Competency progression and completion: how is the policy being enacted in three trades?

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The project and this analysis

This project aims to better understand the processes and practice of competency-based assessment for apprentices in relation to the policy on competency-based progression and completion. In particular, it is concerned with examining their impact on assessment in the cookery, metal fabrication and carpentry trades in public providers across four states and territories: Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. Three specific qualifications in the relevant Training Packages provide the focus:

- SIT 30812 – the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery

- MEM 30305 – the Certificate III in Engineering - Fabrication Trade, and

- CPC 32011 – the Certificate III in Carpentry and Joinery.

The project focusses on the locally-based practices of teachers and trainers, assessors and workplace supervisors. This focus is particularly relevant given concerns expressed by a number of key stakeholders about the quality, consistency and validity of assessment processes as well as the capacity to progress apprentices based on competency and, hence, the validity of judgements about apprentices' competence both during and at the completion of their training.

This support document will not only examine relevant research, but will also analyse national and state/territory based policy and other documentation relevant to competency-based progression and completion and its practice. It will begin by defining these terms and then outlining and presenting information on the evolution of the policies and the policy drivers, how the policy has been implemented in practice at jurisdictional level and then describe the issues which help enable, or work to prevent, the rhetoric of policy becoming the reality of practice. It then presents and discusses the concerns about competency assessment that industry and others have expressed in a variety of documents. Finally it outlines the relevant research and good practice literature on competency-based assessment which underpin quality assessment practices. This information will be used to focus the project and advise its information gathering processes.

Defining and determining competency-based progression and completion

Defining the terms

In essence, competency-based progression discounts the 'artificial time construct' as a pivotal feature in apprenticeship completion (Dickie et al. 2011). In addition, these authors suggest that the concepts of competency-based pay and progression should be based on skills and work performance and recognition for the apprentice's achievements and contributions, not time served. Competency-based

wage progression "…permits access to wage increases as skill milestones are achieved, assessed and verified" (Workplace Research Centre 2012, p.5). However, Dickie et al. note that: "In theory an apprenticeship can be shortened but in practice, with limitations of off the job training courses and calendars, few apprentices manage to knock more than a few months off the four years" (Dickie et al. 2011, p. 16). Karmel and Misko (2009) also report that apprentices and trainees often serve out the full 4 years of their apprenticeship.

Competency completion is about the final judgment made by the parties involved in apprentice training, including the employer, the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) providing the off-job component and the apprentice (NCVER 2011). Competency completion, at its essence, is the administrative process which formally concludes the apprentice's contract of training and completes their indenture. However, it needs to be underpinned by a valid process of assessment supported by appropriate documentation. This assessment process might rely on accumulated assessment evidence, one or more 'capstone' assessments, or both. In sum it is the holistic and final judgment of competence, involving evidence gathered through a variety of methods by a range of parties who have observed and tested the knowledge, skills and personal attributes of the apprentice in both workplace and off-site environments. Decisions about competence at completion are informed by the content of the relevant Training Package and the apprentice's personal training plan. A critical issue, however, is who initiates the completion process and how that process is administered. This is examined for each of the jurisdictions in which the study takes place and described in the section below entitled "Determining completion".

Finally, taken collectively, competency-based progression and completion is often conceived in terms of its ability to 'speed up' completions and hence produce qualified tradespeople more quickly. However competency completion is just that: it allows completion at or before the contract of training has reached its nominated finish date and at the point when the apprentice is deemed fully competent. Equally, therefore, full competence for some might be only finally achieved beyond that time if there are factors impeding competency attainment. In short, not all apprentices are suitable candidates for early completion. It is, as the Workplace Research Centre describes, a balance between duration and determination (Workplace Research Centre 2012).

The context: competency-based progression and completion policy

It might be argued that, in reality, competency-based progression and completion has been a feature of vocational education and training (VET) practice since the introduction of competency-based training (CBT) in the late 1980s and early 90s. It was one of a number of national and industry based initiatives designed to improve the flexibility and responsiveness of the VET system (Dawkins 1989a). It was also part of a broader process which helped push micro-economic and industrial relations reform, including award restructuring and more flexible work arrangements (Dawkins 1989b). One of the features with which CBT was first 'sold' was the opportunity to free those being trained from a rigid time-served system and shorten the training time for some. Thus training time and the length of an apprentice's indenture, potentially, became variable. For a range of reasons it is arguable that there was what the Workplace Research Centre (2012, p. 6) has described as a policy 'breach' which represents "…a gap, or chasm between the policy construct and the lived workplace reality". In other words the time-served system has effectively remained in place for the great majority of apprentices since that time.

Competency completion was given a strong and renewed impetus in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) communique of 10 February 2006 which stated:

By December 2006 all governments will have put in place arrangements that allow apprentices and trainees to work as qualified tradesmen and tradeswomen as soon as they have demonstrated competency to industry standards, without having to wait out a set time period or make special application. (COAG 2006, p.14)

Arguably, this policy was targeted at shortening the duration of apprenticeships where competency could be demonstrated in order to speed up the supply of qualified tradespeople to the labour market. This is also sometimes called an accelerated apprenticeship, and this approach was promoted through a range of approaches. Callan (2008) proposes an 'ideal model' with a number of key features:

- **Laying the groundwork**: this ensures that all parties, and particularly employers, understand clearly what is involved in introducing accelerated completions, what each of their roles will be and how they will work with others. The right people need to be involved. This includes employers, providers and their staff and, most importantly, the participants. As accelerated progression can be challenging for learners, it may be more difficult for those who lack maturity, have learning difficulties (including language, literacy and numeracy) or lack sufficient levels of personal support

- **Providing intensive up-front training**: intensive up-front training gives apprentices and employers the option of undertaking a significant amount of the formal training component of the qualification at the beginning of an apprenticeship. Such an approach might also incorporate prevocational programs and should involve appropriate RPL being granted. It also provides participants with immediately useable vocational skills and knowledge so that they are more job-ready

- **Incorporating key elements and support in the program design**: these key elements include developing and maintaining appropriate partnerships between training organisations and employers. This requires more flexible approaches to work and learning including:

  o using online and other flexible learning approaches, technologies and assessment techniques, both on and off the job

  o appropriate support by trained workplace mentors as well as provider and field officer visits to monitor progress against individual training plans. Such monitoring may need to be quite intensive

  o adopting competency- rather than time-based wage progression for apprentices.

Callan (2008) notes that there are additional financial costs to operating accelerated apprenticeships as well as increased pressures upon apprentices, employers and trainers, all of which need to be managed well.

Competency-based progression and completion has also been promoted through the amendment of training legislation and administrative procedures where necessary, and by removing references to fixed duration from awards and legislation in all jurisdictions where such awards prevent early sign off based on competency. In attaining sign-off, competency needed to be demonstrated to the satisfaction of both the employer and the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) providing the off-job training. COAG also proposed better recognition of the existing skills of all those entering training so that they did not have to repeat or undertake training for skills they had already acquired on the job. Their communique of 7 December 2009, amongst other initiatives for the apprenticeship system,

reaffirmed the commitment to "…facilitate arrangements for the effective implementation of competency-based progression and completion for apprentices." (COAG 2009, p. 6). However, work conducted by NCVER for the Apprenticeships for the 21st century Expert Panel (NCVER 2011) concluded first that the level of accelerated completion is significant but varies with jurisdiction and by industry area. Second, they concluded there is little evidence that rates of accelerated completion have changed much, despite the push from COAG in its 2006 communique. They reported that:

> Using the most current data … about 28% of trade apprentices and trainees who completed their qualifications do so in two years or fewer. At the end of three years nearly 45% have completed. By the end of 3.5 years this proportion has reached nearly 58% and by the end of four years 95% have completed. (NCVER 2011, p. 74)

Finally, the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (COAG 2012a) between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories lists one of the reform outcomes as; "…assuring the quality of training delivery and outcomes, with an emphasis on measures that give industry more confidence in the standards of training delivery and assessment." (p.3) And "… the development and piloting of independent validation of RTO assessment practices with a view to informing the development of a national model" (p. 6). The COAG communique of 13 April 2012 (COAG 2012b, p. 1) affirms these approaches, noting that a key element of Australia's skills reform initiatives is improving the confidence of employers and students in the quality of training courses, by developing and piloting independent validation of training provider assessments. Valid assessment processes are needed to underpin competency-based progression and completion.

The policy surrounding competency-based progression and completion, and the assessment which needs to underpin them, is clear. Nevertheless, the lived reality presents a somewhat different picture. This is discussed in the following sections on how completion is determined and the issues that affect how and to what extent competency-based progression and completion are implemented.

Determining completion

NCVER (2011, p. 75) noted that "While all jurisdictions have policies and procedures to enable early completion to occur, there is a variety of practice." This section examines the practices in relation to competency-based progression and completion in the four jurisdictions targeted for this study: Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. In most cases text from relevant websites and documents has been reproduced here virtually verbatim to ensure that the processes have been faithfully represented. This information was current in late 2013.

Victoria

According to Victorian Government guidelines (*Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website: Competency Based Completion Frequently Asked Questions*, cited July 2013) an RTO must contact the employer a minimum of four times per year to provide information on the progress of the apprentice and/or seek confirmation of their competence. This contact can be made in a number of ways (for example in writing, through a visit, or by telephone). The employer is asked to confirm the competency of the apprentice against a group or cluster of units of competency. The final confirmation from the employer must be provided in writing by the employer and confirm that the employer understands that their confirmation of the final competencies will end the apprenticeship. Thus, the completion of an apprenticeship occurs when the RTO receives written confirmation from the employer that the apprentice has demonstrated any remaining competencies.

There is no set form to complete for this final confirmation; it can be done by the employer signing off on the Training Plan.

For its part the RTO must ensure that clear advice has been provided to the employer that this confirmation completes the training contract. When the RTO has received the confirmation from the employer, the RTO will enter the information into the Victorian apprenticeship database, known as DELTA. Skills Victoria will then write to both the employer and the apprentice, confirming that the apprenticeship is completed. The apprenticeship cannot be completed until all the competencies of the structured training have been achieved and the employer has returned written confirmation of the apprentice's competence as an employee in the workplace to the RTO. If the apprentice is not assessed by the RTO as competent then further training or experience in the relevant competencies may be required – either on or off the job – before the apprentice is considered competent. Similarly, if the employer does not think that the apprentice has demonstrated the competencies necessary to complete their qualification, then the RTO and apprentice may agree with the employer on further training or experience in the relevant competencies.

The Victorian Skills Commission has approved a mechanism for addressing issues where the RTO, employer or apprentice have different views of an apprentice's progress and competence. For example, failing to reach agreement on a way to demonstrate competency to the satisfaction of the RTO and employer, the employer or apprentice can involve contact with an Apprenticeship Field Officer. The issue resolution process allows all parties to present their information and negotiate an agreed outcome.

Training contracts in Victoria continue to include a notional completion date, termed a 'nominal duration'. The nominal duration assists the planning process for apprenticeships. However, this duration is not binding under competency-based completion. Thus, some apprentices will complete earlier, some later than the nominal duration. As outlined above, the actual end date for the contract is whatever is the date that the employer confirms in writing that the apprentice has demonstrated in the workplace the final competencies required for the qualification. If the apprentice needs time to achieve competency beyond the nominal duration, the contract can be extended on the agreement of all parties.

According to the Victorian guidelines the qualifications issued must include the words "obtained under an approved Victorian Government Apprenticeship or Traineeship training scheme", and that DELTA is updated to the status of 'completed' with the date of completion entered. The actual recorded completion date is the date of confirmation by the employer.

Queensland

All apprenticeships in Queensland are competency-based. This means that when all the competencies are achieved and signed off, the apprentice may complete their apprenticeship (with agreement from their employer and supervising registered training organisation) - regardless of the amount of time the apprentice has been in the apprenticeship.

When the supervising Registered Training Organisation (or training organisation), the employer and apprentice agree that all competencies outlined in the training plan have been achieved, the following must take place:

1. The employer and apprentice must promptly sign a written notice (for example, the ATF-011 Completion agreement form) noting this agreement. The signing of this notice does not end the apprenticeship.

2. The employer and apprentice should, in a timely manner, provide the training organisation with a copy of this signed notice (or completion agreement form).

3. On receipt of the completion agreement or signed notice, the training organisation confirms that all training has been completed and confirms the actual completion date of the apprenticeship (which may or may not differ from the 'proposed completion date' nominated by the employer and apprentice). The training organisation then issues a qualification and a list of competencies achieved to the apprentice.

4. Within 14 days of issuing the qualification to the apprentice, the training organisation must send written advice of this event to the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) and the employer. This advice can either be on an ATF-011 completion agreement form or on the training organisation's letterhead.

5. DETE will issue a certificate of completion for the apprenticeship to the apprentice upon receiving advice from the training organisation and will also advise the employer in writing that the certificate has been issued. The actual completion date of the apprenticeship is the date agreed to by all parties and stated on the completion agreement.

6. If a dispute arises in relation to the assessment of competency, or one party is unwilling to sign the completion agreement, a grievance can be lodged with DETE once the appeal process of the Supervising Registered Training Organisation, or SRTO, has been finalised. The role of the SRTO is to:

    *   ensure all training required to be delivered under the agreed training plan has been delivered

    *   if a dispute arises, discuss with the parties to clarify the reasons for disputing the competency or reason why one party is refusing to sign the completion agreement

    *   assist the complainant to complete the appropriate declaration sections of either the disputed assessment of competency or disputed completion form and, as specified on the form, provide details of the actions taken to resolve the dispute.

    In helping to resolve the dispute once referred, DETE will undertake a process to validate the eligibility of the apprentice to complete their qualification or confirm their competency. DETE may contact the employer, apprentice and SRTO as part of this validation process to request additional information.

7. Where the complaint is in relation to the quality of training and/or assessment being delivered by the SRTO, it must be lodged with the National VET Regulator – the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

South Australia

Section 49(5) of the Training and Skills Development Act 2008 (the Act) authorises the Training and Skills Commission (the Commission) to approve the completion of a training contract prior to the nominal completion date of the contract term subject to the Commission being satisfied of the

competency of the apprentice in order to approve the completion of the training contract and relieve the parties of their obligations under the contract.

The Commission may issue confirmation of completion under the following conditions:

1. the parties to the contract have certified that they have fulfilled their obligations under the contract

2. the employer has certified that the apprentice has been provided with relevant on-the-job training and support consistent with the competency requirements of the qualification and that the employer is satisfied that the requirements of the qualification have been met

3. the RTO has certified that the qualification specified in the contract has been achieved, and

4. the request for completion is supported and signed by both parties to the training contract.

However, the Commission may issue confirmation of completion without an application from one or both of the parties (under s. 49(5)) and may make a determination to relieve the apprentice of his or her obligations under the contract provided that it is satisfied of the competence of the apprentice in the declared vocation, trade or occupation. Further, where the contractual parties are in dispute, and the employer or apprentice does not accept that the apprentice is competent, or the employer cannot be found, the Commission may obtain independent industry advice in regard to the competency of the apprentice, or the parties may refer the matter to the South Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

The parties (both apprentice/guardian if under 18 years, and employer) must notify the Commission if the training contract is not completed by the nominal term stated in the contract and will therefore continue beyond the nominal term. Any disputes involving employers, apprentices or RTOs relating to the completion of an apprenticeship may be resolved with the assistance of Traineeship and Apprenticeship Services consultants, or the parties may refer the matter to the South Australian Industrial Relations Commission. South Australia also has an Office of the Training Advocate, which might play a role.

The Australian Capital Territory

The ACT's requirements for delivery of Australian Apprenticeships training is published on their website (ACT Education and Training Directorate 2013). Apprentices are considered to have successfully completed their training when they can apply their knowledge and skills in the workplace and perform effectively to the standards developed and agreed by industry. Assessment of competence takes place at the unit or unit cluster level and at the qualification level. In this way progression and completion are determined.

At the unit level RTOs must retain evidence of engagement and agreement from the Australian Apprentice's employer of competence at both the unit and qualification level. Examples of relevant evidence for competence at the unit level to be held on the Australian Apprentice's file for audit purposes include but are not limited to:

- employer signature against each unit of competency/cluster of units

OR

- record/s of conversation/s and agreement from the employer against each unit/cluster of units (e.g. emails, record of phone conversation)

OR

- written confirmation from employer of agreement of competence against unit/s.

The apprentice, employer and RTO must agree competence has been achieved in the workplace before a qualification can be issued. This final agreement must be formally documented, signed and dated by all parties and retained on the apprentice's file. The agreed date is known as the date-deemed-competent and recorded on the certificate for the qualification.

Therefore, RTOs must:

- verify achievement of competencies in line with the assessment requirements of the training package

- complete final assessment before the end-date of the training contract and at a time when all parties agree full competency is likely to be achieved

- seek assistance in writing via email to apprenticeships@act.gov.au where the RTO and the employer/apprentice cannot resolve differences of opinion about assessment

- retain documentary evidence of assessments and achievement of competencies to the standard required in the VET Quality Framework (VQF), and be able to provide these when requested.

In summary

An inspection of the jurisdictional documentation suggests that different approaches are adopted across the participating States and Territories in this project, especially in terms of how a final decision on competency is reached and who initiates it. This may have an effect on completion practices. There are also differences in how disputes are resolved, and by whom. However these arrangements provide a background on how local decisions about competency based progression and completion decisions are made. These differences may be compounded when documentation of Training Plans is considered and compared. This will be considered in the following section of this review.

The Training Plan and its role

According to the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website the training plan outlines who will deliver the training, and when and where the apprentice needs to go to receive the structured component of their training. The Training Plan is seen as a working document; it should be flexible and be used as a basis for discussion between employers and Registered Training Organisations at any stage during the training. It is based on, and advised by, both the business needs of the employer and the learning needs of the apprentice. Regular contact between the employer and RTO is expected and during these contacts the apprentice's progress should be reported and discussed.

In examining jurisdictional websites it can be determined that the Training Plan must generally specify the following:

- the name of the qualification to be issued

- the parties to the contract

- the competencies to be obtained (which may be clustered or staged to reflect typical work tasks and practices)

- the time-frame for achieving the competencies, including planned commencement and completion dates

- the training to be undertaken

- the delivery modes to be employed

- the details (when, how and how much) of the time allocated outside routine work duties is for off-the-job training

- *who is responsible for the delivery and/or assessment of each competency (authors' emphasis)*

- *assessment details and arrangements (authors' emphasis)*

- a record of any recognition of prior learning (RPL) for qualifications and cross-credit hours granted prior to commencing the apprenticeship or traineeship

- any other specific requirements to be met in accordance with the particular training contract in question

The plan should be developed with all the parties involved: the employer, the RTO and the apprentice. It is signed by all parties and is a record of intent and progress. This information is, by and large, that which is required of the Training Plans in all jurisdictions. Templates and model Training Plans are usually provided by the jurisdictions. These vary to some extent in content, requirements and detail (see Table 1 in relation to requirements for contact between the RTO and the employer), and also in relation to information regarding assessment (see Table 2).

Table 1: The varying emphasis placed on the need for RTO contact with employers in the 4 jurisdictions covered in the present study

SA	RTOs responsibilities include
	Providing the employer with regular reports on the apprentice/trainee's progress and achievement
	Notifying the employer of apprentice/trainee issues that may affect successful completion of the Training Contract
	Liaising with the employer and apprentice/trainee to determine the achievement of competence in required skills
	However there is no provision on the form to record the time or type of employer contact.
Vic	RTOs must indicated on the pro forma when and how they contacted the employer by selecting one of six options: Face to face, email, Post, E-conference, Phone/Fax, Other (please specify)
Q'land	In the obligations and undertaking section the RTO is asked to agree to this statement:
	I will notify the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) of any matter that may jeopardise the successful completion of the training as soon as practicable after the matter arises, and in particular, any failure by the apprentice/trainee to make satisfactory progress, and any failure by the employer to allow the apprentice/trainee the opportunity to complete the training specified in this Training Plan.
	However there is no provision on the form to record the time or type of employer contact.
ACT	No mention of contact with employer

Table 2: Assessment methods outlined in Training Plans in South Australia, Victoria the ACT and Queensland and their variation.

SA	Only specifies on the –job or off-the job assessment
Vic	6 specified: Third party, Q&A, Demonstration, Written response, Observation, Other (please specify)
Q'land	6 specified: Questions (tests, interviews, case studies, questionnaires, self assessments, etc.) Review of products (samples of work, products etc.) Third party Feedback (testimonials, supervisor reports/interviews, etc.) Workplace observation (observed whilst doing job, wet tasks, role play, scenarios or simulations) Portfolios demonstrating experience (workplace documents, journal/logbooks etc.) Structured activities (project, presentations, activity sheets, off the job role play, scenarios or simulations, etc.)
ACT	6 Specified: Project, Portfolio, Practical Demonstration, Knowledge Based Assessment, Observation, Other (please specify)

Our inspection of these Training Plan proformas suggests a range of issues that need to be explored in the course of the present project. These issues include:

- the utility of these proformas for trainers and assessors and workplace supervisors

- the consistency of the plans and the level of detail provided, especially around assessment approaches

- version control issues in relation to establishing that all parties utilising the plans have, and are working from, the latest and current version.

Competency-based progression and completion: the issues

The advantages

In their final report (Commonwealth of Australia 2011) the Apprenticeships for the 21st century Expert Panel outlined a range of advantages they saw for a competency-based training progression system. These included (Commonwealth of Australia 2011, p. 92) advantages for both apprentices and employers:

For the apprentice or trainee:

- achieving a qualification in a shorter time frame

- allowing experienced individuals who are not formally qualified to gain formal qualifications that are nationally recognised

- attracting more mature workers to an apprenticeship or traineeship due to the potential for a shorter training period and reduced opportunity costs to themselves and their families

- increasing application of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) that can allow for earlier completion of training

- support for apprentices or trainees who need additional time to attain competency.

For the employer:

- increasing the pool of qualified tradespersons

- increasing the focus on on-the-job training with associated productivity benefits for the business
- introducing the potential for more flexible forms of training partnerships and cooperation between employers and RTOs
- increasing productivity of employees, who would be better trained, qualified more quickly and better paid.

Nevertheless, the panel acknowledged the low take up of competency-based progression and completion and believed a major reason for this was resistance by trainers to embrace competency-based methodologies of workplace evidence gathering and workplace assessment, and a prevailing culture of resistance to competency-based progression and completion by many employers. Critically, it is also dependent on the extent to which providers have implemented training arrangements – including timetabling and administrative systems - which make it possible for apprentices to undertake their training in a flexible way and progress through their apprenticeship at varying rates.

The Workplace Research Centre has suggested in a paper prepared for Group Training Australia (Workplace Research Centre 2012), competency-based progression is a 'manifold' policy concept which spans multiple spheres of policy. As a result, they believe it is driven and influenced by a diverse range of policy intentions, goals and debates and therefore yields diverse stakeholder interpretations of the concept. However, the implementation of competency-based progression and completion is, at the end of the day, a challenge for the stakeholders at the local level and it is they who make the principle of competency-based progression a 'practical and operational reality' (Workplace Research Centre 2012, p. 26). This reality is dependent in large measure on the quality of the relationship between individual employers and the RTO providing the off-job training (for example, Precision Consulting 2008).

The issues

The Australian Industry Group (AiG), for its part, have been encouraging greater understanding of competency-based progression and completion with both employers and RTOs (AiG 2013). However, it believes the fundamental issue is that:

> Commonwealth and state/territory training authorities and RTO administrative arrangements continue to manage apprenticeships via time based methods. In addition, inflexible RTO work practices often act as a barrier against implementing competency based progression. (AiG, 2013, p.12)

On the other hand others argue that some employers are too willing to sign off on apprentices to get them "off the books" (expedient sign-off), or there is poor buy-in by individual employers because:

> …host employers often found the assessment processes were a burden, were difficult to schedule in, or staff designated with the task were not properly prepared for the role. (Workplace Research Centre 2012, p. 35)

Some employers also pay little regard to the comprehensive skill formation required of the apprenticeship (Workplace Research Centre 2012). This report also notes that employers may be "…highly incentivised to delay formal sign off of skill recognition because of the financial benefits to be derived for the employer" (Workplace Research Centre 2012, p. 34). In addition, NCVER (2011, p.72) noted:

Employers and qualified tradespeople, particularly in traditional trades areas, often retain a preference for the time-served system because that is how they were trained...Others suggest that early completion decreases the 'roundedness' of the training experience and perhaps increases the occupational health and safety and other risks of early completers who are not fully competent.

In reality, and dependent on circumstance, poor rates of competency progression may be sheeted home to the attitudes and practices of employers, providers or a combination of both. There are a range of other issues too. For example, what is competence and where is that best demonstrated? These are key to underpinning the assessment of progression and completion.

The issue of competence

Competence seems on the surface to be a simple concept. However, Guthrie (2009) argues that this apparent simplicity melts away to reveal something which is conceptually far more complex. He also suggests that competence is actually a journey, not an end point, and competencies go beyond formal education and training and experience. They are developed through the integration of all that has been learnt or experienced formally and informally, and in some cases relate to capacities which have been developed over a life span.

Competence can be conceptualised in two broad ways. One takes a view that competence is a personal construct, while the other grounds competence in the context of an occupation and even a particular workplace. In determining competence, and progression towards it, a balance needs to be struck between these two constructs. This is a potential dilemma for assessment processes and their design.

At an individual level the notion of competence stresses work performance and outcomes which are observable, measurable and assessable. However, performance is also underpinned by other constituents of competence: personally held skills, knowledge and abilities which collectively underpin and enable performance. As Guthrie suggests:

So, at best, written competency standards are rough and ready, though useful, guides and we should be wary of assuming that actual realities of what competence is are reflected in the words used to describe them. Therefore it is not the words that are important but what they *mean*, and the extent to which what they mean is widely *understood*. This intangible nature of competence can present particular challenges, one of the most significant of which is its assessment. This is because there is a tendency to concentrate more on the tangible and the overt and less on the underlying (but possibly more critical) attributes of competence (Guthrie 2009, p. 18).

On the other hand, competence may be conceived as a virtue of an organisation, which recognises the complex interaction of people, skills and technologies that drives company performance (LeDeist & Winterton 2005). In other words, as Guthrie (2009) suggests, competence is also context dependent, and the competencies that individuals display or that individual employers value vary in these different contexts. The competencies an employer requires of their apprentice may be broad or narrow, dependent on the nature of their business. Therefore, while broad descriptions of competence such as those described in a Training Package may hold up, the relative emphasis put on their component parts will vary across workplaces and for particular individuals, given the pool of skills and other attributes deemed to be required by a particular employer. Thus, while there are competency standards, they are not necessarily uniformly or universally applied, and their various components have different emphases dependent upon circumstance (Guthrie 2009). This makes it

particularly important to understand not only an individual's competence in relation to a work function, but also the particular balance and level of skills, knowledge and attributes they can bring to, or which are required by, a particular employer. This raises the issue of whether consistency in the assessment of competence is truly achievable, and whether every employer can provide the range of work experiences and workplace assessment opportunities required by the training package related to a particular trade. How competence is perceived and assessed, and the quality of those assessment processes, are all pivotal to the quality of decisions about an apprentice's progression and completion in relation to the competency requirements of their trade. The assessment process is explored in a following section.

Where and when is competence best demonstrated?

One of the arguments put forward in support of the apprentice and traineeship model is its on-the-job experience, and its quality. Indeed, as NCVER (2011) argues, there is a view within the VET sector and amongst its stakeholders that the workplace is the most or—at the extreme the only—legitimate place for occupational training to occur. For some, institutionally-based training is seen as second best. In reality, NCVER (2011) argues, both settings potentially have limitations and advantages for training and the assessment of competence.

The limitations of institutional settings may be the reality and currency of the training provided, and therefore the reality and validity of the assessment process. However, there is a value in simulations in dangerous and other circumstances. In addition, the institution may be the only place where occupationally relevant skills can be acquired and assessed, or to cover and assess the full suite of competencies in the relevant Training Package. This is because some skills or skill clusters do not often occur in the workplace, or are not covered because the scope of the employer's business is narrow or specialised. Unless another employer is able, and prepared, to offer the opportunity for an apprentice to learn the 'missing' skills then the RTO represents the only place at which experience can be gained or competency can be determined. It is also possible that some employers may employ poor practices, which are then passed on to the apprentice and compromise the quality of their assessment and competence.

The quality of the occupational training depends on the quality of those doing it and their practices. The reputation and esteem - for the quality of their occupational training - in which both VET providers or particular enterprises are held will in turn have a bearing on the esteem in which those they have trained are held in the occupational marketplace. As has been asserted above, the context in which the training and assessment has taken place is key, as is the culture of the organisations in which the training occurs. A sound and supportive learning culture with strong mentoring of the apprentice is needed so that work practices can support effective learning and its assessment.

A final issue of particular relevance to apprenticeships is the quality and synergies between the training provided off the job and support and training provided on the job. A good practice guide (Smith et al. 2009a) and its underpinning report (Smith et al. 2009b) show that, increasingly, institutional trainers are being embedded in enterprises to provide occupational training and assessment in a formal partnership, but even where this does not occur the quality of the relationship between the institution and the enterprise is critical to the quality of occupational training and assessment.

Approaches to assessing competency-based progression and completion

A range of reports and other documents have raised issues and concerns about the quality of assessment in the vocational education and training sector (NSSC 2013). For example, the NQC commissioned research because of reports it received raising concerns on the part of industry and regulators about the quality and integrity of RTO assessments (for example ACCI 2008). In particular there was concern amongst these parties that learners were being deemed competent inappropriately (Precision Consulting 2008). Work by the Workplace Research Centre in 2012 for Group Training Australia identified "ensuring quality in competency-based assessment practice" as a key challenge and that:

> The issue of quality and how to preserve quality standards in assessment, has been identified as a contentious issue in the competency-based progression model (Workplace Research Centre 2012, p.32). [and that]

> Researchers identify that training and assessment environments geared towards competency-based methods may be at risk of producing poorly assessed workers, unless provisions are made to provide workers with diverse scenarios to 'test' skill (i.e. require apprentices to extrapolate using existing knowledge and to 'problem solve') (ibid, p.33).

The report of the Productivity Commission on the VET workforce noted that:

> The rapid expansion of the VET sector in recent years, through the development of private and enterprise provision, has left the penetration of formally acquired training and assessment skills within the workforce lagging (Productivity Commission 2011, p. XLII).

In particular, this report suggested that "…casual employment [of teaching staff] might, at times, reduce the quality of the teaching or learning experience in VET [providers], and restrict opportunities to develop teaching *and assessment* (our emphasis) ability" (Productivity Commission 2011, p. XXXV). This, they believe, supports a need for adequate professional development for casual and other non-permanent VET staff. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) noted that there were concerns amongst practitioners about their depth of skills for developing and conducting quality assessments. These concerns appear to be confirmed in other research (e.g. Mitchell and Ward 2010).

For its part, the OECD report reviewing Australia's vocational education and training system (Hoeckel et al. 2008) commended the Australian reforms which base apprenticeships on competencies but suggested that these reforms needed to be translated into actions which allowed flexibility in the length of apprenticeships and supported that through a common procedure for their assessment. Moreover, they noted that:

> Despite a common national qualifications system, there are wide variations in the assessment standards which are applied (p. 13) [and] Consistency in standards throughout Australia should be achieved through a common assessment procedure to determine whether the necessary skills have been acquired (p. 6).

Skills Australia (2010), too, raised the issue of the consistency of assessment, posing the question:

> Should we, for example, institute a system for the external moderation and validation of provider assessments and standards to ensure a Certificate III awarded by one provider is to the same level as a Certificate III awarded by another? (Skills Australia 2010, p. 12)

This is part of that organisation's proposed move to drive excellence and restore confidence in the quality of VET which, in turn, they suggest requires greater transparency, better consumer

information, robust assessment practices and well-designed performance measurement. They note that confidence in VET qualifications is undermined if assessment practices are considered weak and lack independent scrutiny (Skills Australia 2010). Lack of consistency and the quality of assessment has also been highlighted in research commissioned by Service Skills Australia (University of Ballarat 2009), and this study also highlighted assessment as the highest professional development priority for RTO staff in that sector. Indeed, most recently the Australian Workplace Productivity Agency has advocated the development and piloting of an independent validation process for training provider assessments (AWPA 2013). This, they believe, should focus on high-risk qualifications.

Precision Consulting (2008) reported that industry confidence in assessment decisions was high if the employer worked hard to locate an RTO that was responsive to their business needs and with which they developed a close working relationship. However the experience of individual organisations consulted was not one that they might apply to 'the system as a whole". Key factors in confidence and satisfaction related to:

- the calibre of the RTO

- the currency of assessors' industry knowledge and,

- whether the assessor took a 'tick and flick' approach to assessment or used a variety of evidence gathering techniques (Precision Consulting 2008).

Further, confidence and satisfaction with assessment decisions could vary according to qualification (Precision Consulting 2008). While some employers do not want to become more involved than they already are in the assessment process, others are willing to do so and their suggestions for increased involvement in assessment included employer input into final competency assessments and more scope for supervisor feedback and observed competence (Halliday-Wynes and Misko 2013). Maintaining open and effective lines of communication with RTOs and informing employers regularly of the progress of its employees were both felt to be important (Precision Consulting 2008). In addition, this report suggested that RTOs might make better use of existing workplace measures to collect evidence of assessment rather than using RTO developed or provided proformas, or RTOs could undertake direct skill assessments in the workplace.

Other points of intervention to improve the quality of assessment suggested in the NQC (2008) paper include:

- **At the training package development stage** where clear conditions for assessments are written into evidence guides of competencies, and priority units of competency are identified where consistency would be enhanced by the addition of related, standardised national assessment tools. The assessment guidelines for each of the qualifications forming part of this study will be considered shortly

- **In the training and ongoing professional development of teachers, trainers and assessors** where short courses for assessors in the workplace could be delivered to assist them in supporting or working with RTO assessors in identifying and gathering relevant evidence and agreeing on enterprise contextualized units of competency. This also involves having teachers, trainers and assessors regularly attend professional development activities with industry people and improving the quality of assessment training VET teacher/trainer qualifications, especially the quality in the Certificate IV TAE

- **Through a validation and/or moderation process** where assessors meet with each other and industry representatives to discuss approaches, agree on common assessment tools and check consistency and validity. Another approach proposed would be to endorse or register assessors through an appropriate body in some industry areas

- **Through the quality of the relationship between employers and RTOs** where there is joint sign off on assessments (enterprise and RTO), more detailed audits of assessment processes, involving industry representatives and including an examination of the assessment tools used and, finally, better communication between the employer and the RTO about processes, expectations and information provision. A collaborative process is emphasised as a key feature to preserve quality in the context of competency-based progression in work by the Workplace Research Centre (2012). Their paper also emphasises the importance of scheduling work in a way which lends itself to comprehensive and well-rounded skills development.

Other approaches suggested in the NQC report include making better use of workplace evidence by taking workplace tasks and mapping them to competencies, rather than asking the enterprise to find evidence in the workplace to match the competency. This could include processes to recognise enterprise-based, non-accredited training so that the outcomes of such training could lead to statements of attainment and/or qualifications. In addition, more holistic assessment could be undertaken that encourages the collection of 'workplace evidence'. Finally, better use might be made of RPL. 'Workbooks' (or similar consolidated documents) to track and verify progress in skill development seem to be common practice (Workplace Research Centre 2012).

Recommendation 12 in Skills Australia's report "Skills for Prosperity: A roadmap for vocational education and training" has proposed building a robust national VET regulation system by, amongst other things, identifying and disseminating examples of excellence in provider practice to drive continuous improvement in teaching, learning and assessment, and learner support. They believe this should be made part of ASQA's functions (Skills Australia 2011). Indeed, NSSC (2013) reported that:

> ASQA's submission to the NSSC Consultation Paper reported that the most common area of regulatory action taken in its first twelve months of existence (accounting for 97% of rejection decisions) is for non-compliance against, but not necessarily exclusively, standards SNR 15 - Strategies for quality training and assessment and SNR 16 - Strategies for principles of access and equity and to maximise outcomes for clients (NSSC 2013, p. 11).

Again, COAG's National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (COAG 2012a) emphasises measures that give industry more confidence in the standards of training delivery and assessment and developing and piloting of independent validation of RTO assessment practices with a view to informing the development of a national model. For its part, the AWPA has been concerned with the pace of progress on these initiatives (AWPA 2013).

This literature review will now consider:

- The principles that underpin good assessment, beginning with a definition of "competency-based assessment"

- Approaches to assessment, and

- The validation of assessment decisions.

As has been seen, Skills Australia and its successor, the AWPA, have placed great emphasis on the external validation of assessment decisions (Skills Australia 2011, AWPA 2012 & 2013).

Principles of good assessment

Competency-based assessment has been defined as:

> …a purposeful process of systematically gathering, interpreting, recording and communicating to stakeholders, information on candidate performance against industry competency standards and/or learning outcomes (NQC 2009a, p. 58).

Thus, assessment is about gathering evidence systematically and then using it to make judgements. This process is also called summative assessment and, in terms of this project, it is the final and holistic assessment decision made when the competency of the apprentice is finally determined and signed off. Nevertheless, a range of summative judgements are also made in determining progression. In addition to an assessment's validity (which will be discussed in greater detail later in this review), other traditional pillars of a quality assessment approach are:

- Reliability, which refers to the stability, consistency and accuracy of assessment outcomes. Training Package guidelines on reliability note that reliability can only be achieved when assessors share a common interpretation of the units of competence being assessed

- Flexibility, which refers to using a range of approaches which are appropriate to the sites and modes of delivery, and to learner needs. According to the assessment guidelines contained in a number of Training Packages, they should also support continuous competency development

- Fairness, which means that the assessment approach should not disadvantage particular learners. It should be equitable, accessible, transparent, participatory and open to reasoned questioning.

Other elements which affect the quality of assessment decisions include:

- Sufficiency, which relates to whether the full range of performance is identified and which is assessed over a period of time and in a range of contexts. In simple terms, it refers to the quantity and quality of evidence assessed

- Currency, which relates to whether the evidence of the competencies held is recent or current, and

- Authenticity, which relates whether the assessment activities completed are, in fact, the candidate's own work, or that the documentation and other information presented to support the assessment of competence (qualifications, references etc.) are, themselves, actually authentic.

The assessment process is also about risk management, with more care needing to be taken if the consequences of an incorrect assessment decision are likely to be serious.

As the definition of competency-based assessment implies, emphasis is on performance in work and what can be observed as well as inferred. This is contrasted with, and complimented by, the importance of assessing underlying generic skills and knowledge. A key issue is the extent to which the assessment systems capture these. Some also argue that there is a role in competency-based assessment for grading so that excellence can be recognised, rather than just 'competence' (for example, Williams and Bateman 2003).

Assessment also plays an important role in supporting the learning process by helping learners in particular - but others as well - to monitor their progress. This is called formative assessment.

Approaches to competency-based assessment

There is a considerable literature and critique of competency-based assessment. This review does not intend to examine this extensive literature in any comprehensive way. Rather, it is specifically focussed on documenting the range of approaches that might be used to assess the competency of apprentices both as they progress and complete. To do this it draws on 2 major pieces of work:

1. The Training Package assessment material kit (DETYA 2001), and

2. Guidelines for assessing competence in VET (4th edition) (Department of Training and Workforce Development 2012)

Assessment methods need to be holistic and may involve direct or indirect evidence as well as evidence gathered from third parties. Good assessment may involve clustering a number of competencies to reflect a real work task, skill set or job role (Department of Training and Workforce Development 2012). Those suggested in DETYA (2001) include:

- **Observations**, especially of work performance whether involving scheduled assessments or as part of the observation of everyday performance. The observation process should aim to collect evidence of all components of competency and may often involve the use of a checklist

- **Questions or interview approaches**, which are most often oral and are used to complement and support the observation of performance or in structured activities in order to help assess levels of underpinning knowledge and other dimensions of competency as they are being applied in practice. Questions might be open ended or closed and cover such issues as contingencies, safety or regulations, and other related procedures that are undertaken infrequently. Responses need to be recorded in some way

- **Knowledge-based tests**, which are often written and may involve selected response questions such as true/false items, multiple choice and matching questions or constructed response items where the candidate provides and answer such as completions questions, short answer questions or extended response items – such as reports. Selected response items may form part of large item banks and be used to develop and assess individually constructed tests. Extended response items require a marking guide

- **Review of products**, where work samples or finished products are assessed against specification. This might also include consideration of time taken, wastage rates and other factors relevant to producing a product for review

- **Structured activities**, such as demonstrations of a process at another time and place (rather than during actual work) for a variety of reasons such as difficulty, safety, cost, privacy and confidentiality or where the work is not routinely performed by that workplace/employer. Simulations (which replicate the work context and which may involve such approaches as role plays or scenarios), and projects may also be used in the assessment of competence. Projects are particularly useful in assessing work activities over a period of time, and usually require that a range of relevant tasks and activities are performed based on a project outline or brief with a realistic timeline

- **Third party feedback** is used where it may be difficult for the assessor to observe and assess performance for a variety of reasons. In this case evidence is collected by an observer or a third party. However it is the assessor who makes the judgement about the quality of the evidence provided and the extent to which it can be used validly in an assessment decision. Thus, this may involve providing materials, guidelines and briefings to those others gathering such evidence

- **Portfolios** demonstrating pieces of evidence and work outputs that have been gathered over a period of time and which can be benchmarked against relevant units of competency. They are often derived from day to day work and may be a physical product, a video or other suitable recorded or documentary evidence. Portfolios are also often used to support applications for RPL. Authenticity is a particular issue

- **Self-evaluation**, which is a process allowing apprentices to rate their own performance against unit of competency requirements. This evidence is often validated from other sources.

The assessment decision for each apprentice is guided by a range of factors, including those which are most critical to competence. This involves judgement on the part of those involved in the assessment process.

According to Halliday-Wynes and Misko (2013), the key issues associated with assessment in the qualifications they reviewed mainly related to managing the threat to the maintenance of consistency and accuracy in assessments and included:

- trainers and assessors not having the depth of assessment skills and knowledge to conduct valid and reliable assessments, and not applying adequate rigour to the assessments

- providers not allowing enough time for the repeated practice required for the demonstration of competency

- students not having adequate access to work placements and adequate supervision in work placements and lacking the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to undertake the program

- lack of clarity about industry or employer role in assessments, and

- lack of regular and widespread systematic processes for the moderation and validation of assessments either within or between registered training organisations.

Thus assessment systems, like other aspects of an RTO's operations, should involve on-going monitoring and improvement processes (Department of Training and Workforce Development 2012).

More recently Misko et al (2014) report that time constraints and inadequate experience or expertise in specific units (especially those dealing with theoretical components) work against employers' increased involvement in conducting assessments and in assessment validation. Key assessment challenges that trainers and assessors believed they faced related to arriving at fair, valid and consistent judgments and having confidence in their judgments about 'not competent' performance. Misko and her colleagues also found that teachers feel challenged by the need to ensure that their assessment tools keep pace with changing legislative frameworks and standards. Finally the personal

attributes of students were considered to affect a teacher's ability to deliver quality assessments (Misko et al 2014).

Assessment guidelines in the trade areas covered by this project

Information regarding assessment guidelines is drawn from the training packages covering the following qualifications:

- SIT 30812 – the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery
- MEM 30305 – the Certificate III in Engineering - Fabrication Trade, and
- CPC 32011 – the Certificate III in Carpentry and Joinery.

Many elements of these guidelines are largely standardised, covering benchmarks for assessment, specific industry requirements, principles of assessment (as outlined in a section above) and rules of evidence, assessor requirements and competencies and the design and use of assessment tools. While elements are standardised there is variation in the packages over the level of detail and information supplied. These differences and the key features in the guidelines for each package are summarised and presented for each of the particular trade areas below.

Cookery

This package has the most assessment comprehensive guidelines of the three trades being considered, with considerable detail being devoted to the context of and specific resources for assessment. These relate to where the unit is assessed (the environment), the equipment that must be available, the workplace resources and documentation required and the types of interaction that must be involved – including interactions with customers, team members and others. It notes the use of 'industry realistic' simulations as an appropriate assessment approach, and notes that valid and reliable assessment requires gathering information by a variety of methods, on multiple occasions, over a period of time and with the assessment covering a diversity of products and services.

The guidelines contain definitions of validity, reliability, flexibility, fairness, sufficiency and currency which are the same as those found in the MEM05 Training Package, that is, the package relevant to the metal fabrication trade being studied in this project.

Carpentry and metal fabrication

While carpentry is not a regulated trade in the same way that electrical and plumbing and gas fitting tradespeople are, the Training Package notes that there are regulatory bodies in each of the States and the Territory under study that have responsibilities for licencing in the broader building and construction industry. In this regard the Training Package specifically mentions carpenters and joiners.

In relation to the design and use of assessment tools, both the Training Packages notes that assessors may use prepared assessment tools – including those specifically developed to support each of them - or design their own. In using any prepared tools assessors must ensure that they are benchmarked against current and relevant units of competency. They also suggest that self-developed tools should be similarly benchmarked and also validated. The Packages specifically reference the assessment of employability skills, noting that these embedded skills must be drawn upon to design valid and reliable assessment strategies.

Validating assessment decisions

According to NQC (2009a, p.62) validity is

> ...concerned with the appropriateness of the inferences, use and consequences that result from the assessment

It refers to the extent to which the interpretation and use of an assessment outcome can be supported by the evidence. An assessment is valid if the assessment methods and materials reflect the elements, performance criteria and critical aspects of evidence in the evidence guide of the unit(s) of competency and if the assessment outcome is fully supported by the evidence gathered.

Validation is a quality review process (NQC 2009a) which examines what, if anything, has weakened the truthfulness of an assessment decision and then feeds that information back to reduce assessment error. Validation therefore involves reviewing and making recommendations for future improvements to assessment tools, processes and outcomes. It is an ongoing process aimed at continuous improvement through assessor partnerships, consensus meeting of assessors or by external review of assessment approaches involving a panel of external and expert assessors (NQC 2009b). Misko et al (2014) report that the terms 'validation' and 'moderation' still appear to present some confusion with some trainers and assessors identified as validation practices what are clearly approaches to moderation, and vice versa.

Concluding comments

The following summary comments and conclusions are appropriate given what this literature review and situational analysis has led us to:

1. While the construct of competency progression and completion is enshrined in national policy its successful implementation is dependent on TAFE providers and the individual employers with which they work. The success of failure of the policy is locally based and dependent on their collective practices and attitudes.

2. Training Contracts and Training Plans are important parts of an apprenticeship. The Training Plan is seen as a living document, but a critical factor is the extent to which it might perform this role as a living and changing entity. The issue is whether training arrangements are merely broadly guided by it or more closely controlled and the extent to which a Training Plan, once formulated and signed, is actually formally changed.

3. The conception of competence is difficult to define and even when enshrined in competency standards it is subject to local interpretation and contextual issues. Likewise, where and how competence can be assessed is very much dependent on the nature of the work apprentices undertake and the opportunities they have to demonstrate their competence to the (often variable) standards expected by their respective workplaces.

4. A wide range of assessment approaches are possible, and the choice of them is key to ensuring that competence is validly assessed both in assessing progression and making the final judgements about completion and sign off. Both the workplace supervisor and the teacher assessors have a key role to play. Also important is the nature and extent of the relationship between the RTO and the apprentice's workplace.

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Project documentation

The following pages contain the data collection instruments used in this research. These include:

- Teacher-assessor interview questions

- Workplace supervisor interview questions

- Pre-interview questionnaire for teacher-assessors

- Pre-interview questionnaire for workplace supervisors

About the on-the-job and off-the job training and assessment of your apprentices

1. In developing a Training Plan for an apprentice, how well are you able to mesh what happens in the off-job training with what an apprentice may be doing on-the-job?
2. What do you use to guide your approach to integrating what happens in the college training and assessment with what is happening in the apprentice's workplace?
3. What things get in the way of good integration of on- and off-job training and assessment?
4. When changes occur in an apprentice's workplace, what happens with the Training Plan? How do you manage this process?
5. If a workplace is unable to provide all the experience needed for an apprentice to train and be assessed in the workplace against some Units of Competency, how do you ensure those Units are completed?

Assessment: methods and evidence

6. What approaches do you use to gather evidence of apprentice performance off-the-job?
7. What approaches do you use to gather evidence of apprentice performance on-the-job?
8. Does the apprentice have any role in gathering evidence of their own workplace performance against Units of Competency?
9. What role does the workplace supervisor play in collecting evidence about apprentice performance?
10. What do you do to confirm that performance of workplace tasks meets the assessment requirements set out in the Training Package?
11. Under the rules of evidence, evidence should always be gathered using a range of assessment methods. Is this always possible? Is it an issue in this workplace?
12. Apprentices are meant to be offered a number of opportunities for competency to be demonstrated in the workplace. Are there circumstances where this might be difficult to achieve? If yes, can you explain why it is difficult?
13. How confident are you that you are able to get sufficient evidence upon which to make a valid judgment about an apprentice's competence? Very confident, somewhat confident, not confident at all?
14. How confident are you that the evidence is of current or recent apprentice performance? Very confident, somewhat confident, not confident at all?
15. What strategies do you have in place to ensure that evidence being gathered in the workplace is an apprentice's own work?

Assessment decision-making and validation

16. How do you make an overall judgment about an apprentice's performance when you are drawing on evidence from both on and off-the job? What evidence do you consider is more important in the decision to sign off?
17. Of the following options which do you commonly employ:
    a. Discuss an apprentice's performance in the workplace with his/her supervisor before asking the supervisor to sign the apprentice off as competent.
    b. Make the overall decision about apprentice competency and then let the workplace supervisor know that the apprentice is ready to be signed off
    c. Sign the apprentice off at the RTO
18. Do you validate your assessments? If yes, what processes do you use?

Assessment and competency progression and completion

19. Competency progression means apprentices can be undertaking training across a broad range of Units of Competency and at various stages. What impact has this had on the way you teach your apprentices?

20. Has your assessment approach altered because of competency progression and completion? If yes, in what ways has it altered?

21. In your view, do the assessment processes you use provide the quality of evidence you require to say confidently that an apprentice is competent or not? If <u>no</u>, what would you change to enhance your sense of confidence?

Interview Questions: Workplace Supervisors

Integration of on-the-job and off-the job training and assessment

22. In the development of a Training Plan for an apprentice, how easy have you found it to mesh what an apprentice is doing back at the College with what you are requiring them to do in the workplace? Do Training Plans work well for you or not?
23. What things get in the way of getting a good connection between College training and assessment with the work an apprentice must do on the job?
24. To what extent is an apprentice's Training Plan changed to suit changes that occur in your workplace? How do you and the teacher manage this process?
25. If you are unable to cover training and practice against some Units of Competency that an apprentice needs in the workplace, what happens to ensure an apprentice gets to complete those Units?

Assessment: methods and evidence

26. How frequently are you able to provide time and materials for an apprentice to practise skills and prepare for assessment of workplace tasks?
27. What processes do you put in place to ensure apprentices undertake assessment when they are ready?
28. What role do you have as a workplace supervisor in the collection of evidence about apprentice performance?
29. What role does the apprentice have in gathering evidence of their own workplace performance against Units of Competency?

Assessment decision-making and validation

9. It is important that apprentices are offered opportunities for competency to be demonstrated on a number of occasions in the workplace. How confident are you that enough evidence is being gathered for an assessor to make a judgment that an apprentice is performing to the required standard? Very confident, somewhat confident or not confident at all?
10. How comfortable are you about forming a view of apprentice competence? Very comfortable, somewhat comfortable or not comfortable at all?
9. In making a decision about sign-off, what is the usual process for you?
    a. Apprentice's performance is discussed with you before you are asked to sign off.
    b. The RTO makes the overall decision about apprentice competence and then lets you know that the apprentice is ready to be signed off
    c. As a workplace supervisor, I initiate the sign off process

Assessment and competency progression and completion

30. With competency progression in place, apprentices can be undertaking training across a broad range of Units of Competency and at various stages. Does this have any impact on the way training and assessment occurs in the workplace?
31. In your view, do the assessment processes being used by the RTO provide the quality of evidence required to say confidently that an apprentice is competent or not? If not, what would you change about their training and assessment?

NCVER Research Project: *Competency completion: impacts on assessment, assessors and workplace supervisors*

Pre-interview Questionnaire for Teachers/Assessors

Instructions: To ensure we do not waste your valuable time with a long face-to-face interview, you are asked to complete this questionnaire before the interview takes place. The focus is on aspects of your apprentice training and links with the employers/workplace supervisors of your apprentices.

About you:						
Your name:			**Your position in the organisation:**			
Your Training Package:	SIT30812	❏	MEM30305	❏	CPC32011	❏
Your role with apprentices *(tick all that apply)*:						
Teacher only		❏	Assessor only	❏	Both trainer and assessor	❏
About the apprentices and the enterprises employing them:						
Number of enterprises employing your apprentices *(approximate only)*						
Number of apprentices currently in training in this qualification *(approximate only)*						
What is the rough percentage spread of your apprentices across the program stages?						
First year ___ %		Second year ___ %		Third year ___ %		Fourth year ___ %
Your Units of Competency *(List below all the Units of Competency that you teach and assess)*						

PLEASE TURN OVER

Communication about training and assessment

1. **What methods do you use to communicate with <u>apprentices</u> about their training and assessment?** *(Tick all methods that you use and place a "1" against the method you most commonly use. If you use other methods to communicate eg. Facebook, Twitter, online blog , please describe)*

   Face-to-face ❑   Telephone ❑   Email ❑   Text message ❑

   Other methods used (*briefly describe*):
   _____

   _____

2. **On average, how frequently would you communication with an apprentice <u>about their training and assessment</u> ?** *(Select one answer only)*

   Weekly ❑   Monthly ❑   Once every couple of months ❑

   Other (*briefly describe*):
   _____

   _____

3. **When communicating with a workplace supervisor about an apprentice, which of the following aspects receives the most focus?** *(Rank your answers by placing 1 against the aspect with the greatest focus; 2 against the next; 3 against the next and 4 against the one that receives the least focus)*

   Negotiation of the Training Plan ❑   Assessment of the apprentice ❑

   Re-negotiation or modification of the Training Plan ❑   Confirming competency of the apprentice ❑

   If there are other aspects that also are a focus of communication, please describe:
   _____

   _____

4. *For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by* <u>*circling the option*</u> *that best fits your view. The options are:*

SD = Strongly Disagree;   D = Disagree;   A = Agree;   SA = Strongly Agree; U = Unable to Rate

COMMUNICATION	Rating				
(i) Policies and processes are in place in our RTO for communicating with *<u>apprentices</u>* about their training and assessment *<u>on-the-job</u>*.	SD	D	A	SA	U
(ii) Policies and processes are in place in our RTO for communicating with *<u>workplace supervisors</u>* about the training and assessment of apprentices *<u>on-the-job</u>*.	SD	D	A	SA	U
(iii) Policies and processes are in place in our RTO for communicating with *<u>workplace supervisors</u>* about the training and assessment of apprentice *<u>off-the-job</u>*					
(iv) Communication with apprentices about their training and assessment works well in our organisation	SD	D	A	SA	U
(v) Communication with *<u>workplace supervisors</u>* about training and assessment of apprentices works well in our organisation	SD	D	A	SA	U
(vi) The processes, expectations and provision of information about training and assessment for our apprentices is well-communicated to our workplace supervisors	SD	D	A	SA	U

Roles and responsibilities in the training and assessment of apprentices

5. *For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by* <u>*circling the option*</u> *that best fits your view. The options are:*

SD = Strongly Disagree;   D = Disagree;   A = Agree;   SA = Strongly Agree; U = Unable to Rate

Roles and responsibilities in the training and assessment of apprentices	Rating				
I understand the role of the workplace supervisor in the assessment of apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
I have a clear understanding of what competency-based progression means for apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
I work with workplace supervisors to help them understand what competency-based progression means for apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
Workplace supervisors jointly 'sign off' on the assessment of apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
I understand the 'trigger points' at which an apprentice can move through stages of their apprenticeship	SD	D	A	SA	U
Workplace supervisors support the completion of an apprentice before the nominated time period – once they have demonstrated competence	SD	D	A	SA	U
There are implications for businesses associated with allowing apprentices to finish earlier	SD	D	A	SA	U

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUR SUPPORT IS APPRECIATED

Pre-interview questionnaire for Workplace Supervisors

Instructions: To ensure we do not waste your valuable time with a long face-to-face interview, you are asked to complete this questionnaire before the interview takes place. The focus is on aspects of your role and responsibilities as a workplace supervisor of apprentices.

About you:					
Your name:			**Name of business:**		
Training area:	**Cookery** ❑	**Metal Fabrication** ❑		**Carpentry & Joinery** ❑	
Your role with apprentices *(tick all that apply):* **Workplace supervisor** ❑		**Trainer** ❑		**Employer** ❑	
About your apprentices:					
Roughly how many years have _you_ been involved in supporting apprentices in the workplace? **2 years or less** ❑	**3 to 5 years** ❑	**6 to 10 years** ❑		**More than 10 years** ❑	
Roughly how many years has _your business_ employed apprentices? **2 years or less** ❑	**3 to 5 years** ❑	**6 to 10 years** ❑		**More than 10 years** ❑	
Number of apprentices currently employed in your business:					
What is the rough percentage spread of your apprentices in training? **First year** ___ %	**Second year** ___ %	**Third year** ___ %		**Fourth year** ___ %	

PLEASE CONTINUE OVERLEAF

Communication about training and assessment

6. **What methods does the RTO use to communicate with you about the training and assessment of your apprentices?** *(Tick all methods that are used and place a "1" against the method most commonly used. If other methods are used to communicate eg. Facebook, Twitter, online blog , please describe)*

    Face-to-face ❑   Telephone ❑   Email ❑   Text message ❑

    Other methods used (*briefly describe*): _____

    _____

7. **On average, how frequently would the teachers communicate with you about the _training and assessment_ of your apprentice?** *(Select one answer only)*

    Weekly ❑   Monthly ❑   Once every couple of months ❑

    Other (*briefly describe*): _____

8. **When communicating with a teacher about an apprentice, which do you tend to talk about most?** *(Rank your answers by placing 1 against the aspect with the greatest focus; 2 against the next; 3 against the next and 4 against the one that receives the least focus)*

    Negotiation of the Training Plan ❑   Assessment of the apprentice ❑

    Re-negotiation or modification of the Training Plan ❑   Confirming competency of the apprentice (sign-off) ❑

    If there are other aspects that also are a focus of communication, please describe: _____

    _____

    PLEASE CONTINUE OVERLEAF

9. *For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by* <u>*circling the option*</u> *that best fits your view. The options are:*

SD = Strongly Disagree;   D = Disagree;   A = Agree;   SA = Strongly Agree; U = Unable to Rate

COMMUNICATION	Rating				
(vii) Clear processes are in place for teachers to communicate with me about the on-the-job training and assessment of my apprentice	SD	D	A	SA	U
(viii) I understand what training and assessment of my apprentice(s) is to occur off-the-job					
(ix) Communication with apprentices about their training and assessment works well in our workplace	SD	D	A	SA	U
(x) Communication with teachers about the training and assessment for our apprentices works well in our workplace	SD	D	A	SA	U
(xi) The processes, expectations and provision of information about training and assessment for apprentices is well-communicated by teachers and the RTO	SD	D	A	SA	U

Roles and responsibilities in the training and assessment of apprentices

10. *For each of the following statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree by* <u>*circling the option*</u> *that best fits your view. The options are:*

SD = Strongly Disagree;   D = Disagree;   A = Agree;   SA = Strongly Agree; U = Unable to Rate

Roles and responsibilities in the training and assessment of apprentices	Rating				
(i) I understand my role in the training of the apprentice(s) in my workplace	SD	D	A	SA	U
(ii) I understand my role in the assessment of the apprentice(s) in my workplace	SD	D	A	SA	U
(iii) I am clear about the role of the teacher/RTO in the training and assessment of apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
(iv) The RTO people we work with spend an appropriate amount of time planning the training and assessment of our apprentice(s)	SD	D	A	SA	U
(v) I work with the teacher to take workplace tasks and map them back to competencies	SD	D	A	SA	U
(vi) I have a clear understanding of what competency-based progression means for apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
(vii) The RTO has assisted me to understand what competency-based progression means for apprentices	SD	D	A	SA	U
(viii) I jointly sign-off on the assessment of the apprentice(s) with the RTO	SD	D	A	SA	U

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUR SUPPORT IS APPRECIATED