

# BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRAINING PROVIDERS

Creating relationships with training providers can help you with:

- Navigating VET and government funding opportunities
- Aligning training with your organisation's broader workforce strategy
- Accessing training that's adapted to your needs
- Having a say in the quality of training delivery and outcomes.

Building and sustaining a relationship over the long-term requires mutual commitment, trust and ongoing investment.

Good relationships with training providers can take different forms, as can be seen in the case studies in this guide.

All types of relationships can be valuable if you and the training provider agree on what 'success' looks like.

**Establishing the relationship >**

**Reviewing progress and success >**

**The benefits of quality two-way relationships >**

**When things go wrong >**



## ESTABLISHING THE RELATIONSHIP

When you find a training provider you want to work with, take time to agree on your expectations and training outcomes.

The [Checklist for establishing a relationship with a training provider](#) on p.60 can help you to work through the points below.

### Outcomes and details of training

Talk about what the training will achieve and how it will be delivered. Questions to ask include:

- What skills and knowledge will participants gain?
- Can we have a detailed timeline for training delivery and reporting?
- What costs and charges will we have to pay and when?

### Roles and responsibilities

Discuss the commitment you'll each make to the training, including your respective roles and responsibilities.

Clarify the commitment of the training provider and trainers, such as:

- How often will trainers visit employees or students in the workplace?
- What does the training provider/trainer expect of the employees or students and how will they communicate this to them?
- How often will the provider communicate with your employees? What method will they use?
- What support does the training provider/trainer give to employees or students who are struggling?

Identify your roles and responsibilities as the employer/manager, such as:

- How much time off will you give employees for training and study?
- What kinds of work experiences will you provide to support their training?
- How will you supervise and mentor employees in the workplace?
- Who will be the workplace supervisor, and do they need training to do this?
- How will you ensure employees understand what's expected of them for the training?
- What support will you give to help employees if needed?



## Communication and conflict resolution

You'll get the best training outcomes if you communicate regularly and effectively with the training provider.

***“Before training begins, we have discussions with RTOs about how we'll communicate and how often. I like to be able to discuss progress and any issues we're having. For example, we've had students on placement who we've identified will need more time for their training and we've discussed and negotiated that with the RTO. I've learnt that we need to invest in that relationship and that we can't rely on students to let us know when they're having issues.”***

***(Aged Care Service Provider)***

You could agree on some communication ground rules. For example:

- Establish how and how often you'll communicate. You might like to set up regular meeting times or agree that the training provider will send regular email updates on employee progress.
- Clarify what kinds of issues you'd like to be told about, and how.
- Set up clear communication channels and appoint a single point of contact for your organisation and the training provider.

***“Our main communication is the feedback on our students, and we have really good communication. We will get an email if they haven't turned up [for training] and haven't notified the RTO, or if they're lagging behind in any of their assessments, so that we can then support them as well. So it's a two way street.”***

***(Early childhood education and care provider)***

***“If employers are thinking that something's not working, or we're not doing something right, or they're not happy with something, or they are really impressed with something...whatever it is, keep those communication lines open.”***

***(Registered Training Organisation)***

Talk about how you'll resolve conflicts:

- Discuss potential risks and how they'll be managed.
- Explore factors that have hindered training in the past and how these can be avoided.
- Develop a clear process for resolving problems (e.g. parties will meet face to face, put issues in writing and focus on solutions).

***“There are always issues and challenges but we can usually work through them with open communication. One time an employer called us to say that an employee wasn't performing an aspect of their role safely. We visited on site to evaluate the situation and work out whether the student needed more training or whether there was a barrier to their learning. We brought the student back in to repeat training and they ended up excelling.”***

***(Registered Training Organisation)***

Remember that training providers need to comply with the Privacy Act 1988. Talk about their privacy policy and which information they've collected about your employees that they can and can't share with you.

## Formalising an agreement

You will find it helpful to have a formal agreement with the training provider, such as a memorandum of understanding. This gives a touchstone to come back to if things go wrong. It can also be helpful when there's a turnover of staff. Make sure you both sign the agreement and keep a copy on file.

You'll find a [Training Partnership Agreement](#) template on p.62.



## REVIEWING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

It's important to regularly review your relationships with training providers and assess whether they are meeting your needs and producing the intended outcomes for your organisation.

Aspects of training you might like to review include:

- skills and industry currency of the trainer
- quality of feedback given to learners
- quality and currency of resources
- efficient use of learning technologies (e.g. for online communication, simulated learning activities, or access to learning resources)
- the appropriateness of the qualification/skill set to the job role
- the amount of training given
- the level and adequacy of communication from the training provider
- the extent to which the training is meeting your organisation's business strategy and workforce development objectives.

Discuss with the training provider any changes in your business that may impact training.

Ask the training provider to keep you up to date with relevant changes to vocational education and training and funding opportunities.

***“It's really important to have evidence-based decisions around your engagement [with a training provider] beyond an informal opinion of someone. Relationships drive decisions sometimes, which might not be in the best interest of where the organisation needs to head.***

***I think there needs to be something more robust in place that helps you to make the decision around whether or not you'll engage with them. And I guess, just being really clear around what your strategy is as an organisation. And that should really be what's driving your decisions, in terms of engagement.”***

***(Aged care and disability service provider)***

## GETTING INVOLVED

Investing in your relationship with a training provider will give you opportunities to influence the training your current or future employees receive. The more you engage, the more influence you can have over training outcomes.

***“As the employer, you have the opportunity to work with the RTO to make sure the learning is best for your workplace. You have to care about the delivery of training and what it looks like. You have to get involved.”***

***(Disability service provider)***

Good training providers will be keen to hear your feedback on the training and assessment they provide. Your views on the coverage, effectiveness and relevance of training will help them to continually improve the quality of their training and assessment. They can then pass that feedback on to the bodies responsible for developing accredited training products and ensure that they are meeting the needs of industry.

You can also help to raise the profile of your industry sector and your organisation by taking up opportunities to speak to groups of students. Some employers have also found this a useful way to attract new staff.

***“We're in the process of trying to establish partnerships with some really reputable VET providers, so we can work on achieving those job ready employees, but also so that we can understand and have some input on that industry collaboration.***

***So for us, it's developing trust that the students get what our industry needs, and what our sector and essentially our clients are wanting, and helping to steer the sector a little bit.”***

***(Disability service provider)***



## WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

In any business relationship, there's a risk that things won't go as planned and there'll be some issues or disputes. If you have a healthy and professional working relationship and good communication practices, most issues can be quickly resolved.

*“...we're also very respectful and professional. So if there's an issue, we don't point fingers, we just look to resolve issues...we openly talk about it and then we talk collectively from both sides as to how we can resolve some things. We've had plenty of issues, but we've always, just through our professional relationship, been able to resolve them”*

*(Aged Care Service Provider)*

If you're facing a complex, serious or not easily resolved issue, the following steps may help you to work through it.

### Understand the issue and identify solutions

First make sure you clearly understand the problem. Talk to your employees and clarify any misunderstandings.

Refer to the agreement you made with the training provider about what each party would do and how disputes will be resolved.

The information given to your employees before they started training should also outline the training provider's complaints process.

When you're clear about the issue, follow the appropriate process.

Clearly articulate your understanding of the issue and any proposed solution/s. Give the training provider an opportunity to respond and listen to their perspective. Be prepared to negotiate, compromise and work through mutually beneficial solutions together.

Keep a written record of any discussions for future reference.

### Take further action if needed

If you can't resolve a dispute on your own, you might consider getting help from a training ombudsman or consumer protection agency and/or making a complaint to the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

Each state and territory has a **training ombudsman**. They review and resolve enquiries and complaints from anyone in the VET system, including students, RTOs, apprentices, trainees, employers, and other stakeholders. Their service is free, confidential, and independent. It includes:

- providing free and impartial advice about your rights and responsibilities
- reviewing issues and offering recommendations
- referring complaints to other relevant agencies if required
- mediating between parties to reach a mutually beneficial solution.

The **Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)** is the national regulator for vocational education and training and oversees the quality of training provided by RTOs. You can find further information about concerns relating to an RTO, or submit a complaint through the online portal called asqaconnect.

Note though that ASQA doesn't investigate and substantiate individual complaints received. Rather it will look at the provider's pattern of behaviour identified through complaints and use this information to inform decisions about if and when further regulatory scrutiny of a provider is required.

## WHEN A TRAINING PROVIDER CLOSES DOWN

A training provider may close down or cease to deliver a course for a variety of reasons.

There are established processes for supporting students of Registered Training Organisations in this situation. See <https://www.asqa.gov.au/students/provider-closures> for further information.

