

VERIFICATION OF COMPETENCY (VOC)

Frequently Asked Questions for Corporate Clients

What is Verification of Competency (VOC)?

Current industry regulations require employers and persons conducting a business undertaking (PCBU) to ensure their workers can clearly demonstrate their ability to perform the tasks related to their job role when plant is used.

A Verification of Competency (VOC) is a method of assessment that can be used to demonstrate workers' ability to operate equipment and/or undertake the responsibilities of their role. It is commonly used by employers during their pre-employment checks, site requirements and contract negotiations. In fact, a VOC is often required by employers before individuals are even allowed on site.

Why do our operators need a Verification of Competency (VOC)?

According to Safe Work Australia, it is now the legal responsibility of the employer to ensure that the skills of staff working on site are up-to-date and compliant. In January 2012, a new set of Workplace Health and Safety laws were introduced, putting more responsibility onto the employer to undertake "all reasonably practicable measures to prevent the risk to health and safety occurring". (Source: Safe Work Australia).

A licence or 'ticket' is no longer an adequate measure of your workers ability to perform their tasks and operate machinery in a manner compliant with regulations. In the unfortunate event there is an accident on site, will you be able to prove that you – as an employer – took every reasonable step to ensure the competency of your workers? Encouraging your employees and contractors to complete their VOC training – preferably before commencing work on site – will allow you to demonstrate that reasonable measures were taken to ensure the health and safety of all workers on site.

Our workers already have a licence – do they still need a VOC?

Holding a licence or a Qualification Card **does not** necessarily infer competency, but is a pre-requisite to be eligible to undertake the assessment for a VOC.

Persons who have recently received a licence, or received their licence/ticket many years ago, may not be able to immediately verify their competency against the industry standard without some form of basic refresher training and assessment. An example of this shortfall may be demonstrating a sound knowledge of the current regulations, policies and procedures relating to the work they perform.

Your Licence has a range of free refresher courses available online that can be undertaken by operators prior to completing a VOC assessment to ensure their knowledge is current. Comprehensive training material is also supplied as part of the VOC course, in the form of a "Learners Guide".

What other methods can be used to demonstrate competency?

Demonstration of competency evidence may include a Statement of Attainment, Qualification Card, Certificate of Competency, or old regulator issued plant licence. These are often referred to in the Industry as a “Licence” or “Plant Ticket”.

The Regulators encourage formal competency-based training and assessment for the operation of mobile plant and high risk work – this can only be provided by accredited and approved RTO’s through the vocational education and training system. The standard they encourage is to the Units of Competency contained within the national Training Packages, which are driven and endorsed by industry. These are often referred to as RII, TLI or CPCC standards.

What about licences for earthmoving equipment, small cranes and other types of plant?

Some states and territories previously issued a licence for some or all of this equipment, however Regulators stopped issuing these licences in 2012. The only licences now issued by Regulators are for High Risk Work. As part of Duty of Care requirements, employers and PCBU’s are required to ensure competency of the operator when plant is used, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Holding a previously accredited licence for this plant displays that the operator has undertaken training and been assessed to the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) standard. Even though this may have been the applicable standard at the time of issue of their licence, this standard has been superseded by the Industry Standards.

For this reason, an operator’s original licence or ‘ticket’ may not be enough to demonstrate competency to the current industry standard. This is the standard that is required by many employers around the country across a number of industries, including mining, construction and transport. A major part of this ‘skills gap’ usually includes a lack of knowledge about the current Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) regulations and how these are relevant to the work an operator performs in his/her job role. This can be readily remedied as part of the Your Licence VOC process.

How often does an operator need to verify competency?

It is recommended that workers undertake a VOC certification every 30 months, or 2.5 years, to ensure they are kept up to date with new industry regulations, workplace safety standards and any new technology or policies related to the industry and job role they work in at the time of assessment.

Can an operator work on site prior to completing VOC?

Yes. It is entirely reasonable and legally compliant to allow an operator to carry out their normal duties whilst undertaking VOC if the risk is assessed and an appropriate level of supervision is exercised. This is a standard industry practice during training and instruction, and is practiced across the country every day. Enrolment with an accredited Registered Training Organisation to complete VOC is formal evidence of the provision of information, instruction and training as required by regulations.

Regulators allow inexperienced persons to conduct high risk work under training on a work site as long as the risk of operation is assessed and the operator is supervised at the appropriate level. For example, workers who are experienced, ticketed, and undertaking VOC would obviously be at much lower risk than a trainee rigger or excavator operator. Whether an operator will be able to work in this manner will be dependent upon the policies and procedures on each specific site.

What are the varying levels of supervision? How are they worked out?

There are three levels of supervision normally applied to high risk work activity, whether on construction, mining or other sites. These are determined by the responsible persons onsite and must be based on risk that has been properly assessed. These levels of supervision are:

- Direct supervision
 - All operations take place in sight and earshot of a competent, qualified supervisor.
 - Usually applied to an operator who is assessed to have a minimum level of former experience or exposure to the plant or specific tasks.
 - Particularly important for those who demonstrate a lower level of ability and need intensive instruction.
- Periodic supervision
 - Operations which require the supervisor to make regular checks on safety and progress.
 - Supervisor is required to ensure the risks continue to be within pre-determined parameters.
 - Normally applied where the operator is experienced with the plant or specific tasks and demonstrates at least a good level of aptitude.
 - Requires that good communication systems are in place and that there is good accessibility to other licensed or qualified operators that the operator can seek advice from as needed.
- Minimal supervision
 - A lower level of supervision, requiring the supervisor to attend intermittently, to ensure that additional, greater or different risks have not surfaced due to environmental factors or unforeseen issues.
 - Requires the workplace to have good communication systems and good access to; licensed and qualified persons, a high level of instruction and training, and/or stable risk control measures in place to protect the operator.
 - Strong administrative controls would also be relevant in this case, such as exclusion zones for workers from mobile plant operations.

The level of supervision and instruction must be suitable and adequate at all times. The responsible person must assess the required level of supervision that is needed according to the nature of the work being performed and the risks present.

How long do operators have to complete their VOC assessment?

Your Licence allows 28 days from enrolment to complete the process, except in extenuating circumstances. This is in accordance with the timeframes allowed by some Regulators for completion of Construction Induction training and lodgment of an application to obtain a White Card or Licence. Once the 28-day time period has expired, an employee's enrolment will expire if the assessments have not been successfully completed. If the worker is still operating onsite after his/her enrolment has expired, the employer may be exposed in the event of an incident onsite.

Who can conduct VOC assessments?

VOC assessments should only be undertaken by trained, professional assessors, with an understanding of the requirements of the industry competency standards in the national training packages. Your Licence Pty Ltd works in conjunction with Registered Training Organisation partner, AITAC Pty Ltd. and our partnership brings together two teams of professional, qualified assessors who can undertake VOC.

We are currently the only organisation in Australia who is able to deliver VOC assessments online, saving you time, hassle and money. We also offer a range of free refresher courses that can be completed online and are self-paced learning presentations, to give operators the best chance of successfully completing their VOC assessments first time around.

What does RPL mean and why is it relevant?

RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) is a mandatory part of the duties of every RTO involved in the VET system. The current skills and knowledge of a person are required to be taken into account when determining competency against the National Industry Competency Standards.

How or where the skills were gained is not as important as the fact that they exist. Correspondingly, only an RTO can formally apply RPL findings against the national Industry Competency Standards.

An RTO is required to take the current skills and experience of an operator into account when conducting training and arranging assessment or VOC. This is usually done by sighting copies of previous qualifications, as well as references and testimonials from onsite supervisors.

Is the new licensing standard the same as the latest Industry Standard?

No. The Industry Standards detail what an operator is expected to be able to competently perform on the job. The Licensing standards are the entry point to industry, and the minimum requirement to be met for the Regulators to issue a Licence.

How is VOC conducted?

There are two ways to conduct VOC – the traditional way, and the Your Licence way!

1. Traditional VOC Process

VOC is conducted onsite on a face-to-face basis. An assessor conducts theory and practical assessments and makes a decision regarding competency based solely on that meeting.

This process requires that the operator turns up at a predetermined place and time and undertakes a theory and a practical assessment. If they are successful, they can go to work. If not, the operator will be required to undertake gap training and be reassessed. The current process is:

- Inconsistent, changing considerably from one site to the next.
- Not readily transportable across jurisdiction borders or between work sites.
- Extremely inefficient, as it requires face-to-face delivery which is fully dependent upon availability of suitable assessors on site.
- Very difficult for operators to prepare for, which results in poor outcomes.

2. Your Licence's unique blended approach.

Our Verification of Competency process is different. After spending many years training and assessing using these outdated methods, we recognised the need to make the process more efficient, relevant and consistent.

Following much research and development, Your Licence has created a unique approach to offering VOC using online technology, which complements the traditional face-to-face methods. Our process converts an expensive and inefficient drain on resources into an opportunity for businesses and individuals alike. We have done this by:

- Providing gap training to the latest industry standards, recognised across Australia.
- Using a mixture of online and face-to-face methods where required to create a 'blended' solution.
- Reducing down time, resulting in greater productivity.
- Recognising prior learning of each individual.
- Satisfying the legal requirements of EVERY regulator across Australia.

To address the gaps in workers knowledge from their initial licence or plant 'ticket' assessment to current industry standards, we have created a range of free online training courses. Each course focuses on the detail of the job role, current industry standards and WH&S regulations, giving every individual a chance to update skills and knowledge before undertaking a VOC assessment.

The benefit of this method is that each operator is assessed when they are ready for it, and have had the opportunity to undertake refresher training to update their knowledge. The assessments are not site- or time-specific or dependent upon the availability of an assessor, and can be undertaken immediately.

How can Your Licence deliver VOC's online?

After years of face-to-face training, we have developed a more streamlined and efficient process of delivering VOC training assessments.

Using the latest technology, our Online Learning System allows workers undertaking VOC to access training materials supplied in the VOC Pack wherever they can access the internet - making our online training delivery the most convenient and accessible way to deliver this type of training. As workers are able to access their Learners Guides whenever and wherever they like, and work through the theory at their own pace, our process gives them a much better chance of thoroughly preparing for their assessments. As the only online business in Australia currently able to do this, we are proud to be pioneering the way in the industry.

All of our nationally accredited training materials are mapped to the industry standard relevant units of competence and are backed and audited by our RTO training partner, AITAC (Reg. No. 3591).

Is an on-site VOC assessment more accurate than one conducted another way?

No. Both methods have different merits.

On site assessments are basically a 'snap shot' of your performance on that day, at that time. Your performance may be considerably different on another day in a different scenario. You could perform better or worse than normal under more stressful, exam-like conditions.

The Your Licence VOC process allows you to approach the assessments entirely differently. The RPL practical references and testimonials you gather will be related to your performance in the field over a considerable period of time. This is often a more accurate check of your long-term performance ability.

How do you ensure that the right person is actually completing the assessment?

We take the issue of fraud very seriously and have implemented stringent measures to ensure the accuracy of our assessments. We are happy to discuss and demonstrate these internationally accepted measures in detail to alleviate any concerns.

There are several checks carried out to ensure the validity of tickets and testimonials. These cannot be outlined here for obvious reasons, but we would be happy to discuss them with you over the phone on 1800 695 423.

What action is taken if an operator supplies unauthorised tickets, or arranges false references?

Fraud is a criminal offence and any attempts to obtain a fraudulent qualification or ticket incur stiff legal penalties. Any applicant engaging in unlawful behavior of this type will immediately be deregistered from our process, forfeiting any fees paid, and their employer and/or Regulator will be informed of this action.