

Accreditation

The discussion that follows is MVA's general advice and understanding of the issues with respect to accreditation in Australia. You should take into account your personal and workplace circumstances prior to acting on this advice.

The current mining regulations in some States in Australia (and elsewhere) have what are called "statutory" mine officials. These are basically certain specific job positions in the mine that must be filled by persons holding certain qualifications or experience.

For example, the position of "Ventilation officer" is a statutory position in some States in Australia. A mine in one of these states (including hardrock mines in Western Australia and NSW, and coal and uranium mines in all States) must have someone appointed as "Ventilation officer". There is no option about this; the mine must have a "VO" who must be approved by the local Mines Inspector. This person then has certain obligations set down in the mining regulations, and in many cases, also certain powers.

The required statutory qualifications (i.e. stating who could become a VO) were either set out in the legislation for that State, or specified by a Board of examiners (BOE) that was set up by the State to oversee who would receive statutory qualifications.

One problem with this system is that the "qualifications" for these statutory positions vary from state to state, so that if (say) a ventilation officer moved from a mine in one state to another state, he would have to be re-certified in the new State. This could be a simple process but in some cases was lengthy and expensive.

To reduce the complexity, cost and time of all this, the Australian states have agreed to do three things:

- Introduce "national" (common) competency standards. For example, the competency requirements for a ventilation officer in coal and hardrock mines has been determined and a "specification" written. This has been in place for about 10 years now.
- Introduce national (common) workplace health and safety (WH&S) legislation. This has just (January 2012) started for some states (e.g. Qld and NSW) although all states have said they are in the process of adopting the "core" national WH&S legislation
- Introduce a national Board of Examiners that will ensure that each of the States' individual Board of Examiners enforces the same requirements for statutory positions across the country.

The new national Code for mining sets up three *types* of competent persons (effectively, three *types* of statutory positions):

- Type 1 - "Safety critical positions which must be undertaken at a mine by holders of Board of Examiners (BOE)-Issued practicing certificates".
- Type 2 - "Safety critical positions which must be undertaken at a mine by holders of BOE-specified qualifications and competencies".
- Type 3 - "Identified safety positions which if required to be undertaken at a mine must be undertaken by a person with specified qualifications or competencies".

In coal mines, the VO will be a "Type 1" position, i.e. the individual will need a BOE approved competency AND be issued personally with, effectively, a "license to practise" certificate.

In (most if not all) hardrock mines, the VO will be a Type 2 position, i.e. the individual will need a BOE approved competency, but will not need to then apply further to the board for a certificate of appointment.

Hardrock:

MVA offers a 5-day Practical Mine Ventilation course in both "accredited" and "non-accredited" formats. The accreditation is formally granted by the Faculty of Mines and Energy at the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE (TQ). MVA prepares the course material, runs the course, and marks all the assessments.

The course itself is exactly the same in accredited and non-accredited versions, and the course notes and handouts are the same.

The only difference is that in the accredited course the student must complete 6 post-course practical assignments on site and a "workbook". These must be submitted and then "assessed" etc.

The "accredited" version is given the national designation: RIIUND601A. A student has 6 months to complete the assignments and workbook. The student will need access to a working hardrock or coal mine to complete these assignments.

RIIUND601A has been accepted in the past by Western Australian regulators as meeting the requirements to be appointed as statutory VO in WA. Some of the Inspectors in WA have done the RIIUND601A course themselves.

Therefore if a student is ever likely to be transferred to an Australian state that requires a “statutory” VO, it will be a significant advantage for them to have completed the accredited version of this course.

Even if this is not the case, it is still sensible for the mine manager to require the student to complete the accredited course, as this demonstrates that the student has been assessed against the national competency standards as being “fit” to hold this position. In effect, it is much easier to demonstrate the mine has met its “duty of care” if the student has been assessed, rather than just turning up to the course. This is true even if the mine is not located in Australia, as Australian standards (levels) of competency and Australian mine safety standards are usually required by Australian mining companies operating overseas, and even by non-Australian companies.

Coal:

The national competency RIIUND603A is the competency currently accepted by the Qld Board of Examiners as meeting the statutory requirements to be appointed as VO in Qld *Coal*. Through mutual recognition, it is also accepted in NSW *Coal*.

To obtain RIIUND603A, the student needs to first complete RIIUND601A (in common with hardrock) and then also complete four other (smaller) competencies: RIIMCU601A (spontaneous combustion), RIIMCU602A (gas management), RIIMCU603A (gas drainage), RIIMCU604A (gas outbursts). Once all five of these are completed, then the student can sit for a written, open-book exam (3 hours). TQ will then issue the “all-encompassing” RIIUND603A.

The four smaller competencies can all be easily completed via distance education (i.e. no face to face time required). However, each course requires assignments and a completed workbook, which requires the student to have access to a working coal mine (or past experience working in a coal mine) to complete.

General:

Note that the potential for *accreditation* only applies to the 5-day course. The other courses offered by MVA (Ventsim Visual™, Advanced Mine Ventilation, etc) are not offered in an accredited format as they are not required by the various Boards of Examiners. This does not mean that these courses are not important for a VO; just that they are not required to meet the ‘safety’ legislated standards for ventilation in a mine. For example, a knowledge of Ventsim Visual™ modelling is essential for ventilation planning, but not for day-to-day ventilation operations or safety standards.

Summary:

If you are planning to be a hardrock VO only in a jurisdiction that does not require the VO to be a statutory position, then it is sufficient to complete the 5-day course *without accreditation*.

If you plan to work in an Australian state that will be adopting the national WH&S legislation, then you should opt for the accredited course. This is true for both coal and hardrock.

If you want to be coal VO, then you can complete the main course now (RIIUND601A) and then complete the four smaller competencies also required. You can complete RIIUND601A whether you are working in a coal or hardrock mine, but you really should be working in a coal mine, or have access to a coal mine, to complete the four smaller coal-specific competencies.

This is the situation as at January 2012; however, as with all legislation, and in particular since not all states have finally signed off on the national WH&S laws (they have in principle, but not on the specifics), there may yet be changes in some states to this.

One final point: if you are working at a mine operating in Australia, the non-accredited course is GST payable whereas the accredited course is GST exempt. If you are working at a mine not in Australia, no GST is payable.

See also: <http://www.mvaust.com.au/pages/training.html>