

Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 2004-2010

shaping our future

Mapping the Future

A Forward Plan for Australian
Vocational Education and Training Statistics,
2004 to 2010

Preface

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) will be abolished on 30 June 2005 and its responsibilities transferred to the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). This document was developed by the National Training Statistics Committee, a committee of the ANTA Board. With the abolition of ANTA, the implementation of this plan will be shaped by governance arrangements for the collection and reporting of national VET statistics that will be established after 30 June 2005.



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Executive Summary

A five year forward plan, *Establishing an Integrated National VET Statistical Information Program 1998-2003*, was prepared and published by the National Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (NACVETS) in 1998. This document, prepared by the National Training Statistics Committee, the successor to NACVETS, builds on that earlier plan, taking the horizon to 2010 in line with the timeframe of the new national VET strategy, *Shaping our Future*.

It takes stock of where we are in 2004, re-assesses the objectives laid out in the earlier plan, and sets out priorities for change between now and 2010. In doing so, it takes account of the review of the earlier plan, an ABS-NCVER stocktake conducted in 2002, and the changing priorities of policy makers and practitioners as captured in the new national strategy and the associated implementation plan for key performance measures.

The three objectives of the national VET statistics program for 2004-10 are:

- provision of a comprehensive and high quality information base to support policy development, research and evaluation in VET
- to use that information base to underscore public accountability and measurement of the national VET system, including the key performance measures
- to maximise the opportunity for the information base to be analysed, by exploiting data linkages and making the data more widely available in a variety of formats.

The changes proposed for 2004-10 to meet these objectives are of three broad kinds.

The first is to extend the scope of the information base to all nationally recognised training activity. This is not just a matter of altering how wide the net is cast for data from VET providers, but is really a matter of changing the framework in how national VET statistics are presented.

The second is to take advantage of the opportunities afforded in having developed an integrated system to link across NCVER collections where the same individual features from one year to the next (e.g. continuing students) or in two different collections at the same time (e.g. apprentices and trainees doing off-the-job training). This ability to link data sets greatly extends the analytical power of the data holdings. Beyond this, the ideal is to establish a unique student identifier so that individuals can be tracked over time. There are various initiatives underway at State/Territory level to implement this within jurisdictions.

The final area is to widen access and use of national VET statistics. A number of specific initiatives are suggested here which have the potential to expand the pool of data users. The value in making the data more widely available to outside users is clear: it generates more use for the fixed cost of collecting the data, thus leveraging added value in analysis of VET data.

Any plan with a six year horizon is ambitious. The issues that are at the forefront of policy makers and practitioners minds now may wane and other, unanticipated, issues will emerge. Government priorities will change and with that comes the possibility of funding changes for statistical activities. It is only sensible, therefore, to allow the plan to be reviewed and, if necessary, varied. A mid-term assessment of progress against the plan will be undertaken and published in 2007.

Australia's vocational education and training statistics: state of play

Introduction

Official statistics are an indispensable element of modern civilised societies. They provide a foundation of agreed facts which enable informed discussion and decision-making to occur, and over time allow for change to be measured. Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector aspires to be world-class; a world-class statistical information foundation is a necessary supporting element if that aspiration is to be met.

Vocational education and training statistics have improved considerably in recent years. Much of this must be attributed to concerted efforts on the part of governments and statistical agencies to develop, plan and implement a national approach. In particular, a five year forward plan, *Establishing an Integrated National VET Statistical Information Program 1998-2003*, was prepared and published by the National Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (NACVETS) in 1998.

This document builds on that earlier plan, taking the horizon to 2010 in line with the timeframe of the new national VET strategy, *Shaping our Future*. It takes stock of where we are in 2004, re-assesses the objectives laid out in the earlier plan, and sets out priorities for change between now and 2010.

Broad structure of national VET statistics

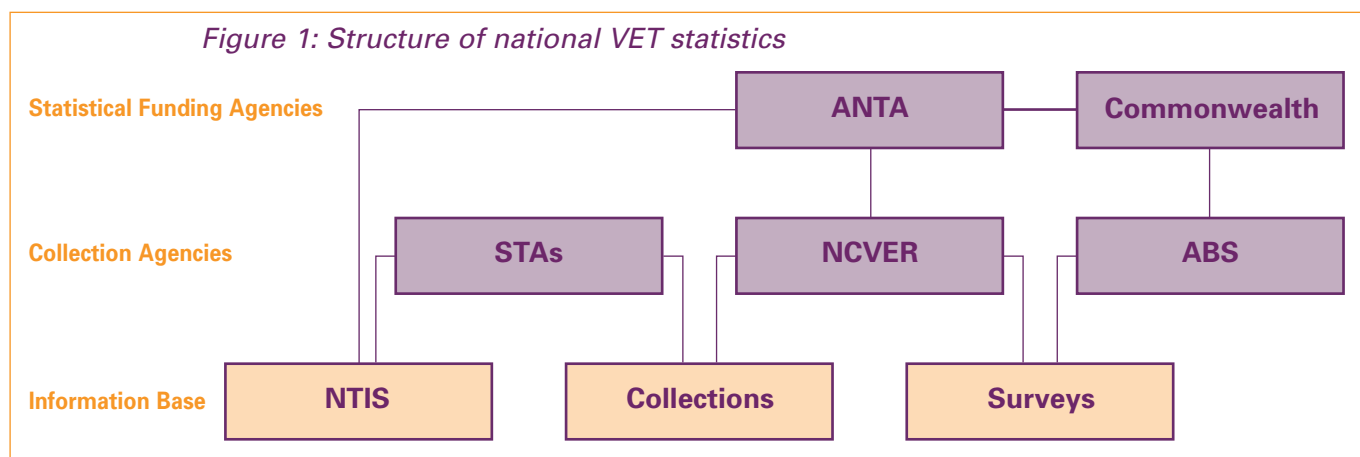
The main elements of Australian VET statistics are shown in Figure 1. This illustrates the agencies involved, the governance arrangements and the type of information collected.

From a bottom-up perspective, there are three different kinds of information from which statistics are drawn (with more detail on the individual collections and surveys provided in Table 1):

- the National Training Information Service (NTIS)
 - the official database of all training organisations in Australia that are registered under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and details of the training services that they provide
 - the official database of all training products (courses, qualifications and competency standards) that are endorsed by government and which are recognised nationally
 - the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) maintains the register.
- national VET collections
 - administrative information on training activity and finances compiled by state training authorities from internal sources, training providers and New Apprenticeship Centres
 - collections are managed in accordance with the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standards (AVETMISS)
 - NCVER is responsible for national reporting of information from the collections, under contract to ANTA.

Australia's vocational education and training statistics: state of play

Figure 1: Structure of national VET statistics



■ Represented on NTSC

- surveys
 - sample surveys of households, students and businesses on issues to do with (vocational) education and training that are managed and conducted by the NCVER (under contract to ANTA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
 - there are several regular surveys done under this heading, including an annual Student Outcomes Survey and Survey of Education and Work
 - from time to time, ad hoc surveys are also undertaken.

The national VET statistics program is overseen by the National Training Statistics Committee (NTSC), the successor to NACVETS. The committee is a sub-committee of the ANTA Board, and is chaired by an ANTA Chief Executive Officer, with representation from each of the state training authorities, ANTA, the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the ABS, and the NCVER Managing Director (on an *ex officio* basis). NCVER also serves as the secretariat to the committee. It is imagined that this committee structure will endure, although it may be appropriate to review it if, for example, private training providers become major contributors to the data collections.

Other education and training statistics

Vocational education and training is one of the three main educational sectors in Australia, the others being schools and higher education. There are a variety of cross-sectoral issues which consistently arise – for example, tracking student movement across sectors – that necessitate taking a wider perspective.

The ABS, Australia's national official statistical agency, plays an important leadership role here, through its National Centre for Education and Training Statistics. It has, for example, produced a *Dictionary of Standards for Education and Training Statistics* (Catalogue No. 4232.0) to ensure that, wherever possible, consistent and comparable data is collected across the three sectors. The Centre is advised by the Education and Training Statistics Advisory Group, a group of experts including educators, academics, State and Commonwealth policy makers, and union and employer groups. There is some cross-representation of membership between this group and the NTSC including, at present, the NCVER Managing Director.



Table 1 Outline of collections/surveys that make up current national VET statistics

Collection/Survey	What is it?	Frequency and scope
<i>NTIS</i>	A database of training organisations and training products that are endorsed by government and details of the training products/services that each training organisation provides.	Updated daily. Scope is all registered training organisations.
<i>NCVER</i> VET Provider Collection	Administrative collection of information on students, the courses they undertake and achievement. The information is sourced from student enrolment forms, training providers and state training authorities.	Annual, dates back to 1994 as a national collection. Scope of collection has progressively widened, and broadly covers the “public VET system”.
VET Finance Collection	Administrative collection of information on the finances of state training authorities.	Annual, accrual reporting dates back to 1997. The scope is the revenue and expenditure of the 8 state training authorities and ANTA.
New Apprenticeship Collection	Administrative collection of information on apprentices and trainees and their employers. The information is sourced from the Contract of Training form at the time of commencement, with updated information provided to state training authorities via New Apprenticeship Centres.	Quarterly, dates back to 1994 as a national collection. Scope is all apprentices and trainees with a Contract of Training.
Student Outcomes Survey	A self-completion survey of students who completed or part-completed a qualification in the preceding year, covering their views on the training they received and their current activity.	Annual, dates back to 1995. Varies in scale from large (Institute-level) to medium sample (State level) in alternate years. Has had frequent change in scope. Current scope is students who completed or part-completed a qualification in the public VET system.
Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System	A telephone survey of employers covering their satisfaction with aspects of the VET system, including satisfaction with the skills of recent VET graduates.	To be conducted in 2005, having previously been conducted in 2001 and before then on a biennial basis back to 1995. Has had frequent changes in scope. Current scope is all employers.
Indigenous Students Survey	A face-to-face survey of Indigenous students that extends some of the information sought in the Student Outcomes Survey, with a specific focus on Indigenous people and the benefits arising from training.	To be conducted for the first time in 2004. Scope is Indigenous students in the public VET system who undertook any training in 2003.

Australia's vocational education and training statistics: state of play

Table 1 Outline of collections/surveys that make up current national VET statistics (Cont'd)

Collection/Survey	What is it?	Frequency and scope
<i>ABS</i> Survey of Education and Work	A household survey conducted as a supplement to the May Labour Force Survey. Focus is on educational attainment, participation and transitions.	Annual. Scope is civilian population aged 15 or more.
Survey of Education and Training	A large household survey. Extensive information obtained on educational attainment, and participation in education and training courses over preceding year.	Quadrennial survey first conducted in 1989 and last conducted in 2001. Next survey to be conducted in 2005. Scope has widened to civilian population aged 15 and over.
Adult Literacy Survey	Household survey on aspects of literacy and numeracy, matched with objective assessments of same.	Last conducted in 1996. New survey planned for 2006. Scope in 1996 was civilian population aged 15 to 74.
Training Expenditure and Practices Survey	A business survey, sometimes covering training expenditure, sometimes covering training practices and sometimes covering both.	Irregular. Last conducted in 2002, with earlier separate surveys of expenditure (1990, 1993, 1996) and practices (1989, 1994, 1997). Scope is all employers.

Besides the surveys listed in Table 1, the ABS also runs a number of surveys (and the five-yearly Census) which capture information on education and training participation and attainment that is incidental to the main purpose of the survey. Examples of this include the General Social Survey and the Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey.

Other agencies involved in education and training statistics with a significant VET component are:

- the Australian Council for Education Research
 - manages, on behalf of DEST, the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth, which can be used for tracking the post-school activities of people who are, or who have had, some engagement with the formal VET system (e.g. school-based New Apprenticeships)
- the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Transition from School Taskforce
 - responsible for, *inter alia*, reporting on progress against the key performance measures agreed by Ministers for assessing VET-in-Schools programs.



Evaluating the 1998-2003 plan

The 1998-2003 plan was reviewed in 2003 by the NTSC. The review assessed progress against the plan in three areas, each discussed briefly below.

The AVETMIS Standards

In this area, the review pointed to the “marked improvement in the efficiency of collection processes, data quality and reporting” in relation to the VET Provider collection and the “substantially improved” quality and reporting of data from the New Apprenticeship Collection.

Some concerns were also noted. This included the lack of resolution in developing a standardised measure of activity because of no accepted metric by which to weight or value different modules and units of competence. The plan had also proposed to conduct a survey of private training providers to fill the major gap in national VET statistics of nationally recognised activity provided on a fee-for-service basis by these providers. A pilot test indicated that any data produced from a survey of this kind would be of questionable value because of anticipated low response rates and poor quality data. The ABS Survey of Education and Training was examined as a possible alternative source to meet this data gap, but analysis of estimates revealed issues of accuracy relating to respondent knowledge and the survey’s reference periods. This still remains a major gap in national VET statistics. It was also noted that issues remained about deriving an accurate measure of completion (and non-completion) rates for apprentices and trainees.

Survey development

The surveys program diverged significantly from the proposals outlined in the 1998 plan.

The Student Outcomes Survey, as it came to be named, shifted over time from a full Census of TAFE graduates who had completed 200 hours or more of training, to a sample survey of graduates and “module completers” (students who complete at least one module/unit of competency, but exited TAFE before completing a qualification) in the public VET system. The frequency and scale of the survey did not settle into a regular schedule. More problematically, the inclusion of non-TAFE students in the scope of the survey met with only limited success as, to date, the results have not been sufficiently statistically robust to publish.

An employer satisfaction survey was conducted in 1999 and 2001, building upon earlier surveys conducted in 1995 and 1997. The focus of this survey shifted from one of employer satisfaction with the skills of recent VET graduates to a more general assessment of employer perspectives on vocational education and training. In attempting to meet both of these aims, the survey left itself open to the criticism of not adequately meeting either. The 1998 plan also proposed to investigate the feasibility of developing a survey which integrated employer provision of training with the existing employer survey. As it transpired, they were kept separate with the ABS conducting on a fully-funded basis the 2001-2 Training Expenditure and Practices Survey.

Australia's vocational education and training statistics: state of play

A range of additional one-off surveys were also proposed. Some of the issues put forward as potential topics were investigated under funding from the National Research and Evaluation Committee, but none were done under the auspices of the statistics program.

Marketing and dissemination of VET information

Significant progress was made in this area by both NCVET and the ABS, but on an independent basis rather than the foreshadowed single “national VET information service provider”. All NCVET statistical publications are freely available to download via the Internet. Users with more specific data needs can make data requests, while a smaller, select group of stakeholders are provided with “data cubes” and confidentialised unit record files to enable them to conduct their own analyses. The ABS introduced similar initiatives across its full suite of statistics.

ABS-NCVER stocktake of national VET statistics

In 2002 the ABS developed a framework for systematically identifying data needs in education and training and assessing available data sources. The framework takes a matrix of elements (e.g. participants) and levels (e.g. organisational) and assesses, for each of the cells in the matrix, the importance of information in that area and how well it is served statistically.

Using this framework, NCVET and the ABS jointly undertook a review of national VET statistics. It concluded that, overall, the information needs of the VET system are “moderately well served”. It did, however, identify six gaps where there was a high policy interest in information but a paucity of data:

- VET activity delivered by private providers
- student pathways
- characteristics of the VET workforce
- VET-in-Schools
- characteristics of non-participants in VET
- longer-term outcomes of participating in VET.

Besides these information gaps, the review also raised two other issues which it said warranted attention. These were the high level of unknown responses for some fields in the VET Provider Collection which detracted from the collection’s usefulness, and the need to make better use of the data in analysis.



Re-assessing priorities

The two key objectives of the 1998-2003 plan were:

- underscoring accountability and measurement of the publicly funded VET system, including the key performance measures
- provision of a comprehensive information base to support policy development, research and evaluation in VET.

Five years on, it is only appropriate to ask whether these twin objectives remain salient.

It is clear that more emphasis has been given to the first than to the second objective. This partly explains, for example, the slow progress in monitoring privately funded VET activity. In theory, however, a well designed statistical program that had as its focus the second objective should also be capable of meeting all of the demands implied in the first objective.

Another area highlighted in both the evaluation of the 1998-2003 plan and the ABS-NCVER stocktake was some concerns about data quality, especially surrounding the VET Provider Collection and the New Apprenticeship Collection. The pursuit of quality should be incorporated into the objectives of the program.

A stated aim of the 1998-2003 plan was to establish an integrated approach to data collection. Now that aim has largely been realised, the next step is to take advantage of the opportunities for integration, in particular, to link across NCVER collections where the same individual features from one year to the next (e.g. continuing students) or in two different collections at the same time (e.g. apprentices and trainees doing off-the-job training). This ability to link data sets greatly extends the analytical power of the data holdings. More generally, extending accessibility of the data to a wider pool of users will add considerably to what can be made from it. It is a very effective means of leveraging value off the costs associated with data collection.

Bringing these strands together allows for a restatement of the objectives of the national VET statistics program. There are three:

- provision of a comprehensive and high quality information base to support policy development, research and evaluation in VET
- to use that information base to underscore public accountability and measurement of the national VET system, including the key performance measures
- to maximise the opportunity for the information base to be analysed, by exploiting data linkages and making the data more widely available in a variety of formats.

In developing proposals for change, account needs to be taken of the review of the earlier plan, the ABS-NCVER stocktake, and how to give effect to the third objective of the program. We must also take account of changing priorities, and other considerations, to ensure that the first and second objectives of the program can be met.

The next section discusses the changed environment which VET statistics are seeking to serve.

The context for change

The ANTA Ministerial Council endorsed in late 2003 a new national strategy for Australia's VET system, *Shaping our Future*. This strategy poses several challenges for the VET system's information base. These are:

- to get the right degree of fit between the elements of the existing information base and the four objectives of the strategy
- the need to broaden the scope of, in particular, NCVER collections and surveys to encompass all nationally recognised training, irrespective of whether it is publicly or privately funded
- implementation of the new key performance measures
- the utility of national VET statistics in providing an information base to monitor and evaluate the action plans associated with the national strategy.

National strategy objectives and adequacy of the existing information base

The degree of fit between the elements of the existing information base and the four objectives of the national strategy is, as outlined below, arguably quite good for objectives one and two but much less so for objectives three and four.

Objective one is that "industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy". The information base here is relatively rich, with both NCVER collections and surveys and ABS surveys all contributing information germane to this area – such as qualifications awarded, employer satisfaction, educational attainment and skill level of the workforce.

The second objective is that "employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training". Again, in this area, the information base is relatively rich, especially the two major "client" surveys that NCVER conducts of students and of employers, including an ability to segment the data to examine different groups of clients such as the designated equity groups.

The third objective is that "communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment". High quality regional data, particularly that which narrows down to individual communities, is very hard to come by. The ABS is only able to provide this through its five yearly Census; none of its education and training surveys is sufficiently large to present data for anything other than large areas. Within NCVER, there is a clear imperative to improve our capacity to present spatial data, particularly from the administrative collections. At present, information on the location of students, apprentices and trainees, and providers is limited to their postcode. Postcodes do not map easily on to standard ways of presenting spatial data, such as statistical local areas and local government areas. They also, outside capital cities, often cover very large areas.



Arrangements have been made with state training authorities to supplement postcode information with suburb information. On this basis, NCVET has been able to develop a cost-effective sampling strategy for the Indigenous Students Survey in 2004. NCVET also expects to begin publishing regional statistics on VET activity by applying population concordances to the suburb and postcode information.

In the longer-run, NCVET would hope to be able to take advantage of the significant improvements in geographic information systems. Coinciding with the 2006 Census, the ABS will introduce 'mesh blocks' as the nationally consistent basic building block for spatial data. Major government agencies have collaborated in developing a geo-coded national address file (G-NAF). This file, which is regularly updated, will be able to be used to routinely allocate addresses to mesh blocks.

The fourth and final objective is that "Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared". Data on Indigenous peoples' engagement with the VET system is limited to identifying the Indigenous status of students, and of apprentices and trainees. For about one in five students, Indigenous status is unknown. The ABS also encounters problems in administering the Census and other surveys with Indigenous people.

One specific initiative that the NTSC has taken, which pre-empted the national strategy, was to develop an Indigenous Students Survey. The Student Outcomes Survey captures Indigenous students through the random sampling process, but it is an instrument that does not resonate well with Indigenous people, nor does it allow Community Development Employment Program participation to be disentangled from other forms of employment. The survey, to be conducted for the first time in 2004, will help to remedy this.

Broadening the scope of the information base

As already noted, the one important area where a critical information gap remains is that the current scope of the VET Provider Collection (and, as a corollary, the Student Outcomes Survey) is limited to "public VET activity" – effectively training activity that is funded through state training authorities. Under the auspices of the NTSC, the NCVET has been conducting a project to investigate the feasibility of capturing all nationally recognised training, and has developed a strategy for doing so. This will endeavour to widen the scope to capture three areas where significant training activity is known to be occurring:

- training funded by other government departments that is not delivered by publicly owned institutions
- fee-for-service activity delivered by private registered training organisations (RTOs)
- training delivered by enterprise/industry RTOs to their own workforces, believed to be very substantial among major government departments/agencies (e.g. Centrelink) and large employers.

This is consistent with the focus of the new strategy which takes a whole of system perspective.

The context for change


Implementation of the key performance measures

Six key performance measures (KPMs) were included in the new strategy. These were agreed by Ministers subject to completion of an implementation plan. That plan has now been published as a companion piece to this document.

The implementation plan describes the purpose of each KPM and how it is to be reported (the “elements”). While the plan is largely a continuation of existing approaches, it does have several consequences for the existing information base.

The main issues, shown separately for each KPM, are:

- **KPM1** The level of student participation and achievement in VET
 - requires data on all nationally recognised training
 - developing a standardised measure of activity which takes into account the different “weights” of individual modules and units of competency
 - improved reporting of completed qualifications
 - improved identification of students in designated equity groups
 - improved reporting of the recognition of prior learning
- **KPM2** The level of student employment outcomes and benefits after training and their satisfaction with their training program
 - capturing student outcome data outside the TAFE sector
 - the absence of any information on students who leave training without any recorded achievement
 - meaningful segmentation of the student population to better align training outcomes with training objectives
- **KPM3** The level of employer adoption of, and satisfaction with, VET in meeting the skill needs of their workforce
 - requires a new survey instrument to be developed to align with the focus of the KPM, as the existing survey had a narrow focus on the skills of recent VET graduates, only one aspect of how employers meet their skill needs
- **KPM4** The extent to which Indigenous Australians engage with and achieve positive outcomes from VET
 - improved identification of Indigenous students
 - measuring the extent of Indigenous participation in the VET workforce when overall workforce data is unavailable
 - other issues, as per KPM1-3 where the same elements are used for reporting

- 
- **KPM5** The level of community awareness and engagement with VET to assist with economic and social development
 - this is a new measure, designed to assess progress against objective three in the strategy. Existing data sources, while having the potential to provide complementary information (e.g. profiles of regional and community training activity), are not able to be used for this measure. A new data collection, involving a survey of officials/representatives in local government areas, has been proposed to remedy this gap.
 - **KPM6** The efficiency of Australia's VET system
 - requires data on all nationally recognised training
 - developing a standardised measure of activity which takes into account the different "weights" of individual modules and units of competency
 - updated national cost relativities used to determine the course mix weightings for each State and Territory

It is accepted that not all of this information will be available each year and, in areas where change is required, will not be immediately available.

Supporting national priority actions

To give effect to the new national strategy, Ministers have endorsed a 2004-5 action plan which contains six priority areas. It is the assumption of this forward plan that the existing information base is adequate to meet the needs of those charged with implementing the action plan in this and future years and, where it is not, some provision will be made for gathering additional information.

Changes in education and training and the labour market

Besides meeting the changing priorities of policy makers and practitioners, statistics must also be able to adapt to changes in "real world" behaviour so that they continue to have meaning. Among the more important changes which have occurred since the 1998 plan are:

- very substantial growth in student numbers in the public VET system driven in part by the rapid take-up of New Apprenticeships and VET-in-Schools
- much greater complexity in government funding arrangements (e.g. User Choice funding, contestability arrangements, new specific purpose programs)
- growth in the private training market
- greater cross-sectoral blurring in delivery

The context for change

- ongoing structural change in the economy, with continuations of trends towards greater part-time working and increased job openings for professionals and associate professionals and a relative decline in openings for tradespersons
- greater appreciation of the consequences of the ageing population

The existing information base has adapted to each of these changes with varying degrees of success. There has been little difficulty counting additional students and apprentices and trainees, for example, but the growth in VET-in-Schools students combined with cross-sectoral delivery has proved very difficult to get an adequate handle on.

Some changes can be accommodated by simple changes in reporting. For example, the concept of a working age population of 15 to 64 years is likely to be called into question where mandatory retirement regulations are disappearing and there are calls for older workers to remain in the workforce. In this instance, so long as information is held about those aged 65 or more it is straightforward to adjust reports.

It is part of the ongoing work activity of NCVET and the ABS to make the necessary improvements to allow the information base to respond to these and future changes. In the case of NCVET the regular cycle of reviews of the AVETMIS Standards provide an opportunity for the National Training Statistics Committee (which authorises the standards) to take account of change. Similarly, the regular review cycle of classification standards by the ABS allows changes to be accommodated and, with appropriate concordances, a continuous time series to be developed. For example, 2006 will see the introduction of a revised occupational classification standard.

Advances in information technology

Although the original forward plan was formulated just six years ago, there have been significant advances in information technology in that time, particularly in take-up of web-based technologies and applications. As with changes noted above, it is expected that NCVET and the ABS will make the necessary continuous improvements to take full advantage of the new technology.

In the area of data dissemination, the ABS has led the way in making information available in a variety of electronic formats – including downloadable publications, time series spreadsheets, data cubes, and confidentialised unit record files. NCVET also allows its publications to be downloaded, but is otherwise more restrictive in providing ready access to data.

Changes in information technology are also likely to have an impact upon the way in which data is gathered. In 2003 the Student Outcomes Survey was able to be completed on-line, and 2.4% of students chose to do so, a proportion which is likely to grow over time. This kind of change is likely to lead to some savings in the costs of data collection. It might also be possible to move towards a system of on-line submission with data obtained from training providers, a system already in place in New Zealand.

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Program priorities



A workshop involving NCVER staff and representatives from ANTA, the ABS, the New South Wales and South Australian state training authorities and the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training at Monash University was held in Adelaide in October 2003. That workshop considered a series of background papers prepared by NCVER staff. The proposals that were developed at the workshop were used to produce a Stakeholder Discussion Paper. That paper was circulated for comment among members of the National Training Statistics Committee and other interested parties, including employer and employee peak bodies, other government departments and academic experts. The proposals were then further developed and refined by the National Training Statistics Committee.

The main focus of the proposals outlined below are to build on the existing collections in ways that enhances their value to policy makers and practitioners, and gives effect to the three objectives discussed in the opening section.

National Training Information Service

The NTIS is currently under redevelopment with completion of the project expected to be the end of 2004. Based on up to date technology, the new NTIS will have many enhanced features not available in the current NTIS. Of particular importance for data collection purposes will be an electronic format of the packaging rules which maps units of competency to qualifications. This should enable better reporting of completed qualifications.

NCVER Collections and Surveys

Twenty-three proposals are outlined below. These are numbered so as to assist with referencing when it comes to taking issues forward and reviewing progress, and grouped according to the specific collection or survey to which they relate.

A. Cross-collection issues

- A1. **Widen scope of collections** (except the Financial Collection) **to cover nationally recognised training activity delivered to students in Australia.** The proposed strategy for dealing with this is to call for voluntary submissions of data from private providers and enterprise RTOs. This approach has the support of peak bodies such as the Australian Council for Private Education and Training and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In the first instance, reports will be published on the characteristics of students and courses that lie outside the scope of public VET activity. In the longer run, NCVER will produce estimates of "total VET effort", and will examine arrangements whereby the scope of the Student Outcomes Survey can be widened to encompass students who have paid to study with a private provider.

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Program priorities

- A2. **Promote and support moves to introduce a unique student identifier.** This would enable the tracking of student pathways through matching collections over time and across sectors. Some States are beginning to introduce initiatives in this area, and NCVER will make use of this information as it becomes available. In the interim, it will continue to use and refine its method for matching, while preserving the confidentiality of student records.
- A3. **Matching across collections with common individuals.** This complements proposal A2 in seeking to make better use of information we hold about the same individual in two different collections or surveys. There are two instances where this can be used to good effect in analysis and reporting. First, with the most recent changes to AVETMISS, it is now possible to identify apprentices and trainees doing off-the-job training with a public VET provider, and to see how they differ in training undertaken from other students. Second, all students participating in the Student Outcomes Survey are sampled from the VET Provider Collection – by linking the two sources together the association between type and nature of the course undertaken can be observed.
- A4. **Improve information about training activity for regions and communities.** NCVER will make better use of information on the addresses of students, apprentices and trainees, employers and providers held by state training authorities. This will enable a much stronger regional focus to reporting in support of objective 3 in the national strategy. (See also G2).
- A5. **Resolve cross-sectoral issues to do with definition and collection.** Working with the ABS and other relevant agencies, such as MCEETYA Transition to School Taskforce, to ensure consistency wherever possible.

VET Provider Collection

Some of the changes proposed under this heading have implications for the AVETMIS Standard. These are to be progressed through NTSC in accordance with agreed schedule and procedure.

- B1. **Improve, over time, the quality of student enrolment information.** As noted above, the level of unknown responses for designated equity groups is unacceptably high, as, indeed, it is for other important fields. NCVER will advise on progress against this item through its annual data quality report. One option to be investigated further if the data does not improve is a nationally agreed and standard student enrolment form (akin to the way in which this data is gathered for the New Apprenticeship Collection).

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- B2. **Develop an agreed standardised measure of activity.** This is needed because of increasing dissonance in growth measures based on hours and on student numbers. The national project to develop agreed nominal hours for training packages is several years off implementation. In the meantime, NCVET proposes to develop and publish an exploratory statistical series of VET activity over time based on statistical measures.
 - B3. **Improve information about student achievement, including qualifications completed.** This will improve reporting for KPM1 as current procedures for recording student achievement are known to undercount completed qualifications.

VET Finance Collection

- C1. **Obtain information on expenditure by government on nationally recognised training that lies outside ANTA agreement.** This is to be pursued with the relevant government departments and agencies in the context of widening the scope of the data collections.
- C2. **Separately identify user-choice funding.** The complexity of funding arrangements has highlighted the need to be able to distinguish between training provider and training funder.

New Apprenticeships Collection

- D1. **Restructure the collection on an individual, rather than a contract, basis.** Policy makers are more interested in individuals (clients) than they are in contracts. The current structure is an impediment to tracking individual outcomes over time.
- D2. **Obtain outcome data for apprentices and trainees.** NCVET intends to investigate whether inclusion of the New Apprenticeship identifier in the VET Provider Collection can form the basis of a new sample design for the Student Outcomes Survey that would enable separate outcome reporting for this group.
- D3. **Identify apprentices and trainees doing wholly on-the-job training.** This is to be explored in the context of the next review of the AVETMIS Standard for New Apprenticeships.

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Program priorities

Student Outcomes Survey


- E1. **Reduce the core content of the questionnaire**, with flexibility to add additional question blocks (modules) on an as-needs basis from one year to the next. This proposal has been partially initiated in 2004, with a significantly reduced questionnaire. An annual questionnaire review cycle will be instituted to allow for modules to be tested and incorporated.
- E2. **Establish robust data collection procedures for the administration of the survey outside the TAFE sector**. To date there has been no publication of results from students outside TAFE because of poor yield rates, the main contributing factor to which is inadequate address records. NCVER will work with state training authorities and non-TAFE training providers to bring about improvements in this area.
- E3. **Examine the scope of the survey** (c.f. proposal D2). A proposal on this issue will be brought forward to the NTSC in the first part of the life of this plan. It will examine the arguments for and against widening the scope to one or more of the following: (i) apprentices and trainees doing wholly on-the-job training; (ii) students undertaking fee-for-service activity with private providers; and (iii) students leaving with no recorded achievement.

Employer Survey

- F1. **Fundamental re-design of survey**. As per the discussion in the previous section, the survey needs to be recast. This is underway for the survey to be conducted in the first quarter of 2005. It is anticipated that most of the changes made for 2005 will endure for subsequent surveys in 2007 and 2010 to enable a judgement of progress against the key performance measure to be made.

Other Surveys

- G1. **Survey of Indigenous Students**. In 2004, NCVER is undertaking a face-to-face survey of 1,000 Indigenous people who were students in 2003 to better understand their reasons for studying, the factors that enabled or hindered course completion, and the individual and community benefits that arise. The work done in developing the survey suggests the data is likely to be of a high standard, and will assist in reporting against KPM4 where it will constitute a benchmark. There may be interest in repeating the survey to measure change over time at some stage in the life of the national strategy.

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- G2. **Survey of Local Government Authorities.** The NTSC has decided that a survey of officials/representatives in local government authorities is the best means of monitoring progress against KPM5. A pilot is to be conducted in 2005, drawing on research work undertaken in Victoria commissioned under the National VET Research and Evaluation program. Subject to the findings of that pilot, a full-scale national survey will be conducted in 2006 and could be repeated in 2009.

Dissemination issues

Several of the changes discussed below require an examination of the current protocols for preserving the privacy and confidentiality of information held about individuals and organisations, and arrangements for making data publicly available. The NTSC has already begun to examine this issue and has agreed to amend the protocols in a way which facilitates greater access to the data while upholding other requirements.

- H1. **Improve data documentation** to promote greater transparency and use of data in secondary analysis. Data inputs (AVETMISS) at present are much better documented than data outputs. Improving the documentation will widen the pool of analysts who can make use of the data and also lead to more robust analysis.
- H2. **Make confidentialised unit record files available** to external users where the NTSC is satisfied that they have a research interest in information at this level, and the data would be securely protected. External users would also be required to sign an undertaking to preserve the confidentiality of the records.
- H3. **Introduce a web-based service to produce customised tables.** This service will be branded under the name VOCSTATS. The first stage in the roll-out of this will be to make datacubes available via the NCVET web site which are able to be queried using free reader software. The second stage will be to allow on-line querying of the various data bases to produce customised tables in a user friendly format.
- H4. **Provide better information to employers, students and providers.** Where relevant, data should be made available to those participating in the system, in support of moves towards a more client-centered system, objective two of the national strategy. An example would be provision of outcome data to prospective students, through a service such as myfuture.edu.au

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Program priorities

Cooperation with state training authorities

Several of the 23 proposals outlined above will require maintenance of the good working relations enjoyed between NCVET and the state training authorities. In particular, seven proposals would all require work to be jointly progressed if they are to be realised:

- widen scope of collections (A1)
- move towards a unique student identifier (A2)
- improve the quality of enrolment data (B1)
- improve the quality of student achievement data (B3)
- capture information on user-choice funding (C2)
- identify apprentices and trainees doing wholly on-the-job training (D3)
- improve the quality of Student Outcome Survey data outside the TAFE sector (E2)

In some of these areas, it is a matter of greater vigilance and contract enforcement to realise gains in data quality over time. In others, such as the move towards a unique student identifier, it is the state training authority that will be taking the lead.

ABS education and training statistics

The ABS publishes a forward collection program that shows planned collections for the next three years. This is revised annually and can be found on the ABS web site. Presently in the core program are the annual Survey of Education and Work and the four-yearly Survey of Education and Training. Two surveys not in the core program are the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey and the Training Expenditure and Practices Survey. Their conduct is dependent on relative user priorities and available funding.

Survey of Education and Work

The next survey in this series will be conducted in May 2005, and is expected to continue each May thereafter over the life of this plan.



Survey of Education and Training

The next survey in this series will be conducted in 2005. Data item specifications have been prepared and a number of changes to the 2001 questionnaire are being considered which will be subject to cognitive and field testing – however, major changes are not anticipated. Changes that are planned include an expansion in age scope to 15 to 74 years for all data items, and over 74 years for a limited set of data items, and a household income module. Based on the past cycle, it is likely that this survey will also be conducted in 2009.

Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey

This survey is to be conducted in 2006 as part of the international round of adult literacy surveys being coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Enumeration would be in the second half of 2006, ten years since the 1996 Survey of Aspects of Literacy. Initial results are expected to be available in mid 2007.

Training Expenditure and Practices Survey

There are no plans to repeat this survey in the foreseeable future.

National Centre for Education and Training Statistics

Measuring Learning in Australia: Plan to improve the quality, coverage and use of education and training statistics is the key document which reflects the Centre's coordination and leadership role. The plan, available via the ABS web site, describes the priorities for information development in education and training statistics, some cross-cutting, some sector-specific or collection-specific. An important characteristic of the plan is that it is a joint agreement between stakeholders regarding priorities for statistical work in the education and training fields.

Major projects for the Centre over the next two years include:

- revising the Dictionary of Standards for Education and Training Statistics
- evaluating the education and training components of ABS surveys and other surveys
- investigating the possibility of capturing employer expenditure on training from other ABS surveys, such as the Economic Activity Survey
- producing estimates of full-time equivalent student load across the three main education sectors
- developing a skills and qualifications profile of the Australian population.

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Program priorities


Schedule of information collection

The following table shows, for completeness and in summary form, the anticipated schedule of collections and surveys that make up the national VET statistics program over the lifetime of this plan.

Table 2: Data collection and survey schedule, 2004-2010

Collection/Survey	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
NCVER							
VET Provider Collection	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
New Apprenticeship Collection	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Finance Collection	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Student Outcomes Survey							
- Institute level		■		■		■	
- State/Territory level	■		■		■		■
Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System	■			■			■
Indigenous Students Survey	■				■		
Survey of Local Government Authorities			■			■	
ABS							
Survey of Education and Work	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Survey of Education and Training		■				■	
Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey			■				
Training Expenditure and Practices Survey	no survey planned						

Notes: ■ assumes that current collection/survey cycle retained
 ■ possible sequencing of second round survey



For the NCVER collections and surveys the schedule assumes that the resources will be made available to maintain the program in accordance with the current cycle, but with no decisions made on a second Indigenous Students Survey and the Survey of Local Government Authorities. It is also assumed that the revised approach to the Student Outcomes Survey of alternating large (Institute-level) and medium (State/Territory level) samples from one year to the next will continue.

For the ABS surveys, as noted above, no definite commitments can be shown for 2008-2010. It would be reasonable to expect, however, that the schedule shown in the table is likely.

Resource issues

At present, there is no single over-arching assessment of the costs involved in the collection, analysis and reporting of national vocational education and training statistics. The three hubs – the NTIS, the NCVER collections and surveys, and the ABS surveys – are managed and financed independently of one another.

The National Training Statistics Committee has oversight of the Statistical Services Contract between ANTA and NCVER, and receives regular reports on the NTIS and the activities of the ABS's National Centre for Education and Training Statistics.

Over the life of the current Statistical Services Contract (2003-2005), NCVER has been able to realise significant cost savings in the administration of the Student Outcomes Survey. These savings have been used to meet the additional outlay costs associated with the Indigenous Students Survey. Over a three to four year period, therefore, the outlays associated with the current survey program should remain about the same in real terms on the assumption that the Indigenous Students Survey was to be repeated. The one new survey proposed is that of local government authorities. Costs for that are yet to be determined.

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Program priorities

On the collections side of NCVER's statistical work, the two areas where there are likely to be additional resources required are:

- **widening the scope of the collection to all nationally recognised training (A1).**
There will be some set-up and ongoing resource implications which can be offset, in part, by more efficient collection arrangements. Resource implications for state training authorities will be relatively small if the existing infrastructure and arrangements for collecting publicly-funded VET activity are to be used or where data is submitted directly to NCVER
- **the costs involved in establishing VOCSTATS (H3).** There will be one-off set-up costs involved, but recurrent costs are likely to be low and absorbed within the ongoing information technology maintenance program.

Reviewing the plan

Any plan with a six year horizon is ambitious. The issues that are at the forefront of policy makers and practitioners minds now may wane and other, unanticipated, issues will emerge. Government priorities will change and with that comes the possibility of funding changes for statistical activities. The assumption of steady state funding, plus some extra to cover the new initiatives, has not yet been tested. It is only sensible, therefore, to allow the plan to be reviewed and, if necessary, varied. A mid-term assessment of progress against the plan will be undertaken and published in 2007.

As part of its regular reporting requirements to the National Training Statistics Committee, the NCVER will produce an annual report outlining progress against the 23 proposals detailed above.

The ABS's National Centre for Education and Training Statistics plan (*Measuring Learning in Australia*) is a dynamic document that will be updated to reflect changes in policy and program priorities. The "Action items" in the "Chart of Priorities" will be reviewed annually and the Plan itself will be reviewed three yearly.



