



Continuous Improvement

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are ultimately responsible for all aspects of their operations, with a particular emphasis on ensuring the quality of training and assessment.

Conducting an evaluation of the RTO's performance and using the outcomes to inform quality assurance of services, and should improve training and assessment and contribute to sound business and educational practice for RTOs. The information used to evaluate RTO performance must be relevant to the operating characteristics and business objectives of the RTO and will vary from one RTO to another.

This Fact Sheet provides guidance to RTOs on developing and maintaining continuous improvement processes consistent with Standard 2 clauses 2.1 and 2.2 of the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015* (the Standards).

Standard 2: *The operations of the RTO are quality assured.*

2.1 *The RTO ensures it complies with these Standards at all times, including where services are being delivered on its behalf. This applies to all operations of an RTO within its scope of registration.*

2.2 *The RTO systematically monitors the RTO's training and assessment strategies and practices to ensure ongoing compliance with Standard 1; and*

*The RTO systematically evaluates and uses the outcomes of the evaluations to **continually improve** the RTO's training and assessment strategies and practices. Evaluation information includes but is not limited to quality/performance indicator data collected under Clause 7.5, validation outcomes, client, trainer and assessor feedback and complaints and appeals.*

[Emphasis added]

These Clauses specify that:

- RTO's have a responsibility for all aspects of its operations, even those conducted on its behalf;
- the RTO must continuously improve all of its operations;
- this continuous improvement is shaped through gathering data such as feedback from stakeholders; and
- this data must be analysed objectively to give direction to on-going change.

Improvement may be necessary because the RTO has identified that things could be done better, or because standards external to the RTO have changed, such as industry standards, VET principles, or the RTO Standards themselves.

What is continuous improvement?

An organisation can progress via a giant leap forward (or backward), or can move slowly forward. This giant leap could be described as a **significant** change and often involves substantial changes, leading to the development of completely new processes and products.

An **incremental change** may involve small steps, revised processes and products, and building upon past experience.

Triggers for continuous improvement

The need for improvement is informed by a discrepancy between the outcomes of the RTOs processes and products and the outcomes sought by the Standards, the community, industry, employers, learners and the RTO team itself. It may be that the RTO is falling short of those expectations, or it may be that these expectations have changed.

These expectations may be outlined in regulations, such as:

- the Standards for RTOs;
- industry standards as expressed in training packages and accredited courses;
- professional standards relating to quality training delivery; or
- political and community expectations.

An RTO dedicated to improvement fulfils those expectations through auditing compliance, facilitating industry engagement, gathering employer and learner feedback, and monitoring its community impact.

Inputs to continuous improvement

The most effective improvement is evidence-based, requiring relevant and valid data that reflects the RTO's current practices, is directly related to the organisation (authentic), and provides sufficient justification for change. The table below illustrates the diverse range of sources from which this data can be obtained, reflecting the varied interests of different parties, and also serves as a resource for finding additional information on those sources.

Data Sources	Further Information	
Students	through day-to-day questionnaires and end of course surveys	Quality Indicators Surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Engagement • Employer Satisfaction
Trainers and assessors	through in-house reviews of resources, RTO policies and procedures, and observation of student response	TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation
Complaints and appeals	indicating incorrect student expectations, errors by the RTO, errors of judgement, or ineffective codes of conduct	TAC Fact Sheet: RTO Complaints and Appeals Webinar: Managing RTO complaints and appeals
Employers	feedback from work placements (including traineeships and apprenticeships) and from graduates	TAC Fact Sheet: Assessing in the Workplace Webinar: Assessing in the Workplace
Assessment validation	reflecting upon both the design and delivery of assessment tools and judgment processes	TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation Webinar: Assessment Validation
Industry engagement	seeking reassurance about the relevance of RTO resources through the observation of industry	TAC Fact Sheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry Engagement • Vocational Competence and Industry Currency

	practices and through industry feedback	Webinars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry Engagement • Understanding Vocational Competence and Industry Currency
Community feedback	from community engagement, press, and social media	Webinar: Continuous Improvement
Internal audits	providing evidence of compliance and advice for improvement	TAC Fact Sheet: Internal Audit Webinar: Internal Audit Series
External audits	providing evidence of compliance and response to improvement	Website: Training Accreditation Council Audits
Total VET activity	RTO completion data	TAC Fact Sheet: RTO Reporting Requirements

While some of these data sources are mandated by the Standards, others are considered good practice, but all of them collectively contribute to an RTO’s awareness of the necessity for improvement or provide assurance that the RTO is operating effectively to meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

Outputs from continuous improvement

Improvement requires change, driven by a clear understanding of desired outcomes and supported by evidence of actual results. These changes can range from minor adjustments to substantial overhauls, often requiring the RTO to revise, rewrite or replace:

- RTO policies and procedures: Is there a problem in the way the RTO has set up its operations?
- Training strategies and content: Have the requirements of the training product been fully understood? Have they been expressed validly in the learning resources? Are they a faithful reflection of current industry practice?
- Assessment strategies and content: Have the requirements of the training product been fully understood? Have they been expressed validly in the assessment tools? Are they a faithful reflection of current industry practice?
- Marketing and RTO information: Has the RTO accurately described its services? Does the student have accessible information about the RTOs expectations and their rights and responsibilities?

They may also require the RTO to rethink how it manages and records:

- Industry engagement: Are the strategies used to engage with industry building effective working relationships that inform the RTO’s strategies and resources?
- Certification: Has the RTO adequately explained the AQF levels to students and employers?
- RTO resources: Are in-house and community resources accessed and managed effectively?
- Trainers and assessors: How effective are the RTO’s strategies for recruitment, performance management and professional development?
- Quality assurance: How effective are the RTO’s strategies to monitor and improve its own outcomes?

Finally, the RTO might need to consider changes to how it delivers:

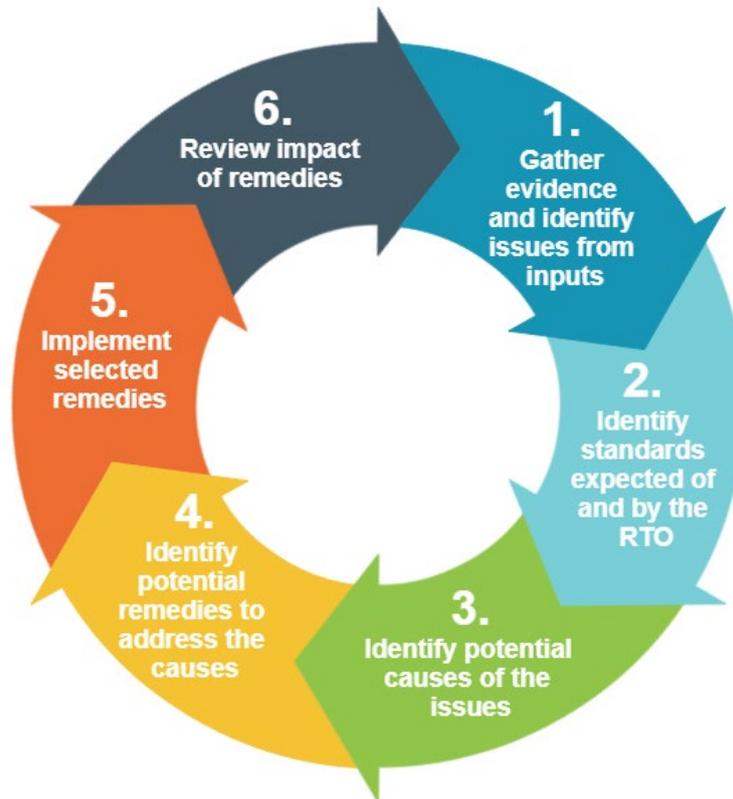
- Learner support: Can the RTO improve the strategies used to identify learner needs and to deliver appropriate support services?
- Training and assessment: Can the RTO improved the experience of being a learner and the opportunity to achieve?

These inputs and outputs are parts of a cycle of continuous improvement.

The continuous improvement cycle

The cycle begins and ends by identifying and monitoring the standards expected of and by the RTO.

The key steps are:



A cycle like this may appear to be never ending and ultimately discouraging, but as a learning organisation an RTO should be comfortable with this evidence-based examination of its own effectiveness.

A healthy RTO mindset embraces the idea of testing, seeking improvement and acknowledging achievements. This mindset involves two essential aspects; a readiness to engage in change processes and an acceptance of the culture of change. Both elements require making continuous improvement an integral part of the day-to-day activities of RTO staff rather than a separate, unwelcome or disruptive event.

Integration with the day-to-day work of the RTO team member

As VET relies on evidence-based practices, gathering data to assess the RTO's performance in achieving its objectives and responsibilities is a part of the RTO's work. Implementing a process for consolidating feedback allows for the identification of trends and shared issues, as well as identifying cases where issues are localised. When faced with multiple challenges, an RTO needs to prioritise issues strategically to address the most urgent ones promptly. Brainstorming solutions should involve the participation of all RTO staff, not just those directly engaged with the problem. Once a strategy is agreed upon, individuals must take responsibility for rectification, progress monitoring, and outcome evaluation.

Ultimately this process requires a collaborative team effort, with each RTO staff member considering it an integral part of their responsibilities.

Continuously improving continuous improvement

Accepting continuous improvement as a standard routine of an RTO's activities may present challenges as there are those who would rather avoid the constant pressure of observation. However, due to the RTO's vital role for learners, employers, industry, and the community, settling for anything less than excellence is not an option.

The parallels with learning are obvious. Like the learner the RTO:

- has goals and standards to achieve;
- must accept that there is always room to improve;
- needs to accept that it must be assessed;
- needs to be able to accept adverse feedback;
- must be able to respond constructively to that feedback; and
- must be willing to resubmit to the assessment process.

The RTO must be a learning organisation that demonstrates a strong commitment to change, evidence-based action, supporting the team in times of change, prioritising professional development, and fostering a culture to continuously improve.

The below case study illustrates how an RTO can utilise the continuous improvement cycle to identify and monitor the standards expected of and by the organisation.

Continuous Improvement Case Study



1

Gather evidence and identify issues from inputs

Student feedback, employer feedback, trainer/assessor feedback, complaints, appeals, progression data, assessment validation, internal or external audit.

- Current and graduate students report that they do not have enough time to learn and are under too much pressure to meet assessment deadlines.



2

Identify standards expected of and by the RTO

Standards for RTOs, Training Package/unit requirements, workplace standards.

- training and assessment strategies (clause 1.1)
- amount of training (clause 1.2)
- learner support (clause 1.7)
- assessment fairness (clause 1.8b)
- course information (clause 5.1)
- learner obligations (clause 5.2 e ii)

3

Identify potential causes of the issue

Policy, procedures, marketing.

- Students may have unreasonable expectations about the time demands of the course
- Duplication of knowledge and skills across related units
- Multiple assessments with the same due dates
- Stresses within and outside the course

4

Identify potential remedies to address the causes

Revise policies and procedures, rewrite training materials, revise assessment tools.

- reducing course intensity by clustering units of competency to avoid duplication
- providing additional advice prior to enrolment to potential students about the requirements of the course
- co-ordination of assessment deadlines across units
- support services for students experiencing elevated stress levels

5

Implement selected remedy

Responsibility, timeline, resources.

- Trainers and assessors: to implement clustering and assessment co-ordination. (Next delivery)
- Marketing to revise course brochure. (Next delivery)
- Student services to set up stress support program. (Immediate)

6

Review impact of remedy – seek new evidence

Student feedback, employer feedback, trainer/assessor feedback, complaints, appeals, progression data, assessment validation, internal or external audit.

- Review the effectiveness of stress support program through student surveys
- Review student feedback during and after next delivery of the course