

# Food processing qualifications review survey



## Summary

Skills Impact, on behalf of the [Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical Industry Reference Committee](#), surveyed trainers and assessors for a project reviewing the Certificates I, II and III in Food Processing and Certificates II and III in Food Processing (Sales). This report summarises the main findings.

## About the survey

- The survey was sent to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) only. It sought comments on the design of the food processing qualifications and asked about RTOs' arrangements for their delivery.
- To encourage a higher response rate, not all questions were compulsory (hence some participants did not answer all the questions).
- The survey was conducted online via SurveyMonkey and was forwarded to 82 RTOs. Of these, 26 organisations responded.
- The survey was not designed to gain statistically representative results but feedback *illustrative* of the issues, strengths and weaknesses many are encountering as they deliver the food processing qualifications.

## Key findings

- The greatest number of respondents' organisations deliver food processing qualifications in New South Wales, followed by Victoria.
- Certificate III in Food Processing is the most delivered qualification. The Certificates II and III in Food Processing (Sales) are offered by only one and two RTOs respectively, indicative of the low *Sales* enrolments shown by NCVER data.
- Training is offered both part-time and full-time in a range of contexts, the most common being as part of on-the-job learning, as a traineeship/apprenticeship and/or through classroom-based learning.
- Most training delivery addresses general food and beverage processing; however, sector-specific training is also delivered, with cheese/dairy processing, bakery product processing and grain/cereal/pasta processing among the common offerings.
- The main strengths identified in the food processing qualifications is their relevance to industry, as well as their flexibility in facilitating both broad and specific outcomes.
- Perceived weaknesses in the qualifications included sector-specific units not being available as elective options and generally that qualifications are structured inflexibly.
- Recommendations for the qualifications included requests for better alignment of units of competency with the AQF level and merging similar units of competency to alleviate duplication. Additional skill sets were also requested.
- To support RTOs' activities relating to changing and transitioning qualifications and units of competency, respondents requested more frequent notifications of changes and extended support resources.

Read the full report below.

# Introduction

## Purpose

Skills Impact, on behalf of the Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical Industry Reference Committee, surveyed trainers and assessors for a project reviewing the Certificates I, II and III in Food Processing and Certificates II and III in Food Processing (Sales) (hereafter “the food processing qualifications”, but not including Certificate IV in Food Processing). This report summarises the main findings.

The content and design of the food processing qualifications was last reviewed and updated in 2011-2012. Since then, many of the tasks and skills required of the food processing workforce have changed due to new food safety regulations, manufacturing processes and consumer demands.

The results of the survey, along with the priority skills identified by industry, will inform the understanding of the need to design new or updated training documents on training.gov.au.

## Survey design and sample

The survey is not intended to be statistically representative of all training organisations with food processing qualifications on scope, but *illustrative* of the issues many are encountering as they deliver them.

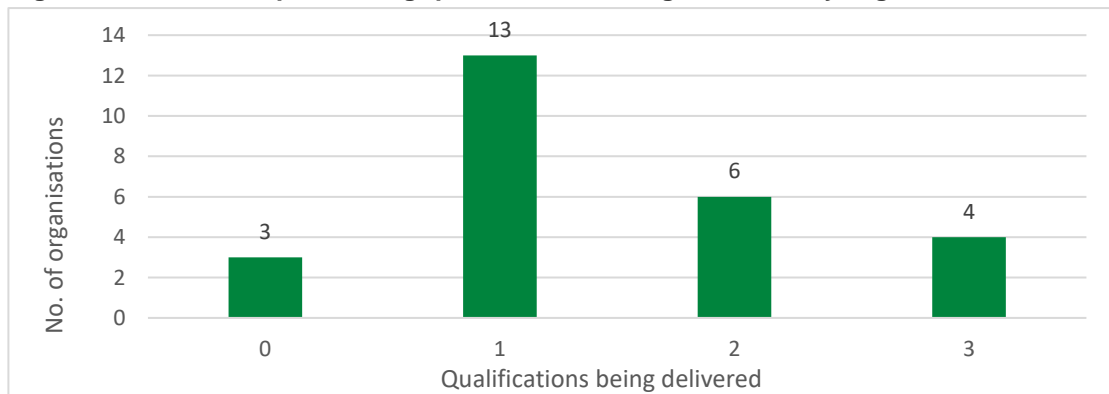
All responses included here are verbatim. There are some incomplete sentences, but these should be read as responding to the question or issue that is contextualised in the commentary above it.

## Profile of respondents

There were 29 respondents from 26 organisations (four respondents were from the same institution).

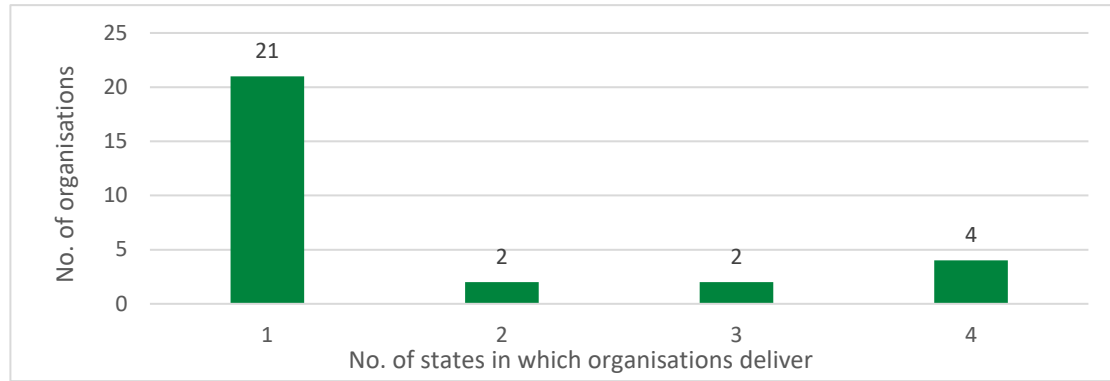
Half (13) of the 26 respondents’ organisations deliver one food processing qualification only. Three of the respondents’ organisations are not currently delivering a food processing qualification, but either have at least one on scope or have submitted a scope application.

**Figure 1: No. of food processing qualifications being delivered by organisations**



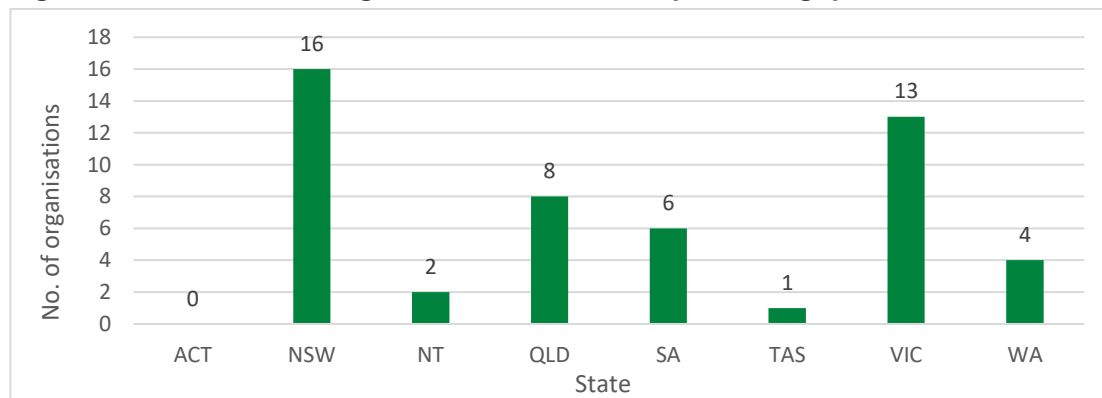
Most of the respondents’ organisations are delivering food processing qualifications in one state only, but four organisations are delivering in four states each.

**Figure 2: No. of states in which each organisation delivers food processing qualifications**



The greatest number of respondents' organisations deliver food processing qualifications in New South Wales, followed by Victoria.

**Figure 3: States in which organisations deliver food processing qualifications**



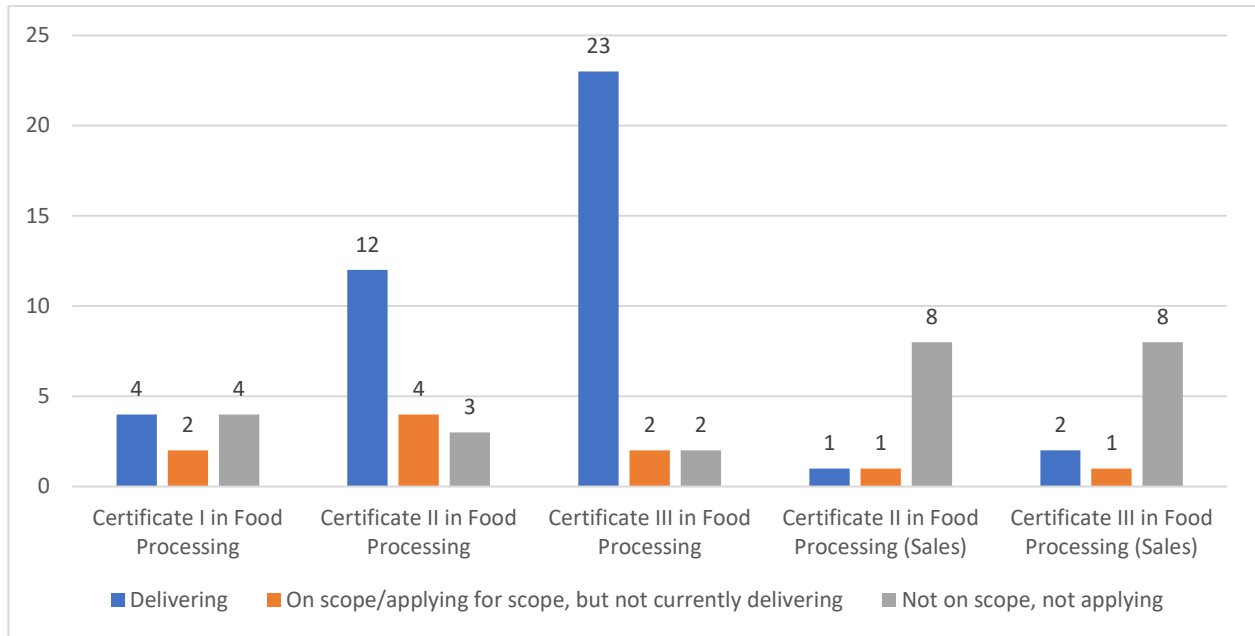
Some training organisations are expanding the scope of their operations while others' have contracted. One respondent, whose organisation delivers the Certificate III in Food Processing in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, commented that the qualification is "on scope to deliver Australia-wide – planning on expanding to other states". Conversely, another respondent, whose organisation currently delivers in New South Wales and Victoria, stated that "in the past we have delivered Certificate III in Food Processing in all states".

## Survey responses

### Qualifications being delivered

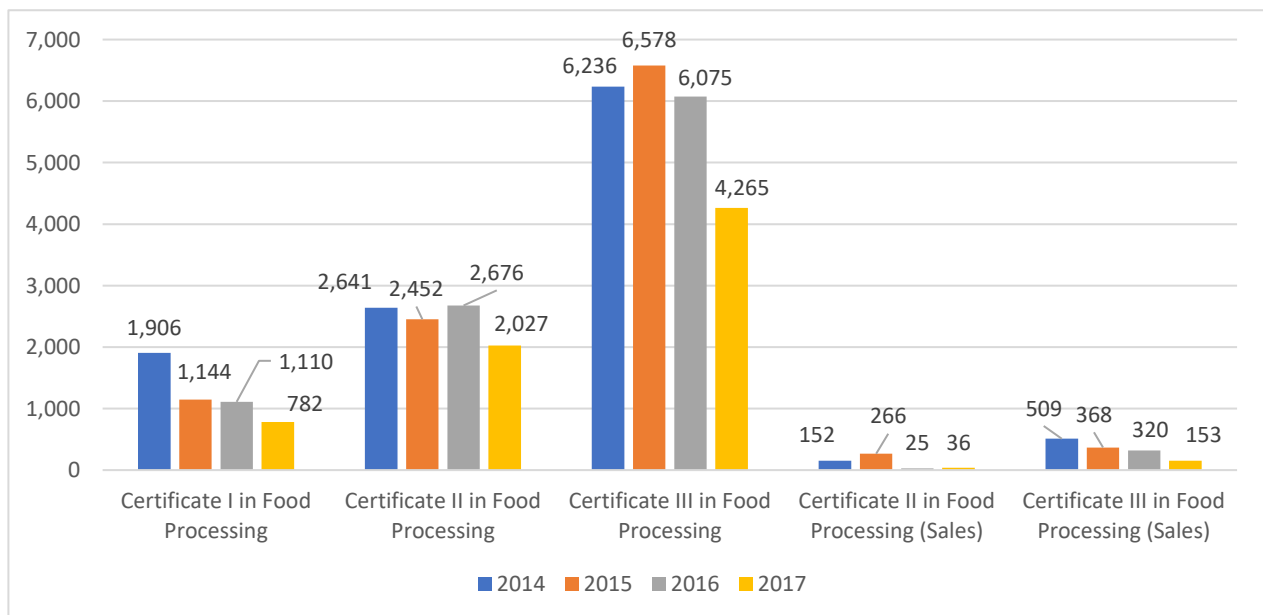
Certificate III in Food Processing is the most delivered qualification, with very few training organisations offering the *Sales* qualifications.

**Figure 4: Respondents' status regarding food processing qualifications**



One participant provided additional comments confirming that their organisation “just deleted Food Processing Sales, have not delivered for more than 12 months”. While the respondent does not detail whether this is due to thin training markets or for other reasons (for example, internal staffing availability), their comment is indicative of the trend of declining Sales enrolments shown in NCVER data (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Food Processing enrolments**



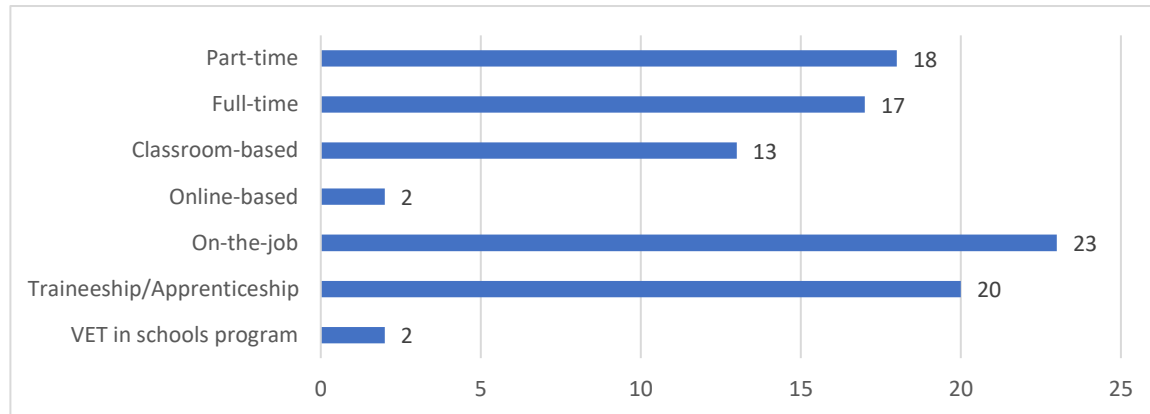
Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, TVA Program Enrolments 2014-2017

## How training is delivered

Respondents' organisations offer both full- and part-time participation in food processing qualifications (although that is not to say there are equal numbers of learners in each mode) to provide opportunities for diverse cohorts:

"Some of our learners are unemployed job seekers (Cert I students). Other learners are new employees to the industry (Cert II students). Our third cohort are existing workers upskilling (Cert III students)."

**Figure 6: How learners are undertaking training**



Learners can also engage through a variety of contexts. While there are few providers facilitating VET in Schools programs or online modes of learning, around 40 per cent offer classroom-based delivery (post-school), which has some advantages:

"Classroom delivery is best because students can brainstorm together scenarios in the workplace."

However, a greater proportion of providers facilitate training on-the-job (72 per cent) or through traineeships or apprenticeships (63 per cent).

Over half (52 per cent) of respondents' RTOs have arrangements with at least one external organisation – be it a manufacturer, training provider or union – for delivering food processing qualifications. This training is often recurring, delivered on-the-job and for more than one learner at a time:

"We currently have approx. 700 students within approx. 40 Food processing businesses. This program is majority "on the job" training and the majority of our employers employ less than 100 staff."

In addition to qualifications, training may be for specific micro-credentials, including legislative or regulatory certification requirements (e.g. HACCP):

"We have arrangements to deliver small skill sets/clusters of targeted units to meet the auditing requirements of industry"

There is a clear indication that arrangements for tailoring training to specific needs is mutually beneficial for the learner, industry partner and training organisation:

"Generic qualifications are no longer enough."

"We are implementing a moderation with our training and the "on the job mentor" to be developed further as we consider the "partnership" arrangement is what provide the best outcomes for all."

“With one of our big clients, our academic manager works and coordinates with the in-house training manager at the client premises to customise and direct the training.”

Tailoring not only takes account of specific workplace contexts and requirements but also a range of ability levels:

“We currently work with a number of facilities in designing and implementing targeted training regimes for their new entrants and existing team members. Organisations are currently accessing people with the foundations skills to commence in the industry in a number of fields, including production facilities and distribution facilities.”

Key to the efficacy of these arrangements is a collaborative approach:

“Our students are employed in the food processing industry and it is very important that the partnership between employer, RTO and student is effectively and regularly communicated between all stakeholders so that we can ensure success.”

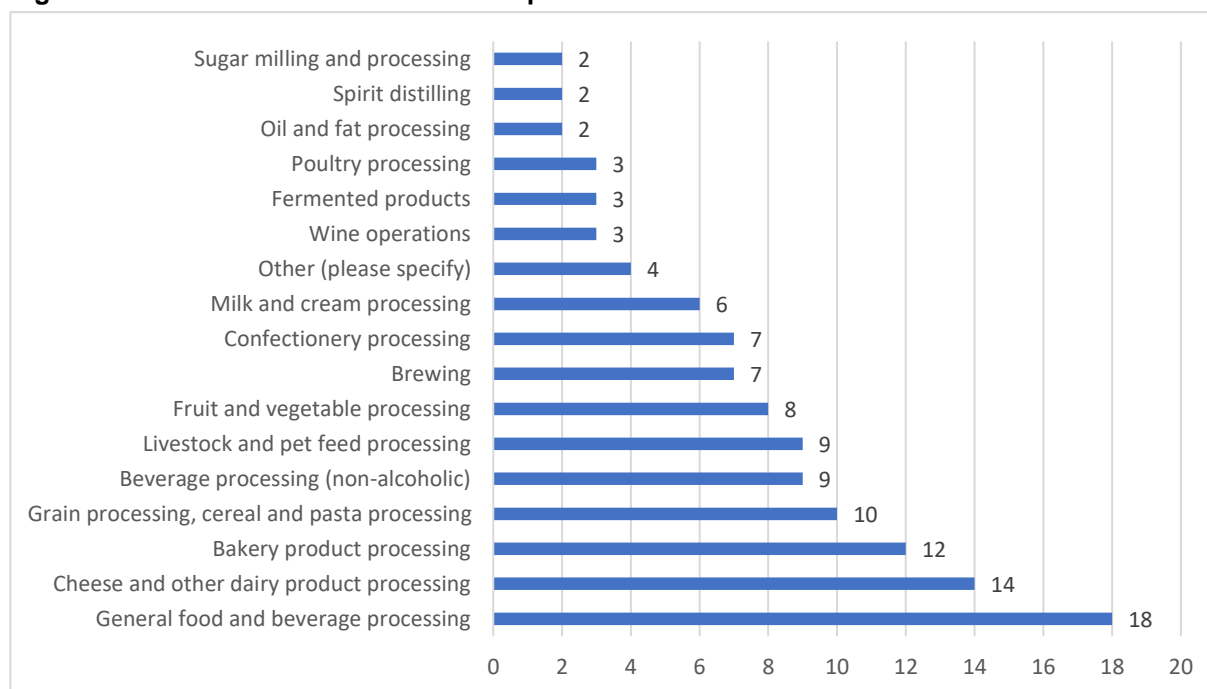
However, industry’s receptiveness to developing and maintaining partner arrangements with training organisations may be affected by various factors, such as the availability of funding, time constraints or their employee ‘profile’:

“We recently have [partnered with an organisation to deliver food processing qualifications], although that arrangement is now finished. We have found in Qld that there does not appear to be a huge amount of interest in the food qualifications....that may be due to the large casual workforce and those people not meeting Qld funding criteria. Another consideration is the "just-in-time" processing and businesses always struggling to fill working spaces.”

## Intended learner outcomes

Respondents’ training delivery is intended to facilitate occupational outcomes across a range of food and beverage processing sectors. Typically, RTOs ‘package’ specific elective units within a qualification to enable contextual learning and, sometimes, specialisation (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Intended sector of learner occupational outcome**



Some large providers have the resources and capability to align their training with the sector of their industry partner (and the geographical and technological contexts in which it is delivered):

“The main streams are micro-brewing, general food preparation for large facilities (jail/retirement village), flour processing, stockfeed & distillation”

Where training organisations do not have partnership arrangements, however, training tends to be more ‘general’ to allow for skills transferability.

### Food Processing qualification strengths

The main strength of the food processing qualifications, as highlighted by respondents, is their flexibility, allowing delivery to facilitate both broad and specific outcomes:

“It provides a great on-boarding into the industry for trainees. The qualification delivers a clear outcome for people wanting to work in the broad based sector.”

“Diversity to cover a number of industries. Cores are appropriate for pre-employment short course to support employment.”

“A diversity of specialisation streams.”

“Good mix of specialised units along with generalised electives such as problem solving and team work”

“[The qualifications incorporate] safety, food safety and manufacturing principles to ensure our students skill set is broad and transferable across Food Processing and Distribution organisations.”

“It provides a good all-round skill and knowledge base for the job role. Also good is the flexibility in the unit selection.”

Such strengths are enabled by the contextualisability of units for different modes of delivery and applications:

“Relevant, real, workplace based, assessed on the job in real situations with real amounts of product. Tailored to each individual area/worker”

Underpinning these perceived strengths of the food processing qualifications is their industry relevance, particularly as they include food safety certification:

“The qualifications are well regarded by industry due to their relevance”

“Meeting industry requirements.”

“Gives Industry a reference point”

“The quality systems approach works well in industry.”

“[Of value are] the food safety units, especially if you include Participate in a HACCP team in the suite of units”

“Food safety programs ie, HACCP and GMP”

### Food Processing qualification weaknesses

Respondents also provided feedback on perceived weaknesses of the food processing qualifications. Some consider that there are specific training gaps in the qualifications:

“Lack of "Operating" unit that was taken out of the last package.”

“Not a lot of units focus on the workplace documents, completing paperwork, process or checksheets in the workplace. Although some units include this to a certain extent, I feel we need a unit that covers the importance of completing work sheets accurately and properly”

“I would like to see a few of the operational units in Cert III as well as in Cert II. I would like to have higher skill level operational units introduced to the Cert III course.”

“units [should be included] for just nut processing and units for juice processing”

Others point to a dissatisfaction with the qualifications’ core or elective options:

“Not as flexible in the packaging rules to enable us to use more relevant units”

“The mandatory requirement for six Group B electives in Certificate III is too restrictive. A number of employers find it difficult to select six units that are suitable to their needs. The unit ‘MSMENV272 Participate in environmentally sustainable work practices’ should not be a core unit at the Certificate I level. Most students and employers find this compulsory unit to be irrelevant.”

Some respondents feel that the performance criteria or evidence are inappropriate for the designated AQF level or contexts of delivery:

“Quite often written at a higher level in content than the unit requires. The performance evidence has content that is problematic as it requires there to be product or situations that might not exist in the workplace such as out of specification product or hazards.”

“The performance criteria can be constructed a little better. Written more for on the job, not class room based”



RTOs also face challenges in working simultaneously with current and superseded versions of the same unit in different qualifications:

“Having two codes and working with different versions of the units is frustrating. The core FBP units have not been released for use under some funding programs or generally, yet they are already in the training.gov site.”

“A challenge having FDF units soon to be superseded and FBP units contained in new FBP qualifications.”

## Suggested improvements

There were a range of suggestions for design or structural changes to the food processing qualifications. Several of these were linked to the weaknesses identified above; for example, after asserting that the elective unit options are inflexible, a respondent suggested “less packaging rules for electives, dispense with limited choice from elective groups”. Similar comments regarding core/elective options and unit ‘writing’ included:

“I would like to have ‘Operate a process control interface’ in group B electives for Cert III, as this is a very important part of milling and packaging and I am finding that the participants need some training and information on the importance of the process settings and control.”

“I would like to see more "sales" related units in the group A section. At the moment there are a lot of "management units" rather than "Sales" and this is making it difficult to select relevant units. Group "B" is very limited in the selection of sector specialist units also.”

“Can be repetitive – particularly with process related units. [...] Remove the repetitive information around working with others, safety etc.”

“Focus on performance evidence, change a little, look at other options”

“The units of competency [should] be better articulated and written at the correct level.”

“Plain English language [is needed] - in line with Food and Baking Industry Language”

One respondent suggested reducing or merging units where there is perceived duplication:

“Combining units that are interrelated - e.g. FDFOP3003A and FDFOP3004A - or equivalent new units.”

On a broader level, potential industry-based partners do not always see the value in delivering full qualifications, often preferring less time-intensive micro-credentialing. Several participants therefore emphasised that they would value the opportunity to deliver new skill sets for the benefit of employers and entrant and upskilling workers:

“Clients are reluctant to deliver full qualifications, would prefer skill set training [...] enabling: Induction, Operator capabilities in production and packaging, Supervision”

“Ability to deliver introductory skill sets or subjects to jobseekers/new entrants to give a holistic view of the industry and its requirements.”

“We also need to be able to deliver skill sets to industry as they no longer require full certificates. We are being asked to develop shortcourse skillsets for particular units to be delivered to workers in different areas of production. This is due to the Food processing companies being audited by their customers to a unit level not a generic qualification.”

## Desired transition support resources

Any changes to the food processing qualifications that RTOs deliver can impact on their training and assessment of them. It can be especially challenging to transition to new qualifications if there are substantial changes to their content:

“The implementation of new training packages can be problematic if not updated more frequently”

Addressing what information or documents would help support them adjust to any changes, several respondents requested general openness and visibility, with regular communication:

“Constant open discussion”

“Being available for a chat is great”

“Notification of units been changed or updated”

“the current emails, etc., are fine.”

Several respondents indicated they would like to see extended support resources for implementation, or to participate in formal sessions, such as workshops. Skills Impact will be taking steps to assist with providing additional implementation advice by directing trainers towards currently available resources, such as Companion Volume Implementation Guides and User Guides and the [training.gov.au](http://training.gov.au) qualification/unit of competency comparison tool. In addition, Skills Impact will be publishing on their website a series of helpful tips, resources and links for RTOs updating their qualifications.