tools</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment evidence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment judgements.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**  A: Industry;  B: Employers  C: Technical & subject matter experts  D: Candidates  
E: Trainers and teachers  F: Assessors  G: Evidence providers  H: Other?
## Activity

Think about the different targets for validation - consider the types of questions you might pose to your stakeholders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Validation target</th>
<th>Which stakeholder/s could answer this question?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were limits to reasonable adjustment clearly defined?</td>
<td></td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do different assessors make the same judgement based upon the same evidence for a unit of competency?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the selected assessment methods and tools reflect current industry standards and practices</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you feel that you were given sufficient information about what was going to be assessed and how you were going to be assessed?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Were you provided with clear instructions relating to gathering the evidence and recording the outcomes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are the assessment records adequate to respond to appeals or complaints?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are clear instructions provided to candidates?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were your roles and responsibilities clearly specified?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the assessment methods/tools faithfully reflect the assessment plan and the requirements of the units of competency?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do all assessors involved in the process meet the requirements of the Training Package</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are judgements based upon sufficient evidence (a range of time, context, and application)?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the assessment methods/tools reflect the level of complexity, responsibility and autonomy indicated by the Employability Skills facets and the AQF alignment of the unit/s of competency?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the assessment methods and tools reflect the performance requirements of relevant units of competency?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
There are a range of validation methods which can be used. It is important to match the method/s used with the purpose and target of the validation activity.

You will also need to think about:
- Business considerations (QA processes, industry sector requirements);
- Resource considerations (cost, staff time);
- RTO context (size, processes);
- Regulatory requirements.

You could consider one (or a combination) of the following methods:

**Assessment panel**

Assessment panels have a variety of functions, depending on the needs of the organisation(s) and the assessment process.
These may include:

- reviewing assessment processes;
- interpreting and promoting a common understanding of units of competency and Training Package requirements;
- determining reasonable adjustment;
- critiquing and signing off assessment tools;
- developing benchmarks or assessment exemplars;
- overseeing professional development for assessors;
- providing a network of mentors and coaches for assessors.

The focus of the assessment panel may be on higher level strategic and policy matters or more practical and operational issues. Wherever possible, panels should include relevant industry representatives, such as employers, unions, industry organisations or industry regulators.

**Assessment tool bank**

An assessment tool bank is a collection of evidence-gathering tools and techniques that are developed and shared among a group of assessors and/or RTOs. The establishment of an assessment tool bank:

- supports development of a shared understanding of the Training Package and in particular the specific unit(s) of competency being assessed;
- encourages collective development of assessment tools that will tend to produce higher quality assessment products;
- facilitates the critiquing and validation of assessment tools;
- ensures that a quality control procedure is applied to the selection of tools for inclusion in the bank;
- reduces cost, minimises waste and avoids duplication of effort in the development of tools.
Assessor networks

Assessor networks are groups of individuals involved in VET assessment who come together to develop and extend their professional practice. Such networks vary in focus, size, structure and level of organisation. Assessor networks contribute to consistency by providing a forum in which assessors can build a shared understanding of Training Packages as well as the assessment requirements of the AQTF.

When assessor networks are focused on a specific industry sector, Training Package or qualification, they offer an environment in which assessors can validate assessment practices. This is achieved through assessors exchanging ideas about the meaning of specific competency standards, the evidence requirements, the ways of gathering evidence and the basis on which assessment decisions are made.

Bank of assessment exemplars

The development of a bank of assessment exemplars enables assessors to access samples of candidate work that are considered to be exemplary. The bank may be developed with the input of industry groups, professional associations or industry regulators. The assessment exemplar bank may be collaborative and informal in nature or highly structured and commercial.
Benchmarking

Benchmarking involves:

- making comparisons with other organisations to identify or create areas for improvement;
- identifying superior performance and/or practices;
- adopting them within a specific RTO.

The two major forms of benchmarking include:

- performance benchmarking (comparison of performance between a number of organisations against a number of agreed measures);
- process benchmarking (comparison of their procedures/processes as well as performance).

Field testing, trialling and piloting

Field testing, trialling or piloting of evidence gathering tools and related materials should be a part of the validation process. Assessors can determine whether the tools are appropriate for the context, gather quality evidence and meet the needs of the enterprises/industry and the candidates. Feedback from candidates and enterprises/industry personnel should be used to refine and enhance the tools. Trialling may also be useful for other components of the assessment strategy.

Lead assessor

The lead assessor has responsibility for developing, managing and monitoring strategies that ensure consistency in assessment. The lead assessor may be the direct line manager of the assessors or may occupy a position with professional responsibility for fostering consistency in the assessment process and outcomes but without direct supervisory responsibility for the assessors.
The appointment of a lead assessor provides a clear organisational focus on the importance of achieving consistency in assessment. The lead assessor has responsibility for all validation processes, ensuring the development of a shared understanding and the maintenance of consistent practice by the assessors.

**Peer review**

Peer review involves assessors observing each other at work, then providing structured and specific feedback.

These strategies can be either formal or informal. It may involve pairing a more experienced assessor with a less experienced assessor.

Peer review can involve an evaluation of the:
- assessment planning interview with the candidate;
- evidence-gathering tools;
- conduct of the assessment;
- evidence collected;
- assessment judgement.
### Activity

When you plan your validation activity you will have to determine the most appropriate method to use for each validation target.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation Method</th>
<th>Which validation method could you use in this stage of the assessment validation process?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment tool bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessor Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of assessment exemplars and benchmarks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldtesting, trialling and piloting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead assessor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How could you record validation of RPL?

**Validation is an investment in continuous improvement**

Record it to:
- celebrate good practice
- monitor and improve the validation process
- track continuous improvements
- guide the development of future assessment activity
- provide suggested remedies to address any future assessment concerns

Your organisation will have a range of documents to record validation activity. Some examples of document templates are provided in Appendix 1.

**Activity**

Spend a few minutes reviewing the templates. Think about which templates match the different validation methods.

You will use some of these templates when you work through the validation activity later in the workshop.
**Activity**

In your group discuss the range of actions which might need to occur following validation activity. What are the benefits for RTOs and assessors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions following validation activity</th>
<th>Benefits for</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RTOs</td>
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What are the benefits of validation activity for RPL candidates?
What processes can we put in place to ensure follow-up?

Planning RPL validation

- What will you validate?
- What principles/rules apply to validation?
- Who could you involve in RPL validation?
- What methods/approaches could you use to validate RPL?
- How could you record validation of RPL?
- What action needs to occur following RPL validation?
A sample planning tool is included in Appendix 2. Spend a few minutes reviewing this tool. You will use it to plan the validation activity which follows.

Slide 28

Skills required

- Revisit the Skills List developed earlier

- Are there any additional skills or knowledge required by those participating in validation activity?

Activity

Record any additional skills you have identified in the box below:
Putting it all together

Activity

In your groups:
- Plan a validation activity
- Conduct the validation activity
- Reflect on your learnings

Activity

In Appendix 3 you will find a collection of evidence used as part of an RPL assessment for units from TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

In your groups:
- prepare a plan for the validation activity (Appendix 2)
- source the relevant documentation and evidence you will use for the activity (Appendix 1 and 3)
- conduct the validation activity according to your plan (this may require members of your group adopting stakeholder roles)
- share your plan and findings with other participants.

Activity

Now it’s time to think about how you will apply your learnings from the workshop. Use the Validation Planning Tool on the following page to develop a validation plan for a unit/cluster of units. Complete the validation activity when you return to your workplace.
Qualification:  
Unit/s of competency:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the target of the validation activity?</th>
<th>What principles / rules apply?</th>
<th>What methods / approaches will you use?</th>
<th>Who will you involve in the validation activity?</th>
<th>What resources will you need?</th>
<th>When will you undertake this validation?</th>
<th>How will you record the activity?</th>
<th>How will you ensure follow up?</th>
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</table>

You could choose a single target or decide to validate a mix of the following:
- assessment processes
- assessment tools
- assessment evidence
- assessment judgements

**Processes and tools** – Principles of Assessment  
**Evidence and Judgements** – Rules of Evidence

Validation Plan Developer: _________________________  
Date: _________________________

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Review

- Validation & Moderation as a CI strategy
- Assessor skills
- Planning RPL Validation
  - What will you validate?
  - What principles/rules apply to validation?
  - Who could you involve in RPL validation?
  - What methods/approaches could you use to validate RPL?
  - How could you record validation of RPL?
  - What action needs to occur following RPL validation?
- Major activity – putting it all together
- Applying learnings to your workplace

Activity

Discuss with others your key learnings / take home messages from this workshop. Record them in the box below.

CONGRATULATIONS
You have completed the Validating RPL workshop.....
HAPPY VALIDATING!!!