Developing a quality strategy...not just an audit tool.

By Ray Earl

Developing and implementing an informed and well-constructed training and assessment strategy will ensure you achieve the right mix when planning a new training program.

The training and assessment strategy

The Training and Assessment Strategy (TAS) is much like a business plan but in a training context. A business plan is the roadmap to where you want to be in business. The TAS is the blueprint for the delivery and assessment of the qualification, unit of competency or accredited course which is aligned to the needs of the learner and developed in consultation with industry.

Why do we need to develop a training and assessment strategy?

Sir Edmund Hillary’s conquest of Mt Everest would not have been possible without a properly formatted strategy for completing the journey.

As with training, without taking time to develop a strategy, an RTO will not be in a position to appreciate the resourcing requirements necessary to develop a structure, acquire or develop training and assessment materials, meet industry and learner needs and meet the requirements of the relevant training package.

How are training and assessment strategies developed?

As part of the RTO’s quality management system (QMS) one of the first steps is to write a policy and procedure document for the development of training and assessment strategies and have it signed off by management. The TAS should cover the following macro areas: purpose, industry consultation, development process, validation, approval, deployment, monitoring, review and continuous improvement. It must be a controlled document that is assigned a version number and detailed in the RTO’s version control register.

The process for developing and deploying training and assessment strategies is illustrated in Figure 1.

Variance in TAS design

There is no ‘set’ layout for developing a TAS. Whilst the process below is not definitive and the concepts are not new, I have used this format for many years and have always received positive feedback from employers and students.

As a consultant and RTO Manager I have seen significant variance in TAS design and development with many strategies containing anywhere from three pages through to what I term as the ‘Bible TAS’ of well over 140 pages. I always know that the former will not be compliant due to insufficient content and the latter will be full of excess text and inaccuracies.

The TAS must be developed taking into consideration learner needs, industry needs,
the training package and the environment in which the RTO plans to operate. Of course it’s possible to purchase an ‘off the shelf’ TAS; however, this approach will not meet learner and industry needs nor will it be compliant with Element 1.2 of the AQTF Standards without further customisation and industry consultation.

Industry engagement and consultation – the crucial factor
Since industry employs the people who complete the training, it is imperative the RTO engages with industry prior to developing its TAS and who better to ask about the skills necessary to carry out a job? At the preliminary stage, the RTO must contact industry and discuss the proposed qualification and the target group. Necessary employee skill sets and learner needs must be clearly identified (i.e. qualification, core and elective units and employability skills). This information will allow the RTO to develop a program that includes the key competencies required to complete the job. The RTO should then consider further validation as per its policy and procedure for validation.

Tip: It is vital that the RTO engages with the right type of industry delegates. This will ensure that the feedback is conducive to the needs of learners. I have seen situations where providers engaged with many industry delegates from different factions or bureaucracies (i.e. those without ‘coal face’ experience in the targeted industry). Unfortunately this wastes time and energy and leads to no valid inputs and outcomes. It is vital that you only engage with industry representatives that can add value to the training and assessment strategy.

Match your courses to industry needs
Whilst running my own RTO, I consulted with Microsoft® prior to adding the Certificate III & IV in Information Technology qualifications onto our scope. During the process I consulted with a network engineer who had real experience at the ‘coal face’.

Actively consulting with industry at this level, I was able to clearly understand their needs and identify critical staffing issues faced by both Microsoft® and the industry. This allowed me to modify the strategy and programs to help achieve the outcomes required by industry. The outcomes of this process meant learners received training that was relevant to the needs of the industry and helped them gain employment in their chosen vocation.

Developing your Training and Assessment Strategy
In developing a comprehensive TAS, I recommend RTOs and trainers start by composing their TAS with a set of headings, matrices and tables. Then while undertaking comprehensive industry consultation, complete the various sections (where applicable) with valid data.

- **RTO details**: (where applicable) Provider Number #, Address, CRICOS #, developer of TAS and date.
- **Background data**: Information about the college including location(s), facilities, history, proposed course, economic viability of the course.
- **Target group**: Who is the target group and why? e.g. non-school leavers (NSL), mature age, etc.
- **Entry Requirements**: What are the entrance requirements? Are there any special conditions to be able to enrol?
- **Consultation and feedback** from industry groups and licensing bodies including name(s) of industry person and date of consultation, comments, recommendations, amendments and feedback.
- **Qualification title and national code**
- **Training package**: Which training package are you putting on scope?
- **AQF level descriptor**: Key specifications of a Certificate III, IV, Diploma, etc.
- **Outcomes**: Provide a snapshot that shows why the target group would want to enrol in this course; for example, define potential job opportunities including job titles and sectors.
- **Unit Listing**: Detail the core competencies and electives.
- **Sequencing**: Arrange the units so they are logically presented, and take into account any pre and co requisites.
- **Legislative Requirements**: Investigate any particular legislative regulations and/or licence requirements; for example, in

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Process for developing and deploying Training & Assessment Strategies

AQTF Element 1.2

Develop Policy for Training & Assessment

Content Headings for Training & Assessment Strategy

Research & Collect Data on Stakeholder & Training Package

- Populate Strategy-

- version control

YES

Related Documents - referenced

Validate with Stakeholders - Is Change, Amendment, Improvement Req’d?

NO

Approved - Deploy and Action Strategy (per Policy)

Professional Development session with Trainer/Assessors - prior to Training

Review for Improvement - Change Required?

Document, Monitor and Feedback

Process for developing and deploying Training & Assessment Strategies

real estate, security, childcare, electrical.

- Contextualisation: Determine any contextualisation that needs to happen while following the qualification packaging rules contained in the training package.

- Learner needs: Detail specific training approaches to suit the needs of learners.

- Reasonable Adjustments: Determine any adjustments in assessment needed to suit individual learner needs.

- Resources: Specify facilities, equipment, trainer and assessor, student support materials and additional support resources required to meet the needs of students with specific needs.

- Duration of course: Specify time necessary to complete the course, provide a program schedule and a class timetable.

- Delivery mode: Will the course be delivered in clustered mode, on the job, institutionally (classroom), mixed mode, online, or via distance education?

- Assessment Requirements: Note dates and times when assessment(s) will take place, define and explain the principles of assessment, e.g. fair, valid, flexible and reliable.

- Pathways: What are the pathways? e.g. Is there a possible articulation to University or a career in a specific field? Show the ability of the qualification to provide a clear career pathway.

- Training and assessment method: For each unit of competency include the format used: case study, discussion, Q&A sessions, role play, RPL, workbook activity, written test, demonstration, assignment or practical exercise.

Trainers and Assessors: Outline the staff available to train and assess. Include a skills matrix which details the training and assessment competency and vocational experience.

- Industry placement: Certain courses may have a supervised work placement component (e.g. Certificate III in Aged Care). Explain how this will be facilitated.

- Employability skills: These should be included in the TAS as they are embedded into most qualifications. Include a skills matrix to show where the employability skills are addressed in each unit of competency.

- Validation: What is the process used to validate the course and assessment activities? Note: Ensure that the intent is followed by action.

- Moderation: What is the process used to moderate assessments to ensure consistency of judgements?

- Recognition of prior learning: Outline the RPL process and how trainers and assessors would process an application. Explain the process for credit transfer.

- Language, literacy and numeracy levels: What are the specific requirements in this regard? i.e. What level of language, literacy and numeracy is necessary for the student to be able to comfortably complete the course? What student support strategies will you use to help students who have been flagged as requiring assistance?

Risk assessment: Detail any risks that learners face associated with enrolment in the course.

Conclusion

RTOs must appreciate that training and assessment strategies are NOT an audit tool. They are a vital component of the day to day delivery of training and assessment and must be used by the RTO. A TAS must be a live document that is reviewed and amended on a regular basis based on regular industry feedback. Each trainer must have access to the TAS specific to the program they are delivering and provide feedback to management on its effectiveness.

The average time to develop a quality training and assessment strategy should be about 30 hours. This is time well spent as it provides the RTO with a clear and cohesive blueprint for the deployment of training and assessment in the chosen qualification.

The implementation of an informed training and assessment strategy will provide outcomes to meet the needs of students, industry and associated stakeholders.

The Australian Training Awards 2011

Nominations are now open for the state and territory training awards in the ACT, NSW and Qld. Other states and territory nominations opening throughout March and April. Winners in each State and territory will then go on to compete at the National Australian Training Awards which this year, will be held in Brisbane on 25 November 2011.

Eleven categories will be presented at the 2011 Australian Training Awards including five organisational categories and six individual categories. Five National Focus Awards will also be presented. For more information on the national Australian Training Awards, and how to apply, contact 02 6240 5408 or visit www.deewr.gov.au/australiantrainingawards

Key dates for the state and territory training awards

ACT: Nominations close: 11 May 2011

NSW: Nominations close: 25 March 2011

NT: Nominations close: 6 May 2011
www.det.nt.gov.au/events/trainingawards

Qld: Nominations close: 25 March 2011
www.qta.qld.gov.au

SA: Nominations close: 27 May 2011
www.satrainingawards.sa.edu.au

Tas: Nominations close: 31 May 2011
www.skills.tas.gov.au/trainingawards10

Vic: Nominations close: 12 May 2011
www.skills.vic.gov.au/events/victorian-training-awards

WA: Nominations close: 13 May 2011

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