

Assessment of rail safety worker competence

October 2025

Rail transport operators must ensure that each rail safety worker who is to perform rail safety work in relation to its railway operations has the competence to carry out that work safely.

Requirements are set out in section 117 of the *Rail Safety National Law* (RSNL) and regulation 30 of the *Rail Safety National Law National Regulations* 2012.

In establishing competence requirements, operators should:

1. Identify the classes of work that are *rail safety work*, as described by section 8 of the RSNL.
2. Identify the competencies (skills and knowledge) that are required for the rail safety work for each relevant role.
3. Source applicable units of competence and/or qualifications from Australia's system of nationally recognised training (which is underpinned by the Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF]) wherever possible.
3. Source providers of training and assessment and/or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pathways which result in the issue of AQF qualifications or a statement of attainment. Or, where this is not reasonably practicable, determine an alternative approach.
4. Employ a system to maintain records of training and assessment decisions, including the evidence to be retained to support this.

Identify competencies

The first step is to carry out a task analysis and a risk assessment for the rail safety work to be undertaken, which includes:

- > Determining all the activities that must be performed competently and consistently in order to carry out the rail safety work.

- > Identifying hazards and risks associated with these activities to inform appropriate training and/or assessment outcomes e.g. external AQF qualifications (including vocational competency-based outcomes), internal unaccredited training and assessment, one-off activities, refreshers etc.

Source applicable units of competence, skill sets and/or qualifications

The AQF encompasses senior secondary education, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and schools, with recognition of prior learning available for those with existing qualifications, or current skills or knowledge.

The VET sector provides industry-specific, occupational skills training and assessment (competency-based) that lead to AQF qualifications or competencies (individually offered or combined into short courses, skill sets or training packages). National industry training packages are developed and maintained by appointed Jobs and Skills Councils. Industry Skills Australia is the appointed Council for the Transport and Logistics industry sectors - [Industry Skills Australia](#). The TLI – Transport and Logistics package includes competencies specific to rail, which may be considered industry standards.

To ensure rail safety workers achieve the competency required for the specific work and operating environment it may be necessary for operators to supplement whatever AQF-based qualifications or competencies have been selected (e.g. enterprise-based in-house training or instruction not covered by the AQF).

Where whole qualifications, skills sets and/or particular units of competence do not apply or exist, the operator can adapt existing units of competence or develop new enterprise standards for their own training and assessment arrangements.

Sourcing registered providers

Nationally recognised AQF qualifications and competencies are offered by many registered training and education providers, who may offer the same qualifications or competencies through varying delivery methods, durations, and course costs.

Higher education providers are required to be registered with TEQSA (the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency). The National Register of providers and courses is available at www.teqsa.gov.au

VET courses are delivered by Registered Training Organisations (referred to as RTOs) and government institutions (called Technical and Further Education (TAFE)). In some cases, rail transport operators are also registered training organisations and can offer AQF qualifications and competencies in-house. The full list of VET qualifications, training package components and registered training providers is available from the National Register on VET at www.training.gov.au.

Maintaining records and evidence

Operators must ensure assessments of competence are conducted against nationally recognised competencies and/or enterprise-based competencies (or similar standards) which are identified by the operator as the knowledge and skills required for the rail safety work to be undertaken safely.

Irrespective of the standards chosen, assessment must always reflect a match between the requirements of the task and the competence of the worker.

Nationally recognised or alternative achievements must be evidenced (e.g. records, certificates, statements of attainment etc.) and any enterprise-based training and/or assessment must be fully documented and recorded (refer to regulation 30).

Determining whether it is reasonably practicable to assess in accordance with the AQF

There may be cases where it is not reasonably practicable to assess the rail safety worker's competence to carry out the operator's rail safety work in accordance with the AQF. Examples of where alternative approaches may need to be sought include:

- > all of the units of competence for a qualification are not necessary
- > a suitable qualification, unit of competence, skill set or nationally recognised provider is not available
- > suitable providers are too far away and remote delivery methodologies are not offered, or suitable for the purpose
- > the need relates to a licensing requirement or other professional certification/registration requirement outside of the AQF
- > cost is prohibitive
- > the workforce is restricted (i.e. not able to send workers away).

If any of these circumstances apply, operators may consider an alternative approach. This approach must ensure that the worker has otherwise acquired the necessary:

- > qualifications and competencies applicable to that rail safety work, and
- > knowledge and skills to carry out rail safety work safely.

Alternative approaches may include recognition of prior experience, use of industry qualifications or training and assessment packages/ standards, modifying existing AQF competencies, or in-house training and/or assessment (called 'enterprise attainment') – or a combination of these. Further information on ONRSR's expectations for alternative assessment is available in the Application of the AQF to Rail Safety Worker Competence Policy.

About the AQF

The [Australian Qualifications Framework \(AQF\)](#) is Australia's national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It applies broad discipline-free terminology to describe each category of AQF qualification (*i.e. Certificate I – Doctoral Degree*). Education providers that issue AQF qualifications have been authorised to do so under law. And all subsequent discipline based AQF qualifications delivered by these providers are quality assured through government accreditation processes.

Registered training organisations operate under the [VET Quality Framework](#) which incorporates the AQF. Only registered training organisations can deliver nationally recognised courses and accredited Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) VET qualifications. Registered training organisations may offer anything from Certificates I-IV right up to diplomas, advanced diplomas, and vocational graduate certificates or vocational graduate diplomas in specific disciplines (*depending on their current 'scope of registration'*).

For a further understanding of the language used in this field you can consult relevant glossaries, such as provided in the [AQF Glossary of Terminology](#) or [VOCED plus](#) for a VET-specific glossary.

Further information

Detailed guidance on the responsibilities of a rail transport operator to ensure competency and document the assessment is available via ONRSR's:

- > Safety management system guideline.
- > Application of the AQF to rail safety worker competence assessment policy, which details ONRSR's approach for assessing compliance.

Available from ONRSR's website at www.onrsr.com.au