

# JMA ANALYTICS

---

## QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

# How to use VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ reports to improve quality

## An interview with Dianne Baron Manager, Quality Unit, TAFE SA Regional

*Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 16 Sept 2010. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by Dr John Mitchell and validated as accurate by Dianne Baron.*

### Purpose and audience

The purposes of this recorded interview are to:

- **stimulate ideas** about how to use VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ reports to meet quality requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)
- **encourage the development** of a national network or a community of practice among users of VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ who are focused on improving quality in their registered training organisations (RTOs).

The intended audience for this document is RTO managers nationally who are peers of Dianne Baron who can use VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ reports to meet and exceed quality requirements.

### Background

The VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ surveys were conducted at TAFE SA Regional for the first three weeks of June 2010. In July 2010 the Institute received seven reports of thirty pages or more for VETCAT™ and seven of twenty two pages or more for CURCAT™ – one for each of the six faculties and one whole-of-Institute report.

## THE INTERVIEW

### Part A: VETCAT™

(John Mitchell) **What broad uses of the VETCAT™ data and findings do you see for quality purposes within your TAFE Institute?**

(Dianne Baron) The AQTF has a focus on VET practice teaching and learning but I think the most critical aspect in relation to quality we all need to clearly recognise is that the AQTF is the minimum requirement. And as we move into a more and then highly contestable

marketplace it will give people the market edge to be able to deliver higher than the AQTF requirement. I believe VETCAT™ will start to give RTOs the edge in relation to transparency because they'll be able to validate their teaching and learning skills to support their teaching and learning delivery.

I believe that VETCAT™ provides an evidence base on which you'll be able to create marketing approaches in a contestable market. It will be validated evidence of your overall functionality as an RTO in relation to teaching and learning. For quality purposes within the institute that evidence is highly valuable because we need to refocus on core business as in teaching and learning and the quality associated with that. I think that VETCAT™ enables us to really focus on the continuum of quality.

### **What do you mean by the continuum of quality?**

The standards in the AQTF are guiding principles about a continuum of improvement to customer service and satisfaction.

I believe that VETCAT™ provides RTOs with the benchmark of where you currently are at and where you need to be in the future. It will allow you then to develop the continuum of quality especially as we move towards possible recognition of RTOs with excellence or differentiated in the market as one of the top 100 RTOs. What makes the top 100? The difference is my teaching and learning staff have all of these capabilities demonstrated in the VETCAT™ reports and these are the strengths of my RTO.

It's fine to be an RTO meeting the minimum standards but the reality is the marketplace will actually determine that it wants more. And it wants RTOs who can provide excellent teaching and learning and everything else that fits with that. I think the biggest message for every RTO is that AQTF is the minimum requirement and the minimum in a contestable market just isn't going to be high enough.

### **How can the VETCAT™ individual reports be used to meet AQTF requirements?**

I think it's twofold. For us there are AQTF requirements that lecturers increase their overall skills and abilities and then there is the individual lecturer progression related to that.

If I focus on the AQTF in the first instance, when you actually read the true intent of the AQTF standards it refers to resources, but the resource word actually goes further because it incorporates both human and physical resources. So when you're looking at it from a quality perspective, what is an individual going to get out of the VETCAT™ report? It's actually an investment in each and every staff member to be able to measure their current skills and abilities in relation to teaching and learning and to assist them in looking at a personal development plan.

And VETCAT™ provides the RTO with the opportunity to then work with the individual in ensuring that you can then develop and build the overall capabilities of the RTO.

VETCAT™ assists the individual lecturer in giving them an opportunity for self-reflection. It also is a re-affirming component about their current skills because as we move towards being in a tougher contestable market. The reality of the market we're in is that we will need to be able to tender for the dollars in a way where we must be able to provide validated

evidence of the skills of our individual trainers and the collective capabilities of a program area and the whole RTO.

I think the VETCAT™ individual reports add high value not only to the overall quality but to the overall well-being of the individual in allowing them to reassess where they are in their career, and to identify individual pathways that may not have been clearly evident to them before undertaking the VETCAT™ self assessment process. The individual reports then lead to building the capabilities of the faculty or program area plus the overall institute in the long run.

### **How can the VETCAT™ institute and faculty reports be used to meet AQTF requirements?**

VETCAT™ data relates very specifically to quality requirements around governance. If you have a look at the new conditions of registration in the AQTF, Condition 1 around governance has really been ramped up for consumer protection. It clearly states that the RTO's Chief Executive Officer has to take a leadership role in monitoring and reviewing all components of the business.

Now the prime component of the business is the human resource or the human capital within that business. CEOs need to be accountable for all RTO functions and how the RTO operates and they have to ensure that they're operating within a sustainable business model. So I clearly see that at a both a program and an RTO level, that the VETCAT™ process enables them to benchmark where they're currently at and to monitor the progress of the individual faculty and overall RTO and it fully supports the government's requirements about registration. It links clearly back to that.

### **Are there any other benefits of the VETCAT™ data or reports for quality purposes?**

The overall benefit of VETCAT™ is the continuum of quality and the continuous improvement. The biggest component of the AQTF that RTOs will need to address, especially as they go towards re-registration, is organisational self assessment. Now it's a bit of a sleeper in the AQTF and for me to re-register this institute I need to be able to evidence organisational self assessment at a point in time. The point in time is here and now and the re-registration is about what have we actually done to continuously improve. Now I can't provide evidence for that unless I can pinpoint the point in time, so the VETCAT™ data and findings actually create the whole plan. It also will give us an opportunity to benchmark with the other RTOs which is an inherent requirement of the AQTF.

### **What do you mean when you say 'create the whole plan'?**

To re-register you need to be able to provide evidence in relation to the registration requirement and the continuous improvement. I can tell you I can continuously improve but to actually table evidence that in a way that is tangible and transparent you need to benchmark. The overall benefits of benchmarking are that is it gives us the opportunity to apply a process systematically across the whole RTO.

Quality in the AQTF is very clearly defined, it talks constantly about the whole of RTO function, the whole-of-RTO outcome, so while we clearly recognise we have pockets of best practice VETCAT™ actually provides us with the opportunity to make systemic change and embed the best practice all the way across the RTO.

VETCAT™ provides us with the opportunity of ensuring that we have a highly skilled workforce to meet the continuous improvement aim, not only of the quality standards, but certainly of the clients' and the students' needs.

## **Part B: CURCAT™**

### **What broad uses of the CURCAT™ data and findings do you see for quality purposes within the Institute?**

In AQTF Standard 1.4, Elements C and D are the new or the stronger requirements and they're about lecturers demonstrating industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment, and continuing to develop their vocational education and training competencies. And Elements within Standard 1.2 are very clear strategies for training and assessment to meet the requirements of the training package.

When you actually unpack that and really see how all of the standards fit together it's all about consumer protection, it's about ensuring that the student actually gets the relevant up-to-date information that will enable them to move straight into the job, or a higher paid job, whatever is the focus of the individual.

One thing that is really critical about differentiating RTOs is that the standards also require that the individual staff have the capabilities and the capacities to actually provide the training and assessment strategy of that individual RTO. It's not just about the training package or accredited course, it's about the context of the delivery and meeting those individual requirements which I think is absolutely critical.

The biggest use for CURCAT™ findings in relation to standard 1.4 I think is very clear. It's about verifying that trainers and assessors meet the nationally agreed competency requirements. CURCAT™ enables you to benchmark where they are at currently. That benchmarking process is critical when it actually comes to either self-evaluation of the RTO or whether it's as an audit process, or whether it is re-registration or change of scope of registration.

It is very easy to say all of my trainers are current and up-to-date but to actually validate that in the past without these CURCAT™ findings has always been a challenge. Looking at somebody's CV and looking at their qualifications that are all listed possibly in a staff matrix, isn't in-depth enough: it doesn't have enough depth to actually truly validate the requirements of the standard.

I believe that the focus of the standard is on the individual. CURCAT™ provides you with the opportunity to validate where their current skills are at, or to measure where they are at currently. And then CURCAT™ enables you to create the plan in relation to ensuring that it will meet what you need in the future. It's not about what they've got today, it's about what they will actually require tomorrow and three years from now, in order to ensure that the RTO is sustainable.

### **How can the CURCAT™ individual reports can be used to meet AQTF requirements?**

Again it comes back to AQTF standard 1.4. The new focus and the hottest discussion point I would suggest here is about the ongoing validation of industry currency and how long ago

was the lecturers last in industry? So while the individual report is the foundation it's also about what are you going to do with that foundation. It's about 'this is the moment in time' and then being able to actually constantly build on it.

We're looking at and investigating e-portfolios as a possible solution to link with this issue of industry currency because it's about 'this is where we currently are but I need you to constantly be able to validate your engagement with industry to further add to it. I think that's the challenge: it's about how you then move forward and record the evidence requirement.

### **Could the CURCAT™ individual report be a key document within the e-portfolio?**

Absolutely. Whether we like it or not we're going to have a much more mobile workforce across the VET sector because of the nature of the business challenges that we'll all be facing. The individual VET practitioner needs to become more mobile than they possibly have ever been before and will need to be able to provide evidence of their industry currency to pick up the contract of employment for a period of time with a variety of RTOs. So I see the CURCAT™ individual report as great value.

It would be interesting if you could link your CURCAT™ report structure back to the standard, even if it was a one-page matrix showing how this component of the CURCAT™ report equates to Standard 1.4 Element C. [This advice is being implemented: John Mitchell]

### **How can CURCAT™ institute and faculty reports be used to meet AQTF requirements?**

Currently an RTO is registered for a period of five years. Historically training packages went through a five-year cycle then a three-year cycle and now it's continuous improvement, so it's absolutely critical that we can benchmark: this is where we're at but this is where we've gone, so it's about that journey and it's about the continuous improvement cycle, but it's about the sustainability that it actually underpins it.

CURCAT™ provides a picture about our overall workforce and it clearly gives you a whole of organisational assessment about where you're at currently. It also enables you to plan where you need to be within the changing marketplaces given the skills of your VET practitioners and the currency of those skills or the gap in those skills. So to move into new markets or new training and assessment markets, to do any of that forward strategic planning, these CURCAT™ reports are vital reports to enable an RTO to make some very informed decisions.

### **Is CURCAT™ needed urgently in any sections of an RTO?**

Measuring industry currency is critical where a new or revised training package is to be implemented, for instance in primary and allied industries where their package hasn't been reviewed since before 2000 for a whole variety of reasons. Now they've compacted four training packages into one, it will go live in the next six months so people's skill and knowledge in relation to teaching practice, pedagogy, everything relating to industry currency all of a sudden will ramp up like you haven't seen before. Previously the pressure to do that hasn't been there because they haven't been through a scope of registration chain and because they haven't been through an implementation cycle for a long time.

**Are there any other benefits that you can see of the CURCAT™ reports for quality purposes?**

Absolutely. My biggest message to our institute currently is 'look, the AQTF was always seen as the guiding light, I would highly suggest to you that at the moment as we evolve it is clearly the minimum requirement, not the requirement'. And the overall CURCAT™ data report actually adds so much to it because it gives you the ability to aim for the AQTF excellence criteria, currently in draft form. It also gives you the opportunity to work for business excellence within the international environment.

One criterion as it sits within the AQTF excellence criteria, is criterion 3 regarding people development. If you're actually looking to raise the profile of an RTO to be differentiated in the market, to be able to be recognised as one of those top 100 RTOs, or to be recognised in what will possibly be determined as 'quality committed' or 'outstanding' as identified within the draft criteria, the only way forward is to be able to prove where you're at currently and how you've continuously improved, how you have targeted sustainable PD for your individuals and to be able to actually provide evidence on the return on that investment. From where I sit these are fundamental business cycles that fully support the quality assurance processes of the VET sector.

**What are the fundamental business cycles?**

The CURCAT™ reports support all the fundamental business components of the strategic planning about where you're going to be. In any strategic planning you need to fully understand where you are currently. The challenge for all of us is to take the information as it's been provided within the CURCAT™ report and then clearly implement an action plan from there forward.

So whether that be embedded within local business plans that a program or faculty area or individual learning plans for individual staff members or overall strategic or business plans for the RTO, CURCAT™ enables you to make some very sound business decisions at each of those levels. Not only do I see the CURCAT™ reports and the process and the analysis as supporting quality, but I see them actually supporting the overall fundamental functions of the business.

**Part C. Comments on both VETCAT™ and CURCAT™**

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that's come to mind?**

Some of the key issues all the way through AQTF and the environment we're working in are benchmarking and measures of quality. AQTF is all about outcomes. So in reality both VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ give us the outcomes of our own people development. They are internal measures that actually help us to build the RTO profile and give us the absolute fundamental requirements of an RTO organisational self assessment to then be able to build your planning process on. I think VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ give us the foundations of ensuring that we become the learning organisation we should be.

We need to reassess our internal audit processes and I would suggest to you that anybody who goes down the pathway of utilising CURCAT™ or VETCAT™ would reassess the type of evidence that they will then put forward at audit. It means that our auditors will need to

consider different questions, different validation points and different evidence than they have ever seen previously.

Historically external auditors understand that 1.4 would say show me that they've got their TAA whereas it's so much more than that. And I would suggest to you at a national level external auditors will be struggling with what evidence can an RTO give to me about our current industry skills and vocational confidence. How can somebody who is not the subject expert validate or benchmark vocational confidence? So I think CURCAT™ evidence far exceeds what the AQTF is requiring and you know my view that AQTF is the minimum; AQTF is a given and we want more.

**You have mentioned benchmarking a few times in the interview. What do you have in mind?**

It would be good to create a kind of consortium – call it whatever you like – between the RTOs that you're working with – regarding VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ – because the AQTF standards are explicit about benchmarking against 'like' RTOs. In South Australia the only RTOs we can benchmark with are Adelaide North and Adelaide South Institutes of TAFE.

The reality is there are always pockets of underperformance just because of the size of A TAFE Institute and the number of individuals and the true value of the VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ assessments are that they give us the opportunity to actually benchmark against other RTOs in different states and jurisdictions.