

# Good Practice Guide

## Gathering Workplace Evidence in Electrotechnology Apprenticeships

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Electrical, Utilities and Public Administration Training Council Inc.  
Suite 10, 231 Balcatta Road, Balcatta WA 6021  
T: (08) 9448 5179  
W: [www.eupa.com.au](http://www.eupa.com.au)



## 1 Introduction

*(This guide assumes that readers understand the principles of competency based assessment. References in the document to trainers or assessors refer only to those employed by training providers.)*

This guide attempts to resolve issues reported to cause uncertainty in the assessment of electrotechnology apprentices (and in some cases pre apprentices).

This uncertainty appears to be about:

- workplace assessment in these apprenticeships; and
- workplace profiling, and its relationship to work place assessment.

Industry expects workplace assessment to occur to some degree in every apprenticeship.

However, industry understands that electrotechnology apprentices change sites frequently, making the logistics of large scale workplace assessment impractical. This guide therefore suggests ways to combine limited workplace assessment with other forms of assessment for a more valid and reliable final judgement.

The training package requires the use of profiling tools to record workplace experience – this can be critical to both the qualification and, sometimes, electrical licensing.

However, while profiling tools can contribute meaningfully to the training and assessment process, they do not provide formal evidence of competency.

## 2 What is a Profiling?

The electrical industry considers that maintaining a record of what an apprentice does on the job is an essential part of training and assessment.

This is recorded through 'profiling' – use of a paper based log book or electronic profiling tool. Log books provide an economical and simple tool for small numbers of apprentices, while electronic profiling facilitates data management and sophisticated reporting.

Major Western Australian electrotechnology training providers use electronic profiling tools for apprenticeships and pre apprenticeships.

Profiling can record that a task or skill has been attempted and when it has been practiced. This is critical information for determining adequacy/sufficiency of training.

The profile can alert a **training provider** to:

- inappropriate/inadequate workplace experience for a qualification or a license;
- when an assessment is best conducted (eg after on the job practice);
- differences between employer and assessor perspectives (eg where an apprentice completes a task many times on the job but is judged 'not competent' in an off the job assessment);
- ; or
- Changes in the nature of work, methods and techniques in industry.

The profile can provide **employers** with:

- a reminder of any gaps in their on the job training;
- a tool to integrate on and off the job training;
- a basis for discussing performance issues with trainers/assessors;
- a structure on which to provide performance feedback to apprentices; and
- a review of whether the range and quality of on the job training is sufficient for a qualification or license (in conjunction with the trainer/assessor).

Lastly, it allows apprentices to understand and integrate the range of tasks and skills that make up their trade.

## 3 Profiling is not Assessment!

'Profiling' and 'workplace assessment' must not be confused – profiling only provides evidence that a task or skill has been carried out, not that it has been carried out competently.

***The student must not be assessed as competent simply because the employer/assessor signs the profiling tool. In every case a formal assessment process must be undertaken and recorded by the assessor.***

#### 4 Employer must agree with the assessment of competency

The Regulations to the VET Act (1996) state:

*‘the Contract is successfully completed when there is agreement from the employer, Registered Training Organisation and apprentice/trainee, and/or an acknowledgment by the State/Territory Training Authority, that the apprentice/trainee has attained all the required competencies’*

This means (usually) that the employer must agree with the final determination of competency by the training provider before the contract is successfully completed. This creates a need for a strong, ongoing understanding between supervisors and assessors. It is far too late to start resolving differences of opinion when the contract is due to expire. While it is essential that the assessor maintains the formal assessment process required under the AQTF, the employer must also be a partner in this process. Communication about the assessment process and the profiling process is critical to this.

#### 5 Limitations of profiling

During the recent pre apprenticeship survey a number of employers who were significantly engaged in apprenticeship training volunteered their concerns about profiling. The issues they raised need to be remembered when implementing the tool.

The key issues identified were:

- Apprentices entered data in an ad hoc fashion, often well in arrears.
- Data entered well in arrears may be Signed off by the current supervisor, not the one who supervised at the

time, or the supervisor may not recall details of the task.

- The person ‘signing off’ the profiling tool often misunderstood the purpose.
- There was little communication between trainers/assessors and employers about the profile – were employers simply wasting their time providing quality input?
- Some apprentices enter exaggerated information, in arrears, making it difficult for the employer to dispute their claims. This has arisen where there was a disagreement between employer and apprentice about reductions in term. Although small in number, these apprentices often represented the greatest risk due to insufficient experience.

The same employers commented that there was no place in most profiling tools to identify that the apprentice:

- had performed the task below employer expectations;
- needed more on the job training;
- needed more off the job training; or
- was ready for assessment.

Some employers were unsure what ‘signing off’ the profile implied, as they did not necessarily mean that the apprentice was competent when signing off a task (or vice versa).

It is essential that a trainer/assessor appreciates all these potential weaknesses and works pro-actively with employers and apprentices to compensate for them.

## **6 Overcoming profiling limitations**

This is discussed in more detail in section 5 (above) but most of the issues are addressed by communication.

Electrotechnology employers frequently complain about the lack of meaningful communication from training providers about their apprentice. If training providers opened a regular dialogue with employers, using the content of the profile as a basis for discussion, many of the issues would disappear.

## **7 Workplace Assessment, not just profiling**

The industry requires that some formal workplace assessment by a qualified assessor must occur in every apprenticeship, especially in the summative, or final, assessment. This is quite separate from profiling.

However, the industry appreciates that formal workplace assessment of every skill is usually impractical due to frequent changes in work site by electrotechnology apprentices.

Given this there is a need for better connection between the profiling process and practical workplace assessment. This will require training providers to implement a method which combines workplace assessment, profiling and off-the-job training and assessment into a comprehensive final training / assessment solution that meets AQTF and training package requirements.

## **8 Bridging the gap between profiling and workplace assessment**

The training package makes the following clear:

- A profiling tool must be used in the workplace.
- Profiling is not workplace assessment, but provides training and assessment information.
- The assessor needs to substantiate the information the profiling tool provides through workplace visits and selective workplace assessment.
- Off the job assessment at a training provider's premises must be done in conjunction with carefully reviewing evidence from the workplace.

## **9 Suggestions to make the most of the profiling system**

The following practical suggestions may resolve tensions created by the industry's preference for workplace assessment, the impracticality of maintaining a comprehensive workplace assessment process, the inability to use the profiling tool for direct evidence and the need for an employer to agree that the apprentice is competent before the trade certificate can be issued.

## 10 *Induction to the Profiling System*

- Apprentices/supervisors should be inducted in the profiling tool through workplace visits.
- Supervisors' limitations in completing the profile should be understood.
- The apprentice's performance must be discussed with the supervisor. In these discussions the profiler can be used as a tool to determine if the apprentice has achieved the supervisor's perception of industry standard<sup>1</sup>.
- The assessor should be prepared for future visits by asking the following types of questions:
  - What does the employer expect to see the apprentice do before they will appraise them as having achieved industry standard? (suggest a representative competency)
  - How the employer might make any judgement fair for the apprentice – discuss a competency that has some fairness issues for the particular apprentice.
  - What is the usual or most likely work context for the apprentice? (eg construction, building, repairs and maintenance, manufacturing etc). This will enable the assessment to be contextualised more effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the same as an assessment of competence but will alert the training provider that the apprentice may be ready (or not) for an assessment of competence.

- Ensure, as a safety consideration, that the apprentice is being adequately supervised on the job. Concerns should be discussed with the employer and, if the concern persists, reported to the appropriate authority<sup>2</sup>.
- The names and license numbers of the approved and inducted workplace supervisor/s who are 'signing off' the profiling tool should be recorded.
- The date of the induction and on-going communications should be recorded.

## 11 *Progression – on going assessment*

- It should be confirmed that the 'sign off' of the task/competency was by the inducted workplace supervisor/s. All signatories should be inducted into the profiling methodology as they change. The use of electrical license numbers simplifies this. Changes in signatories and their induction should be recorded and dated.
- A structured review of the profiling tool should be conducted at specified, regular intervals (perhaps every 3-6 months) to ensure that workplace experience is appropriate and sufficient. Findings should be recorded and dated.
- Any evidence of confusion about what is being attempted as a task should be investigated – a typical clue might be where advanced skills are being recorded in the 1<sup>st</sup> year or where competencies are being claimed in a task that doesn't normally include that competency.

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<sup>2</sup> In most instances this will be Energy Safety or ApprentiCentre, depending on circumstances.

## 12 Reviewing profiling before and during off the job training

- The profile tool and off the job assessment should be consistent – this is critical for risk management. For example, if the profile suggests a competency is frequently practised but the apprentice cannot demonstrate the competency in a valid off the job assessment, the RTO must investigate and address the reasons for this with the workplace supervisor and apprentice. It is not satisfactory to ‘correct’ the skill during off the job training and then assess the apprentice as competent via a single instance, when suspecting that future instances might be below par. This is most important where there are safety implications. If the training provider is unable to resolve this scenario with the employer the appropriate authority should be alerted.
- Where the profiling data and the workplace supervisor’s sign off seem to suggest a different outcome from the training provider’s assessment, the following diagnostic shortlist might be considered:
  - Is the workplace training appropriate?
  - Do the training provider and supervisor have the same understanding of the task?
  - Is the apprentice/supervisor taking the profiling tool seriously?
  - Does the supervisor imply some standard has been achieved when signing off the profile tool, or are they just acknowledging task activity?
- Have the apprentice’s personal circumstances changed? – a pastoral care issue.
- Is the training provider out of touch with current industry accepted standards?
- Does the mode of assessment used within the training provider make the assessment unfair or invalid compared to workplace assessment?

## 13 Understanding workplace supervisor’s judgements

As mentioned in Section 4 (above) the employer must agree with the training providers assessment of competence. This is best done progressively, in partnership, so there are no surprises near the end of the contract.

In some profilers the level of supervision of the task in question is identified. Where an apprentice is ‘signed off’ by an employer as completing a task ‘under limited supervision’ trainers/assessors have been known to interpret this as direct evidence of competency. However employers may not share the training provider’s interpretation.

One of the first questions asked of the supervisor during visits might be: *‘is the apprentice capable of doing a particular task?’*

A positive answer to this will indicate that the employer is unlikely to have an objection to an assessor's determination of competency and that the employer believes the apprentice is ready for assessment. It does not, however, provide direct evidence of competence. This must still be determined by a formal assessment process.

The following steps are then suggested to progress towards final assessment:

- Ask questions about the standard the employer expects, focussing on at least one of the core competencies. This competency should be one that is built on the foundation of other competencies – this will allow you develop an appreciation of the general standard across several competencies. There are usually several such competencies in any training package. The employer might be asked questions similar to those under 'Induction' (above).
- Discuss a recent example of actual work with the apprentice and employer – even better if you can view the completed work while you are undertaking the discussion. Discuss what the apprentice and employer thought of the apprentice's performance on this job, ask the apprentice some technical questions about the job in

the presence of the employer<sup>3</sup>, and determine if both the apprentice's and employer's views are consistent with yours. Match this with the profile tool to ensure the frequency of the task was sufficient to initiate an assessment.

- In the unfortunate circumstance where the employer demonstrates quite inappropriate training and assessment approaches, the RTO needs to determine how it might compensate for this. If no method presents itself, ApprentiCentre should be alerted.

### *Bringing it all together*

By the completion of the process above, the training provider's assessor should have had regular opinions from the workplace supervisor regarding the apprentice's work; be able to weight those opinions against the assessment principles (validity, reliability, fairness, authenticity etc); have evidence of sufficiency from the profiling tool (after confirmation by the supervisor); have personally verified the level of commonality between the supervisor and the RTO assessor opinions; have direct off the job evidence of all competencies (at least as far as off the job assessment permits) and have directly assessed some representative competencies in the workplace.

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<sup>3</sup> Only as far as the principle of Fairness allows – if for any reason this was likely to put the apprentice under undue strain, carry out the questioning away from the workplace supervisor.