

## At a glance



### Highlights

- From fragmented beginnings ten years ago, Australia now has a high-quality vocational education and training (VET) statistics collection and research and evaluation program.
- With financial support from all Australian VET ministers, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) now collects and analyses a wide range of data and information on the Australian VET system and houses the VOCED international VET research database. VOCED indexes and abstracts all research published in English worldwide relevant to vocational education and training and is a major resource for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in the Australian VET sector.
- NCVER consults widely throughout the VET system to ensure the quality and accuracy of its statistics collection and analysis and also to ensure that the national research and evaluation program meets the needs of all of the key groups in the sector.
- Effective communication of information is critical to the uptake of statistical analysis and research. NCVER has pioneered a number of innovative methods for communication, including the production of short, synthesis publications, customising the website to the needs of users, as well as face-to-face briefing groups and public research forums.
- NCVER has learnt that the full impact of VET information can only be realised by linking the production of research and statistics to the needs of users as they arise—a 'just-in-time' approach, one which feeds relevant information directly into policy and practice development processes.
- The future is for a VET information service that combines high-quality statistical analysis with rigorous research closely tailored to the needs of clients in the VET system and delivered in customised and innovative ways. In this way the VET sector will be able to build its capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate the success of its programs.

## What works?

Ten years of experience developing a more effective national approach to information in the VET sector have produced a number of valuable lessons for NCVET on how to conduct research and statistical analysis and ensure that they have an impact in the sector.

### Fitting research to the policy cycle

The impact of research and statistical analysis is significantly amplified when the production of information matches the policy timeframe. Some examples of recent work which have had clear, positive impacts on the sector are given later in this publication.

### Clustering

Research and statistical analysis operate most effectively when work is clustered around important themes. A number of these clusters of work which aim to illuminate key aspects of the national strategy for VET (*A bridge to the future*), is illustrated in the 'Researching VET' section of this publication.

### Combining methodologies

Research which uses both quantitative and qualitative methods is synthesised, producing information which is more readily accessible to those in the VET system. Information provided in this way is more effectively used. Combining the results of a number of different projects, each addressing different aspects of an issue, together with rigorous statistical analysis can produce a far more 'grounded' picture than a single piece of work.

### Outward-looking

VET research is often inwardly focussed. Research has more influence if it is forward-looking and global in perspective, thus allowing users to consider the future rather than consider the past.

### Active communication

Communicating the findings of the research and evaluation and statistics programs to the full range of users of this information is critical if the research program is to be seen as relevant and useful to policy-makers and practitioners. While this may seem an obvious observation, few research agencies have seriously addressed the issue of how to make their constituents aware that information potentially useful to them is available.

## The next step

The forging of more direct connections between research and statistical analysis with both policy-making and practice represents the way forward for VET in Australia.

In order for research and statistical information to make a difference it has to be used. Research agencies, such as NCVET, need to become information 'brokers' to work in partnership with the key groups in the sector, meeting their information needs while maintaining independence and integrity.

Communicating information is a key service that NCVET now offers the VET sector.

## Communicating with the VET sector

In recent years, NCVET has developed a suite of communication techniques that have greatly enhanced the take-up of research and statistics by those in the sector—both policy-makers and practitioners.

### Synthesis publications

These are short, sharp summaries of major statistical reports and bodies of research on key topics produced in an easy-to-read format and which highlight the key messages of the work for lay audiences. These synthesis products include *At a glance* research and statistics summaries, the practical *Getting to grips with ...* series, books of research readings and the consolidated *Review of research* series.

Packaging of information in ways which are accessible and useable is a key to effective communication. The other key is using a wide variety of methods of communication.

### NCVER website

NCVER has significantly enhanced its website to move its publishing activity online. A major step forward has been to mount reports and statistical publications on the website which allows free access to research information for all users. The website is increasingly designed around key topic pages which address specific issues for VET and the needs of particular groups in industry and education. The NCVER website can be visited at <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

### Insight

This is a regular publication, which provides short summaries of recently published research both in Australia and overseas. The format of *Insight* is deliberately journalistic, covering the highlights of research with links to full reports. *Insight* is delivered free to over 6000 users of research in the VET sector.

### VOCED international VET research database

VOCED is a web-based database of all VET research published in Australia and overseas in English. The database indexes and abstracts articles on VET-related research from over 140 journals worldwide and research monographs published by 300 VET-related research centres and agencies internationally. VOCED has its own website at: <http://www.voced.edu.au>

### VOCED highlights

Produced as a companion to *Insight*, *VOCED highlights* provides short summaries of the most important new additions to the VOCED database.

### Briefing groups

Briefing groups, which are conducted face to face, focus on critical issues and are tailored to the needs of individual groups in the sector, allowing senior staff to take on board the key messages from research and statistical analyses and discuss the implications of findings for their operations.

### Research forums

These short one-day workshops, again making use of face-to-face communication, have replaced the traditional conferences which generally represent too large a time commitment for busy users in the VET sector and are too costly to organise on a regular basis. The forums combine short, sharp inputs on the key messages from research with a highly interactive format designed to engage participants with the research, and focus their attention on how research can help policy formulation and/or change practice.

## NCVER's forward vision

### An holistic approach

Using both statistics and descriptive information to tell the story and give the key facts upon which to determine action and set agendas.

### 'Just-in-time' advice

Providing information that is short and sharp and can be collated quickly in time to inform policy and political processes rather than being limited to calendar year project planning. Policy cycles are often far shorter than traditional timetables for research.

### Customised communication

A service that provides face-to-face briefings and opportunities for decision-makers and others to question and explore research and analysis.

### Responsive and topical information

Analysis and research grouped around key themes and issues which are topical in the sector and where release is planned to give maximum impact.

### Innovation in service delivery

Products and services which make information easier to use and understand at a range of levels, including among providers, researchers, policy-makers and industry bodies.

### Capacity-building strategies

Building the sector's capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate success for students, for firms and employers, for industry and for programs and providers.

## Examples of recent NCVER work and its impact

### Realising the returns for employers

An example of research relevant to enterprises.

#### *Background*

Working out the returns to employers from their investments in training has long been a source of anxiety for trainers and other human resource practitioners working in industry. Despite their belief in the effectiveness of training for the business, trainers have often experienced difficulty in persuading senior managers that there is a clear return to the bottom line from training.

#### *1999–2000*

Having identified returns on investment (ROI) as a priority, NREC funds four major research projects to examine ways in which enterprises can measure more effectively the returns to their own investments in training.

#### *2001*

NCVER undertakes a major communication campaign to promote the results of ROI research

to industry and other users. This includes three products:

- *Returns on investment in training: Research at a glance*
- *Getting to grips with returns on investment in training*
- *Return on investment in training: Research readings*

NCVER runs three highly successful public forums in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Over 300 participants attend, with one-third from private industry. Participants give the forums an '8 out of 10' overall rating in their evaluations.

#### *Impact*

This program of research has been successful in engaging the interest of human resources personnel and managers in enterprises and has resulted in a demand for further workshops and attendees at information dissemination forums. Resources to help calculate returns from investment in training are also sought.

## Apprenticeships and traineeships

An example of research that has raised national debate.

### *Background*

Part of the remit for any independent research agency is to inform the important debates of the day and to shed the light of factual evidence on critical issues. The developments in Australia's apprenticeship and traineeship system in recent years have led to vigorous national debate.

### *2000*

NREC funds and NCVER manages a national program of research into apprenticeships and traineeships comprising 12 projects.

### *2001*

NCVER conducts a major communications campaign to bring the findings of research to a range of key stakeholders. This campaign involved:

- media coverage: national press and radio interviews

- briefings for all state/territory training authorities
- briefings to Commonwealth authorities:
  - Department of Education, Science & Training
  - ANTA
- a range of publications:
  - *Australian apprenticeships: Facts, fiction and future*
  - *Australian apprenticeships: Research readings*
  - *Australian apprenticeships: Research at a glance*
  - individual research reports
- eight public research forums conducted, one in each state and territory

### *Impact*

The report effectively established a firm factual basis for future discussion. Furthermore, a number of important recommendations for the development of the apprenticeship and traineeship system was made. This work demonstrated the power of independent analysis and effective communication in framing the policy approach to major issues in the VET system.

## Tackling industry skills shortages

An example of research relevant to policy and 'just in time'.

### *Background*

In late 1999, responding to mounting concern in the business community about skills shortages, especially in the traditional trades areas, the then Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Dr David Kemp, established an industry-led exercise to examine the reasons behind the emerging shortages. Known as the National Industry Skills Initiative, the exercise brought government and industry together in a partnership to address a critical issue clearly hampering the ability of industry to expand and grow. From the outset all parties realised the importance of feeding the results of high-quality research on skills shortages into their deliberations.

### *2000*

NCVER analyses data from the statistical collection and other relevant research to create an overview of the general picture of skills supply into traditional trades.

### *2000-02*

Industry-led working parties are established to examine and report on skills supply in nine critical industry areas. NCVER is represented on each working party and produces analyses of skills supply.

### *Impact*

Skills shortages are better understood to be the result of various factors, not solely because of skill supply. Some policy changes were made to facilitate filling of identified skill gaps.

## Enhancing group training

An example of research that is 'just-in-time' and informed a major review.

### *Background*

Information from VET research and statistical analysis played a key role in the recent ANTA-led review of group training organisations. The dramatic growth of group training organisations in the last five years, paralleling the unprecedented growth in apprenticeships and traineeships since the mid-1990s, has led to a redefinition of the role of group training in the Australian VET system. ANTA requested NCVER to provide comprehensive information on the development of group training based on the latest research and statistics.

### *September–December 2001*

NCVER analyses and synthesises information from the statistics collections and produces three reports:

- *Group training apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia*
- *Group training apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia: Research at a glance*
- *Analysis of funded and non-funded group training companies, 2000*

NCVER brings forward research funded by NREC so that a telephone survey of group training companies is conducted in time to provide findings to the review of group training.

### *Impact*

The ANTA review aimed to chart the changing role of group training and suggest future directions for growth.

## Surveys

An example of a survey which has built the capacity of stakeholders to determine their success in meeting client needs.

### *Background*

Since 1997 NCVER has conducted surveys of students. In six years this has evolved from a national paper-based survey of technical and further education (TAFE) graduates to a surveys program which covers graduates as well as subject-only or module completers from both TAFE and non-TAFE sectors.

This surveys program is now considerably more flexible and provides supplementary phone-based surveys to target information from specific groups of students.

In addition, the program has developed a do-it-yourself survey for providers which allows them to develop and conduct their own surveys via a web-based, point and click tool.

### *1994*

A national survey of TAFE graduates commences to improve performance at institute, state and national levels.

### *1999 to current*

The national Student Outcomes Survey is conducted every year and covers:

- TAFE graduates
- TAFE module completers
- non-TAFE graduates
- non-TAFE module completers.

### *2002*

Capacity-building is undertaken.

Do-it-yourself survey is developed to help providers design and conduct their own surveys.

### *Impact*

The results have been:

- improved client focus and information for planning among VET providers
- the capacity to pilot-test new information collection for consideration for national applications.

## Researching VET

NCVER has been contracted by ANTA since 1997 to administer the national VET research and evaluation program.

The program is guided by priorities developed under the national research and evaluation strategy for VET, 2001–2003. These research priorities are closely related to the five key objectives established in the ANTA national strategy for VET 1998–2003, (*A bridge to the future*).

Objectives from <i>A bridge to the future: National strategy for vocational education and training 1998–2003</i>	Key priorities from <i>National research and evaluation strategy for vocational education and training in Australia 2001–2003</i>
Equipping Australians for the world of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ transitions from education to work</li> <li>■ quality of teaching and learning</li> <li>■ outcomes of VET</li> </ul>
Enhancing mobility in the labour force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ innovation and the changing skills of the workforce</li> <li>■ outcomes of VET</li> <li>■ lifelong learning and the social and community impact of VET</li> </ul>
Achieving equitable outcomes in VET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ equity in VET</li> </ul>
Increasing investment in training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ innovation and the changing skills of the workforce</li> <li>■ economics of VET</li> <li>■ international comparisons of VET</li> </ul>
Maximising the value of public expenditure in VET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ economics of VET</li> </ul>

Over 200 research projects have been funded under the national program since 1997. Many of these projects are collaborative in nature involving researchers from universities, the VET sector and private consultants. NCVER encourages collaboration and consults widely in the sector to ensure that the research priorities reflect the major issues facing the system.

The national research and evaluation program is guided by the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) which is constituted as a sub-committee of the NCVER Board. NREC includes representatives of the major users of research in the VET sector; a practice which ensures a very high level of relevance in the research funded.

NCVER also supports a strong internal research unit which, in addition to other value-adding research activities, carries out an annual program of research which complements the work undertaken in the national program.



## Collecting data for the VET sector

From very fragmented beginnings less than ten years ago, NCVER now collects and analyses a wide range of data relating to the Australian VET system, data which assist in informing key decision-makers in government and within institutions providing training. The national statistical collection is based on the Australian VET Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) and includes:

- the national VET provider collection: an annual provider collection covering information on students, what they do and where they do it, and what they achieve in terms of skills and qualifications
- the contracts of training collection: a quarterly collection covering New Apprenticeships and describing their contracts of training, including education level, duration, subject matter and employer information
- an annual audited financial collection covering public expenditure and revenue
- a national qualifications eligibility register
- survey data.

The national program of surveys encompasses:

- an annual survey of student outcomes: a survey of course graduates and those who complete one or more modules or subjects
- a triennial survey of employer views encompassing employers who have experience of graduates and those who do not.

Increasingly NCVER is tailoring the capacity of its surveys to meet the needs of the key groups in the VET system and developing a do-it-yourself surveys package for providers. The work of NCVER on administering the national statistical program is overseen by the National Training Statistics Committee (NTSC). Chaired by a chief executive officer of one of the state or territory training authorities, the NTSC operates as a sub-committee of the ANTA Board which funds the collection activity.

© National Centre for Vocational Education  
Research, 2002

ISBN: I 74096 074 2 print edition

ISBN: I 74096 075 0 web edition

TD/TNC: 70.11

Comments and suggestions regarding this  
publication are welcome and should be  
forwarded to NCVER.

This publication was produced by the National  
Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd  
ABN 87 007 967 311.

NCVER Ltd  
252 Kensington Road  
Leabrook SA 5068  
PO Box 115, Kensington Park SA 5068

Telephone: (08) 8333 8400  
Facsimile: (08) 8331 9211  
E-mail: [ncver@ncver.edu.au](mailto:ncver@ncver.edu.au)  
Web page: <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

Printed by Prestige Copying & Printing, Adelaide