

Interpreting competencies in Australian VET — Stakeholder responses

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This document was produced by Steven Hodge based on the research for the report *Interpreting competencies in Australian VET: practices and issues*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's website: www.ncver.edu.au.

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Interpreting competencies in Australian VET

Stakeholder responses

In the course of this research major stakeholders were invited to respond to key findings to help clarify implications of the research. The following stakeholders agreed to consider the findings:

- Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA)
- VET Development Centre (VDC) (Victoria)
- SkillsSA
- Innovation & Business Skills Australia (IBSA)
- Australian Council of Private Education & Training (ACPET)
- Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group (ACDEVEG)
- Hugh Guthrie
- John Mitchell

A briefing paper that summarised findings (see main report) was made available to the stakeholders and they were invited to respond to it in a telephone interview or in writing. Most stakeholders discussed their responses and implications in a teleconference while one responded in writing.

Issues

Most stakeholders were already aware of particular issues raised in the briefing paper. One said that the findings were ‘exactly what I guessed’, while most stakeholders identified with one or two issues. Key issues raised in the discussions were:

1. The language of units of competency and training packages

Most stakeholders believed that the language of units of competency and training packages could be made clearer and the structure of these texts could be simpler. There was some acknowledgement that the process of developing competencies and training packages is a complex process with a range of people involved and that consistency across packages is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, most stakeholders thought that more could be done to enhance the accessibility of the texts. Observations on the language of some competencies included that they sometime contain jargon, repetition and vague language, that industry relevance can sometimes be questioned, and that they can be complicated to negotiate. Suggestions included removing duplication, submitting the documents to more stringent editing processes and that consistency of style and presentation across all training packages should be mandated. Most stakeholders were confident that new training package streamlining guidelines would go some way toward addressing the challenge of making competencies and training packages more accessible to VET practitioners.

2. Intrinsic complexity of the task of interpreting units of competency and training packages

A smaller number of stakeholders drew attention to the complexity of the task of interpreting units of competency and training packages. It was pointed out that close reading, analysis and interpretation of texts was not a routine skill in some industries, and that VET practitioners from these industry backgrounds may not be as comfortable with the task of interpreting competencies as practitioners from industries in which work with documents is routine. Other stakeholders suggested that the interpretation of competencies and training packages is among a number of 'high-level skills' required by VET practitioners. These stakeholders indicated that like the development of other professional capabilities, interpretation skills may need longer periods to mature and that allowance should be made in the sector for this need.

Some stakeholder highlighted that not all VET practitioners are required to read, analyse and interpret units of competency and training packages. However, stakeholders agreed that all VET practitioners should be able work confidently with competencies.

3. Initial training in interpreting units of competencies and training packages

Most stakeholders believed that some of difficulty in interpreting units of competency reported by research participants would be due to insufficient time devoted in initial training to unpacking the texts. One said that initial training in unpacking competencies is 'the heart of the matter' and that interpretation skills are 'very badly taught if taught at all.' It was suggested that the limited time available to cover all of the competencies within the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment would impinge on the ability of trainers to cover interpretation skills. In line with the suggestion that interpretation is a higher-level skill of VET practitioners, some stakeholders thought that the Certificate IV should not be regarded as sufficient to equip practitioners to undertake interpretation work without support.

4. Induction and mentoring

Some stakeholders indicated that induction practices for new VET practitioners may contribute to their difficulty interpreting units of competency and training packages. Since each provider has its own expectations of practitioners and practices in relation to reading, analysing and interpreting, it is vital that new practitioners are given a thorough induction into interpretation work in a provider. It was suggested that improved induction processes that explicitly address unpacking competencies and training packages may have benefits for the whole organisation, not just for the practices of the inductee.

Lack of suitable mentoring was also raised as a possible reason for diverse practices and difficulties with interpreting units of competency and training packages. It was suggested that mentoring programs that include an explicit focus on unpacking competencies and training packages might be an effective way to address some of the issues raised by the research findings.

5. Professional development

All stakeholders who responded to the briefing paper highlighted the importance of professional development for becoming skilled at unpacking units of competency and training packages. Some suggested that reductions in the amount of funding to the VET system overall has lead to less professional development being offered and taken up by VET practitioners, while others emphasised

that some providers generally have better track records than others when it comes to professional development opportunities and that development opportunities for some practitioners are minimal.

Some stakeholders suggested that continuing professional development would be an appropriate model for developing and extending the skills of unpacking competencies and training packages. The point was made that if these skills take a longer period to acquire then ongoing professional development would be the best way to promote their development. The point was also made that event-based or one-off professional development opportunities might not be as effective as a sequential program. But other stakeholders felt that event-based opportunities would be effective.

6. Trainer professional practice

Some stakeholders expressed concern that the findings could be too easily read as an indictment of the skills and professionalism of VET practitioners. In other words, findings that practitioners experience difficulty interpreting units of competency texts may obscure shortcomings of the system, of initial and ongoing training, etc. The weight of stakeholder opinion on this point was that practitioners work under challenging conditions in complex environments and are not always well supported by the system and their employers. However, the question was posed by some stakeholders about the extent to which practitioners regard developing expertise in unpacking competencies and training packages as a professional responsibility.