Competency progression and completion: how is the policy being enacted in three trades?

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What did we want to find out?

- Impact of COAG’s 2006 competency-based progression and completion policy, allowing:
  Apprentices to work as qualified tradesmen and tradeswomen as soon as they have demonstrated competency to industry standards, without having to wait out a set time period or make special application.
- Whether there is a gap between the policy construct and the lived workplace reality?
- Whether we are ‘cutting it’? Are the outcomes being achieved meeting the standards set out in Training Packages?
Our burning questions:

- How and to what extent are teachers-assessors and workplace supervisors communicating with each other about their roles and responsibilities in the assessment process?
- To what extent and in what way is off-the-job training and assessment integrated with that in the workplace, to ensure that rules of evidence are being met?
- What assessment methods are used to collect evidence of performance from the workplace and how is competence being determined and validated?
- What views do teacher-assessors and workplace supervisors hold about assessment and how might assessment practices be improved?
What did we do?

- Literature review
- Pre-interview questionnaire
- Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions
- 7 TAFE Institutes across 3 states and 1 territory
- Commercial cookery, carpentry and metal fabrication
- 26 TAFE teacher-assessors
- 21 workplace supervisors
- 47 interviews
What did we find? In our lit review.....

- RTOs often:
  - Continuing management of apprenticeships as though time-based AND
  - Lacking flexibility in administrative and teaching practices (AiG 2013)

- Employers often:
  - Signing off apprentices early to ‘get them off the books’
  - Not recognising the need for comprehensive skill formation
  - Delaying sign off to avoid paying tradesperson wages
  - Preferring time-served because that's what they did

Overall → poor rates of competency progression due to attitudes and practices of employers, RTOs or both
What did we ask? Through our field research.....

Questions about:

- Integration of on and off-the-job training and assessment
- Assessment methods and evidence
- Assessment decision-making and validation
- Implementation of competency progression and completion policy into practice
Challenges to successful implementation of competency progression and completion policy:

1. Lack of employer support
   Employers concerned about the costs, particularly where apprentices were the crucial to business survival.

2. Demand for something more than competence
   Supervisors expressed concerns about apprentices’ ability to perform at the level required by the workplace. Differing views about ‘competence’. 
Findings....

3. The influence of tradition in trade training
   “Because it was the way it used to be”

4. The perceived need for maturity and experience
   Time is an essential factor - apprentices need to ‘grow up’ and build their experience.

5. TAFE funding: impacts on providers and the workplace
   Reduced contact hours meant less time off-job and more responsibility on workplace supervisors to provide the essential training.
Findings....

6. Dearth of information and levels of awareness

Both teachers and supervisors highlighted concerns about how policy was meant to work in practice. Differing views on roles and responsibilities regarding dissemination of information.

7. Further training or greater responsibility

Employer preference for apprentices to do further training or take on more challenging jobs rather than being signed off early.
Table discussions: Implications of research for policy and practice

Our research suggests a number of actions for consideration relating to:

- Requirements for effective implementation
- Thinking differently about assessment
- Acknowledging the major role apprentices must play in their own training and assessment