



STAR RATING SCHEME

**GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS**

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## Table of Contents

1. About this guide	4
2. Eligibility	4
3. The Evaluation Process	5
3.1 Overview of the process	5
3.2 Steps in the evaluation process	5
3.2.1 Making application	5
3.2.2 Preparation and submission of self evaluation report	6
3.2.3 Appointment of evaluation team	6
3.2.4 Desk-top evaluation	6
3.2.5 Consensus meeting and planning for the site visit	7
3.2.6 Conduct of the site visit	7
3.2.7 Completion of the evaluation process	8
4. The Evaluation Criteria	8
5. Policies and Conditions	9
5.1 Fees	9
5.2 Confidentiality	9
5.3 Conflict of interest	9
5.4 Conditions of use of level of rating	9
5.5 Period of currency of rating	10
5.6 Feedback and complaints	10
5.7 Timeframes for evaluation and notification	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## 1. ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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This guide is one of a series of publications designed to provide information and guidelines for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and schools, faculties, teams and divisions within RTOs seeking to participate in The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence (The Institute) Star Rating Scheme (The Scheme). It sets out the requirements for making an application and participating in the evaluation process.

This Guide is to be used in conjunction with the following companion documents:

- ✚ *Information brochure* which provides a broad overview of The Star Rating Scheme
- ✚ *Application form* which is used to collect details about the RTO's application
- ✚ *Terms and Conditions* which RTOs need to confirm they meet when applying for The Scheme
- ✚ *Self-evaluation report template* which applicants need to complete as the first step in the evaluation process.

## 2. ELIGIBILITY

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The Star Rating Scheme is open to an RTO or a school, faculty, team or division within an RTO that delivers training within any of the eight industry areas which are the focus for The Institute. These are:

- Automotive
- Building & Construction
- Electrical
- Hospitality & Personal Services
- Manufacturing
- Metals & Engineering
- Mineral Resources
- Rural & Farming

Each of these industry areas is represented by an Industry Reference Group (IRG) which is responsible for carrying out evaluations under The Star Rating Scheme within its industry area. A list of qualifications and occupations under each industry area is provided on The Star Rating Scheme page of The Institute website at [http://www.itse.com.au/star\\_rating\\_scheme.html](http://www.itse.com.au/star_rating_scheme.html).

In order to be evaluated as a separate entity, the school, faculty, team or division of an RTO applying must have substantial authority within the RTO to manage its training and assessment processes and set strategic direction for those activities covered by the evaluation criteria.

If an RTO offers trade qualifications covered by more than one IRG and wishes to be evaluated for all qualifications, separate applications to each relevant IRG are required.

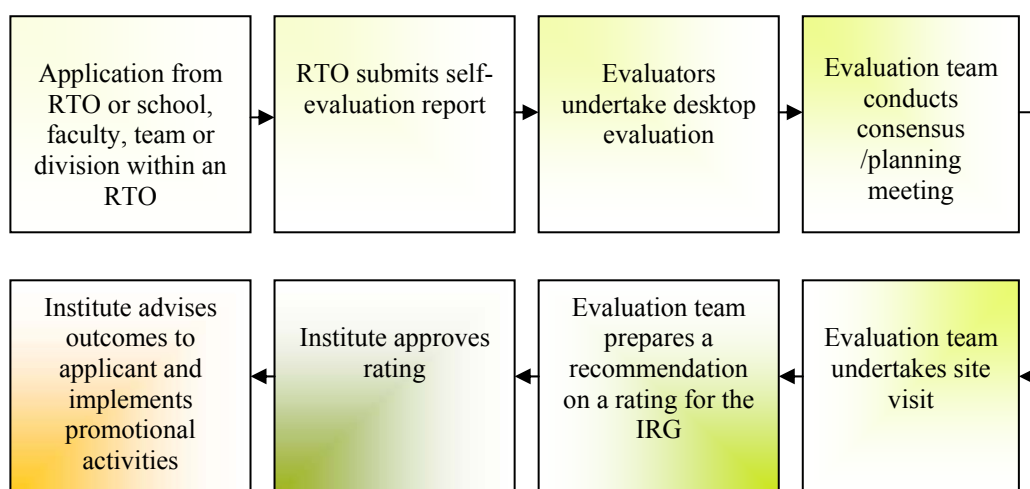
Where an RTO offers distinctly different trade qualifications that are covered by the same IRG (eg hairdressing and commercial cookery qualifications are both covered by the Hospitality and Personal Services IRG) separate applications must be submitted to the IRG.

### 3. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

#### 3.1 Overview of the process

Individual faculties, schools, teams and divisions within RTOs are evaluated by The Institute using accredited evaluators, industry experts and industry designed criteria. Those considered excellent are recognised with a One Gold Star, Two Gold Star or Three Gold Star Rating by The Institute. The Institute also publishes a capability statement for each RTO which explains the school or faculty's strengths and the level of service an employer can expect to receive.

An overview of the process is depicted in the following diagram:



#### 3.2 Steps in the evaluation process

##### 3.2.1 Making application

The first step involves the submission of the completed application form to The Institute. The form is provided on The Institute website at [http://www.itse.com.au/star\\_rating\\_scheme.html](http://www.itse.com.au/star_rating_scheme.html). It requires the applicant to provide information about the RTO that will be used to plan the evaluation. It also requires a declaration by the RTO confirming agreement with the Terms and Conditions that apply to all participants in The Scheme. The Terms and Conditions are also listed on The Institute's Star Rating Scheme webpage.

The applicant is required to identify a staff member who will be the key contact for The Institute and the evaluators throughout the course of the evaluation.

Information provided by the applicant will be checked for eligibility and completeness. The Institute will confirm that the evaluation can proceed and will forward the relevant documentation to the applicant.

### *3.2.2 Preparation and submission of self evaluation report*

The Institute will provide the applicant with a self-evaluation report template and ask the applicant to submit a completed report within an agreed time-frame.

The report format is designed to capture initial information on current performance against the evaluation criteria as the basis for the evaluation. It is important that the information in the report be kept brief and succinct as additional information will be requested before or during the site visit.

In completing the self evaluation report, the applicant should ensure that any claims made can be readily supported, as evidence will be requested during the evaluation process.

There are guidelines in the front of the self evaluation report template for further information about completing the self evaluation report. The Institute can also provide advice, if required.

### *3.2.3 Appointment of evaluation team*

The Institute will appoint members of the evaluation team. The team will comprise two or three evaluators and will include at least one member drawn from the national pool of accredited evaluators as well as an industry expert. One member of the team will be designated team leader for the conduct of the evaluation.

Each member of the evaluator team is required to declare any potential conflict of interest with the applicant.

The applicant will be advised of the names and affiliations of the team members and can raise any objections based on a potential conflict of interest at this point. A potential conflict of interest applies if any circumstances could be perceived to influence an evaluator's ability to serve effectively and impartially as a member of the evaluation team. The Institute will consider the grounds for any objection and advise the applicant of its decision.

### *3.2.4 Desk-top evaluation*

Each member of the evaluation team will receive a copy of the self-evaluation report submitted by the applicant.

Each member will consider the information contained in the report and identify additional information or clarification that may be sought during the course of the evaluation.

This information will provide the basis for developing an initial draft of a site visit schedule. This will be done at a consensus meeting of the evaluator team.

### *3.2.5 Consensus and planning meeting*

All members of the evaluation team participate in a meeting to consolidate their individual considerations and reach consensus on issues to be further pursued during the site visit.

The team will also prepare an initial draft of a site visit schedule, including possible timing, duration, locations to be visited and key personnel to be interviewed.

The team leader will discuss the draft schedule with the key contact and agreement will be reached on a final schedule. The RTO will be given at least a week's notice to prepare for the site visit.

In planning for the site visit, the key contact will need to ensure that:

- ✚ All relevant people within the school, faculty, team or division are made aware of the site visit, when it will occur, its purpose and what is expected of them
- ✚ Staff are informed that all information collected during the site visit will remain confidential to evaluators
- ✚ The evaluation team is informed of any site visit protocols including safety requirements, security issues and any dress standards and protocols if applicable
- ✚ Appropriate meeting and interview facilities are available
- ✚ All key people are available at the time of the visit
- ✚ A room or appropriate area is made available for use by the evaluators during the visit.

### *3.2.6 Conduct of the site visit*

The site visit is typically of one day duration and will be conducted in accordance with the agreed schedule. Additional time may be required if the visit includes multiple sites.

The primary purpose of the site visit is to allow the evaluators to seek out further evidence or clarification to verify the information provided by the applicant. This is achieved through a number of ways including scheduled interviews, informal discussions with staff, examination of documents, charts, correspondence and other data.

In preparing a schedule for the visit, some periods of time will be designated as "unscheduled". This is to allow evaluators to seek further clarification, to regroup and discuss the evidence sighted or obtain additional information as issues emerge during the course of the site visit.

The applicant should note that the conclusion of the site visit does not mark the end of the evaluation process. The evaluation team will need to consider its findings and prepare recommendations for the IRG to approve before forwarding to The Institute the final approval on the star rating to be awarded. The evaluation team is therefore not in a position to offer any comments on the likely outcome of the evaluation prior to leaving the site.

### 3.2.7 Completion of the evaluation process

After completing the site visit and considering all the information, the team will make a recommendation to the IRG who will advise on The Institute on whether no rating or a "One Gold Star", "Two Gold Stars" or "Three Gold Stars" rating should be awarded. The team will also prepare a feedback report and draft capability statement for applicants.

The feedback report prepared by the evaluation team will summarise the "strengths" of the applicant identified during the evaluation together with a summary of the "opportunities for improvement" which the applicant can consider in prioritising improvement plans. This document is provided to the applicant on a confidential basis.

A capability statement is a short, publicly available document that outlines the unique features of the applicant. The primary target audience of the capability statement is employers who will be able to access the statement to gain further information about the particular attributes of the RTO. A draft capability statement will be forwarded to the applicant who will be invited to identify any "errors of fact" that will be amended before a final statement is published.

All applicants are encouraged to have their capability statement published on The Institute web site as participation in The Scheme will be positively regarded as a demonstration of intent to strive for excellence. However, an applicant can elect not to have the star rating and capability statement published.

When a final decision has been made, The Institute will advise the RTO and forward:

- a feedback report
- a capability statement
- the rating to be awarded
- a marketing and communications guide that sets out conditions and mechanisms for the use of The Gold Star Rating awarded, as well as the package of promotional support to be provided by The Institute.

## 4. THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

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Each stage of the evaluation is conducted against a set of criteria. The criteria were developed through consultation with industry and reflect those attributes and performance measures that are considered important for employers to make a more informed choice in selecting a training provider.

The criteria are the same for all industry sectors and trades but each industry has provided industry-specific good practice examples to help give the criteria a more specific context.

The criteria are grouped under three broad categories. Within each category, there are specific *areas to address* and a list of *possible measures of success*. The full criteria are listed on the website and at the beginning of the self-evaluation report template. The three broad categories are:

- A focus on the needs of enterprises and learners
- Excellent trainers and assessors and contemporary resources
- Empowered enterprises and learners

In conducting an evaluation, two dimensions are considered for each *area to address*. They are:

- a) approach: how this is done or planned to be done in the organisation?
- b) deployment: how well and how extensively it is being implemented?

For each category, organisations and evaluators also need to consider measures of success. That is:

- c) results: what is being achieved?

The self evaluation report template is based on this convention.

## **5. POLICIES AND CONDITIONS**

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### **5.1 Fees**

Until The Institute has completed 150 evaluations, the fee per evaluation is \$3,000 plus annual licence fees of \$1000 in years 2 and 3.

An RTO that has an additional campus/site within the same industry area evaluated concurrently will pay only the annual licence fees of \$1000 – the upfront fee of \$3000 will be waived.

### **5.2 Confidentiality**

All information obtained during the course of an evaluation will remain confidential at all times. The feedback report will be classified as “confidential” and the RTO can determine the extent to which information contained in it will be made more widely available.

### **5.3 Conflict of interest**

Evaluators will be required to declare formally any matters that could influence or be perceived to influence their ability to serve effectively and impartially as a member of the evaluator panel.

The applicant will be advised of the names and affiliations of the team members and be invited to raise any objections based on potential conflict of interest at this point. The secretariat will consider the grounds for the objection and advise the applicant of its decision.

### **5.4 Conditions of use of rating**

The RTO is required to agree to a set of conditions to use The Star Rating Scheme seal. A marketing and communications guide will be forwarded to the recipients

along with electronic versions of the seal and capability statement. The guide will include conditions for use of The Gold Star Rating seal and capability statement.

The guide will also set out a list of marketing/promotional opportunities for recipients of a Gold Star Rating. These include:

- A media release
- A TV infomercial about the RTO, to be aired on SkillsOne Television
- Inclusion on a website honour roll
- An article on The Institute's digital web platform SkillsOne.com.au
- Announcement story on SkillsOne News
- Three Gold Star recipients will also receive an invitation to join an exclusive Circle of Excellence, providing access to professional development and networking opportunities.

### **5.5 Period of currency of rating**

All ratings awarded will remain current for a period of three years, but an RTO can elect to reapply after one year in which case participation in a re-evaluation process will be required.

Applicants awarded a Gold Star Rating through The Scheme are required to provide formal advice to The Institute if, during the rating period, there is any change of ownership of the RTO or a restructure that has changed the scope of activity or the operating boundaries to which the rating has been applied.

If there are any changes in circumstances during the three year period that give rise to a possible change in the rating or the scope of the rating, The Institute may initiate a validation of the rating. This will involve The Institute seeking updated information or evidence on a range of items related to the evaluation criteria. The Institute will review the information and determine and confirm any change to the level and scope of the rating.

### **5.6 Feedback and complaints**

Every applicant is invited and encouraged to provide feedback on the evaluation process by completing the applicant feedback survey provided at the end of the evaluation process. This feedback will provide valuable input to the continuous improvement of the process and the benefits of participation in The Scheme.

An applicant cannot appeal the outcome or level of the rating awarded but can elect not to have the rating and capability statement published. A complaint about any aspect of the evaluation process can be lodged with The Institute who will provide a response as soon as the complaint has been investigated through the complaints handling process. The details of the process can be found at [http://www.tradeskills.com.au/star\\_rating\\_scheme\\_02.html](http://www.tradeskills.com.au/star_rating_scheme_02.html)