

Equivalence and Awarding Credit Transcript

Mel Hartley

Welcome to TAC Talks, a podcast where we unpack the Standards for Registered Training Organisations to provide practical information to support business improvement and compliance practices.

My name is Mel Hartley from the Training Accreditation Council or TAC, and today I'm joined by Claire Werner, one of TAC's auditors. Claire is an expert in the field of training and assessment and the Standards for RTOs. Today she'll help us navigate the topic of Equivalence and how it applies in the VET environment and how awarding credit ties in with this.

We hope this podcast will assist in understanding the requirements in the Standards for RTOs and how RTOs can meet these requirements.

Before we commence I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are recording on, the Whadjuk people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Hi Claire and thank you for joining us.

Claire Werner:

Thanks for having me, this is an important discussion because it's something that is not well understood by the sector and when we get it wrong it can have significant implications for the integrity of training and assessment in the VET sector.

Mel Hartley

Claire tell us what does equivalence mean in the VET sector and when do we use the term?

Claire Werner:

Equivalence in the VET sector is an important concept and equivalence means exactly what it sounds like. If we looked at a dictionary definition of equivalence it will say "the fact or state of being equal in value, function, amount, meaning, or importance...." In the VET sector we are asking how alike or equal are these two things we are comparing?

We do that comparison in two situations.

The first is when a training package goes through a transition process, and training package developers compare the old and new qualifications and units to determine if they are equivalent.

The second is when we are talking about a trainer / assessors vocational competence and we compare the units of competence and experience that person has to the unit they deliver and assess to determine if they hold equivalent competencies.

Mel Hartley

In each of those two different situations how equivalence is determined Claire, are there any guidelines the sector uses to make these decisions?

Claire Werner:

Training Packages are incredibly important in Australia's national VET system because they define occupational skills standards in units against which training and assessment of competency can take place. All RTOs train and assess against that same standard.

They also tell us about the combinations of units that have to be held to be awarded a qualification.

The reason this is so important is that it enables the national recognition of the vocational outcomes of learning. If someone presents a qualification to us, say a Certificate III in Engineering (Fabrication), or a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment we all have a very clear picture of what that person knows and can do.

Training Packages are developed through a process of national consultation with industry and change over time as industry needs change. When a training package is changed, the developers are required to determine the equivalence of units and qualifications in accordance with a policy called the Training Package Products Policy. This is one of three documents that form the Training Package Organising Framework. The other two documents are the Standards for Training Packages and the Training Package Development and Endorsement Process Policy. You can download all three documents from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations website.

When the Training Package developers say a new qualification is equivalent to a superseded qualification it means that the occupational outcome and / or AQF level described by the two qualifications has not changed.

When the Training Package developers say a new unit is equivalent to a superseded unit it means the work outcome described by the two units has not changed.

Now the second situation is where we are talking about the competency of an individual trainer / assessor. Our standards at Clause 1.13 say that trainers and assessors must be vocationally competent.

For us this means that the trainer and assessor hold the unit that they are delivering and assessing or they prove they hold equivalent competencies.

This will again trigger a comparison process where we look at evidence to decide that they know everything they need to know and can do everything they need to do, to be able to deliver and assess the new unit. TAC also has a fact sheet about vocational competence that is a great reference if you are looking for more detailed information and examples.

What is incredibly important to acknowledge is that this is a process that only holds value within the RTO where the comparison happened. It doesn't result in any recognition or the award of a statement of attainment or qualification... it's really a quality control process in an individual RTO.

Mel Hartley

That's seems quite straightforward, why is it that RTOs are confused by equivalence?

Claire Werner:

Because there is a flip side ... what equivalence doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that the units are the same for training and assessment purposes and I think this could be one of the main causes of confusion.

There can often be a number of changes to the unit and assessment requirements that require the RTO delivering the unit to review and update materials for training, resources, equipment and assessment tools. Often the changes sit in the assessment requirements and add extra evidence requirements, specifications or conditions that substantially change how the RTO needs to train and assess. TAC's new fact sheet on Training Product Equivalence has some examples of this that RTOs can review.

Mel Hartley

Yes it does, that factsheet has recently been uploaded to the TAC website for RTOs to access. Now that we are clear on what equivalence does and doesn't mean, let's talk about how equivalence affects practice in the RTO. Claire, where and when is equivalence used by RTOs.

Claire Werner:

Equivalence impacts a number of processes in RTOs but the most significant and common are:

1. Training package transition when the RTO is changing their scope;
2. Credit applications from an individual learner; and
3. Determining the vocational competency of trainers and assessors.

When a training package transitions, qualifications and units on an RTO scope of registration that have been determined to be equivalent will be updated automatically by their regulator. When qualifications or units are not equivalent, the RTO will need to apply to add the new units or qualifications to their scope and go through all of the normal review processes and then potentially an audit process.

As we mentioned earlier, if a unit or qualification has been determined to be equivalent it doesn't mean there are no changes from a training and assessment perspective, so the RTO really needs to establish what has changed, what the impact of those changes are, and then update their training and assessment materials to address those changes. This will often also include the strategy documents, the marketing and checking the trainer and assessors qualifications.

Establishing what has changed will most often involve a mapping process where the RTO will compare all parts of the old and new units to identify what is different and the impacts of those differences. It's a detailed mapping that can be used to help the RTO with the other two processes we mentioned as well. The new factsheet has a worked example of a mapping for the first aid units that will assist RTOs to understand this process as well.

Mel Hartley

Yes it does, we should stress that the example provided in the fact sheet is not a template that must be used, it is just one example of how an RTO might do a mapping.

Claire Werner:

Correct, each RTO will have its own approach.

Mel Hartley

Ok the other two processes you mentioned were awarding credit and determining vocational competence. Let's talk about credit.

Claire Werner:

First I want to establish that there are only two situations for when an RTO can award credit.

1. The first is if a student provides evidence of holding the current unit / module. That could be with a Statement of Attainment or an authenticated VET transcript from the USI register. This is a straightforward process that is very common in most RTOs.
2. The second is when the student provides evidence of holding the superseded equivalent unit and/or module that reflects the current unit and/or module outcomes. This can happen each time a training package goes through a transition process and the training package developers determine whether the immediately superseded qualifications and units are equivalent to the new qualifications and units.

Mel Hartley

You mentioned the two situations that RTOs can award credit. A question that is often raised is what if a person has an older version of a unit, say from two training package versions prior and each of those versions has the old unit equivalent to the new unit, in essence you get a chain of equivalent units?

Claire Werner:

That is a great question Mel and a really important thing to remember is that when training package developers determine equivalence it is only for the current unit and the unit that it immediately supersedes.

Their determination of equivalence does not consider the unit and/or module from versions superseded twice or more, so it does not consider the historical versions in your chain of equivalent

units. It's not reasonable for RTOs to make the assumption that those units are equivalent to the current unit. The analysis hasn't been done by the training package developers.

The Training Accreditation Council has provided advice to the sector about this in its fact sheet – Awarding Credit. That advice says that where an award of credit is sought for units and/or modules that have been superseded **twice or more**:

- the RTO must conduct a mapping process to confirm no gaps exist in the content and learning outcomes between the unit and/or module already attained by the learner and the unit and/or module for which the learner seeks an award of credit. If there are no gaps the RTO can award credit.
- Where a mapping process identifies gaps in the content and learning outcomes, no award of credit can be provided.

Mel Hartley

So to summarise if a student holds an equivalent unit that immediately precedes the current unit the RTO can automatically grant credit.

If the student holds an equivalent unit which does **not** immediately precede the current unit, and a mapping or analysis has been done by the RTO which determines that there are no gaps, then credit can be awarded.

Claire Werner:

That's correct.

Mel Hartley

Claire what happens if a student holds an equivalent unit which does **not** immediately precede the current unit, and the mapping or analysis determines that there are gaps?

Claire Werner:

If gaps are identified between equivalent units or modules that have been superseded twice or more, no award of credit can be provided. Instead the RTO would consider undertaking a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process or enrolling the learner in training that addresses the gaps.

Mel Hartley

One thing we haven't talked about is when a student requests credit where units are not equivalent.

Claire Werner:

Credit cannot be awarded when versions of units or modules are not equivalent, but the RTO could undertake an RPL process with the learner. The TAC Fact Sheet: Recognition of Prior Learning will help RTOs interpret the requirements of Clauses 1.8 and 1.12 (assessment) in relation to this process.

Mel Hartley

Ok, let's move onto the last topic, equivalence as it relates to vocational competence.

Claire Werner:

What we are trying to do with vocational competence is establish that the trainer and assessor knows everything they need to know and can do everything that they need to do so that they can train and assess the current unit. We also don't issue a Statement of Attainment when we are establishing vocational equivalence for the purpose of Clause 1.13a.

If we think back to what was said earlier that for equivalent units there can be differences that impact the training and assessment. We have to find out if that is the case for our units. When an RTO is looking at establishing equivalence for a trainer assessor, even if the unit they hold has been determined as equivalent by the training package developers, the RTO should establish if there were any differences that mean we need some more evidence from the trainer assessor or that we need to provide some form of gap training. In an equivalence process this may be less formal than for RPL, for example, the trainer / assessor might do some form of job shadowing, or some informal training to address the gap that has been identified.

In most instances RTOs are going to do that analysis by mapping the units to identify the differences. That mapping or analysis will be evidence that an RTO should keep and will contribute to how they demonstrate their compliance with Clause 1.8 of the current regulatory standards.

Mel Hartley

Thanks Claire, any final advice for our listeners today?

Claire Werner:

Equivalence has very specific meanings in the VET sector and we should all ensure that we understand this and use equivalence as it is intended. If we do this we can assure the integrity of our assessment systems and the certification we issue.

Please access the TAC fact sheet on Training Product Equivalence, it has detailed explanations and examples that will be helpful for RTOs understanding equivalence. The TAC fact sheet on Awarding Credit and the Training Accreditation Councils advice to RTOs also provide further clarification in this area.

Mel Hartley

Thank you for speaking with us today Claire and working through the concept of equivalence in the VET sector and how this applies to awarding credit. We hope that this information has assisted RTO understanding.

As mentioned a few times throughout the podcast, further information is available in the fact sheets Training Product Equivalence, Awarding Credit, Recognition of Prior Learning, and Vocational Competence and Industry Currency which are available on the TAC website wa.gov.au/tac.

You have been listening to TAC Talks with Mel Hartley and Claire Werner, thank you for joining us.