NCVER

High-quality traineeships:
Identifying what works

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Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

A National Vocational Education and Training **Research** and **Evaluation** Program **Report**

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Publisher's note

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Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

The NVETRE program is based upon priorities approved by ministers with responsibility for vocational education and training (VET). This research aims to improve policy and practice in the VET sector. For further information about the program go to the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>. The author/project team was funded to undertake this research via a grant under the NVETRE program. These grants are awarded to organisations through a competitive process, in which NCVER does not participate.

ISBN 978 1 921413 38 4 print edition
978 1 921413 39 1 web edition

TD/TNC 97.09

Published by NCVER
ABN 87 007 967 311

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About the research

High-quality traineeships: Identifying what works

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Introduced to Australia in the mid-1980s, traineeships have adapted the model of apprenticeships—combining work with on-the-job learning and formal training—to a wide range of occupations.

The aim of this research was not to evaluate or comment on the general value or suitability of Australian traineeships. The researchers set out to identify high-quality practices in traineeships through interviews with stakeholders involved in the traineeship system and through case studies in six industry areas—cleaning, child care, construction, retail, finance and insurance and meat processing.

The report suggests a number of policy measures that could improve both the practice and image of traineeships. As an ideal, the high-quality features set a target for which to aim. A good practice guide has been developed from the research to assist employers and the vocational education and training sector to meet this target.

High-quality traineeships were found to be those where:

- Trainees attain a sense of worth and occupational identity, and where a pathway to higher qualifications and career progression is provided.
- Employers obtain a competitive edge and are better able to attract and retain staff.
- The content of the training (as codified in training packages and the associated resources) is current and industry-relevant, and complemented by high-quality, current learning resources prepared by teachers and trainers with good industry knowledge. There is a focus on underpinning knowledge as well as skills.
- There is a well-designed and -delivered off-the-job component as well as on-the-job learning.
- The training provider has close and constructive engagement with the employer and with the trainee.
- There is a strong commitment on the part of the employer towards traineeships, including supportive supervisory staff and a suitable learning environment.
- Intermediaries, such as group training organisations, provide the information and support that employers and trainees need to sustain a good working relationship.

The authors assert that funding incentives are not the main driver for either initial or continued participation in traineeships. Many employers participate even when no subsidies are available because they are convinced of the benefits.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Executive summary

This project set out to identify the features of high-quality traineeships. Traineeships, like apprenticeships, involve a combination of on- and (usually) off-the-job training and have been available for a little over 20 years. Traineeships have had a 'bad press' in many quarters, partly due to a lack of understanding of their aim and structure and partly due to some problems with quality in their early years.

Trainees may be young or mature people, full-time or part-time workers, existing workers or new entrants, in trade, or more commonly, non-trade occupations, part of large-scale programs within major workplaces or engaged as the sole trainee in small businesses. Thus traineeships need to be flexible and contextualised, while remaining a high-quality training program. Around 200 000 Australians, drawn from a diverse population base, now commence traineeships each year. With such large numbers it is important that they receive high-quality training and support, and that the standard achieved by graduating trainees is commensurably high.

The research team undertook case studies of traineeships in six areas during 2007 and 2008: cleaning, child care, construction, retail, finance and insurance and meat processing. For each case study, site visits were made to two company examples, and additional interviews were carried out at national and industry levels. Interviews were also carried out, at a more general level, with 13 high-level stakeholders—senior officials in government, employer and employee peak bodies, and other major players in the traineeship system, such as Group Training Australia.

There was clear agreement among all stakeholders at all levels about what constitutes a high-quality traineeship: it involves good training delivery both on and off the job, a qualification that is respected by industry, high levels of current underpinning knowledge and skills, and pathways into higher-level jobs and qualifications. It provides appropriate support for disadvantaged learners.

The benefits of traineeships to industries and enterprises were found to include a larger and more mobile skills pool, improved productivity and quality of output, the assurance of consistent skill levels among workers, compliance with national and international industry standards, and safer working practices. These improvements were seen to increase the competitive edge of companies and Australia in the international marketplace.

For individuals, traineeships were found to improve the status of occupations by making explicit the knowledge and skills involved, through the award of a qualification. This formal recognition of the job role and the certification of the performance standards achieved by trainees offer the possibility of advancement, both within and outside the industry. More broadly, traineeships create more worthwhile jobs through multiskilling; for example, full-time jobs can be created from previously part-time jobs that utilised restricted skill sets. This in turn enhances the industry as a career choice.

The components of a high-quality traineeship were analysed using the following features of quality adapted from the Australian National Audit Office's features of quality:

- *Inputs*: a high-quality traineeship involves the input of highly skilled and industry-specialised teachers and trainers who are well educated and familiar with relevant learning theories and practices. The traineeship is based on a current, well-planned and widely accepted training

package. Trainees are provided with high-quality, current learning resources prepared by teachers and trainers with good industry knowledge. Funding is available to help enterprises and registered training organisations meet the cost of providing the training; funding rules are well known. A traineeship exists within an industry or occupation with a strong sense of vocation, or is able to help to build such a sense.

- *Processes*: a high-quality traineeship involves some off-the-job training and the delivery of underpinning knowledge as well as skills. On- and off-the-job training are integrated. Mentors are provided on the job. An appropriate balance is found between customisation to the enterprise and a broader industry and educational viewpoint. Through retention of trainees high-quality traineeships show that mutual expectations are being met. Good service from the registered training organisation is an important contributory factor. Intermediary organisations provide correct and timely advice and help to support the trainees in ways within their remit.
- *Outputs*: graduates of a high-quality traineeship possess skills and knowledge valued across and beyond an industry. They move smoothly onto higher-level qualifications and can confidently expect to compete in career ladders.
- *Outcomes*: high-quality traineeships provide enterprises and industries with well-skilled staff, sometimes working with entrants who lack many skills that employers would prefer. They contribute to the rise of standards in an industry and to increased employer confidence in selecting staff and in expanding their businesses. Traineeships are viewed by employers as a way of attracting and retaining workers, both to their own companies and to an industry skill pool.
- *The influence of objectives and the allocation of resourcing for traineeships*: while traineeships were introduced primarily as a labour market program, high-quality traineeships emphasise skill formation, although these two objectives work in tandem with each other. The benefits of traineeships accrue to all parties and the costs are also borne to some extent by all parties.

Within the 'traineeship life cycle'—the time from sign-up to completion—many factors contribute to quality. In a high-quality traineeship, all parties to the traineeship have similar and clearly articulated expectations. Intermediary bodies and offices of government departments are engaged with enterprises and trainees throughout the traineeship, and information from these bodies is readily and promptly available. Enterprises are committed to devoting staff time to making traineeships work and they 'market' them throughout their organisations; structures are set up within workplaces to support trainees, and work is organised to provide suitable learning experiences. Workplaces have good work practices (in relation to quality and to safety) to avoid a conflict between what is being learned and what is experienced in workplaces. Trainees get the chance to interact with a peer group, either within or external to the enterprise and they receive advice from different quarters about their options at the end of the traineeship.

Most important of all, however, is the quality of the teaching and learning that takes place within traineeships. The research showed that off-the-job training is a necessary component of high-quality traineeships. However, this need not take place away from the worksite. Registered training organisation staff need to be well qualified, both as trainers and in the industry area in which they are training. Learning materials should be of high quality, with due regard for underpinning knowledge, and with an appropriate degree of contextualisation to suit the needs of the enterprise and/or specific learner groups. Assessment is rigorous, and, while recognition of prior learning (RPL) is available, it is used conservatively. Learners are provided with extensive opportunities to practise the skills being learned in a range of contexts.

When the various individuals and organisations who participate in the traineeship life cycle adopt the features of high-quality traineeships described above, a context favourable to a high-quality traineeship is established—even where other factors are not particularly conducive to a successful outcome; for example, in geographically isolated areas.

To assist with the creation of favourable environments for traineeships, the research has suggested a number of new policy options worth consideration:

- *Marketing traineeships*: governments could conduct a marketing campaign for traineeships similar to that for apprenticeships. This would not only raise awareness of their availability but dispel any doubts about the value and quality of traineeships. Employer and employee peak bodies, skills councils, peak bodies for registered training organisations and state education systems all have a role to play and in many cases need education themselves about the nature and benefits of traineeships.
- *Support for traineeship quality improvement*: this could occur through more rigorous application of state training authority audit functions. It is also suggested that these bodies provide independent advice and assistance vis-à-vis traineeships. Registered training organisations would benefit from good practice examples of traineeship delivery. Employers should be mentored and otherwise encouraged to develop 'traineeship management' skills so that they provide better on-the-job training and support for trainees.
- *Training packages*: these should include better articulation pathways for both career progression and to higher-level qualifications. State training authorities should review the suitability of individual qualifications for traineeship delivery more rigorously.
- *Teaching and training qualifications*: governments and peak registered training organisation bodies should consider improving teaching and learning by requiring higher-level training qualifications for trainers and devoting more resources to high-quality learning resources, rather than relying on training package support materials.
- *Funding*: there may be a case for a traineeship funding model flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of traineeship environments. For example, it can be argued that an on-the-job traineeship in a rural or remote area where the typical learner has literacy problems should receive markedly different funding from an off-the-job traineeship in a metropolitan area. Traineeships specifically targeted to particular client groups are also more expensive to service and should receive greater amounts of funding.

Traineeships provide the opportunity for large numbers of workers to gain nationally recognised qualifications. They offer the possibility of both lateral and upward mobility in employment and they contribute to employers' efforts to lift quality and productivity. The challenge is to make sure that all traineeships are of equally high quality. This research has suggested ways in which this can be done. A good practice guide—a set of specific tools to assist registered training organisations, employers and intermediary organisations—has been developed for this purpose.

Introduction

This project set out to identify the features of high-quality traineeships. The aim was not to evaluate or comment upon the general quality of Australian traineeships, but to use our research data to determine what factors contributed to high quality in this type of training, to enable these to be applied more generally. To this end a good practice has also been developed, which we hope will assist all those involved in traineeships—employers, the registered training organisation and the learner—to understand what constitutes a high-quality traineeship and their part in it.

About traineeships

Like apprenticeships, traineeships involve employment with an employer and delivery of a qualification by a training provider, often known as 'contracted training'. Traineeships, established in Australia in 1985 as a result of the Committee of Enquiry into Labour Market Programs—the Kirby Report—were introduced to increase the reach of contracted training to a wider range of occupations and industries and to a broader range of learners (particularly women) and to improve the labour market prospects of young people. After a slow start, traineeships began to grow rapidly in numbers in the mid-1990s, so that of the 415 000 Australian Apprentices (apprentices and trainees) in 2006 (NCVER 2007), 245 000 were trainees, with a smaller number of 170 000 traditional apprentices.

While traineeships possess some features of traditional apprenticeships, such as the combination of off- and on-the-job training leading to a qualification and the availability of government subsidies to encourage growth, there have been many concerns and debates about traineeships (for example, Cully 2006; Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee 2000; Schofield 2000), and traineeships are often seen as inferior to apprenticeships and possessing a number of disadvantages. These include a 'thin curriculum' (a lack of deep knowledge [Smith 2002]), inadequate off-the-job training (Misko, Patterson & Markotic 2001, pp.166–71), a lack of close attention to on-the-job development (Favero 2003), and a widespread belief that many employers and registered training organisations only take part in the system to access government funding (for example, Schofield 1999; Snell & Hart 2007).

Despite these criticisms, trainees now outnumber apprentices, and the initiative has given hundreds of thousands of Australians access to nationally recognised employment-based training. Traineeships have introduced structured training to a wide range of occupational areas and provide pathways into higher-level qualifications. They can provide valuable training that benefits both individuals and employers (for example, Smith et al. 2005). Many concerns identified by turn-of-the-century reports on traineeship problems have been addressed in subsequent VET policy developments, such as changes to incentives and subsidies, and the introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

Apprenticeships may be held in higher regard than traineeships because they are in traditional trades, they are supported by cohesive trade unions and they have the weight of history and tradition behind them. Traineeships, on the other hand, tend to be in service sector occupations that more commonly have women than men working in them, are sometimes in emerging

industries, often have a large proportion of part-time and casual workers, and are weakly unionised (these generalisations of course have considerable exceptions). There is some evidence that traineeships are well regarded among some stakeholders, and young people have been shown to value them (Ferguson 2007). Employers have been shown to offer traineeship qualifications to attract labour, to use them to construct career paths, and to value qualifications gained through traineeships offered by previous employers (Smith et al. 2005). Traineeships, perhaps more than apprenticeships, have had a strong equity focus, one of their original aims being to improve training opportunities for women (Smith 2006) and they have been instrumental in improving Indigenous people's employment prospects (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2007).

A particular challenge in traineeships is that they are much more likely than apprenticeships to have their 'off the job training' delivered 'fully on the job' (Smith & Keating 2003, p.99). While in such cases a registered training organisation is still responsible for training and assessment, there have been concerns that training quality is low in these traineeships (Schofield 1999) because production pressures will often take precedence over the need for training. State training authorities have sometimes regulated this area, requiring 'real training' (that is, away from the workstation) to be delivered for a certain number of hours if user choice funding is to be received. However, in a competency-based system it has sometimes been difficult for people to find appropriate arguments against fully on-the-job traineeships as, in theory, competency-based training is not supposed to mandate delivery methods.

It is often a feature of discussions about traineeships that they have focused on administrative, economic and policy arrangements rather than pedagogical issues, although some relevant Australian research has addressed this issue. Harris et al. (1998) have provided a useful overview of apprentice learning which focused in particular on the way in which apprentices juggle learning undertaken in off-the-job and on-the-job environments. They argued that it was not necessary to align off- and on-the-job learning closely, as part of the role of being an apprentice was to evaluate what was being learned in different environments. Smith (2002) extended this discussion to traineeships.

Pedagogy in traineeships, as in the rest of the sector, might be assumed to have improved as a result of the introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). The AQTF was introduced in 2001 in response to complaints about quality in VET. Strict standards were established to which registered training organisations were required to adhere. These included provisions about the qualifications of their staff, financial and administrative records, the provision of services for students, and regulations about training and assessment. Since then the AQTF has been revised twice; the 2007 version was less prescriptive than earlier versions and introduced fewer set standards. It also provides registered training organisations with the opportunity to apply for a higher quality status through 'excellence criteria' (Commonwealth of Australia 2007). However, as AQTF 2007 is still in the process of implementation, it is difficult to judge the extent to which it has had an impact on the quality of delivery in traineeships.

While the AQTF has been welcomed by the VET sector, there has not yet been a full-scale evaluation of its impact on quality and particularly on teaching and training. Moreover, running alongside broader concerns about quality there has been a debate about the ability of teachers and trainers to deliver high-quality outcomes, considering that the required qualification for VET teachers is only at certificate IV level—the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. While this in itself is a low-level qualification, it has also been argued that it does not meet agreed criteria of good teaching (Robertson 2008) and that it has been poorly delivered (Simons & Smith 2008)

It is clear that there is a huge demand for traineeships, although equally there is a great deal of unease about them. Historical factors go some way to explaining the antipathy of some stakeholders to traineeships, but there are also some real areas of concern that require improvement. Without improvements in quality across all traineeships their value may continue to be dismissed and this would be unfortunate—not least for people who possess traineeship qualifications.

About this research

As the traineeship system involves about a quarter of a million Australians at any one time, it is obviously important to achieve high-quality outcomes. A great deal of research and discussion on traineeships has addressed their practical arrangements, including their implementation. As noted, some studies have considered their shortcomings, while others have examined individual traineeship areas and uncovered examples of good practice, for example, in aged care (Booth et al. 2005). However, there has been no previous large-scale national research into what constitutes a high-quality traineeship. This study therefore set out to fill this substantial gap in the literature. The research questions were as follows:

- What can be described (by various stakeholders) as a high-quality traineeship?
- What organisational and pedagogical features contribute to a high-quality traineeship?
- What are the effects of variables such as employment practices, industry area, training package content and structure, industry traditions, social construction of the industry area?
- In what circumstances are quality features displayed?
- How far are the features replicable in other traineeships and how can this be done?

'Quality' is a widely used but seldom defined term. The project team's initial concept of quality was derived from the Australian National Audit Office's three features of quality: outputs, processes, outcomes, and included, as does the Audit Office definition, consideration of the desired objectives and available resources (in Schofield 2000, p.5). For the purposes of this research we found the need to add 'inputs' to this model. Most of the inputs are pre-existing conditions applying to all traineeships in an industry before a traineeship commences; the quality of teachers and trainers varies among training providers and enterprises but is to some extent determined by an industry-specific labour market.

These features and considerations can be operationalised for traineeships as follows:

Table 1 The meaning of measures of quality for traineeships

Quality component	Meaning in traineeships
Quality features	
Inputs	Qualifications and experience of teachers and trainers
	The availability of suitable training packages
	Appropriate levels of resourcing for training
	Levels of funding and incentives
	Sense of vocation attached to the industry
Outputs	Calibre and industry acceptance of graduated trainees
	Pathways to higher qualifications
Processes	Pedagogy (on and off the job)
	Employer-trainee psychological contract[(a)]
	Interaction among users, providers, intermediary organisations and governments
Outcomes	The contribution of trainees to companies and to Australia's stock of skills
Additional considerations	
Objectives	Determining key objectives of the traineeship system: labour market program or skill formation?
Resourcing	Who should pay for traineeship training as a national system, and who benefits?

Note: (a) The term 'psychological contract' is taken from the management literature and refers to the unspoken agreements between worker and management about appropriate behaviour and obligations on each side (Cullinane & Dundon 2006).

The meaning of measures of quality for traineeships shown in table 1 has a strong relationship with the quality standards and indicators used in the Australian Quality Training Framework. There are three standards in AQTF, with each having a number of more detailed elements. These are:

- ✧ The registered training organisation provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations.
- ✧ The registered training organisation adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients.
- ✧ Management systems are responsive to the needs of clients, staff and stakeholders, and the environment in which the registered training organisation operates.

Registered training organisations must meet these standards in order to deliver and assess nationally recognised training and issue nationally recognised qualifications, including those delivered through traineeships. Registered training organisations are also required to gather information on their performance against three quality indicators:

- ✧ employer satisfaction
- ✧ learner satisfaction
- ✧ competency completion rate (Commonwealth of Australia 2007).

However, while these quality standards and quality criteria offer a rigorous framework for quality assurance of registered training organisation operations, we consider that for this research the modified National Audit Office quality features discussed earlier will provide a more appropriate framework for this research, as they allow analysis of a broader range of the factors and organisations that impact on the quality of traineeships overall. The Australian Quality Training Framework applies to the operations of registered training organisations.

Research methods

The research was carried out in two major stages during 2007–08 as follows:

Stage 1: interviews with 13 'high-level stakeholders' who were senior officers in nine national-level bodies and institutions concerned with traineeships

Stage 2: case studies in six industry areas: financial services, children's services, asset management (cleaning), construction, retail and meat production. The case studies comprised stakeholder interviews and company examples, some of which were national companies. The site visits covered a mix of metropolitan, suburban and regional locations.

This report begins with a discussion on factors affecting the adoption of traineeships at an industry and enterprise level. The quality components of traineeships are then discussed and contain a summary of the results from the high-level stakeholder interviews and case studies. A chapter on the traineeship lifecycle is included; that is, what happens during the time an individual trainee commences, undertakes and completes a traineeship, before broader policy issues are examined.

A detailed account of the interviews with the high-level stakeholders is found in appendix 2 of the support document and includes the organisations represented and reasons for their inclusion in the research; the case studies are presented in full in appendix 4 of the support document.

Advantages and limitations of the methods

The research method, proceeding from high-level stakeholders to industry-level stakeholders, to company examples, provided much more variety and nuance than was initially envisaged and than would have occurred had the research proceeded straight to company case studies. A greater range of issues than expected was uncovered in the research.

It is considered that the range of company types was appropriate for the industry areas and overall provided a good range, from small enterprises to large national companies, although some limitations in the research can be identified. The choice of occupational areas, although it was carefully justified and validated by the reference group, inevitably affected the outcomes of the research. It is possible that some occupational areas could exhibit different characteristics. The qualifications studied were at certificate II and III level and therefore the findings may favour some characteristics associated with lower qualification levels. Qualitative methods by their nature limit the range of instances accessed, although in our view this is more than compensated by the suitability of qualitative research for the research questions. Access to companies proved more difficult than expected, meaning that first choices were sometimes not possible. However, the company examples each added materially to the data, often in quite unexpected ways.

A further point needs to be made which is not exactly a limitation but which is important to mention because of the controversy surrounding quality in traineeships. The project focused on identifying high-quality features in traineeships. It did not intend to prove anything either in relation to the general quality of traineeships or to argue that the data uncovered were either typical or atypical of the bulk of traineeships. The company examples were not chosen as 'exemplars' of good practice; however, we certainly did not seek out examples of bad practice either. The purpose of the project was to draw out those features which make up or could make up a high-quality traineeship. The underlying aim was, to use the German term, 'melioristic'—to improve practice. It is hoped that by our clear identification of high-quality features, policy-makers and practitioners will have useful data to assist them in implementing procedures to lift the quality of traineeships generally.

Adoption of traineeships

Traineeships operate within a broad framework, predicated on government policy and the economic and social environment. During this research, enterprises and other stakeholders provided insight into the reasons why and how they engaged with the traineeship system and how they hoped that they, and others, would benefit from it. While the study did not posit a specific research question related to adoption, the reasons for and the nature of adoption in industries and enterprises are closely related to issues surrounding quality in traineeships. For example, if an industry has a strong tradition of training, pedagogical processes are likely to be of high quality, while an industry with a weak training tradition is likely to struggle until pedagogical processes are established. Furthermore, understanding the reasons why the traineeship path is adopted is likely to result in traineeships of a higher quality because all parties will have a clear picture of the context for a particular traineeship, the role of the various participants and the expectations that traineeships are expected to meet.

The research undertaken for this project identified three categories of adoption of traineeships according to the extent of their take-up. These categories apply at both industry and enterprise levels.[1]

- *Ad hoc*: in this category, there is no systematic approach taken to the use of traineeships by the industry or the enterprise. At an enterprise level this might be manifested as the occasional employment of trainees in parts of the organisation but with no enterprise-level commitment to the implementation of traineeships. At the industry level, traineeships may be used in just a few companies, a feature of the construction industry.
- *Regularised*: in this category, enterprises and industries have developed an approach to traineeships that see their use in a limited number of specialised occupations.
- *Comprehensive*: in this category, traineeships have become the normal means of training people for many occupations in an industry or an enterprise. In some cases traineeships are an integral part of workforce planning and most new full-time employees in major occupational groups are automatically placed on traineeships, often at the same times as retaining market wages. A prime example of this use of traineeships is in the meat processing industry.

Adoption at an industry level

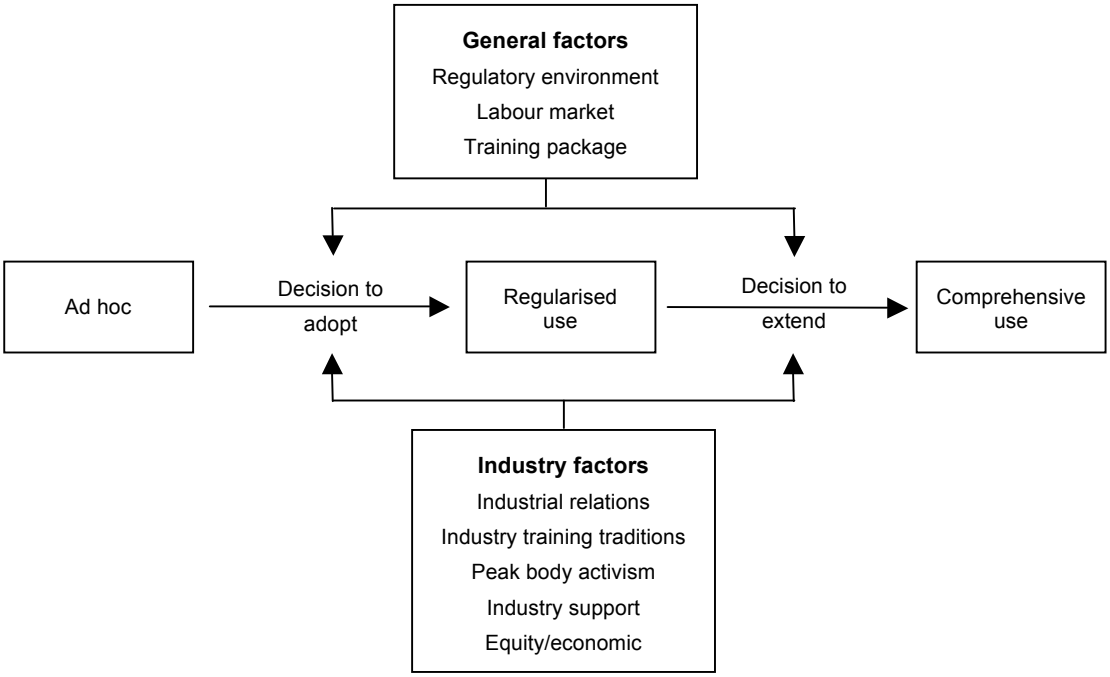
The movement of enterprises and industry sectors from the ad hoc towards the comprehensive category is influenced by a number of factors, internal and external. These are illustrated in the adoption model of traineeships at an industry level shown in figure 1.

[1] These categories of adoption bear a similarity to the model of adoption of nationally recognised training developed by Smith et al. (2005, p.50), which identified three stages of adoption of nationally recognised training, from engagement, through extension, to integration. This model of adoption of traineeships does not include the integration stage of the previous model because the integration stage refers to human resource practices outside the scope of the current study. This model extends the Smith et al. (2005) model by its inclusion of industry-level adoption.

At the industry level the position that an industry occupies in the model of adoption is affected by three general environmental (external) factors operating on the industry:

- *Regulatory environment*: in some industries, the adoption of traineeships is driven by regulatory requirements. Traineeships, with their structured and auditable approach, require that training meets regulations. An example of this is the finance and insurance industry, where the passing of the *Financial Services Reform Act* (FSRA) in 2004 provided the impetus for the industry to adopt the Certificate III in Finance and Insurance and higher qualifications for those giving financial advice to the public. In meat processing, national and international health regulations and legislative requirements are partially satisfied when staff enrol in traineeships.
- *Labour market*: the difficulty faced by employers in many industries in recruiting suitable staff leads industries to embrace and promote traineeships as a means of securing the supply of skills into the future. Traineeships assist because they are attractive to potential employees and provide structured training, enabling employers to be confident that workers will normally reach acceptable levels of performance. This factor was important in all the industries studied in this project, but most important in the asset maintenance (cleaning) and meat processing industries.
- *Career pathways and the training package*: in many instances adoption depends on how the qualifications in the training package articulate into a recognised career pathway in the industry. In finance and insurance, pathways lead from lower-level to higher-level financial advisor positions. In the meat industry clearly articulated pathways lead to higher qualifications, which are often supported financially by enterprises. The lack of proper articulation in construction on the other hand is a major impediment to the adoption of traineeships.

Figure 1 Adoption model of traineeships at the industry level



Influencing factors within the industry (internal) include:

- *Industrial relations*: the state of industrial relations, in particular the attitude of major unions in the sector towards traineeships, has a profound impact on their adoption in the industry. Thus, in the construction industry, opposition by unions to the perceived dilution of skilled trades through the use of traineeships has hindered the growth of traineeships in this sector.
- *Industry training traditions*: industries are shaped by historical and cultural factors and each has a tradition of training which predisposes employers in the sector to adopt certain forms of training,

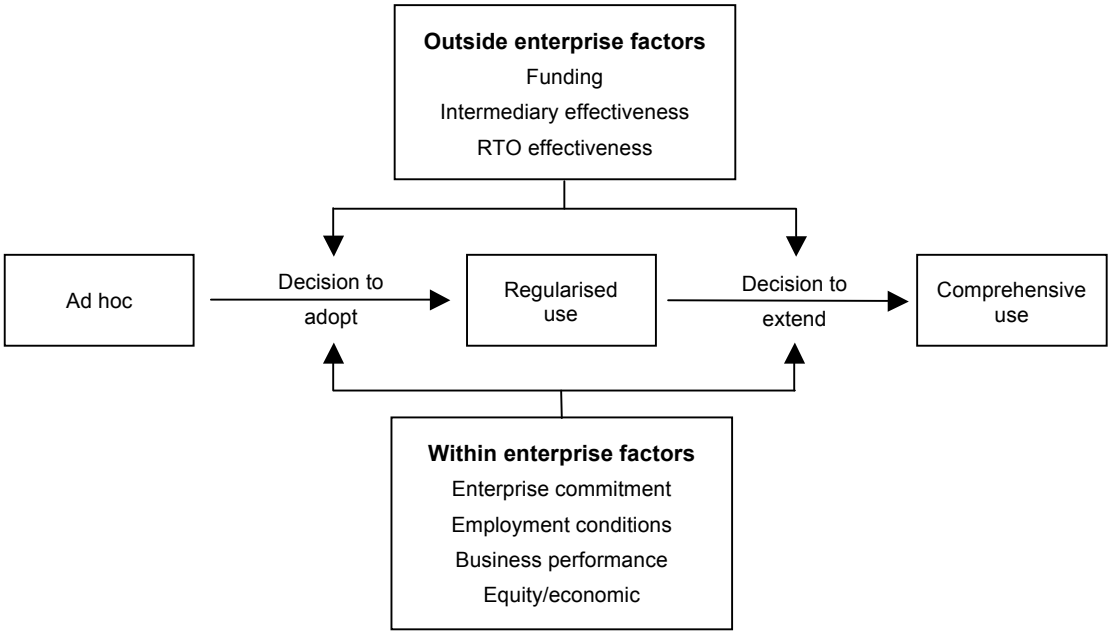
including traineeships. Often traineeships flourish in industries where there has not been a strong tradition of training for lower-level workers, for example, in the retail or meat industries.

- *Peak body activism*: in some industries, employer or employee peak bodies play a significant role in the spread of traineeship adoption.
- *Industry support*: some industries have taken steps to advance the adoption of traineeships through supportive financial arrangements. Thus, levies may be implemented and scholarships and bursaries offered for individual trainees.
- *Equity*: in some industries traineeships have been adopted to improve the employment prospects of equity groups. This altruistic motivation for the adoption of traineeships is often influenced by economic considerations that are centred on securing 'pipelines' of skilled staff into the industry. In general or industry-specific tight labour markets, the economic considerations lead to particular needs to attract equity groups. Some of the limited number of construction traineeships were targeted at equity groups such as young Aboriginal people.

Adoption of traineeships at an enterprise level

Below the level of the industry sector, there are more specific factors that influence the decision to adopt traineeships within individual enterprises. The model for enterprise adoption of traineeships is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2 Adoption model of traineeship at the enterprise level



External factors operating on the enterprise are:

- *The availability of funding*: the previous study by Smith et al. (2005) found that the availability of funding from Commonwealth and/or state governments is important to enterprises in the first stage of engagement with nationally recognised training. The same is true for traineeships. The move from ad hoc to regularised use of traineeships is positively affected by funding, but the spread of traineeships to other occupations in the enterprise is more likely to be dependent on the experience of the enterprise with traineeships for specialised occupations than on funding in itself. Many enterprises use traineeships despite lack of funding.
- *Intermediary effectiveness and advocacy*: intermediary bodies such as Australian Apprenticeship Centres and Jobs Network providers can exert significant pressure on enterprises at an

individual level to adopt and extend their use of traineeships. The role of the Aboriginal Employment Service in one of the finance company examples exemplifies the effectiveness of an intermediary body.

- *Registered training organisation effectiveness and advocacy*: similarly, the more effective the registered training organisation is in working with the enterprise to support traineeships and in its delivery of training, the more likely the enterprise is to adopt and extend its use of traineeships.

Internal factors influencing the adoption of traineeships include:

- *Enterprise commitment*: the level of commitment from the enterprise, particularly at senior management levels, is critical to the adoption of traineeships and to the enterprise moving from ad hoc to comprehensive use of traineeships. This may be linked to the use of qualifications in broader human resource management policies.
- *Employment conditions*: traineeships are less likely to be used effectively, and enterprises less likely to move from ad hoc to comprehensive adoption, in situations where large numbers of staff are employed on a casual basis. In these contexts, enterprises may only give training that is immediately relevant to the job and may be less likely to fund the more general training found in a traineeship. However, there are many examples where traineeships are used for casual staff, for example, in asset maintenance (cleaning).
- *Business performance*: enterprises vary in their ability to sustain traineeships. Traineeships are expensive for enterprises to implement and manage properly. More profitable enterprises such as banks can commit more resources, regardless of the availability of government funding, than less profitable enterprises. The level of business performance therefore significantly affects the ability of the enterprise to move to more comprehensive use of traineeships.
- *Equity*: this factor also operates at the enterprise level. A good example from the case studies is provided by the bank case study, where the Indigenous traineeship performed an equity function and helped to establish a pipeline of talented young people for the enterprise.

The enterprise's internal factors will be influenced by the size of the enterprise, although the size of the enterprise is unlikely to change the nature of the factor, only its extent. For example, the adoption of traineeships will depend on enterprise commitment, regardless of enterprise size. However, in small businesses this is more likely to be expressed through the personal commitment of the owner/manager. In larger enterprises, commitment might be generated by managers at a number of levels.

A matrix for industry and enterprise adoption

Table 2 illustrates the way in which the factors operate at each stage of the model of traineeship adoption. It is important to note that it is not necessary for all factors to operate in order for an industry or an enterprise to move from one adoption category to the next.

Industries and enterprises, then, adopt traineeships to varying extents and in various ways. Their adoption needs to be seen to benefit the industry and enterprise and the workers in that industry and enterprise. External factors such as a poor-quality articulation path in the training package, difficulties with variations in regulation among jurisdictions, or industrial relations conflict may impact adversely on adoption. Enterprises need to make business decisions and these may involve not only expansion of traineeships but also withdrawal from or scaling-down of traineeships. For example, comprehensive use of traineeships may prove ineffective because it involves a greater commitment of resources than the productivity gains or recruitment benefits involved, and therefore companies may offer traineeships only to those workers with, for example, management potential. Importantly, business considerations are often mixed with goodwill towards workers and commitment to the long-term future of the industry, leading enterprises to persist with traineeships even when there is no clear business benefit.

Table 2 Factors influencing traineeship adoption at industry and enterprise level

	Ad hoc	Regularised	Comprehensive
External to the industry	No regulatory imperative	High regulatory imperative	High regulatory imperative
	Only localised labour market problems	Generalised labour market problems	Generalised labour market problems
	No mapped career paths	More focus on career paths	Well-mapped career paths
Within the industry	Adversarial industrial climate	More cooperative industrial climate	Cooperative industrial climate
	Training traditions that do not support traineeships	Training traditions that support traineeships	Training traditions that strongly support traineeships
	Low peak body activism	Higher peak body activism	High peak body activism
	Low industry support	Better industry support	High industry support
	Low concern for equity	Increased concern for equity	High concern for equity
External to the enterprise	Enterprise does not access funding	Enterprise effectively accesses funding	Funding less important to enterprise than benefits of traineeships
	Low intermediary body impact	Higher intermediary body impact	High intermediary body involvement
	Low registered training organisation impact	Higher registered training organisation impact	High registered training organisation involvement
Within the enterprise	Low enterprise commitment	High enterprise commitment	High enterprise commitment
	Less permanent employment conditions	More permanent employment conditions	More permanent employment conditions
	Low enterprise profitability	Higher enterprise profitability	Higher enterprise profitability
	Low concern for equity	Increased concern for equity	Significant enterprise concern for equity

Quality components of traineeships

Overview of high-level stakeholder interviews

To provide the perspective of those who deal with traineeships at a national and/or policy level, 13 individuals from nine key organisations were interviewed at an early stage of the project.

The interviewees revealed a deep knowledge of the traineeship system. In many cases their involvement with traineeships preceded their current role, and their understanding of traineeships and attitudes towards them had been formed by these previous experiences. Thus their current positions in policy roles were often, but not always, informed by on-the-ground experience. It was apparent that some interviewees had a deep commitment to traineeships, although a small number were quite negative about them. The high-level stakeholders were asked to comment on the following aspects of traineeships: the motivations of those involved in the traineeship (both trainees and employers); curriculum content, including the size and appropriateness of modules from training packages, the length of the traineeship and assessment; the roles of on-the-job and off-the-job learning; partnerships and collaboration, particularly those between the employer and the registered training organisation; and, finally, the learners themselves.

The features of high-quality traineeships

Eliciting the views of the stakeholder on what they believe constitutes quality in a traineeship was an important aspect of the stakeholder interviews. Table 3 interprets and summarises the interviewees' comments about the features of high-quality traineeships. In this table the comments have been divided between teaching and learning (pedagogical) features and organisational features; and by the body that has primary responsibility. These divisions are somewhat artificial as some features straddle types.

What could change to improve quality?

Interviewees also presented a range of ideas about how quality could be improved, which in some cases were contradictory. These ranged from suggestions about funding, to the role of intermediary bodies, such as group training organisations, to employers and how accountable they should be (for example, evidence of providing good-quality on-the-job training). Stakeholders emphasised that taking on a trainee is a substantial commitment which involves a great deal of work; a number suggested that state training authorities could be resourced to enable them to work more closely with employers and that processes be examined to give employers more real support and less paperwork. A number of suggestions advocated quite radical approaches to improving the quality of traineeships. These included:

- ✧ a reduction in the number of occupations that have traineeships attached to them
- ✧ a shifting of focus for traineeships to equity groups and older workers for traineeships
- ✧ funding made available for the training (in some occupations) without the associated apparatus of traineeships

- ✧ an alignment of the marketing of traineeships more closely to the likely labour market demand for different occupations, with more information made available to trainees.

Table 3 Features of high-quality traineeships as described by high-level stakeholders

Primary responsibility	Pedagogical	Organisational
RTO	Off-the-job training or (if not available) regular face-to-face contact with RTO staff	A clear understanding of what is involved for all parties
	A substantial up-front off-the-job training input	
	Emphasis given to training rather than (or as well as) assessment	
	Willingness and ability of RTOs to offer appropriate units of competency for the organisation and the learner	
	High-quality learning materials	
	Cautious use of RPL and of fast-tracking	
	Structured training plans to manage trainees	
	Motivated learners	
Within enterprise	An assigned mentor and supervisor	Enterprise commitment to training and one where the use of traineeships is supported by senior line managers
	Training for mentors and supervisors	
	Close supervision of trainees in the workplace	
		Enterprise commitment to training beyond the immediate job role
		Highly skilled HR and training staff
		A large company
		Opportunity for trainees to move among different departments or tasks
		Enterprise commitment to retaining and developing staff rather than purchasing staff from the labour market
External to the registered training organisation and enterprise	Currency of training	A close relationship between the RTO, the enterprise and appropriate intermediary bodies
		Continuous networking among enterprises and among intermediary bodies
		A sufficient length of training contract (e.g., nine months or more)
		Pathways to higher-level qualifications and/or jobs

Note: RTO = registered training organisation.

Case studies

Using the components of 'quality' identified by the Australian National Audit Office, the case studies in the six industry areas chosen for detailed study are analysed in the following section. Table 1 in the first chapter of this report has explained how these components were amended and operationalised in a way that made them applicable to the research into the quality components in traineeships. The case studies are presented in full in appendix 4 of the support document. The industries represented in the case studies are:

- ✧ asset maintenance
- ✧ children's services
- ✧ finance and insurance
- ✧ general construction
- ✧ meat processing
- ✧ retail.

Inputs

Teachers and trainers

The case studies showed that the quality of traineeships was very much dependent on the quality of the teaching and training staff working in these industries. Good teachers and trainers could compensate for other deficiencies among the inputs; for example, a training package that was not entirely suitable could be customised and delivered by an experienced and well-qualified teacher or trainer. Learning resources came alive when the teacher or trainer had the experience and expertise to transform these in ways that matched the needs of the particular group of trainees they were working with. A 'sense of vocation' could be consolidated and developed by a teacher or trainer who was aware of the crucial importance of this dimension of industry and personal identification. The cleaning industry case study exemplified many of these examples, with staff dedicated to the industry and determined to produce learning materials relevant to different environments.

Across the industries in this study teachers and trainers were working with trainees in a variety of configurations: face to face in block periods or through regular attendance at class, either at the registered training organisation premises or in hired or mobile premises; by flexible delivery, using print-based learning materials supplemented by telephone and/or email contact; on the job, either with occasional visits from a teacher or trainer, or with an enterprise registered training organisation trainer on site.

It is evident that many domains of knowledge and skill are required for teachers and trainers to operate confidently across such a range of teaching situations, and those who were well qualified and experienced could adapt learning materials, plan programs, deliver training and assess competence with an ability that went far beyond a superficial interpretation of the training package and its assessment requirements. They were aware of the diversity of their learner groups and the trainees' learning styles; they also had a deep understanding of assessment and were able to construct tasks that maintained the integrity of the training package, while allowing for some adjustment for the learner's circumstances. It is debatable whether such teacher skills and knowledge can be realised through the qualification currently required for teachers and trainers—the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Perhaps significantly, two teachers (both construction teachers) interviewed in the study, who displayed a great deal of expertise in their teaching, had university-level degrees or diplomas in education. They were able to discuss their practice in some detail and explain how they adapted their teaching for different learner needs. They were also aware of their limitations, sought advice and peer assistance, and were able to plan for improvement. The asset maintenance (cleaning) case study demonstrated the importance of an effective registered training organisation, in this instance, a regional TAFE institute which employs qualified training staff and enables those staff to continue their development and remain current with trends in the industry.

Trainees interviewed for this study articulated the attributes of good teaching and training. They applauded those who were respectful of their circumstances, literacy and numeracy levels and who adapted to meet their particular learning needs. Trainees and enterprise representatives were also able to identify situations where the teachers and trainers were not up to the required level, with a number of enterprises changing registered training organisations because of poor-quality teachers. There was an awareness that some teachers and trainers were not familiar with the industry whose package they were teaching. 'Generic' teachers who used the industry expertise of enterprise-based assessors did not seem to be what was required or what enterprises and trainees respected. The implication of this was that teachers and trainers needed qualifications and experience in the industry in which they taught, as well as high-level teaching qualifications.

Training package

All research participants felt that the currency, relevance and industry sensitivity of the respective training packages exerted a significant impact on quality. The weighting given to each of these

issues varied considerably by industry area. While the training packages in the six industry areas were generally considered to be appropriate for the learners, there were some differences in participant opinions. The degree of industry input into the training package and its revisions was generally seen to be a critical factor, and some comments suggested that there were a number of problems with particular training packages. For example, the Community Services Training Package included units that might be too prescriptive or that might create unrealistic expectations of trainees. Here, the flexibility and creativity of the registered training organisation was an important ameliorating influence.

Learning resources

High-quality resources were viewed as essential for a high-quality traineeship. This was particularly obvious where the traineeship was conducted fully on the job. The case studies identified difficulties in providing resources to support trainees who had low levels of language, literacy and numeracy or whose first language was not English. The cleaning industry addressed this problem by providing audiovisual aids and simulated working environments. In the meat industry extensive use was made of online learning resources that relied less on print and more on visual representations of the intended learning. High-quality resources were seen as those which were written in plain English, with appropriate illustrations, and were not formulaic or written in template form. This was particularly critical when assessment was involved and some participants felt that more investment in this area would contribute to overall quality.

The effectiveness of the resources and the extent to which they contribute to high-quality traineeships were believed by some respondents to be primarily the province of the registered training organisation. In other cases resources were produced industry-wide, as for the meat industry, and with national training package support materials. Quality was more likely to be guaranteed where there was a range of resources that were relevant, current, nationally applicable and reflected current legislation, as in the children's services industry.

It was also clear that resources needed to provide explicit links between the off-the-job and on-the-job components of the traineeship. Where this gap was too large, quality could be compromised. Materials that were out of date and no longer relevant to the industry area were seen as compromising quality. This was particularly evident in the financial services sites, where the highly specialised nature of the industry juxtaposed beside overly generic learning materials had produced a justifiable scepticism about the quality of the traineeships.

Funding and incentives

Funding was seen to be a significant issue in traineeships, particularly in areas such as cleaning, where the profit margins were quite low. In some industries, for example, the meat and finance industries, training for compliance and regulatory reasons was necessary, irrespective of the funding available; in these instances funding helped to develop the necessary infrastructure and improve quality. Inconsistencies in funding rules among the states and territories had the potential to compromise quality; for example, the absence or reduction of funding would reduce the ability of enterprises to provide effective on-the-job training or the ability of registered training organisations to undertake the desired number of site visits. Consistent policies and practices in traineeships across jurisdictions would contribute to higher levels of quality.

The lack of clear and accessible information about traineeships and their funding was also seen to be a major impediment, despite major efforts by many stakeholders. In the case of the meat industry, the industry's advisory council had largely assumed the role of providing this employer information. The other industries did not seem to have the advantage of such a body.

Because they impacted on the calibre of applicants and on retention, trainee wage levels were an important component of the overall quality of the traineeship. Wages varied markedly across the six industry areas examined in this study. In the meat industry entry-level wage rates were highly competitive with other industry areas, although in the children's services area wages were seen as a

barrier to high-quality outcomes, with entrants receiving low wages. Some respondents considered low wages to be tied to training wage provisions, but it should be noted that employers were able to choose to pay higher wages, and many did so, particularly where they found it hard to attract labour and/or where product pricing structures permitted it.

It is possible that a different funding formula would improve the quality of traineeships. If smaller employers who currently experience difficulties in providing the training needed received higher payments for trainees, then this may act as an incentive for them. Larger companies are able to reap the benefits of economies of scale that are simply unavailable to smaller enterprises.

Sense of vocation

Some industries have long-standing occupational identities, while others have weak identities; traineeships are valued particularly in undervalued industries. In two of the industry areas studied, meat processing and cleaning, traineeships have the potential to contribute a great deal to the sense of vocation of the participants. These two industry areas have suffered from poor public perceptions of their worth. This in turn has created a volatile labour force, where employment 'churning' is very common. The availability of traineeships could make a great difference to the individual value which workers ascribed to their work, their productivity, their safety, their self-efficacy and motivation.

A more strategic approach to the marketing of traineeships and their value could contribute to the creation of a more multiskilled workforce and attract better candidates to traineeship industries. The retail industry case study demonstrated that traineeships were reaching a mature stage, with a generation of traineeship-trained managers who appreciated the value of traineeships, similar to those industries where apprenticeships prevailed.

In the building and construction industry, however, the heavy weight of the apprenticeship system had unfortunately led to a deeply embedded set of suspicions about traineeships. The sense of vocation in this industry was firmly tied to apprenticeships and there was little support from the major trade union, as a union respondent put it, 'for bodgie traineeships that fragment the trades … [Traineeships] will fill the industry up with a big group of semi-skilled people who are going to do damage.' With such perceptions firmly entrenched it was difficult to identify constructive ideas from some stakeholders that could contribute to improved quality in traineeships, as they remained in a frame of mind that wished traineeships away.

Processes

Pedagogy: On and off the job

Most of the informants agreed that an off-the-job component was necessary if quality in traineeships was to be guaranteed. The ideal model for delivery was believed to be a combination of both on- and off-job training, where the relative weightings given to each component was negotiated by employer, employee and registered training organisation. A combination enabled trainees to interact (ideally across different companies) and built group support and solidarity. Quality would be achieved when flexible approaches to delivery were adopted that focused not only on the acquisition of skills but also on the development of the underpinning knowledge that was necessary if trainees were to progress to higher-level qualifications: as one construction industry interviewee put it: 'The secret is understanding why you're doing what you're doing.' Underpinning knowledge was best taught in a non-disruptive and quiet atmosphere away from the normal workstation, with support from a trainer. In some instances the exigencies of production simply did not allow for meaningful training to occur and hence off-the-job training was needed.

The effectiveness of the off-the-job training component was to some extent influenced by the inclination and ability of employers to release trainees to undertake this learning. In industries and/or enterprises where the commitment to traineeships was very high, employers recognised the importance of this element of the training to the maintenance of quality. However, where profit

margins were low, or if the particular company was small, releasing staff was an expensive exercise that influenced profit margins. High-quality training was also achieved when the workplace could provide opportunities for integrating the trainee's learning and assessment with workplace practices. The use of the trainee's supervisor as the trainer/assessor enabled very close monitoring of trainee progress and established clear and strong links between underpinning knowledge and the application of skills in the workplace.

The cleaning industry in the asset maintenance case study provides an example of how both the on- and off-the-job components of the training are used effectively. In this instance, the off-the-job training was emphasised and was delivered up front in the traineeship life cycle, thus embedding the necessary underpinning knowledge before staff progressed to the job itself. One of the cleaning examples demonstrates how the on-the-job training is facilitated by an additional member of the cleaning team and by the establishment of a strong mentor relationship with another, experienced employee.

Quality was high when on-the-job training was monitored for currency of content and process. Good-quality resources, opportunities for practice, an acceptance of the likelihood of mistakes, and skilled and empathetic trainers and supervisors were seen to be vital to ensuring the quality of the learning experiences. The skills, knowledge and experience of the trainers, both on and off the job, were seen as critical to high-quality traineeships.

In some industry areas informants felt that traineeship quality could be assured when the traditional apprenticeship model was adopted and comprised substantial periods of off-the-job training and an assigned mentor on the job. There needed to be careful selection of mentors; they needed to be able to model good practice, as well as having the appropriate attributes for overseeing the trainee. The traditional apprenticeship model was applied to a traineeship in some areas of general construction, where apprenticeship processes were well understood.

In all cases and for all delivery modes, the need for learning support from both the employer/supervisor and the registered training organisation were seen as the central and underpinning component that determined quality. If programs were tailored or customised to support particular trainees, if appropriate program content was maintained and the relationship between off the job and the workplace activities was made explicit, then the respondents believed that quality would be guaranteed.

Employer–trainee psychological contract

In some industry areas there were clear expectations of the contribution of each of the parties to the traineeship—the employer, the employee and the registered training organisation. Clearly articulated expectations attracted and retained workers and provided a sound basis for trust between employer and worker. This was particularly so in the meat industry, where traineeships were deeply embedded and accepted as part of the conditions of employment. Several company respondents noted that that they had offered traineeships as part of their quest to become an 'employer of choice'.

A registered training organisation that advocated, explained and serviced the needs of the company and also the trainee contributed to the quality of the traineeship. Where the registered training organisation provided less than optimal service or where the employer did not provide appropriate support or training on the job, the trainee could become disgruntled. Poor experiences in the on-the-job component of the traineeship and from the registered training organisation, and unclear financial and operational information had a negative impact on the quality of the traineeship. Where a traineeship was a positive experience for a trainee, their commitment to the company and the industry was enhanced.

Intermediary interactions

Stakeholders agreed that interactions between employers and intermediary organisations involved in the traineeship system could contribute significantly to the level of quality in traineeships. Intermediaries such as group training organisations and apprenticeship centres were critical in disseminating information and safeguarding employers' interests, while also protecting employees from potential exploitation. The former were particularly important in maintaining and supporting the traineeship system. Since many 'employers are still not up to speed and traineeships fall over', as a respondent from the meat industry put it, a more proactive and supportive strategic direction could be adopted by some of the intermediaries and this would contribute to higher-quality levels. This was particularly important where trainees might have a disability or low levels of language, literacy and numeracy, or were from a non-English speaking background.

In some instances the lack of a nationally consistent approach and identified inefficiencies in state training authorities and Australian Apprenticeship Centres adversely influenced the quality of the traineeships. Many respondents felt that better and more efficient sign-up arrangements would contribute to the uptake and subsequently the quality of traineeships. Quality could also be improved if staff members in the various state departments of education or training were able to provide helpful advice and support with the operation of traineeships.

Retention during traineeship

The attrition rates of some traineeships were perceived to be high. In some instances this was due to the low wages offered, for instance, in children's services. In other cases, such as cleaning and meat processing, the attrition rates reflected the general volatility of the labour force, where high turnover of staff was the norm. However, it should be noted that one cleaning company had experienced no attrition since the introduction of its traineeship program. It was clear that frequent visits by representatives from the appropriate registered training organisation, who reinforced the relationships between theory and practice and dealt with employment, motivational or relationship issues, contributed to lower attrition rates as well as higher levels of quality. This was particularly the case where the traineeship was undertaken entirely on the job.

Group training organisations were important in maintaining the apprenticeship and traineeship system. Joint group training funding enabled group training organisations to place trainees and subsidise their placements. In the research the role of group training organisations in construction was well documented as was their support of equity initiatives such as the Indigenous traineeships in the bank company example and one of the cleaning examples.

Outputs

Calibre and industry acceptance of graduated trainees

In the cleaning and meat processing industry areas, traineeships were seen as a way of enhancing the business position of the company. The ability to demonstrate that employees conformed to regulations, legislation and compliance regimes through traineeships was seen to be an important component of the company's quality processes. In most industries traineeship graduates were accepted by the industry. The qualifications were regarded as portable and the skills transferable.

Some reservations about the quality of traineeships were expressed; these largely related to registered training organisations that were perceived to 'push people through' at the expense of high-quality training outcomes. While no such instances were observed during this research, many respondents produced anecdotes to support this claim.

Pathways to higher qualifications

The availability of clear pathways to higher qualifications in the industry was regarded as an indicator of quality. In some industries these pathways were clearly articulated, promoted and supported. In others a disparity between certificate levels was seen as impediment to the smooth transition between levels of qualification. In the case of building and construction, for example, the Certificate II General Construction offered only partial pathways into higher qualifications. Nevertheless, some employers routinely used traineeships in this industry as a pathway to an apprenticed certificate III qualification.

A number of participants (for example, in children's services) commented on the lack of funding for diploma-level qualifications and suggested that quality could be improved if funding were made available for higher-level qualifications. In some industries however employers funded higher-level qualifications for their workers.

Career progression

The opportunities for career progression influenced to some extent the perceived quality and value of undertaking a traineeship. Career progression possibilities varied across the industries. Where the industry was highly distributed, as with cleaning, there were fewer opportunities for upward movement as managerial positions beyond the supervisory level were relatively scarce. In some industry areas, such as meat processing, career progression was regarded as a way of 'growing their own' staff for higher-level positions. Where traineeships were regarded by the organisation as part of overall strategic workforce planning, as with the financial services and meat processing studies, the quality of the training during traineeships was more likely to be assured, since the traineeship provided the foundation for subsequent skills and knowledge acquisition. Where the attainment of progressive certificate levels contributed to increased pay scales, participants felt that this encouraged career progression and legitimacy for training, reinforcing the need for funding for higher-level qualifications.

Outcomes

Skilled staff for businesses and industry

Severe staff shortages in some industry areas meant that the skills of potential employees were not always of the appropriate standard. Traineeships were regarded as a way of improving the overall skill levels of the new, and in some cases existing, workforce. Traineeships also contributed to the 'professionalisation' of the industry, as in the case of cleaning, meat processing and children's services. Traineeship employers were able to avoid spending time going through the basics with every new employee. Furthermore, traineeships could also be used to address vital issues such as health, hygiene and OH&S, thereby enhancing the quality of working life for the workforce. Through multiskilling, traineeships could create better jobs with greater variety and longer hours.

Staying in the industry

Employers generally regarded traineeships as an investment in their workforce and as a way to attract and retain staff, many employers believing that the skills learned during the traineeship were transferable to other employers or occupations and contributing to the self-confidence and self-efficacy of employees. Some organisations keen to retain trainees after the completion of their traineeship established career counselling and targeted employment strategies, consciously creating pathways to other parts of the organisation for trainees. This practice was regarded as contributing to both the quality of the traineeships and the overall workforce needs of the company. There was no evidence of employers terminating or wishing to terminate trainees at the end of the traineeship, although where traineeships were part of a labour market program there was no sense of 'failure' if participants left for other employment.

Additional considerations

The National Audit Office model includes additional considerations relating to objectives and resources, since a complete picture of quality must incorporate the achievement of appropriate objectives and also considerations of efficiency and appropriate allocation of resources in terms of costs and benefits. The section below discusses the case study findings in relation to these two issues of objectives and resources.

Objectives—are traineeships a labour market program or a strategy for skill formation?

The case studies did not provide a definitive answer to this question because for many the two were inextricably linked. Traineeships were introduced in the 1980s, partly as a form of labour market program in a time of high unemployment and with regard to particular disadvantaged groups. This research study was carried out during 2007–08 at a time when the labour market was extremely tight and when all employers complained of difficulties in finding suitable staff. The labour market program aspect of traineeships—helping people into work—thus operated in two ways. Firstly, the presence of traineeships meant that employers were able to work more effectively with groups and individuals who, in harder economic times, would not perhaps enter the labour market. These groups and individuals might, for example, have low literacy or low social skills, and traineeships enabled employers to take on disadvantaged applicants, confident that, after completing a traineeship, they would become productive workers. Examples identified in this research were the meat and the construction industries, where applicants were scarce and often of poor quality. Secondly, even in a period of record low unemployment, there were still some groups and individuals who found it difficult to access work independently. Traineeships operated by intermediary organisations assisted these people into work. An example from the case studies includes a church-sponsored charitable organisation which was both a group training organisation and a registered training organisation. This body worked with long-term unemployed people in cleaning (and other industries). Case studies which illustrated a more skills-focused approach included retail and child care. The examples with a greater focus on labour market factors also demonstrated a strong commitment to skill formation.

Resourcing—who should pay and who benefits?

Benefits from traineeships accrue to enterprises in terms of increased skill levels, motivated workforces and their increased attractiveness in the labour market ('an employer of choice'). Individual trainees realise benefits in terms of better job prospects and self-efficacy, while a registered training organisation receives funding for larger numbers of students. The nation as a whole benefits from increased skills levels and a large and active network of training providers. The case studies showed that costs were borne as follows:

- ✧ by enterprises, which provided employment to relatively unskilled people, time release for staff undergoing training, and considerable amounts of staff time for planning, organising, implementing and evaluating on-the-job training and the services provided by registered training organisations
- ✧ by individual trainees, who sometimes in their own time undertook the 'homework' associated with their studies and sometimes had to pay a small contribution towards registered training organisation enrolment
- ✧ by registered training organisations, which sometimes offered traineeships despite making no money or even a loss on such programs
- ✧ by the nation as a whole, through provision of employment subsidies, 'user choice' funding to registered training organisations, and provision of funding and infrastructure for intermediary bodies such as group training organisations and apprenticeship centres.

The case studies showed that there were varying degrees of understanding of the relative costs and benefits of the traineeship, as well as varying degrees of importance attached to the notion of costs and benefits to training. Enterprises tended to use traineeships for a variety of motives and, while costs and benefits were considered, often the desire to participate sprang from other motives.

Employers often acted against what seemed to be contrary to their interests economically. For example, a company in the cleaning case study not only enrolled its workers in traineeships despite receiving no funding, it also paid them to attend classes outside their normal working hours. For individuals, since traineeships were often attached to a job they would do anyway, there seemed to be little deliberate weighing-up of costs and benefits. Gratitude tended to be directed towards the employer, who provided the opportunity for a traineeship, rather than to the government which partly funded the opportunity.

The traineeship life cycle

The previous section has given an overview of the high-level stakeholder interviews and analysed the case study data using headings derived from the adapted National Audit Office definition of quality given in the introduction. A clear division emerged in the data gathered in the research between what happens in an individual traineeship and broader policy issues.

The term 'traineeship lifecycle' is used to refer to the processes that relate to individual trainees entering, undertaking and completing a traineeship and incorporates all the actors that engage with those trainees, including registered training organisations and the employing enterprises. In this chapter we further analyse quality in the traineeship life cycle, using data both from the case studies and from the stakeholder interviews. Policy issues are examined in the final chapter.

Analysis of the data indicated that a list of features that impact on the quality experienced in a traineeship lifecycle can be identified. The features may be considered against identifiable phases of a traineeship, namely:

1 recruitment; sign-up; induction

2 training delivery and assessment

3 support during the traineeship

4 completion and beyond.

While all are important, some features were shown in our research to impact more than others on quality. In our analysis of the data collected, the quality factors were assessed as having either a high, medium or low impact on the overall success of a traineeship. Low does not mean negligible impact; it means that the impact was lower than some of the other features. Table 4 indicates the quality features, organised by level of impact on the quality of the traineeship.

Some features appear at several phases but have different meanings at the different phases. For example, engagement of intermediaries with the trainee refers in phase 1 to the provision of appropriate information and counselling for a correct occupational choice, while in phase 3 it refers to frequent contact and what is often known as 'pastoral care' of trainees. Appendix 5 of the support document provides more information about the application of the quality components in the different phases of a traineeship.

Table 4 Quality features of traineeship, shown by level of impact[(a)]

High impact	Medium impact	Low impact
Enterprise enthusiasm and commitment (1, 3)	Careful recruitment and selection of trainees (1)	Contact for trainees with peer cohort (2)
Clear expectations shared among parties (1, 3)	Opportunities for practising skills (2)	RPL available and of high quality (2)
RTO engaged with trainee (1, 2, 3, 4)	Quality of training package (3)	Skills transferable to other occupations and industries (2)
RTO engaged with enterprise (1, 3, 4)		Guidance materials available and utilised to assist people perform their role (3)
Intermediaries engaged with enterprise and trainee (1, 3, 4)		Pathways available to other qualifications (4)
Off-the-job training present and effective (2)		Graduated trainees attractive to other employers (4)
On-the-job training visible (i.e. separate from working) and effective (2)		
RTO and enterprise staff have relevant teaching/training qualifications (2)		
High-quality and freely available learning resources (2)		
Rigorous and relevant assessment methods (2)		
Good work practices in enterprise (2)		
Structures in place to support trainees at work (3)		
Staff in RTO and enterprise skilled in mentoring trainees and shaping work to allow for learning (3)		

Note: (a) Phases of traineeship shown in brackets after each feature.

As well as the features noted above, which are within the control of the local players (worksites, registered training organisations, trainees and local intermediary bodies), we identified four 'quality resilience factors' which impact on the quality of traineeships. While their presence or absence may not be the final determinants of quality in a traineeship, they have some effect. We call them quality-resilience factors because they test the commitment and stamina of the participants in producing a high-quality product. If these factors are oriented favourably in a given situation, a high-quality traineeship is more likely. If the reverse holds, then a high-quality traineeship may be achieved, but it is more difficult. The research uncovered examples of high-quality traineeships, despite the presence of adverse quality resilience factors.

The factors are listed below with some explanation for each.

- *The performance of government bodies and intermediaries*: for example, a state accreditation body may be responsive or unresponsive, or an apprenticeship centre may or may not provide accurate information.
- *The organisational structure/distribution of workers within an enterprise*: for example, a high level of concentration of trainees at one worksite makes economies of scale possible.
- *The availability of a choice of registered training organisation*: for example, in metropolitan areas there might be a wide choice, whereas in rural areas or industry 'thin markets', there may be very little choice of registered training organisation.
- *The availability of funding such as incentives and user choice options*: for example, funding may or may not be available for a particular qualification and/or group of workers.

Facilitators and inhibitors of quality features

A number of factors were identified that facilitate and inhibit the development of the quality features given in table 4. The facilitators and inhibitors were either directly observed in the case studies, reported by respondents within the case studies and interviews, or derived by the researchers from the data. The facilitators and inhibitors are listed in full in appendix 6 of the support document. The table given in this appendix focuses on facilitators (since in many cases inhibitors are the direct

converse of facilitators) and is ordered by level of impact, beginning with high-impact features. For example, in terms of the extent and effectiveness of off-the-job training, a high-impact facilitator might be the employer's commitment to time release for trainees, while a high-impact inhibitor might be workplace production pressures.

Characteristics of a model traineeship

In this section the quality impact factors and the facilitators and inhibitors are utilised to produce an overview of the characteristics of a model traineeship in the context of the four phases of the traineeship lifecycle. The summary differentiates between those characteristics which the research showed were necessary for a high-quality traineeship and those which are present ideally. Some factors specific to fully on-the-job traineeships and the off-the-job component are also mentioned. Two hypothetical trainee case histories were developed, one on the job and the other off the job, to illustrate the characteristics described below. These can be found at appendix 7 in the support document.

Phase 1: Recruitment; sign-up; induction

Necessarily

Prior to recruitment, the registered training organisation and intermediaries learn about the organisation's workplace and business issues and try to ensure that the traineeship adds value to the enterprise as well as to the individual. The registered training organisation works with the employer and the supervisor to select the qualification and units of competency for the traineeship, ensuring they are relevant to the enterprise and the future career intentions of the trainee. The qualification provides the potential for advancement to a higher qualification or pathways to other education and training options and is designed to develop occupational loyalty within the trainee.

Once the trainee has been selected, the registered training organisation and intermediaries meet with the employer, supervisor and trainee to establish a partnership and provide advice to the enterprise and the trainee. The employer and immediate supervisor demonstrate a strong commitment to the success of the traineeship; the employer clearly regards the traineeship as an investment in their workforce and as a way to attract and retain staff. The employer considers traineeships to be part of the organisation's overall workforce development strategy and is clear about the purpose of traineeships. The trainer, trainee and supervisor are in no doubt about the expected outcomes and processes to be delivered through the traineeship and each party's relevant responsibilities. All parties are aware of the frequency of contacts from the registered training organisation, the means of communication available (SMS, email, phone) and the dispute-resolution processes in place. The employer conducts an induction/orientation session for the new trainee or trainees.

In larger organisations, the human resource team develops comprehensive guidelines for the business units which take on trainees. This team ensures consistent treatment of trainees and safeguards the organisation's training standards. Where possible, a person is given responsibility for managing all trainees in the organisation.

Ideally

The registered training organisation and employer only recruit trainees who are clearly suited to the industry and have the ability to succeed in the program. Where younger applicants are taken on, the training organisation and employer involve parents in the recruitment phase to provide support and motivation during the life of the traineeship. The training organisation and employer brief parents on key program details, including their expectations of the trainee. The former also provides the trainee with a resource pack containing all learning materials and assessment tools, along with the administrative details and paperwork associated with the traineeship. Staff from state training agencies (separate from the audit functions) provide support and guidance to registered training organisations, employers and supervisors on best-practice traineeship delivery.

Phase 2: Training delivery and assessment

Necessarily

The registered training organisation and employer agree on a program that includes the mixture of on- and off-the-job training that will ensure the highest quality outcomes in the traineeship. The training organisation does not impose a single delivery model on the employer but offers a tailored delivery and assessment solution suited to each workplace. The training organisation uses recognition of prior learning (RPL) appropriately to encourage trainee engagement and articulation into further traineeship pathways. The training organisation uses RPL only when agreed with the employer and trainee and to expedite early completion only when agreed by all parties. The training organisation works with the employer to ensure that any in-house employer training is embedded in the traineeship and to provide opportunities for integrating the trainee's learning and assessment with workplace practices.

The employer ensures that time is set aside for training—on the job, in the workplace or off site. The employer makes sure that the trainee is given opportunities for practice, accepts the likelihood of mistakes and provides skilled and empathetic trainers and supervisors to encourage quality learning experiences. The employer ensures that all worksites operate according to good working practices and conditions, particularly in relation to OH&S, and that good practice is modelled in the workplace to provide a consistent message for the trainee. The employer ensures that the trainee is closely supported by mentors or buddies and that supervisors spend time with trainees to mentor and encourage their learning.

The aim of both the registered training organisation and employer is to utilise trainers with skills, knowledge and experience of a high standard. They aim for high-quality training that will extend the trainee's skills and encourage their attachment to the occupation, rather than focusing only on completion. Trainers are enthusiastic about the field of study and keep up with rapidly evolving technology and work practices. The training organisation uses high-quality and current learning materials with a strong emphasis on OH&S and relevant to the trainee's workplace. Both the training organisation and employer ensure that training and assessment materials are customised to the specific workplace activities rather than being generic work books. Materials are in plain English, with graphics where appropriate to the industry area and AQF level, and are adapted to suit trainees with particular language, literacy or numeracy needs. Assessment is as holistic as is compatible with rigour and relevant to the workplace, while avoiding over-customisation. Underpinning knowledge extending beyond the immediate workplace is delivered.

Where the traineeship is fully on the job, the employer and registered training organisation work together to deliver well-structured on-the-job training. The employer develops a clearly articulated on-the-job curriculum or program of activities that provides appropriate experiences and learning opportunities, allowing the trainee at least three hours per week away from the job during working hours to study the learning materials supplied by the training organisation and to carry out the assessment tasks. Training organisation staff scaffold the learner's use of work books and learning materials rather than just expecting them to complete written tasks. The content and processes used in on-the-job training are closely monitored by the training organisation staff to safeguard quality.

Where there is off-the-job training conducted at a registered training organisation, the trainers impart a coherent body of underpinning knowledge to trainees during off-the-job training and use authentic simulated environments to provide trainees with opportunities for practice. Trainers utilise a variety of delivery methods to cater for diverse learners, including the use of appropriately applied learning theory, well-scaffolded project work and group discussions, as well as lectures and anecdotes to maintain interest. Employers ensure that the release of trainees is a priority even during busy times.

Ideally

The registered training organisation offers flexible learning options to suit trainee and enterprise needs. The organisation facilitates literacy and numeracy support where necessary and liaises with other

intermediaries to ensure that equity groups have participated in pre-employment training. Employers rotate trainees among different departments or worksites (or with other employers, for example, through group training) to access the full range of experiences and opportunities for practice.

Phase 3: Support during the traineeship

Necessarily

Intermediaries develop good ongoing relations with employers and build trust with managers, supervisors and trainees. They provide accurate, current, and appropriate information. Registered training organisation staff undertake frequent visits to ensure that on-the-job trainees are satisfied with their learning and their daily work. During visits, training organisation staff reinforce the relationships between theory and practice and deal with any employment, motivational or relationship issues, or alert appropriate intermediary staff. For traineeships involving off-the-job training, training organisation staff contact employers regularly to discuss the trainee's progress and ensure that off-the-job training takes account of the type of workplace in which the trainee is located.

Employers and supervisors provide regular and ongoing feedback to trainees. The employer provides a dedicated mentor for the trainee. The mentor meets with the trainee regularly to check and ensure progress through the learning materials and the employer evaluates the mentoring relationship. The training organisation, supervisor and trainee participate in an ongoing review process to monitor issues and progress.

Ideally

Employers, supervisors and mentors use the clear and specific information and support materials provided by intermediaries, which outlines the key actions necessary to ensure quality. The employer and trainee enter into an explicit contract that covers the traineeship. The contract links the traineeship to career and salary progression in the industry, and the employer uses the agreement as a tool for attracting and retaining workers. The training organisation, employer and/or intermediary provide career counselling and pastoral care as appropriate to the trainee during the traineeship.

Phase 4: Completion and beyond

Necessarily

Both training organisation and intermediary staff work with the employer, supervisor and trainee in an effective and timely manner to ensure effective completion of the traineeship. They make sure that all assessment tasks are completed and that the trainee feels confident in each area covered. The parties participate in a comprehensive evaluation of the traineeship and review findings collectively to ensure continuous improvement purposes.

Ideally

The employer and training organisation work with the trainee to establish further education and training pathways. Training organisation staff arrange articulation into another traineeship or apprenticeship and/or enrolment into further education and training. Employers provide signposted pathways to more senior jobs in the enterprise and opportunities for the attainment of higher qualifications.

Policy implications

This chapter discusses the implications of the research project for policy. Policy stakeholders include employer and employee associations and peak bodies, skills councils, state training authorities and other government departments, peak bodies of 'traineeship life cycle' participants, and others involved with policy-making. They also include those in management positions in registered training organisations and enterprises, as these individuals create policy for their own organisations.

The aim of the project was to use our research data to identify high-quality features in traineeships, which could be applied more generally—not to evaluate or comment upon the general quality of Australian traineeships. This chapter focuses primarily on practical ways in which the high-quality features identified as a result of the research data can be applied and improved across the whole of the traineeship system.

What can be done at a policy level to improve the quality of traineeships?

The messages from the research were clear—and are equally applicable to apprenticeships. Those involved with the system were asking for consistency among jurisdictions in all traineeship processes, more transparency and more straightforward sign-up processes. They wanted a consistent set of processes from federal and state governments, particularly in relation to the length of traineeship contracts to ensure that graduates are fully skilled, as well as urgent attention to low-quality registered training organisations, perhaps involving increased monitoring of these organisations and/or the provision of advice. Other issues that emerged from the research included a need for registered training organisations to justify the qualifications and electives that were offered to employers. As Schofield (2000) has pointed out, intermediary bodies need a deep knowledge of the training system to be able to advise on such issues, and this knowledge may be lacking.

With regard to training packages, pathways to higher qualifications could be improved through speedier approval of new and revised training packages, and more willingness among the parties to compromise on entrenched positions. Having well-articulated pathways to higher-level qualifications, including consideration of appropriate AQF levels, is a crucial aspect of training package development.

Pedagogical processes: How policy could assist

The research indicated that good pedagogy was at the heart of a good traineeship and that there was room for improvement in pedagogical processes. Teaching and learning takes place in individual worksites and training rooms, and much of the quality depends on individual people. However, processes could be improved through more attention at the policy level to teaching and learning, both off and on the job. One suggestion from the research was the active encouragement—perhaps from registered training organisation peak bodies (public and private) and/or state training authorities—for the acquisition of higher-level educational qualifications for

training organisation trainers. Important also is the provision of appropriately qualified staff delivering traineeships, rather than having 'generic' trainers and assessors in this role.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) was mentioned by many participants. People generally felt that recognition of prior learning should be given conservatively because it was beneficial to undergo training and necessary to fill gaps that may have been left in previous training. It is possible that the poor practices that were hinted at in these responses could be improved by better training of teachers and trainers in recognition of prior learning assessment, including familiarising teachers with arguments for and against its implementation in particular circumstances.

Central funding for the development of high-quality learning resources, including textbooks and online materials, with some targeted to particular learner groups was raised as a factor likely to contribute to high-quality traineeships. There seemed to be a need to move beyond the typical 'work books' produced as part of training package support materials, to resources that provided a deeper engagement with a body of knowledge. Where traineeships have a labour market as well as skill-formation focus, extra resources are required to support some client groups.

Policy possibilities for the traineeship players

High-quality on-the-job training is a fundamental element of traineeships and implicit in the role of stakeholder groups such as industry peak bodies, skills councils and trade unions is a responsibility to maintain the quality of this component of traineeships. The role of the employer, particularly in relation to the workplace supervision of trainees and the need to provide a wide range of task experiences to match the qualification, was emphasised, although it was recognised that less experienced enterprises might struggle with their on-the-job obligations and may need additional assistance or professional development (for example, undertaking structured training such as that contained in the Training and Assessment Training Package unit TAADEL404A: Facilitate work-based learning).

Additional processes designed to safeguard quality in traineeships and which more tightly specify requirements for both off- and on-the-job training could be introduced. It may be argued that the quality of off-the-job training is largely assured by the AQTF, but the research indicated that this was not necessarily the case, with, in some instances, the need for more delivery of underpinning knowledge. Certainly, more sophisticated approaches are needed to the services provided by registered training organisations to on-the-job trainees. The research indicated examples where such services were extensive and professional, but also others where this was not always the case. Furthermore, there is little regulation of the on-the-job training provided by employers, compared with that which exists in other countries such as Germany, and as many employers of trainees are unfamiliar with contracted training there is a need to assist them in their obligations.

Employers should be encouraged to be 'critical consumers' of registered training organisation services, for example, requesting detailed information about delivery methods. Mentoring by experienced 'traineeship employers' would assist with this. Such mentoring could be brokered by employer associations, the Enterprise Registered Training Organisation Association and similar bodies. Those employers with well-developed 'traineeship management skills' (Rowlands 2000) would probably be very willing to share their insights. Training programs in 'traineeship management skills' for employers could be developed by industry peak bodies, skills councils and trade unions.

Trainees also have obligations in the teaching and learning process, which are more difficult to enforce through policy, but which could be encouraged through registered training organisations, employers, Australian Apprenticeship Centres, unions and, where appropriate, through schools prior to employment. This is particularly true for fully on-the-job trainees, as individual motivation plays a large part in success in this mode of delivery. Trainees should be encouraged to seek learning support for literacy and other difficulties. A specific contact person, who can direct trainees to appropriate assistance, should be provided to all trainees as part of the training contract.

Outcomes for trainees

Analysis of data on economic rates of return on individual investment in vocational qualifications (Long & Shah 2008), although not targeted specifically at contracted training, indicates that traineeship returns are likely to be satisfactory. Long and Shah's research showed that returns were higher for part-time than for full-time learners, and for certificate III and above level than for lower-level qualifications; all trainees are part-time learners, and the majority of qualifications in traineeships are at certificate III level and above. Long and Shah's (2008) research also showed returns to be higher for those with school completion at Year 10 and below, which describes much of the cohort of those undertaking existing worker traineeships.

While these recent results are promising for traineeships, the notion of rate of economic return does not align well with the traineeship experience. Trainees undertake qualifications as part of a job rather than making a decision to invest in a qualification. Our research provided a qualitative approach and one not confined to economic returns as reflected in potential salary levels. The research uncovered examples of good pathways to higher-level qualifications and promotion opportunities, as well as examples of training deliberately given in skills that were transferable to other employers and occupations. However, there was room for improvement. Skills councils could consider devoting more resources to liaison with other skills councils and industry associations to improve pathways and transferability.

Importantly, as the cleaning case study indicated, even putting aside promotion and higher-level qualifications, traineeships could open the door to 'better jobs'—jobs that use a wider range of skills and are less casualised. Employer peak bodies, trade unions and skills councils could work together to produce examples for dissemination in relevant industries to show how this could be done on at least a cost-neutral basis.

Resourcing traineeships

Who should pay for traineeship training and who benefits? The research showed general agreement with the method of financing traineeships: through an employment incentive payable by the Commonwealth Government to the employers; 'user choice' funding payable by the state or territory to the selected registered training organisation; and Commonwealth Government-funded curriculum through training package development. A number of suggestions for minor adjustments were made that might improve quality: funding more heavily weighted towards completions and weighted differently for different levels of qualifications; incentive payments (federal and state) varied for geographical remoteness, high-cost industry areas and/or high-quality training; and small employers receiving more funding than large employers in recognition of their lack of established systems. A further suggestion was that state training authorities and the federal government might consider looking at arrangements that currently exclude some qualifications and some groups of workers (for example, existing workers) from employment incentives and/or user choice funding, as these seem to be creating particular hurdles for the participation of some industry areas. One participating organisation argued for the exclusion of a greater number of qualifications from traineeship eligibility to allow more funding for the remainder. Finally, consideration could be given to improved funding for group training organisations, in recognition of their important role in traineeship operations.

Addressing and redressing beliefs of low quality

As we highlighted in the introductory chapter, there have been some challenges associated with the implementation of traineeships and there are also perceptions that traineeships could be of a higher quality. We feel that in a report identifying the features of high-quality traineeships that it might be useful to address some of these issues in the context of the data we have collected for this research project. While the research found many areas where improvements could be made, on the whole participants undertook traineeships in the 'right spirit' (Misko, Patterson & Markotic 2001) and

there was nothing to indicate that deficiencies in pedagogical or administrative processes were more obvious than in any other area of the Australian VET or the broader educational system.

Beliefs about low quality: What the research tells us

In this section, beliefs about low quality are briefly addressed using data from the interviews and case studies.

- *Belief: funding is the driver of most participation in traineeships*: funding incentives, although important, were not the main driver for either initial or continued participation in traineeships. Properly managed traineeship programs were expensive, and funding assisted here. Many employers participated even when no subsidies were available because they were convinced of the benefits. There was little evidence to suggest that employers took advantage of the chance to pay the reduced training wage, with many companies in the study paying above-market rates to their trainees.
- *Belief: traineeships just provide public funding for training that would happen anyway*: there was no evidence in the study to show that traineeships provided an unwarranted shift of costs from the employer to the public purse. The systematic and broad-based nature of traineeship programs exceeded by far the combination of haphazard on-the-job training and assorted short courses, which were all that existed before traineeships were introduced in some of the industry areas in the study.
- *Belief: traineeships are (and should be) just a labour market program*: the research generally showed that traineeships were used by industries and enterprises as skill-development strategies and were not labour market programs, although in a few cases the primary focus was a labour market one—usually to assist disadvantaged groups such as young Aboriginal people and the long-term unemployed into work. The research showed that traineeships are in many instances performing a dual role and therefore adding double value to the economy.
- *Belief: the content of traineeship programs is low-level*: the research showed clearly that the traineeship programs studied contained a great deal of skill development and underpinning knowledge. As the development of qualifications in many of these industry areas is comparatively recent, the codification of the body of knowledge is less developed than in industry areas with longer-established qualifications and this is probably what has led to perceptions of lower levels.
- *Belief: employers do not wish to retain trainees after they have served their purpose in attracting employment subsidies*: the research showed the reverse—all of the employers involved wished to retain trainees after the completion of their traineeships; for many, traineeships were an recruitment tool.
- *Belief: assessment is just 'tick and flick'*: the research indicated that assessment practices could be improved, but there was no evidence that, in general, practices were of poorer quality than in other VET programs. Various forms of assessment were used both off and on the job, including project work and the use of simulated workstations.

What can be done to improve the image of traineeships?

The previous section addresses some of the misconceptions associated with traineeships; however, they may persist unless addressed in the public arena. Of course, as traineeships become more firmly established, negative perceptions are likely to diminish. Like any new initiative, as the pool of graduates from traineeship programs increases and the operation of traineeships becomes more standardised, their use is likely to increase, as will their quality.

The longer-term outcomes of traineeships are more difficult to predict and, indeed, to plan for. Greater confidence in the traineeship system may mean the development of better articulated pathways for career progression and retention in the traineeship industries. It is also possible that a reconceptualisation of work organisation and organisational structures could occur as a result of the extension of contracted training to a greater number of workers. It is difficult to plan for certainty in a climate where the value of traineeships is not always recognised.

Thus it is important to think about ways to promote the value of traineeships. Our research suggested some possible intervention points. Industry and popular acceptance of traineeship qualifications could be improved through stakeholder familiarisation with relevant qualifications, and a willingness of stakeholders to accept qualifications in industry areas previously without them. Another approach might be their active promotion through industry associations and peak bodies, and also to employers, highlighting the less tangible benefits to be gained from traineeships, as well as the rights and financial benefits accruing from them. Industry associations, peak bodies, trade unions and skills councils could be encouraged to argue for the inclusion of a traineeship qualification as a requirement for particular job levels and for advancement within an industry and/or an organisation.

Rather than a primary focus on traditional trades, federal and state government media campaigns could promote traineeship qualifications. A more sophisticated view of traineeship utilisation could be disseminated and the various levels of engagement defined and marketed. School careers teachers, and importantly other teachers who may consciously or unconsciously affect career choice, need to be further educated about the quality of traineeship qualifications. In the context of registered training organisations and state training systems, more detailed and open discussion between those dealing with apprenticeship qualifications and those dealing with traineeships would assist in promoting the value and role of traineeships.

Are high-quality features replicable across traineeship areas?

We end by considering the final research question, 'How far are high-quality features replicable across traineeship areas?' The analysis in this report has shown that there are many clearly identifiable features of high quality in traineeships and, while each feature has relevance to all industry and occupational areas, some have applicability in specific industry or occupational areas. For example, well-designed and -delivered off-the-job training may be more likely in some industry areas than others; good, well-organised work practices are more likely in large workplaces than small; some industry areas may have a more suitable and better designed training package to work with than others. The models of adoption of traineeships within industries and enterprises provide specific information about the effects of many of the outside influences which impact on quality features. In the end, the 'quality resilience factors' and other contextual issues are what the players have to work with and which must be accommodated.

The research suggested that, with commitment on the part of the various individuals and organisations involved, a high-quality traineeship can be a reality in most and perhaps all circumstances and industry areas. Adoption of some of the tools developed as part of this research will assist those individuals and organisations in their quest for a high-quality traineeship.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *High-quality traineeships: Identifying what works—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2191.html>.

- Research methods
- Overview of high-level stakeholder interviews
- About the case studies
- Industry case studies
- Application of quality features
- Facilitators and inhibitors of quality features
- Hypothetical case histories

The National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation (NVETRE) Program is coordinated and managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with funding provided through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

This program is based upon priorities approved by ministers with responsibility for vocational education and training (VET). This research aims to improve policy and practice in the VET sector.

Research funding is awarded to organisations via a competitive grants process.

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