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**PRELIMINARY STOCKTAKE OF VET SURVEY ACTIVITY IN AUSTRALIA**

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## Preface

Over the last two to three years, Commonwealth and state and territory officials, together with representatives from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), have put a very substantial effort into reviewing various aspects of the national statistics for the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

As part of this exercise, the Social Research Centre was engaged to undertake a stocktake of surveys that are conducted in the sector. The report details the various surveys, which range from national household surveys—such as the Survey of Education and Training, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)—to evaluations of particular programs and student feedback surveys.

The authors note that the report is based on preliminary scoping work only and was compiled with minimum stakeholder consultation.

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# Contents

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|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>  | <b>I</b>  |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Overview .....  | 1         |
| 1.2 Objectives.....   | 1         |
| 1.3 Methodology.....  | 1         |
| 1.4 About this report .....   | 2         |
| <b>2. VET SURVEY DATA IN CONTEXT .....</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| 2.1 VET administrative data collections.....  | 3         |
| 2.2 VET survey data stakeholders.....   | 4         |
| 2.3 Stakeholder requirements and VET survey data .....                                    | 6         |
| 2.4 Preliminary observations .....  | 8         |
| <b>3. TIER 1A SURVEYS .....</b>   | <b>9</b>  |
| 3.1 Scope and definition.....   | 9         |
| 3.2 Description of Tier 1A survey activity .....  | 9         |
| 3.3 Preliminary observations .....  | 14        |
| <b>4. TIER 1B SURVEYS .....</b>   | <b>15</b> |
| 4.1 Scope and definition.....   | 15        |
| 4.2 Description of Tier 1B survey activity .....  | 15        |
| 4.3 Preliminary observations .....  | 18        |
| <b>5. TIER 1C SURVEYS .....</b>   | <b>19</b> |
| 5.1 Scope and definition.....   | 19        |
| 5.2 Description of Tier 1C survey activity .....  | 19        |
| 5.3 Preliminary observations .....  | 21        |
| <b>6. TIER 2 SURVEYS.....</b>   | <b>22</b> |
| 6.1 Scope and definition.....   | 22        |
| 6.2 Description of Tier 2 survey activity.....  | 22        |
| 6.3 Preliminary observations .....  | 26        |
| <b>7. SELECTED TIER 3 SURVEYS.....</b>  | <b>27</b> |
| 7.1 Scope and definition.....   | 27        |
| 7.2 The role of surveys in measuring institutional performance .....                      | 27        |
| 7.3 The role of surveys in evaluating specific local-level programs and initiatives ..... | 28        |
| <b>8. RELATED SURVEY ACTIVITY .....</b>   | <b>29</b> |
| 8.1 Scope and definition.....   | 29        |
| 8.2 Description of related survey activity.....   | 29        |
| <b>9. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS .....</b>  | <b>35</b> |
| 9.1 Early findings.....   | 35        |
| 9.2 Next steps .....  | 37        |
| <b>REFERENCES .....</b>   | <b>38</b> |

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Project management responsibility for the Enhancing Survey Data Project resides with the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development. We thank our Project Coordinator, Dr Ross Kelly, Director of Business Information, Performance Evaluation and Statistics, and his team for their input.

## Abbreviations

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| ABS      | Australian Bureau of Statistics  |
| ACC      | Australian Apprenticeship Centres  |
| ACE      | Adult and community education  |
| ACFE     | Adult, community and further education   |
| ACPET    | Australian Council for Private Education and Training                                    |
| AQTF     | Australian Quality Training Framework  |
| ASQA     | Australian Skills Quality Authority  |
| AVETMISS | Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard |
| CDEP     | Community Development Employment Project   |
| COAG     | Council of Australian Governments  |
| DAISES   | Dynamics of Australian Income Support and Employment Services                            |
| DEEWR    | Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations                              |
| DEST     | Department of Education, Science and Technology  |
| DEWR     | Department of Employment and Workplace Relations   |
| ETRF     | Education and Training Reforms for the Future  |
| HILDA    | Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (Survey)                              |
| ISC      | Industry skills council  |
| KPI      | Key performance indicator  |
| KPM      | Key performance measure  |
| LSAY     | Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth   |
| NCVER    | National Centre for Vocational Education Research  |
| MCEETYA  | Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs                |
| MCTEE    | Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment                                |
| NASWD    | National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development                                  |
| NATSISS  | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey                                    |
| NIRA     | National Independent Retailers Association   |
| NQC      | National Quality Council   |
| NSOC     | National Senior Officials Committee  |
| NSSC     | National Skills Standards Council  |
| NTIS     | National Training Information Service  |
| OECD     | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                                   |
| PISA     | Programme for International Student Assessment   |
| PC       | Productivity Commission  |
| RTO      | Registered training organisation   |
| SCH      | Statistical Clearing House   |
| SCOTese  | Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment                           |
| SERA     | Survey of Employers who have Recently Advertised   |
| SET      | Survey of Education and Training   |
| SEUV     | Survey of Employer Use and Views (of the VET System)                                     |
| SEW      | Survey of Education and Work   |
| SMART    | Survey Management, Analysis and Reporting Tool   |
| SOS      | Student Outcomes Survey  |
| STA      | State training authority   |
| TAFE     | Technical and further education  |
| TREC     | Transport Research Education Consortium  |
| VET      | Vocational education and training  |





## Executive summary

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### Background

The National Vocational Education and Training Data Strategy Action Group (Action Group) commissioned the Social Research Centre to undertake a preliminary stocktake of VET-related survey research. While this stocktake was originally envisaged as part of a larger strategic review of VET-related survey activity, it was seen as a valuable compendium of survey research across the sector in its own right and is presented here as a standalone report.

The stocktake was compiled from:

- desk research, drawing heavily on NCVER's 'VET Data Strategy: current issues paper' (2008), internet search engines and academic databases
- discussions with NCVER (Adelaide) about the 'VET Data Strategy: current issues paper' and other survey research
- consultations with DEEWR (Canberra) to discuss their VET-related survey research program
- limited liaison with NCVER's Survey Network Group (under the auspices of the Action Group) to identify and collect information about state and territory research being undertaken in this area.

### Analytical approach

A taxonomy of VET-related surveys was developed by the authors to identify and categorise the variety of survey activity across the sector. The intention of the broader VET Enhancing Survey Data Project was a reduction in the number of surveys and the burden of survey participants. Five tiers of survey activity were identified:

- Tier 1A: surveys which provide input into established national accountability measures and agreed quality and performance frameworks
- Tier 1B: ad hoc and repeat national surveys undertaken by DEEWR, which are often used for program evaluation, policy development or contract management purposes
- Tier 1C: ad hoc or repeat national surveys which are used for policy development, scoping, or environmental scanning
- Tier 2: state and territory surveys. This tier comprises state and territory level surveys with a primary focus on measuring the performance of the VET sector in that state or territory, as well as surveys which inform and contribute to VET research and policy development
- Tier 3: institute-level surveys or other small-scale specific-purpose surveys.

The main focus of this report is the identification of Tier 1A, Tier 1B, Tier 1C and Tier 2 surveys.

## **Main findings**

### VET survey data in context

The report identifies the VET administrative data collections, key VET survey data stakeholders, survey data requirements and relevant VET survey populations in order to make clear the role of VET surveys as one component of the evidence base that supports VET decision-making.

Surveys constitute one of the major methods used to measure a range of aspects of the current and future performance of the VET system that are not captured in the administrative data collections; however, there is a concern that there may be considerable overlap in the surveys being undertaken. Many of these surveys are administered by different bodies, yet target the same respondents. These concerns increase with the number of VET-related surveys, as do issues relating to the ambiguity surrounding survey populations contributing to VET-specific and VET-related data collections.

### Tier 1A surveys

The nine Tier 1A survey programs identified by this report assess the nature, quality and outcomes of VET training in Australia to varying degrees of detail and specificity. Broadly speaking, this occurs through the ABS surveys; in more detail from the employers' and learners' perspectives in NCVER's surveys; and in a very specific, localised manner through VET providers in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Quality Indicators surveys.

### Tier 1B surveys

Twelve Tier 1B surveys were identified in the public domain by this research. This number is an unconfirmed estimate of total survey activity in this field. It could be argued that many of the DEEWR VET surveys are out of scope for this review because they focus on program evaluation or contract management. Departmental programs relevant to the VET sector are large, ongoing and national in focus, which suggests that any survey data required will be on a similar scale. If it is not the Jobs and Training Compact that is being evaluated, there will be another relevant program of a comparable order of magnitude. Similarly, there will always be a requirement to manage the performance of VET-related service providers and it is extremely likely that surveys of clients and customers receiving these services will be a continuing part of DEEWR's work program. Coordinating VET survey activity within the department and across the sector to minimise overlap of data collection periods and respondent burden appears to present an ongoing challenge.

### Tier 1C surveys

This research identified ten Tier 1C surveys relevant to the scoping exercise, undertaken by or on behalf of industry skills councils (ISCs), the Australian Flexible Learning Framework and the Australian Chamber of Commerce. This number is an unconfirmed estimate of total survey activity in this field. It is difficult to assess the true volume of industry-related VET survey activity since, while some industry groups openly publish survey outcomes, others appear to be less forthcoming or engage in less primary quantitative data collection. Industry surveys, while often narrowly focusing on a specific skills area or sector are typically national in scope and have the potential to overlap or coincide with other VET-specific or VET-related surveys. Consultation and discussion with ISCs and other industry stakeholders would be required to fully understand the scale and scope of survey activity in this area.

### Tier 2 surveys

Twenty-nine Tier 2 surveys were identified by this research. This number is an unconfirmed estimate of total survey activity in this field.

Based on information available in the public domain, it is difficult to assess the scale, scope and currency of VET surveys. State and territory surveys listed in this section are indicative of the 'best available' information and will need to be confirmed as part of the consultation phase of the research.

Jurisdiction-level VET surveys appear to collect data about VET issues from both a training perspective and an education perspective. Surveys of school students or school leavers typically contain a broad range of questions about VET outcomes. It is possible that these recent school leavers are also answering similar questions about training when surveyed by registered training organisations (RTOs) or other VET agencies.

### Tier 3 surveys

The institute-specific surveys included for review here are indicative only of the total survey activity undertaken by institutions. The precise number of surveys undertaken at this level could not be clarified by this research. The huge task of identifying and assessing all surveys conducted by RTOs would perhaps require a census of this survey activity or the development of administrative record-keeping practices to report or compile such activity.

## **Early findings**

The ability of this research to adequately assess the scope and relative impact of the issues identified in relation to VET-specific and VET-related survey activity was hindered by a lack of stakeholder consultation. Early findings of the desk-based scoping exercise are listed in brief below:

- Changes in reporting and compliance regimes for the Australian Government and the state and territory governments during 2010 and 2011 create some uncertainty with respect to the identification of future survey data needs.
- There is a very limited amount of information in the public domain about VET-specific and VET-related surveys beyond the Tier 1A national surveys and any work undertaken by NCVER.
- Based on the volume and scope of current survey activity, there appears to be a clear role for VET-specific survey coordination, as distinct from rationalisation, both within and across tiers.
- A thorough assessment of the VET survey population and sample frames needs to be completed before the issues of respondent burden, sample size and longitudinal surveying can be explored. At this early stage, there is little evidence of content gaps but there are indications of 'blind spots' in population coverage, most notably in relation to private providers.

## **Issues for future consideration**

### Impact of the national regulator on VET surveys

The establishment of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) in July 2011 has the potential to substantially change survey activity at both national and jurisdictional levels. It is currently difficult to determine the nature of this potential impact on VET surveys.

### Availability and accessibility of VET survey information

There is a distinct lack of published publically available information about the scope and content of survey activity across the VET sector (due to, for instance, a lag between research conduct and results release, or a reluctance of jurisdictions and stakeholders to provide detailed information). Again, direct consultation with VET survey stakeholders will be required to substantially analyse relevant issues.

### Coordination of VET survey activity

Ultimately, information-sharing amongst stakeholders about survey activity could minimise overlapping periods of data collection and create opportunities for cost-sharing, improved knowledge about survey research and data-sharing.

The Statistical Clearing House (SCH) for Business Surveys website once acted as a key source of information for survey managers, but has not been updated since 2007. It is anticipated that it will be updated in the 2011–12 financial year. For more information, go to:

<<http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/pages/About+SCH>>.

### Survey populations and sample frames

Given that information about survey execution was difficult to obtain via desk research, a key challenge encountered was attempting to recognise the VET population of interest and also who had been surveyed from within that sample frame. Obtaining this information accurately rather than inferring from available documentation is a key survey parameter that should be investigated further if a consultation phase of the research is conducted.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Overview

In October 2010, The National VET Data Strategy Action Group—a former sub-committee of the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC)—appointed the Social Research Centre to undertake a stocktake and analysis of VET surveys in Australia as part of the Enhancing Survey Data Strategy project.

## 1.2 Objectives

The purpose of the VET Enhancing Survey Data Project was to review and consolidate existing surveys with the intention of reducing the number of surveys and the burden on survey participants. This project also aimed to review the existing survey program to determine information gaps and to assess the feasibility of a longitudinal survey of VET students.

Specific objectives included:

- identifying which surveys of VET sector clients are effective and efficient in delivering timely information
- determining the surveys from which valuable, credible and statistically valid conclusions can be drawn
- examining the extent to which surveys display overlap in VET sector clients and identifying potential areas for consolidation to reduce the survey burden on students, industry/employers and RTOs
- determining the extent to which the survey data are accessible and usable by the stakeholders and clients of the system to enable the effective tracking of trends and the identification and monitoring of issues that arise.

These findings will help to define the principles of best practice in the conduct of such surveys. These principles will include the development of public policy and practice to make survey results more transparent and available to users of the VET system. The intention is to better inform users about the standards, quality and performance of the VET system and to inform consumer choice.

## 1.3 Methodology

The following two project phases were originally envisaged to achieve the objectives<sup>1</sup> stated in section 1.2. The first phase involved a preliminary stocktake of VET-related survey research. Under the second phase of the work program it was originally intended to undertake follow-up consultations and further discussions with key stakeholders. However, it was decided by the Action Group not to proceed with the follow-up consultations, due to time constraints. This has limited the extent of the analysis contained in this report and, as such, not all of the original objectives for this project have been met.

The content of this report has been derived from the following processes:

- desk research drawing on NCVER's 'VET Data Strategy: current issues paper' (2008), internet search engines and academic databases

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<sup>1</sup> The Social Research Centre submitted a project plan to the Action Group for consideration at its meeting of 2 March 2011. Discussion at that meeting, and subsequent to the meeting, led to parameters being agreed for this project.

- discussions with NCVER about the 'VET Data Strategy: current issues paper' and other survey research
- consultations with DEEWR to discuss their VET-related survey research program
- limited liaison with NCVER's Survey Network Group (under the auspices of the Action Group) to identify and collect information about state and territory research being undertaken in this area.

## **1.4 About this report**

This report presents the findings from the preliminary stocktake of VET-related survey activity. To assist with this process five tiers of survey work have been identified:

- Tier 1A: surveys which provide input into established national accountability measures and agreed quality and performance frameworks
- Tier 1B: ad hoc and repeat national surveys undertaken by DEEWR, which are often used for program evaluation, policy development or contract management purposes
- Tier 1C: ad hoc or repeat national surveys which are used for policy development, scoping, or environmental scanning
- Tier 2: state and territory surveys. This tier comprises state and territory level surveys with a primary focus on measuring the performance of the VET sector in that state or territory, as well as surveys which inform and contribute to VET research and policy development but do not necessarily have an exclusive focus on the VET sector
- Tier 3: institute-level surveys or other small-scale specific-purpose surveys.

The main focus of this report is the identification of Tier 1A, Tier 1B, Tier 1C and Tier 2 surveys. Examples of Tier 3 surveys have been included to provide a flavour for the type of work being undertaken at the individual institution or RTO level.

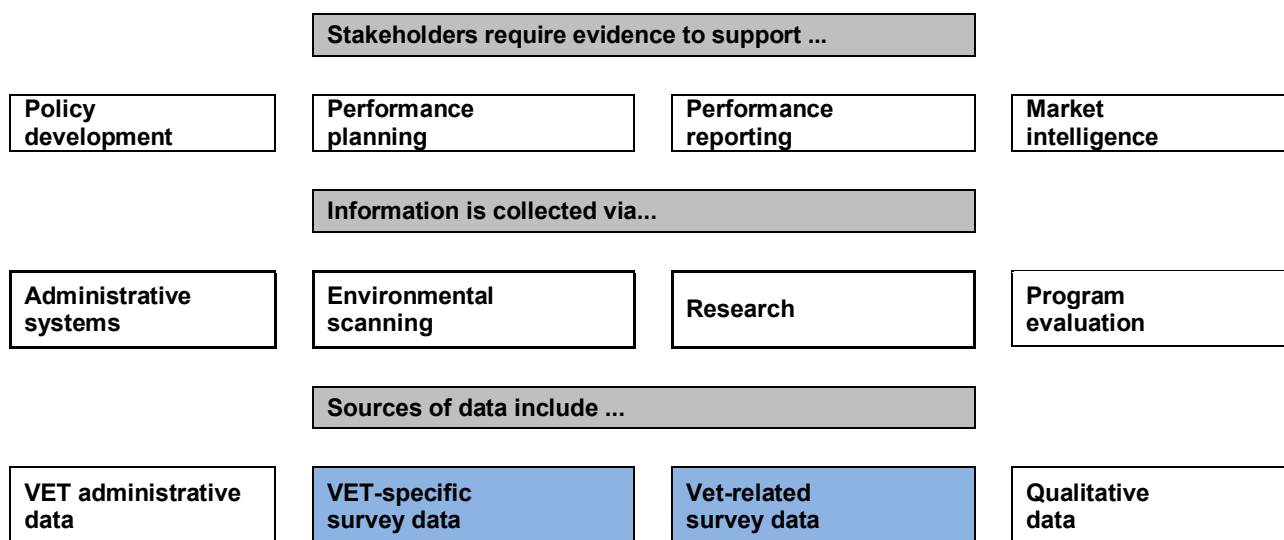
To give an understanding of the context for VET surveys, section 2 of this report briefly summarises the administrative data collections used to monitor and evaluate aspects of the sector. Sections 3 to 6 then document the survey activity across the abovementioned tiers. To round out the picture, section 7 provides some brief background information about other surveys, including ABS surveys, which do not specifically focus on the VET sector but are of relevance to and widely used by the sector. This is followed by a preliminary discussion (section 8) of issues relating to overlap, respondent burden and possible consolidation of survey activity. References have been provided for the survey information, where available.

Readers should note that this report is based on preliminary scoping work only and has been compiled with minimal stakeholder consultation.

## 2. VET survey data in context

Evidence is required by governments and allied stakeholders to inform policy and programmatic decision-making across the VET sector. The key focus of the National VET Data Strategy was to increase the scope, collection, storage and accessibility of VET data while also ensuring that this information is timely, accurate, effective and relevant. As shown in figure 1, VET surveys are one component of the evidence base that supports VET decision-making.

**Figure 1 Vocational education and training ‘evidence environment’**



To consider the place of VET surveys with respect to data collection and the development of an evidence base, this section identifies the VET administrative data collections, key VET survey data stakeholders, survey data requirements and relevant VET survey populations.

### 2.1 VET administrative data collections

In evaluating the importance of surveys to the VET sector and in addressing the objectives of this project, it is important to recognise that surveys are not the only, or necessarily, the primary performance measure used by the sector. Administrative data collections also play a role, with survey programs usually being designed to fill ‘gaps’ in administrative data holdings and/or to provide further insights. In assessing how well VET surveys perform this role (and in identifying any gaps, overlaps, possible redundancies and/or coordination opportunities), it is necessary to examine how well current VET surveys are coordinated and how well they integrate with and complement both existing administrative data collections and other broader survey programs. To this end, in this paper it is important not only to examine the survey activity within the sector but also to have an awareness of the main administrative data collections used by the sector.

The ‘VET Data Strategy: current issues paper’ (NCVER 2008) identified the following key administrative data collections.

The National VET Provider Collection is an administrative collection of information on students, the courses they undertake, qualification completion details and students' achievement. The information is sourced from student enrolment forms and through state and territory training authorities from registered training providers. This annual national collection dates back to 1994. The scope of the collection has progressively widened and broadly covers the 'public VET system'.

The MCEECDYA VET in Schools Collection contains data on courses undertaken by school students in recognised VET qualifications, including certificate I, II, and III, and including the senior secondary certificate of achievement. The information is sourced from student enrolment records through the board of studies in each state or territory. This is an annual collection dating back to 2005. The scope is VET undertaken as part of the senior secondary certificate of education in a calendar year.

The National VET Financial Data Collection consists of information on the finances of state and territory training authorities and the Australian Government in relation to VET activity. This annual collection, which uses accrual reporting methods, dates back to 1997. The scope is the revenue and expenditure of the eight state and territory governments and the Australian government.

The National Apprentices and Trainees Collection includes data on apprentices and trainees and their employers. This information is sourced from state and territory training authorities via Australian Apprenticeships Centres from the apprenticeship/traineeship training contracts registered at the time of commencement and updated throughout the life of the contract. This is a quarterly collection dating back to 1994. The scope is all apprentices and trainees with an apprenticeship/traineeship training contract.

## **2.2 VET survey data stakeholders**

The VET sector has a diverse range of stakeholders, all of whom have differing needs with respect to survey data. Key stakeholders who have an interest in VET-specific and VET-related survey information include the:

- Australian Skills Quality Authority
- National Skills Standards Council
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research
- state training authorities
- state and territory governments
- registered training organisations
- industry skills councils.



### **Australian Skills Quality Authority**

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) was established as the national regulator of VET courses and VET training providers from 1 July 2011. The ASQA is responsible for registering and auditing registered training organisations and accrediting VET courses. As part of its role as the national regulator, the ASQA will ensure that national quality standards are met and will also report on performance in the VET sector. A key focus of the authority's work is on assessing risk, taking into account a range of data sources, including information provided by the Australian, state and territory governments, student and employer outcomes and student complaints. Survey data are currently used to assess satisfaction with and outcomes from training. As such, it is likely that the ASQA will be a key stakeholder in any discussions relating to VET surveys.

### **National Skills Standards Council**

The National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) was established in July 2011 to assume many of the functions of the former National Quality Council. The NSSC is a committee of the Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) and provides advice to SCOTESE on the national standards for regulation of vocational education and training. It is anticipated that the NSSC will undertake relevant research and analysis to ensure that the national standards represent best practice.

### **Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) combines the functions of the former Departments of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). DEEWR takes a national leadership role in education, employment and workplace relations and coordinates school, training, vocational education, university and employment participation agendas. The department works with stakeholders across governments, industry and the community to ensure effective training outcomes, increased workforce participation and strong employment growth.

DEEWR's vocational education and training strategic responsibilities include strengthening the responsiveness of the training systems to the varying needs of individuals and industry, promoting quality at all levels of training, and helping people to make effective transitions and well-informed career choices.

### **National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is a not-for-profit company owned by state, territory and federal ministers responsible for training. It collects, manages, evaluates and communicates national VET research and statistical information to support evidence-based policy-making. NCVER is responsible for aggregating the national VET data, ensuring data quality management, and assisting other organisations, including registered training organisations and state training authorities, with data quality assurance. The VET information consolidated by NCVER includes administrative, survey and research data.

### **State training authorities**

A training authority in each state and territory is responsible for the administration of VET, including the allocation of funds and, in some cases, the registration of training organisations and the accreditation of courses. When the powers of the Australian Skills Quality Authority became fully operational on 1 July 2011, responsibility for training organisations registered in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory was transferred to the national regulator. Transfer to the national system will occur later in 2011 or early 2012 for training organisations currently registered in Queensland, South Australia and

Tasmania. In Victoria and Western Australia, responsibility for registering VET providers will only be referred to the Australian Skills Quality Authority if the organisation offers courses to international students or also operates outside Victoria or Western Australia. State training authorities that are no longer registering bodies will still be required to plan and report on VET strategies, administer funding and support organisations, employers and the community in relation to VET issues.

### **State and territory government departments**

State and territory governments have a responsibility to report on a range of issues relevant to vocational education and training, particularly with respect to the activity of TAFE (technical and further education) colleges and institutes. TAFE institutes are organisations owned by the governments, which means that, in addition to providing data to report against state and territory progress plans, they also have a need to collect market and business intelligence information.

### **Registered training organisations**

Registered training organisations (RTOs) provide nationally recognised training and qualifications to VET students. Organisations that can become registered to offer training include TAFE colleges and institutes, adult and community education providers, community organisations, schools, higher education institutions, commercial and enterprise training providers, industry bodies and private providers.

### **Industry and industry skills councils**

Industry requirements are understandably the foundation of the national vocational education and training system. Industry stakeholders can include employers, industry associations, professional bodies and unions. Industry skills councils are the interface between government and industry and consolidate advice on training needs across 11 industry areas. ISCs are responsible for collecting information on industry training needs from employers, unions and professional industry associations to maximise the flexibility and responsiveness of the VET system.

## **2.3 Stakeholder requirements and VET survey data**

The various VET stakeholders have quite different needs with respect to VET survey data. Table 1 summarises the range of survey data requirements in very general terms. For example, DEEWR requires survey data as part of its contract management regime, while the Australian Skills Quality Authority will use survey data to assess training quality. In cases where there seem to be opportunities for alignment of survey activity, other issues such as survey population and timeliness need to be taken into account. It could be the case that survey data on the quality of training are needed on a more regular basis by registered training organisations to support active service improvement, whereas the NSSC may only require this information on an annual basis.

**Table 1 Summary of VET stakeholder survey data requirements**

| Stakeholder  | Requirement for survey data  |
|--|--|
| Australian Skills Quality Authority                            | To monitor student and employer outcomes in order to assess risk and manage training quality                         |
| Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations    | To evaluate the impact of and outcomes from large-scale government programs and to manage service delivery contracts |
| Industry skills councils                                       | To determine individual, sectoral and industry skill needs   |
| National Quality Council/<br>National Skills Standards Council | To quality-assure and ensure national consistency in the application of the AQTF standards                           |
| National Centre for Vocational Education Research              | To provide nationally and internationally recognised statistical and research data                                   |
| Registered training organisations                              | To report performance against the AQTF Quality Indicators  |
| State and territory governments                                | To assess the demand for and supply of training and ensure that quality standards are being met                      |
| State training authorities                                     | To monitor the quality of training provided by RTOs  |

VET sector stakeholders also require survey data to enable reporting against two long-term targets as part of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD). The two targets include:

- halving the proportion of Australians aged 20 to 64 years without qualifications at certificate III level and above between 2009 and 2020
- doubling the number of higher qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) between 2009 and 2020.

These targets are informed by three NASWD and one National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) performance indicators (see table 2). Data used to report against these performance indicators are drawn from five surveys across two data collections (ABS and NCVER). The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development: Performance report for 2009 suggested that progress towards national targets should be monitored at a state and territory level through the development of jurisdictional targets.

**Table 2 National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development and National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Indicators**

| Indicator   | Data source  |
|---|--|
| Proportion of 20 to 64-year-olds who do not have qualifications at or above certificate III                                       | Census of Population and Housing<br>Survey of Education and Work<br>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey<br>National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Survey |
| Proportion of graduates employed, unemployed and not in the labour force after completing training, by previous employment status | Student Outcomes Survey  |
| The percentage of graduates with improved employment status after training  | Student Outcomes Survey  |
| The proportion of Indigenous 20 to 64-year-olds with or working towards post-school qualifications at certificate III or above    | Census of Population and Housing<br>Survey of Education and Work<br>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey   |

The jurisdictions also have specific VET-related planning and performance reporting requirements that are typically informed by survey data which have not been explored as part of the desk-based phase of the scoping project. It is anticipated that these survey data requirements for reporting at this level will be revealed during the consultation phase of the current project, where relevant.

## 2.4 Preliminary observations

Surveys are one of the major methods used to measure a range of aspects of the current and future performance of the VET system and which are not captured in the administrative data collections. Surveys attempt to gain information from current and past students, current, past and potential employers, registered training organisations, high schools, teachers and other people and organisations associated with the sector. There is concern that there may be considerable overlap in the surveys being undertaken around the country; some are administered by the ABS, NCVER, DEEWR, by jurisdiction, or by individual RTOs. These surveys often target the same respondents. As the number of surveys in the VET sector increases, so also do concerns about respondent burden and whether the surveys are 'fit for purpose'. There are also potential issues relating to VET survey populations and exactly who is being interviewed to contribute to VET-specific and VET-related data collections.

## 3. Tier 1A surveys

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### 3.1 Scope and definition

For the purposes of this report Tier 1A surveys are defined as established, ongoing national survey programs, the results of which are used as direct measures of, or to provide input to, national key performance indicators (KPIs) or quality indicators.

### 3.2 Description of Tier 1A survey activity

The research undertaken to inform this paper identified nine Tier 1A survey programs.

- Survey of Education and Work
- Survey of Education and Training
- Student Outcomes Survey
- Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System
- Apprentice and Trainee Destinations Survey
- Student Intentions Survey
- Down the Track
- Indigenous Students Survey
- Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Indicators; comprising
  - The Learners Survey
  - The Employers Survey

A brief description of these surveys is provided below and further information is contained in appendix 1.

#### **Survey of Education and Work (SEW), Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The Survey of Education and Work is a household survey run in May each year as a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey. The scope of this annual survey is the civilian population aged between 15 and 64 years. The latest available data are for May 2010.

SEW provides selected information on participation in education, highest educational attainment, transition from education to work and current labour force and demographic characteristics for the civilian population aged 15–64 years. Characteristics reported include: type of educational institution attended or attending; level and main field of current study; and highest level and main field of educational attainment. Information on unsuccessful enrolment and deferment of study is included for persons not studying in the survey year. Data on apprenticeships are also provided. Limited information is also included for persons aged 65–74 years who are in the labour force or marginally attached to it. Some of the statistical tables are presented in time series format.

In considering outcome measures relating to the depth and breadth of the skills and capabilities required for the twenty-first-century labour market, the COAG Reform Council Report (2009) recommended that the SEW be further developed to allow, in particular, data disaggregation by jurisdictional and target sub-populations

and to improve the precision of jurisdictional estimates. It was also recommended that additional measures be included to allow for more precise indications of whether the working-age population has the 'depth and breadth' of skills and capabilities required, such as detail on the type of study undertaken, broken down by age group. To this end, the 2010 data cube released by the ABS contains information which enables reporting on NASWD Indicator 2 (the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, Indicator 2 – the proportion of the working aged population aged 15 to 64 years at literacy level 1, 2 and 3).

### **Survey of Education and Training (SET), Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The most recent Survey of Education and Training was conducted nationally from March to June 2009.<sup>2</sup> Information was collected via personal interview with individuals on their participation in education and training and on their educational attainment.

The data focus on participation in education and training; completed qualifications; level and field of educational attainment; details of training courses completed; training outcomes; difficulties, barriers and employer support for education and training. Some state and territory data are also provided.

As mentioned in section 2.3, when taken together, SET and SEW are the main data sources for indicator 2 of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development.

### **Student Outcomes Survey (SOS), National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The Student Outcomes Survey focuses on students' employment and further study outcomes. It also enquires about student satisfaction with VET. The survey shows how well the VET system serves individuals and the community. Since 1999 the survey has covered graduates (those who complete full qualifications) and module completers (those who complete at least one module), providing information about their:

- demographic and training characteristics
- employment outcomes
- satisfaction with and benefits from training
- further study.

The scope of the Student Outcomes Survey is nationally recognised VET. Currently, the survey includes publicly funded VET activity (all providers) and privately funded VET activity delivered by TAFE institutions, ACE providers and other government providers.

The COAG Reform Council Report (2009) recommended improving the Student Outcomes Survey to allow for disaggregation by Indigenous status and socioeconomic status.

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<sup>2</sup> This ABS survey is conducted every four years.

## **Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System (SEUV), National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System is designed to provide detailed information on the way employers interact with the vocational education and training system and their satisfaction with these dealings. The aim of the survey is to provide information that enables the Australian Government and state and territory governments to monitor, over time, employer engagement and satisfaction with VET in meeting the skill needs of the workforce. The survey also identifies and ranks the factors that influence employer engagement and satisfaction with VET.

NCVER has conducted the survey in its current form every two years since 2005. The next iteration of the survey will be conducted in 2011, with results available in December 2011.

This survey is currently under formal review. As part of the review of the survey, NCVER is consulting with users to identify their information requirements and how the survey may be modified to better meet their needs.

The current survey was designed to measure progress against two key performance measures (KPMs) introduced by the Australian Government in 2004, which focused on employers' awareness, engagement and satisfaction with the VET system. Specifically, the focus was on the proportion of Australian employers who:

- are aware of and who have adopted VET as a strategy to meet the skill needs of their workforce
- are satisfied with VET in meeting the skill needs of their workforce.

In 2006, the Commonwealth dropped awareness of VET as a KPM. From 2007 onwards, the survey followed suit, focusing solely on employer engagement and satisfaction.

The KPMs for the VET sector were superseded by the new National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, which focused on outcomes and outputs and set new performance measures. With this change, it is timely to reconsider the content, scope and methodology of the survey. The findings from this review will feed into the development and redesign of the 2013 survey.

## **Apprentice and Trainee Destinations Survey, National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

This non-regular survey collects information about the destinations of apprentices and trainees approximately nine months after they leave their training. The in-scope population for the survey is apprentices and trainees who complete their training (completers) or cancelled or withdrew from an apprenticeship or traineeship and did not return to the same qualification (non-completers), according to the administrative collection at the time of sampling. The survey collects data on employment outcomes, reasons for non-completion, satisfaction with the apprenticeship or traineeship and further study destinations.

To date the survey has been conducted twice: in 2008 and again in 2010. The 2008 survey covers those who left their training between October and December 2007, with interviews between September and November 2008. The 2010 Apprentice and Trainee Destinations Survey covers apprentices and trainees who left their training between April and June 2009. Participants were interviewed by telephone approximately nine months after leaving their training, between March and May 2010.

The Apprentice and Trainee Destinations Survey uses a randomly selected sample stratified by state and territory, trade and non-trade occupation and contract status; that is, completion or cancellation/withdrawal. Survey responses are weighted to population benchmarks from the National Apprentice and Trainee Collection. Responses to the 2010 survey were weighted to March 2010 Apprentice and Trainee quarterly data and responses to the 2008 survey to September 2008 quarterly data.

### **Student Intentions Survey, National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The Student Intentions Survey is a one-off survey that provides information regarding students' intentions to complete a course/qualification and the reasons behind these intentions. This survey of approximately 10 000 students aims to give a more informed understanding of completion patterns, which will, in turn, enable improvements for students such as greater support.

The purpose of the survey is to provide policy-makers and stakeholders with information about:

- students' intentions to complete a course/qualification at the time of enrolment and at the time of interview
- reasons behind students' stated intentions (to complete or not complete)
- current study status at the time of interview
- students' understanding of the VET system
- attitudes to completion of full courses as opposed to specific subjects/modules
- influences on training choice.

The survey targeted students who commenced VET in February 2011. In-scope students had to be 15 years of age or older, and be undertaking a qualification at the level of certificate I or above. Results from the 2011 Student Intentions Survey are scheduled for release in October 2011.

### **Down the Track, National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The aim of the one-off Down the Track Survey was to establish the longer-term outcomes of VET. The survey looked at the first few years after training and examined how students used training to gain employment. The survey collected information on:

- the current labour force status of former students
- employment-related issues (for example, income and job stability)
- benefits of the training
- any additional training undertaken.

The focus of the survey was on young TAFE students; hence it provides a view of the outcomes of VET in the early stages of students' careers. Conducted in 2004, this national telephone survey yielded information from 3372 graduates and module completers aged 15 to 24 years who completed training in 2001. This was a follow-up of students who participated in the 2002 Student Outcomes Survey. The scope of the survey is the same as that of the Student Outcomes Survey.



### **Indigenous Students Survey, National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The Indigenous Students Survey, conducted in 2004, gathered information about the benefits of VET for Indigenous students in five regions—major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. The Indigenous Students Survey sought to capture benefits beyond employment outcomes, including individual, community and economic benefits gained from VET. For this purpose, the survey collected information about:

- socio-demographic characteristics
- language and communication
- transition from school
- training in the previous year
- reasons for study
- benefits and perceived quality of training
- students' paths in the year following their training.

The information was collected by face-to-face interview. The scope of the survey was Indigenous students in the public VET system who undertook training in 2003.

### **Australian Quality Training Framework Indicators**

The AQTF Quality Indicators for RTOs were developed to underpin an evidence-based and outcomes-focused approach to quality assurance in Australian vocational education and training. When considered in the context of an RTO's business, data matched to the Quality Indicators are designed to provide a measure of an RTO's performance and the quality of outcomes for its clients. The Quality Indicators are being maintained by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

The three unique Quality Indicators are competency completion rates, learner engagement (learner engagement and competency development), and employer satisfaction (competency development and training and assessment quality). Collecting data from employers and learners helps RTOs to assess their performance against all of the AQTF Essential Standards for Registration and most of the underpinning Essential Elements. In short, the data can help to support continuous improvement processes to ensure that:

- the RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations
- the RTO 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 RTO operates.

Standard learner and employer survey instruments and methodologies are available to enable RTOs to provide summary reports related to the AQTF Learner Engagement and Employer Satisfaction Quality Indicators to registering bodies. The Competency Completion Online System is available for RTOs to report their data on competency completion.

**The learner survey** collects information from learners participating in nationally recognised training through the Learner Questionnaire (LQ). The survey focuses on whether learners are engaging in activities that are

likely to promote high-quality skill outcomes and includes learner perceptions of the quality of their competency development and of the support that they have received during their training.

**The employer survey** collects information from employers on learners participating in nationally recognised training through the Employer Questionnaire (EQ). The survey focuses on employer evaluation of learner competency development and the relevance of the overall quality of the training and assessment provided by registered training organisations.

### **3.3 Preliminary observations**

The nine Tier 1A survey programs share a common thread in assessing the nature, quality and outcomes of VET training in Australia, but in different detail and degree of specificity. These assessments occur very broadly through the ABS surveys; in more detail from the employers' and learners' perspectives in NCVER's surveys; and in a very specific, localised manner through VET providers in the AQTF Quality Indicators surveys.

## 4. Tier 1B surveys

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### 4.1 Scope and definition

For the purposes of this report Tier 1B surveys are defined as ad hoc and repeat national surveys mainly used for policy development, program evaluation or contract management purposes by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Unlike the Tier 1A surveys, generally speaking, the main purpose of these surveys is not to inform national VET KPIs or Quality Indicators.

### 4.2 Description of Tier 1B survey activity

The research identified 12 Tier 1B surveys in the public domain.

- Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences
- Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised
- Employer Incentives Survey
- Satisfaction with Australian Apprenticeships Centres
  - Survey of Australian Apprentices
  - Survey of Employers
- Job Services Australia Evaluation
  - Job Seeker Omnibus Survey
  - Employer Survey
  - Survey of Employment Service Providers
- Jobs and Training Compact Evaluation
  - Survey of Training Supplement Recipients
  - Survey of Access Program Participants
  - Australian Apprenticeships Survey – Employers
  - Australian Apprenticeships Survey – Apprentices

After our meeting with representatives from DEEWR it became apparent that there were a number of additional survey programs underway that collect either VET-specific or VET-related data. DEEWR collated information to contribute to this scoping paper; however, detailed information, including survey scope and data items for the surveys, was not available prior to the finalisation of this report. It is possible that, in addition to the surveys listed above, there may be up to a further 30 relevant data collection activities conducted by DEEWR.

## **Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences**

The Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences is conducted by DEEWR as part of a rolling survey program into demand for labour and skills. Results from the survey are used to inform the development of programs to address local recruitment, employment and training issues. Approximately 8000 ten-minute phone surveys are conducted annually with employers, typically focusing on a specific region or industry. Specific questions are asked about apprentices and trainees and nationally recognised training programs.

## **Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised (SERA)**

The Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised is a survey of employers who have recently advertised vacancies in selected skilled occupations and provides information on employer recruitment experience and broad trends in skilled labour markets.

DEEWR staff contact employers who have recently attempted to recruit in the occupations included in the skill shortage research program. Vacancy details are collected from available sources to identify in-scope employers, including major metropolitan and regional newspapers, general employment and specialist industry/occupational internet sites, as well as from professional associations or from notices outside business premises.

Contact with employers is discussion-based, rather than a formatted survey, but the minimum information sought from employers is the number of positions available, whether vacancies were filled, the total number of applicants and the number of suitable applicants. Where relevant, employers are asked about apprenticeships. The number of employers contacted varies and is based on the number of people employed in the occupation and the number of vacancies advertised. In 2010, approximately 7500 surveys were completed.

## **Employer Incentives Survey**

The Employer Incentives Survey (in field mid-2011) is designed to measure the effectiveness of government support given to businesses to assist them with employing staff. Employers who received incentives through a range of labour market programs in 2010 will be contacted to undertake a telephone survey. It is likely that a number of questions will be asked in relation to apprentices and training, given the targeting of many incentives towards VET activities.

## **Satisfaction with Australian Apprenticeships Centres (Apprentices and Employers)**

Australian Apprenticeship Centres (AACs) are required to provide streamlined support services to employers and Australian Apprentices. Under the current Australian Apprenticeships Support Services Contract, there is a requirement under the Key Performance Indicators for DEEWR to survey AAC clients, employers and apprentices to measure the level of satisfaction regarding the provision of a streamlined service. The employer and apprentice surveys measure overall satisfaction with the AAC, perceptions of service quality, the accuracy and timeliness of information provided by the AAC, and the assistance provided to employers and new apprentices by the AAC in obtaining incentives and allowances. Additional questions explore pre-apprenticeship training, training status and skills shortage issues. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2011 with approximately 6000 employers and 6000 apprentices.

## **Job Services Australia Evaluation**

The Job Seeker Omnibus Survey is an annual survey that collects information on job seekers' experiences with the employment service, including their perceptions of the quality of the service delivered.

The Employer Survey is conducted at two-yearly interviews with employers to examine their relationships with Job Services Australia. Topics include recruitment methods, awareness, understanding and usage of the employment service and perceptions of the quality of services.

The Survey of Employment Service Providers is an ongoing survey conducted since 1999. It seeks the views of providers on the quality of services from Centrelink and DEEWR and is designed to monitor the department's performance in relation to employment service deeds and Centrelink's performance against service objectives.

## **Jobs and Training Compact Evaluation**

The Jobs and Training Compact was announced in the lead-up to the 2009–10 Budget to address potentially deteriorating economic conditions resulting from the Global Financial Crisis. The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the Jobs and Training Compact achieves its objectives by assessing the compact's overall performance and the performance of its major elements. Data from administrative collections are being used to inform the evaluation in addition to a series of surveys aimed at obtaining information about specific aspects of the compact.

The Survey of Training Supplement Recipients is a telephone survey of Newstart Allowance and Parenting Payment recipients who have received the Training Supplement in the past six months. The survey is aimed at understanding the extent to which the Training Supplement encouraged and helped eligible people to undertake study to increase their skills in readiness for employment.

The Survey of Access Program Participants is a telephone survey for those who have commenced in the Access Program in the past 12 months. The survey provides information about the experiences of Access Program participants, including their views on the training, support and assistance provided by the Access Program and the extent to which this assisted them.

The Australian Apprenticeship Survey of Employers and Apprentices addresses issues relating to participation in pre-apprenticeship training; service quality; tailoring of assistance; take-up of employer incentives; the extent to which these incentives contribute to retention in apprenticeships and traineeships and the additional apprenticeships and traineeships generated; and take-up of employment and education opportunities. Two surveys were conducted with approximately 600 employers and 1400 apprentices in 2010 and 2011.

### **4.3 Preliminary observations**

It could be argued that many of the DEEWR VET surveys are out of scope for this review because they focus on program evaluation or contract management. Departmental programs relevant to the VET sector are large, ongoing and national in focus, which suggests that any survey data required will be on a similar scale. If it is not the Jobs and Training Compact that is being evaluated, there will be another relevant program of a comparable order of magnitude. Similarly, there will always be a requirement to manage the performance of VET-related service providers and it is extremely likely that surveys of clients and customers receiving these services will be a continuing part of DEEWR's work program. Coordinating VET survey activity within the department and across the sector to minimise overlap of data collection periods and respondent burden appears to present an ongoing challenge.

## 5. Tier 1C surveys

### 5.1 Scope and definition

For the purposes of this report, Tier 1C surveys have been defined as ad hoc or repeat national surveys used for policy development, scoping or environmental scanning. Generally speaking, the main focus of these surveys is to identify skills shortages and employer needs.

### 5.2 Description of Tier 1C survey activity

Tier 1C survey activity was identified as being undertaken by or on behalf of industry skills councils, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework and by the Australian Chamber of Commerce. Ten surveys or data collection activities appear to be relevant to the current scoping exercise.

#### Industry skills councils

The research undertaken to inform this paper revealed four clear programs of Tier 1C survey activity in progress or completed by industry skills councils. Table 3 contains information about online surveys identified by the desk-based research.

**Table 3 Industry skills councils' VET-survey activity**

| Industry skills council        | Survey  | Approach to data collection | Timing  |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------|
| Community Services and Health  | Perception Audit                                  | online survey               | ongoing |
|                                | Hospital Pharmacy Survey                          | methodology unknown         | 2010–11 |
| Government Skills Australia    | Survey of Local Government Training Package Users | online survey               | 2011    |
|                                | Water Industry Operations Survey                  | methodology unknown         | 2010–11 |
| Manufacturing Skills Australia | Manufacturing Skills Australia Perception Survey  | online survey               | 2011    |
|                                | Environmental Scan Survey                         | methodology unknown         | ongoing |
| Transport and Logistics        | Workforce Planning and Development Survey         | methodology unknown         | 2010    |
|                                | Environmental Scan Survey                         | online survey               | ongoing |

The Community Services and Health ISC also conducts regular reviews of specific occupation areas as part of its Continuous Improvement Work Plan. A number of these reviews involve surveys of employers and employees. Information about the scope and number of the surveys is not in the public domain.

While the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities ISC does not appear to conduct any surveys in its own right, it was part of a group that successfully lobbied DEEWR to undertake a survey of the gas supply industry in 2011. Data will be collected as part of DEEWR's ongoing program of employer surveys and will provide an insight into relevant workforce and skills issues.

The Innovation and Business ISC undertakes an annual environmental scan in each of its six industry areas. As part of this scan, quantitative data are collected from stakeholders during various consultation processes, although the exact nature of this survey activity is unknown.

The Transport and Logistics ISC recently established the Transport Research Education Consortium (TREC). One of the roles of the TREC is to provide a centralised capability for transport education research. The extent to which this program of research will involve surveys with employers, apprentices, students in training, or RTOs is currently unknown.

The Agri-Food, Construction and Property Services, Skills DMC, Service Skills Australia, and ForestWorks ISCs do not appear to conduct VET-specific surveys. It is possible that these ISCs are undertaking this research but electing not to make the findings publically available, or that the desk-based research failed to uncover this information in the time available.

### **E-learning benchmarking surveys**

In 2010 the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's Benchmarking and Research program conducted the sixth annual national survey of the uptake and use of e-learning by VET providers, VET teachers and trainers and employers. The surveys conducted in July and August 2010 captured information on the use of e-learning in all TAFE institutes, private and enterprise training providers, community education providers and VET in Schools providers.

The 2010 E-learning Benchmarking survey includes responses from 800 employers, 784 RTOs and more than 2000 VET teachers and trainers. The survey highlights the latest e-learning trends and attitudes in VET and allows participants to benchmark their own e-learning activities at a national, state, industry and provider level.

### **National Workplace Skills Survey—Employer's Commitment to Training, 2010**

This survey was commissioned by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and was designed for all employers, in all industries, regardless of business size or turnover. It comprised 133 questions, when all sub-questions are taken into account. The categories of questions were as follows:

- general questions about the organisation
- investment in training
- skills requirements
- recruitment of people with skills and formal qualifications
- training of apprentices and trainees



- training of employees other than apprentices and trainees
- barriers and opportunities
- satisfaction with training providers
- skilled migration and overseas students.

The total number of respondents to the 2010 survey was 669. Although these respondents were drawn from all states and territories, just over 50 per cent of responses were from Victoria. These respondents were drawn from a broad cross-section of Australian industry. Topics included annual expenditure on training per employee, annual expenditure on training in the future, paid time off for employee study and the proportion of annual training budget spent on apprentices. There are no current indications that this survey will be repeated.

### **5.3 Preliminary observations**

It is difficult to assess the true volume of industry-related VET survey activity, since, although some industry groups openly publish survey outcomes, others appear to be less forthcoming or engage in less primary quantitative data collection. Industry surveys, while often narrowly focusing on a specific skills area or sector, are typically national in scope and have the potential to overlap or coincide with other VET-specific or VET-related surveys. Consultation and discussion with ISCs and other industry stakeholders would be required to fully understand the scale and scope of survey activity in this area.

## 6. Tier 2 surveys

### 6.1 Scope and definition

For the purposes of this report Tier 2 surveys comprise two main components:

- state and territory level surveys with a primary focus on measuring the performance of the VET sector in that jurisdiction. These surveys may also provide input into state-specific reporting requirements
- state and territory level surveys which inform and contribute to VET research and policy development but without, necessarily, an exclusive focus on the VET sector. The state or territory-based school leaver and school destination surveys fall into this category.

### 6.2 Description of Tier 2 survey activity

The research undertaken to inform this paper identified 29 Tier 2 surveys.

**Table 4 VET-specific and VET-related surveys conducted at a jurisdictional level**

|      | <b>VET-specific surveys</b>  | <b>VET-related surveys</b>  |
|------|--|---|
| NSW  | Private Provider Survey<br>Cost-benefits of Adult Community Education Survey   | Destinations Survey<br>Student Pathways Survey  |
| Vic. | Cancellation Project<br>ACE Business Survey<br>Why employers do or do not employ apprentices<br>Workplace Behaviour Research Project<br>Private Provider Survey<br>ACE Learner Satisfaction Survey | On Track (Annual)<br>On Track (Longitudinal)<br>Early School Leavers Survey<br>(included in On Track) |
| Qld  | Private Provider Survey<br>TAFE Queensland Student Survey<br>TAFE Queensland Business Survey<br>Hard to Fill Vacancy Survey  | Early School Leavers Survey<br>Next Step  |
| SA   | TAFESA Student Survey  | School Leaver Survey  |
| WA   | Student Satisfaction Survey  | Destination Survey  |
| Tas. | Census of Registered Training Organisations<br>Learners Survey   | Early School Leavers Survey<br>Post-Year 12 Destinations Survey                                       |
| NT   | -  | -   |
| ACT  | Client Satisfaction Survey<br>Accreditation and Registration Customer Survey   | School Leaver Destination Survey  |

A brief description of each of these surveys for each jurisdiction is provided below where this information is available in the public domain.

## New South Wales

The Private Providers Survey (2008) included private RTOs that deliver training in NSW. It aimed to provide a greater understanding of the scope, magnitude and contribution of the private training market to NSW VET.

The Cost-benefits of ACE Survey (2006) examined the costs and benefits of ACE to particular groups. Benefits included those obtained from undertaking courses such as student participation, objectives and overall satisfaction.

The Destinations Survey (2011) involved surveys of government and non-government school students in order to assess the education pathways, destinations and attainments of young people. Factors that drive student engagement, retention and pathway choices, including parent, teacher and student expectations in relation to post-compulsory education and training, were examined.

The Student Pathways Survey is a joint venture between the Vocational Education in Schools Directorate, the Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate and the Information Technology Directorate. Students in Years 9–12 undertake the Student Pathways Survey as an initial step in identifying actions in their career and transition planning. The survey consists of 29 questions, is accessed online and, on completion, students receive an instantaneous feedback report.

## Victoria

The Cancellation Project aims to examine Victoria's apprentice cancellation process and reasons for cancellation and identify the early intervention strategies and administrative procedures which will contribute to the objective of improved trade apprentice completion—particularly young apprentices—in all industries. It involves a survey of 140 employers and 102 apprentices.

The ACE Business Survey collects information on services, clients, staff, financials, and recently addressed issues relating to the impact of the skills reform.

Market research into Why employers do or do not employ apprentices is focused on identifying the reasons why employers in the building and construction, engineering, electrical and automotive industries are or are not resistant to employing apprentices. Data from the survey of 1208 employers will be used to make recommendations on strategies to affect behavioural change and assist industry to address potential barriers to the employment and training of apprentices.

Using a survey of 1200 apprentices, the Workplace Behaviour Research Project investigated the extent to which apprentices and trainees are exposed to bullying or harassment and whether this impacted on apprenticeship and traineeship completion. The project also aimed to identify key influencers in relation to workplace bullying or harassment that any strategy or campaign should target.

The most recent Private Provider Survey was completed in 2007 by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) on behalf of Skills Victoria.

Adult, community and further education (ACFE) contractors provide annual data on a range of student satisfaction questions for 20 per cent of their enrolments as part of the Learner Satisfaction Survey. Learners are asked about their satisfaction with the quality of teaching, management of learning, pre-entry advice and guidance, learner support, and the benefits and impacts of learning.

On Track is an annual post-school destination survey of all Year 12 completers and early leavers from all Victorian schools. This project also includes a longitudinal survey that provides a comprehensive picture of the outcomes for a cohort of young people in the four years after they leave school. The survey program involves undertaking a short telephone survey with approximately 40 000 school leavers each year.

## Queensland

The Private Provider Survey originally included private providers registered to provide publicly funded VET (not including schools) but was expanded in 2007 to include interstate providers who are registered to deliver VET in Queensland. The aim of the survey is to gather information on the private provider market, especially to capture fee-for-service activity.

TAFE Queensland conducts a Student Survey and a Business Survey during April–May each year. Approximately 10 000 TAFE students complete an online survey and 800 employers participate in a telephone survey. A key focus of these surveys is satisfaction with the training and the improvement of service delivery.

The Queensland Hard-to-Fill Vacancy Survey focuses on quantifying skills shortages, as well as the nature and extent of skills shortages in the state. A survey of 5000 employers allows the geographic distribution of skills shortages and associated causal factors to be identified. The survey covers recruitment activity and staff departures over a six-month period and focuses on three areas: the reasons why vacancies were hard to fill; causes of staff turnover; and employers' approaches to coping with skills shortages in the past. Employers are asked to identify each vacancy and whether they found a lack of applicants, qualifications, skills or experience—as opposed to other factors—that led to their recruitment difficulties. It is anticipated that by focusing on the causes of hard-to-fill vacancies, the survey will provide insight into the role of education and training in mitigating skills shortages.

The Next Step Survey has been conducted annually by the Queensland Government since 2005 and involves young people who completed Year 12 at government and non-government schools across Queensland. The survey of student destinations was commissioned by the former Department of Education, Training and the Arts as part of the Schools Reporting initiative and supports the State Government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) initiative, which aims to have every young person either learning or earning.

The Early Leavers Survey is also an annual survey, from 2007, and is focused on Queensland students who left a government or non-government school before they completed Year 12. It asks whether young adults are currently studying, working, or neither, and the details of these destinations. If the young person is studying, information is collected about where they are studying, the level of the program and whether they are studying full-time or part-time.

## Western Australia

The Student Satisfaction Survey is conducted annually and yields approximately 9000 useable responses. The survey is used to monitor the quality of service, training and facilities provided at an institute and state

level to ensure that students gain their expected and required skills during training. Data are collected on: overall student satisfaction with their course; the level of previous post-secondary education achieved; reasons for undertaking training; student course experiences relating to learning methods; and the quality of training and assessment provided.

### **South Australia**

The School Leaver Survey is conducted over the phone with a sample of South Australian school leavers. Approximately 1900 recent students are asked questions about their education, training and employment activities nine to ten months after they have left school.

The TAFESA Student Satisfaction Survey collects data from all current students to measure TAFESA's positioning in the marketplace.

### **Tasmania**

The aim of the Census of Tasmanian Registered Training Organisations was to provide a thorough understanding of the training provider industry and to gain information that would assist Skills Tasmania when planning initiatives that affect RTOs. Out of the 118 RTOs that were approached, 114 responded, including TAFE Tasmania. The census explored topics such as turnover, staffing, enrolments and business planning strategies. The census was conducted in 2008.

The Learners Survey was an online survey emailed to 1826 learners who commenced their traineeship or apprenticeship between 1 September 2008 and 31 July 2009 and who had either completed their training contract or were active at the time the data were extracted. It included both publicly funded and employer-funded apprentices and trainees.

Documentation suggests that the Department of Education, Tasmania, is also conducting an Early Leavers Survey and Post Year 12 Destination Study to explore post Year 10 pathways. These telephone surveys are aimed at determining what young people who have not completed Year 12 or its equivalent are doing and to track young people once they complete Year 12 or equivalent.

### **Northern Territory**

The Northern Territory has confirmed that it does not currently conduct VET-specific surveys and has not commissioned any related survey work in the past two years.

### **Australian Capital Territory**

The Client Satisfaction Survey involves surveying a sample of 400 apprentices and trainees and 200 employers annually on training and skills issues. The focus of the survey Accreditation and Registration Customer Survey is on improving future service delivery of VET in the ACT and involves an annual survey of 100 RTOs.

The School Leaver Destination survey is conducted annually with approximately 2000 Year 12 completers from all ACT schools. Information is collected about the field and destination of their study, if relevant, and the pathway to their course.

### **6.3 Preliminary observations**

It is difficult to assess the scale, scope and currency of VET surveys based on information that is available in the public domain. State and territory surveys listed in this section are indicative of the 'best available' information.

Jurisdiction-level VET surveys appear to collect data about VET issues from both a training perspective and an education perspective. Surveys of school students or school leavers typically contain a broad range of questions about VET outcomes. It is possible that these recent school leavers are also answering similar questions about training when surveyed by RTOs or other VET agencies.

## 7. Selected Tier 3 surveys

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### 7.1 Scope and definition

The third tier of surveys in scope for this review are surveys undertaken by specific RTOs or other small-scale specific-purpose surveys. The surveys included in this section of the report are indicative only of the total survey activity undertaken by institutions. Identifying all surveys conducted by RTOs and obtaining information about these surveys is obviously an enormous task in its own right, perhaps requiring a census of institutional survey activity or the development of administrative record-keeping practices to report/compile such activity.

The building of the research capacity of the VET sector is, in fact, a key concern for NCVER. To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own research to address a workplace problem. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor and NCVER publishes their research results. Some of the institute-level and specific-purpose surveys undertaken as a result of these scholarships are included in the following sections.

### 7.2 The role of surveys in measuring institutional performance

The paper *Tracking our success: how TAFE institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency* highlights the role that both external and internal surveys play in evaluating performance and is a reminder of the extensive amount of internal surveying undertaken at the institutional level.

The results of a range of external surveys such as the Student Outcomes Survey (SOS), the Survey of Employer Use and Views (SEUV) and state-based surveys of business satisfaction (where available) are used both for strategic planning and evaluation. Findings help managers to track trends in client satisfaction and employment outcomes and to understand areas of improvement and decline. The Student Outcomes Survey is often used by institute marketing departments.

Surveys of staff conducted by state agencies enable institutes to monitor staff numbers, characteristics, turnover and absenteeism. In some institutes these surveys, along with institute-specific surveys of staff (including exit surveys), are used as an indication of the health and culture of the organisations and in the identification of areas for improvement. In others a staff 'intentions survey' enables institutes to develop organisational development responses for succession planning and for mentoring and coaching junior staff. There is some use of exit interviews with staff and students but these are not widespread.

Common strategies for giving students 'a voice' include focus discussion groups, one-on-one discussions with teachers, representation on governance bodies, and complaints and suggestion box arrangements. Student responses to internal course or program surveys (run at teaching section levels by teachers or by institute quality units) provide information on issues related to teaching and learning, resourcing and areas that need improvement.

### **7.3 The role of surveys in evaluating specific local-level programs and initiatives**

In addition to measuring institute-level performance in areas such as staff and student satisfaction, a range of surveys are undertaken by institutions, often as a result of support from the NCVER community practice scholarship program to support small-scale purpose-specific surveys. Some examples of this type of survey activity (as reported in NCVER 2010) follow.

#### **Polytechnic West in Western Australia**

This research explored the difficulties confronting apprentices with a learning disability and the strategies that help them to overcome these difficulties and to achieve a unit of competency completion. The study comprised a survey of apprentices with a learning disability, a focus group made up of lecturers and disability services staff and interviews with family members to identify the successful strategies used by apprentices, lecturers and support staff.

#### **Blue Mountains College, part of the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE**

A survey tool was developed to predict when a student was at risk of leaving a course, thus helping teachers to identify when intervention strategies to prevent student drop-out are required.

The study involved piloting the survey tool with three classes at a medium-sized vocational education college in an outer suburban area. Attendance rates and final course results were also collected from the college records and matched to the survey data.

#### **Practitioner expectations and experiences with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment**

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104) is seen as the standard entry-level teaching qualification in the VET sector. The qualification is widely accepted and well supported as an essential requirement for VET practitioners. However, it has been criticised in relation to its ability to provide the level of skills and knowledge required. Survey research was undertaken amongst new practitioners to explore this issue and to ascertain their views on whether they believe that the certificate has provided them with an effective foundation for the delivery and assessment of training in the VET environment. An online survey upon completion of the certificate and a semi-structured interview six months later were used for this study.

#### **Kiama Community College, Training and assessment (TAA40104) in community providers in New South Wales: participant intentions and outcomes**

This research explored a sample of people who had undertaken the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, their initial expectations of the course, and how their intentions compare with their actual outcomes.

The study used a mixed method approach that comprised a quantitative survey of people who had enrolled in the qualification at one of the 25 adult and community education institutions in New South Wales in 2008, as well as semi-structured phone interviews with some of the survey participants, to explore in more depth the themes emerging from the survey.



## 8. Related survey activity

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### 8.1 Scope and definition

For the purposes of this paper ‘related survey activity’ refers to surveys that do not have a central or specific focus on the VET sector but nonetheless collect data that are important to this VET sector. Surveys in this domain are used for a number of key performance indicators, as discussed in section 2, and are also used for research purposes and to detect and track trends in employment and unemployment, career progression, the transition from education to training, and to provide a context for VET-related initiatives and reforms.

### 8.2 Description of related survey activity

The research undertaken to inform this paper identified 11 national VET-related surveys. These were:

- Census of Population and Housing
- Survey of Education and Work (SEW)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)
- General Social Survey
- Australia at Work
- Survey of Income and Housing
- Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey
- Training Expenditure and Practices Survey (TEPS)
- Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)
- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey
- Dynamics of Australian Income Support and Employment Services (DAISES).

#### **Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The Census of Population and Housing aims to accurately measure the number of people in Australia, their key characteristics and the dwellings in which they live. Level of highest educational attainment was introduced in the 2006 census.

The main limitations of the census as far as the VET sector is concerned are:

- The questions about qualification attainment have VET qualifications lumped together (that is, no capacity to report by level of qualification).
- It is not possible to identify separately training that was undertaken with a private training provider (lumped under the category of ‘other’).
- The census is of limited use in providing information on the VET workforce. The main job occupation is recorded, of which one classification is ‘Vocational Education Teacher’ (that is, VET practitioners

not professionals). This relates to a person's main job. A number of VET practitioners are part-time, so the figures from the census are likely to be an undercount.

### **Survey of Education and Work (SEW), Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The Survey of Education and Work was most recently conducted throughout Australia in May 2010 as a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). Respondents to the LFS who were in scope of the supplementary survey were asked further, education-related, questions. The SEW provides a range of key indicators of educational participation and attainment of persons aged 15–74 years, along with data on people's transition between education and work. The annual time series allows for ongoing monitoring and provides a link with the more detailed range of educational indicators available from the four-yearly Survey of Education and Training. The supplementary survey provides information on: people presently participating in education; their level of highest non-school qualification; their level of highest educational attainment; characteristics of people's transition between education and work; and data on apprentices.

### **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), Australian Bureau of Statistics**

This is a household survey of Indigenous Australians that focuses primarily on social issues or dimensions. Topics include family life, health, housing, education, employment, income and demographics. The survey is conducted in remote and non-remote areas in all states and territories.

The survey was first undertaken in 2002 and most recently in 2008. The sample size for the 2008 survey was approximately 13 300 Indigenous Australians living in private dwellings in remote and non-remote areas, including discrete communities. It collects information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations of Australia for a wide range of areas of social concern, including health, education, culture and labour force participation. Education-related data items include:

- level/field of highest educational attainment
- highest year of school completed
- level/field of highest non-school qualification
- highest year of school completed
- full-time/part-time current study
- type of educational institution of current study
- vocational training in last 12 months
- type of vocational training in last 12 months
- whether training was done as part of the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP)
- whether training is used
- relevance of training to employment.

**General Social Survey, Australian Bureau of Statistics**

First conducted in 2002 and repeated again in 2006 and 2010, the General Social Survey covers persons resident in private dwellings aged 18 years and over. It collects information about personal and household characteristics to enable analysis of the interrelationships between a range of social dimensions. Topics covered are health, housing, education, work, income, financial stress, broad assets and liabilities, information technology, transport, social capital, voluntary work, family and community, recreation and leisure, and crime. The topics specifically related to education include:

- level/field of highest educational attainment
- highest year of school completed
- level/field of highest non-school qualification
- full-time/part-time current study
- type of educational institution of current study
- reasons did not study, although wanted to
- main reason did not study, although wanted to
- reasons did not do training, although wanted to
- main reason did not do training, although wanted to.

**Australia at Work, Workplace Research Centre**

Australia at Work is a longitudinal telephone survey of 8341 Australians whose aim is to examine people's working lives in a continually changing industrial relations environment. The research participants were contacted once a year for five years (2007–11) to find out how their working lives are changing. The latest available information available online relates to the Wave 3 (2009) survey.

The main topics covered by the survey are:

- current employment situation
- employment situation at March 2006
- occupation and industry
- forms of employment
- the labour contract
- employment income
- working conditions
- attitudes toward work
- demographic characteristics.

### **Survey of Income and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The Survey of Income and Housing collects information (through face-to-face interviews) on sources of income, amounts received, housing characteristics and household and personal characteristics. The main classifications include dwelling tenure type, source of income, labour force status, occupation, industry, educational qualification, state and part of state.

The survey was first conducted in 1994–95 and was run every year to 2003–04 (except 1998–99 and 2001–02) and then every second year after 2003–04. The most recent data available are for 2007–08. The survey scope covers residents of private dwellings in both urban and rural areas of Australia. It excludes residents of non-private dwellings (for example, hotels, boarding schools) and households in very remote areas (for example, in Indigenous communities). Results are published every second year in August.

### **Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey, Australian Bureau of Statistics**

This is an international survey (conducted in Australia by the ABS) which measures proficiency in the four skill areas of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving amongst persons aged 15 to 74 years. A measure of health literacy (that is, the ability to interpret information about health issues) was also produced as a by-product of these four skills areas. The survey was first conducted in 1996 and repeated in 2006.

In considering outcome measures relating to the foundation skills needed to enable effective educational, labour market and social participation, the COAG Reform Council Report (2009) recommended:

- improving the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey to allow disaggregation by Indigenous status, or identify an alternative data source
- considering measures in addition to literacy and numeracy skills to more comprehensively assess progress towards the outcome of reducing gaps in foundation skills to enable 'effective educational, labour market and social participation'. These could include measures of social participation.

### **Training Expenditure and Practices Survey (TEPS), Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The Training Expenditure and Practices Survey provided national estimates of employers' structured and unstructured training practices and expenditure on structured training during the financial year ending June 2002. The survey focused on structured training provided to employees, although some data are available for workers other than employees. Structured training was defined as all training activities which had a specified content or predetermined plan and were designed to develop employment-related skills and competencies. Unstructured training comprised all training activities which did not have a specified content or a predetermined plan. Information on the characteristics of employees and employers was also collected.

The survey covered employers in all states and territories and in all industries (except those primarily engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing); private households employing staff; overseas embassies/consulates etc.; and the Australian permanent defence forces.

An initial sample of approximately 7100 employers was selected from the ABS Business Register and stratified by state or territory, sector, industry and employment size. Responses to the survey, conducted by mail in 2002, were received from 92.8 per cent of the in-scope sampled units, resulting in a final sample size of 5889 employers. A small number of strata were completely enumerated, and for the remaining strata a simple random sample was selected from each stratum.

Results of the 2001–02 Training Expenditure and Practices Survey were released in April 2003. The survey was a one-off survey and has been discontinued, mainly due to the difficulty in collecting accurate employer-funded training data.

### **Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), National Centre for Vocational Education Research**

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth track young people as they move from school into further study, work and other destinations. The survey uses large nationally representative samples of young people to collect information about education and training, work, and social development.

Survey participants (collectively known as a 'cohort') enter the study when they turn 15 years, or as was the case in earlier studies, in Year 9 of school. Individuals are contacted once a year for ten years. Studies began in 1995 (Y95 cohort), 1998 (Y98 cohort), 2003 (Y03 cohort), 2006 (Y06 cohort) and more recently in 2009 (Y09 cohort). Since 2003, the initial survey wave has been integrated with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Over 10 000 students start out in each cohort.

LSAY provides a rich source of information to enable a better understanding of young people and their transitions from school to post-school destinations and of their social outcomes, such as wellbeing. Information collected as part of LSAY covers a wide range of school and post-school topics, including: student achievement, student aspirations, school retention, social background, attitudes to school, work experiences and what students do when they leave school. This includes vocational and higher education, employment, job-seeking activity, and satisfaction with various aspects of their lives.

### **Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, Melbourne Institute**

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey provides some information related to VET. As such it is a useful research resource but is of limited value for monitoring purposes. This survey is an established household-based panel study which began in 2001 and has the following key features.

- It collects information about economic and subjective wellbeing, labour market dynamics and family dynamics.
- Special questionnaire modules are included in each wave.
- The Wave 1 panel consisted of 7682 households and 19 914 individuals.
- Interviews are conducted annually with all adult members of each household.
- The panel members are followed over time.

- The funding has been guaranteed for 12 waves, although the survey is designed to continue for longer than this.
- Academic and other researchers can apply to use the General Release datasets for their research.

The questions of particular relevance to VET researchers are those pertaining to the topic areas of employment and education.

### **Dynamics of Australian Income Support and Employment Services (DAISES)**

The Dynamics of Australian Income Support and Employment Services survey is a longitudinal survey that tracks people's opinions and experiences of employment services and income support over time. The survey aims to help DEEWR understand more about people's experiences with government assistance and it will also be used to better understand the pathways that may lead to paid work and the types of training and support people need when looking for work or preparing for work. Data collection is undertaken every six months with 10 000 to 25 000 income support recipients.

## 9. Preliminary analysis

### 9.1 Early findings

It can be seen from table 5 that a substantial volume of recent VET-specific and VET-related survey activity is being undertaken. There appears to be a similar number of surveys being conducted nationally and jurisdictionally, although in many cases the sample sizes of the national surveys are larger.

During this initial phase of the research, the project team was unable, based on the publically available information, to confirm whether some surveys were 'one-off' or are ongoing. A number of jurisdictions provided basic information regarding relevant surveys; however, it was not always possible to ascertain whether these activities were in or out of scope.

Identification of the number and scope of surveys conducted at an institutional level is a huge task and consideration could be given to selecting one or two 'reference jurisdictions' to narrow the breadth of the work, while still including some of this work in the analysis. Similarly, it is likely that the scope of work currently undertaken by ISCs and industry-related groups has been underestimated during the desk-based research. If more detailed information about Tier 1C surveys is required, it would be preferable to consult with the ISCs and industry groups directly rather than relying on published information, which may be incomplete.

**Table 5**      **Number of VET-specific and VET-related surveys**

|                        | <b>No. of surveys</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| National VET surveys   |                       |
| Tier 1A                | 9                     |
| Tier 1B – DEEWR        | 12*                   |
| Tier 1C – Industry     | 10*                   |
| Jurisdictional surveys |                       |
| Tier 2                 | 29*                   |
| Institutional          |                       |
| Tier 3                 | unknown               |
| VET-related surveys    | 11*                   |

\*Unconfirmed estimate.

Without stakeholder consultation, assessing the scope and relative impact of the issues that have been identified in relation to VET-specific and VET-related survey activity is difficult. Early findings from the desk-based scoping exercise are listed below.

- Changes in reporting and compliance regimes for the Australian Government and the state and territory governments during 2010 and 2011 create some uncertainty with respect to the identification of future survey data needs.
- There is a very limited amount of information in the public domain about VET-specific and VET-related surveys beyond the Tier 1A national surveys and the work of NCVER.
- Based on the volume and scope of current survey activity, there appears to be a clear role for VET-specific survey coordination, as distinct from rationalisation, both within and across tiers.

- A thorough assessment of the VET survey population and sample frames needs to be completed before the issues of respondent burden, sample size and longitudinal surveying can be explored. At this early stage, there is little evidence of content gaps but there are indications of 'blind spots' in population coverage, most notably in relation to private providers.

### **Impact of the national regulator on VET surveys**

Given that the Australian Skills Quality Authority only became fully operational on 1 July 2011, it is difficult to determine the potential impact that the regulator will have on VET surveys, particularly in relation to Quality Indicators. The surveys associated with the Quality Indicators are currently under review.

### **Availability and accessibility of VET survey information**

The ABS and NCVER maintain detailed and transparent registers of their surveys and provide a wealth of data about the technical aspects of these surveys. There is, however, a distinct lack of published publically available information about the scope and content of survey activity across the VET sector. Many websites do not appear to have been updated since 2009 and there is typically a lag between the conduct of research and the release of results. Without being fully briefed on the purposes of and potential outcomes from a review, some jurisdictions and stakeholders are understandably reluctant to provide detailed information about their surveys, many of which can be considered commercial in confidence. In a number of cases, detailed information about the execution of the survey is not available because it was not provided by the data collection agency. It is apparent that considerable discussion and consultation with VET survey stakeholders will be required for an informed analysis of the issues.

### **Coordination of VET survey activity**

There appears to be a need for all stakeholders to have an awareness of the nature and scope of the VET-specific and VET-related surveys active at any given time, in order to minimise at the most basic level the chance of overlapping periods of data collection. At this early stage, there is no evidence to suggest that rationalisation is required; however, without detailed information about all relevant surveys, it is difficult to be definitive on this point. Sharing information about survey activity could also result in opportunities for cost-sharing and improving knowledge about survey research and data-sharing.

The Statistical Clearing House (SCH) for Business Surveys has previously provided some measure of coordination of VET surveys by acting as a central clearance point for business surveys run, funded, or conducted on behalf of the Australian Government. The SCH's website has been a key source of information for survey managers planning business-related surveys; however, the site has not been refreshed since 2007. The survey register is currently being reviewed and it is anticipated that it will be updated in the 2011–12 financial year.



## **Survey populations and sample frames**

A key challenge identified by this scoping review is understanding exactly who is in scope for VET-specific surveys and who is completing them. As mentioned above, information about survey execution was difficult to obtain and it was often hard to identify not only the VET population ‘of interest’ but also who had been surveyed from within that sample frame. For example, a survey of employers can refer to employers who have been sourced from: the White Pages; an administrative database; a commercially provided list; a list provided by TAFE institutes or the Australian Business Register. Information about VET populations was often inferred from the available documentation or website commentary and is one of the key survey parameters that should be investigated during the consultation phase of the research.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

Based on these early findings, we recommend that:

- the report is made available on the NCVER website and that it is circulated to the CEOs of state training authorities to raise awareness of the extent of VET surveys in Australia
- the Data and Performance Measurement Principal Committee consider the report and determine whether the information in it is sufficient or if further consultation and action are required
- the survey information held by ABS Statistical Clearing House is updated.

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