

Initial and continuing VET in Australia: clarifying definitions and applications

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Overview and key finding

This project set out with the aim of investigating whether the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system could be divided into two categories: initial VET and continuing VET (referred to hereafter as IVET and CVET), as it is in a number of countries. The rationale for undertaking this investigation was to deepen our understanding of VET, which could in turn inform a more sophisticated level of input into the development and implementation of VET policy.

For the purposes of this project, IVET is broadly considered as ‘general or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life’ (CEDEFOP 2014, p.117). CVET is broadly defined as ‘education or training after initial education and training – or after entry into working life’, where the aim is to help people to acquire or further their knowledge and skills, and/or to continue their personal or professional development (CEDEFOP 2014, p. 51). These definitions are further expanded in the next section.

An examination of the viability and utility of distinguishing between IVET and CVET raises many similar issues to those associated with the increasing call for so-called micro-credentials, which is seen as the domain of CVET. In addition, with IVET and CVET recognised as separate entities, a context is potentially created whereby government can be informed about the types of training to be funded. Two distinct categories of VET would also make it easier to determine whether qualification policy is meeting the needs of different learner groups.

Articulating definitions for IVET and CVET is problematic in the Australian VET context, where training is rarely defined as such, despite the differences in the learners belonging to each category and the type of training they undertake. The premise for determining and applying these definitions lies in the intent of the VET qualification: most VET qualifications are aligned to an occupation or cluster of closely related occupations and assume prior work or qualifications as entry requirements (CVET), whereas others are designed to prepare students for the labour market (IVET). With little distinction in the descriptions of qualifications to discriminate between the two, it is feasible and probable that students are taking courses that are not suited to their circumstances, noting that students will not always be undertaking a course for a direct vocational outcome. This potentially has implications for how IVET and CVET are taught and the required qualifications and experience of teachers and trainers.

We considered that more specific information about *qualification purpose* – and, of equal importance, *learner intent* – would also help in the assessment of the effectiveness of qualifications in meeting industry and learner needs and the broad purposes of VET. One of the key issues for consideration here is whether the student is learning for a career or whether they are learning to obtain a particular skill.

In this context, Moodie et al. (2015) propose four purposes of VET, namely:

- preparation for the labour market
- pathways to further education
- social inclusion
- upskilling and reskilling the workforce.

Of these four, the first three could be considered as examples of IVET, with the fourth being CVET. While this adds another layer of complexity to any proposed approach, making these distinctions could potentially help to articulate more clearly the role VET plays for learners at different stages of their lives, thereby enhancing the role of VET in lifelong learning.

Billett et al. (2015) pointed to the need for an explicit *continuing* education and training system, one that values workplace learning, to meet the ongoing needs of Australian workers, who may be balancing work, family and study. In their research they argued that the existing entry-level focus of the education and training system does not meet these needs. By extension, their argument would imply a distinction between initial and ongoing (or continuing) VET.

To investigate these issues in this report, we examined definitions of IVET and CVET in international contexts; we also sought views from a range of people and groups representing a variety of organisation types on issues relating to a proposed categorisation of IVET and CVET.¹ These people and groups could be considered ‘key informants’, given their knowledge and experience of the Australian VET system.

Key finding: from a dichotomy to a matrix

As the project progressed, and in particular following the consultations with key informants, it became apparent that, within the context of the purposes of qualifications and learner intent, as was proposed by Moodie and colleagues (2015), more is needed than just a straightforward differentiation between IVET and CVET. A far more nuanced and sophisticated classification approach is required, one that accounts for both the learner – as they move through their life and work journey – and the types of learning they undertake at the various points along this journey. In essence, a classification approach or framework that truly encapsulates the concept of lifelong learning, rather than lifelong education, becomes necessary.² Indeed, the role of a qualifications framework that supports lifelong learning as a ‘practical reality ... [and not] ... an abstract goal’ was a key point raised in the recent review of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) led by Professor Peter Noonan (p.8).³

1 The number of respondents is presented in table A1. Details relating to how the respondents were selected and approached is provided with this table.

2 There is a difference between lifelong learning and lifelong education. Billett (2018) sees lifelong learning as a personal process and something that people do, whereas lifelong education is more about the provision of (intentional) educational experiences. He argues that the terms are often (and incorrectly) used interchangeably, although they are distinct concepts.

3 While not specifically mentioning lifelong learning, on the 9 December 2019, the Australian Government accepted the aims of the review in relation to VET, contingent on further discussions with state and territory governments; see <<https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/new-future-vet-and-higher-education>>.

Based on the discussions and insights from representatives of one skills service organisation (SSO) in particular, we present a definitional matrix of learners and learning that goes some way to encapsulating the complexities of the Australian VET system. We acknowledge that it is only one representation, but it is a starting point for consideration and debate on how this might work in the Australian VET system.

Application of the proposed matrix

A granular definitional matrix – more detailed than the dichotomy first suggested – provides an even greater opportunity to assess how well qualifications meet the four broad purposes of VET, as described by Moodie and colleagues (2015).

In terms of its usefulness in the future of the Australian VET system, the matrix presents data analysis and research opportunities with the potential to inform the development of VET policy and also provide input into the current reforms to the system. These include:

- more clearly defining students and courses within the data collections according to the categories in the matrix
- using the information on defining students and courses in the point above in relation to:
 - tailoring content and delivery; for example, a qualification being undertaken by career starters with no-post school qualifications may include a greater focus on content knowledge and employability skills. This also has implications for the skills and experience required of teachers, as well as the site of learning and institutional arrangements
 - funding decisions; for example, if a course for a career starter, as noted above, requires more intense learning, more contact hours, more infrastructure etc., then it may be funded at a higher rate.

Definitional matrix of learners and learning

The matrix has two dimensions: the *learning* and the *learner*. The learning dimension refers to the type of VET education required, such as apprenticeship or traineeship, qualification or short-course training. The learner dimension refers to the individual's background and experience, with the categories of learners including career starters, developers and changers, and compliance/regulation. One column in the matrix also accounts for those learners who are undertaking VET for non-career-related reasons. This group of learners can be considered as representative of Moodie et al.'s (2015) social inclusion purpose of VET. At the intersection of the categories across the two dimensions, the training can be either IVET, CVET, both or not applicable. Further, as highlighted in the consultations and demonstrated in the matrix, is that, in terms of learning, foundation skills and pre-vocational courses need to be considered as a different category.

Table 1 Conceptualisation of Australian VET across the dimensions of the learner and learning pathways

		Learners						
		Career starters			Career developers	Career changers	Compliance/regulation	Non-career
		<i>School leaver: no post-school qualifications^a</i>	<i>Unemployed/NILF school leavers</i>	<i>Unemployed/NILF – other^b</i>				
Learning	Apprenticeship/traineeship	INITIAL	INITIAL	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL	N/A
	Qualification	INITIAL	INITIAL	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT
	Short course or subject only	INITIAL	INITIAL	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	CONT	INITIAL/CONT
	Licensing	INITIAL	INITIAL	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	INITIAL/CONT	CONT	N/A
	Foundation skills	PRE-INITIAL	PRE-INITIAL	PRE-INITIAL	N/A	N/A	N/A	INITIAL/CONT
	Pre-vocational	PRE-INITIAL	PRE-INITIAL	PRE-INITIAL	N/A	N/A	N/A	INITIAL/CONT

Notes: N/A = not applicable. NILF = not in the labour force

a Does not include VET in Schools (VETiS) part-time or casual work.

b This would include people from a variety of different circumstances and not all necessarily young people e.g. migrants and refugees. It would also primarily refer to those who have not worked for some time, if at all, as opposed to those who are unemployed or NILF for transient periods.

Introduction

This report examines whether a distinction can be made in Australian VET between initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET), as applies in a number of other countries. Assisting students to more effectively identify and undertake courses that will optimise their outcomes from VET is the major rationale for this investigation. The other objective of this research is to enhance our understanding of VET, enabling useful input into future policy development and implementation.

This report covers the following:

- a brief overview of key aspects of IVET and CVET internationally (with a focus on Europe) and commentary on the Australian context
- an outline of the context of the Australian VET system and the features pertinent to the IVET/CVET distinction
- a summary of expert views in relation to six questions on the distinction between IVET and CVET.



International concepts of initial and continuing VET

To gain a greater understanding of how a distinction between IVET and CVET works in practice, we investigated the training systems of five countries in the European Union: Germany (Hippach-Schneider & Huismann 2019), Austria (Tritscher-Archan 2016), Luxembourg (INFPC 2019), France (Centre Inffo 2019) and Spain (Sancha & Gutierrez 2019). During this process we also identified the elements of these various systems that could be applicable to the Australian VET system.

Before moving to a more detailed comparison of these five countries, we will highlight the distinction between initial and continuing VET, a distinction that is clearly apparent in some international VET systems, such as the German system. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training in Germany (BiBB)⁴ provides the following definitions for IVET and CVET in Germany:

Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) is a work-based training process or activity for apprentices/trainees. It leads to a formal qualification. The activities are often financed (partly or wholly) by the enterprise, but this not a mandatory condition. Apprentices/trainees often have a special training contract.

Vocational further training (CVET) generally requires a completed apprenticeship and/or appropriate relevant professional experience. The vocational training should open up the possibility for people to maintain their professional capacity in their current position/occupation (further training) or to expand their professional capacity for professional advancement (advanced training). There are thus two forms of continuing vocational training in the German system: further continuing training (receiving and adapting) and advanced continuing training (expanding and career advancement).

These two definitions are quite specific to the conditions of the German VET system. Apprenticeships are almost a standard option for those not going on to university (unlike Australia) and there is a large focus on IVET in the German system.

CEDEFOP (2014) has broader definitions for European education and training, with this organisation defining initial vocational education and training as ‘general or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life’ (p.117). This definition is expanded to include scenarios where ‘some training undertaken after entry into working life may be considered as initial training (such as retraining)’ (CEDEFOP 2014, p.117).

4 BiBB VET Glossary, available at <<https://www.bibb.de/en/80996.php>>.

Continuing vocational education and training on the other hand is defined by CEDEFOP (2014, p.51) as:

Education or training after initial education and training – or after entry into working life aimed at helping individuals to:

- improve or update their knowledge and skills
- acquire new skills for a career move or retraining
- continue their personal or professional development.

However, these definitions are not always fixed, or at least their parameters are not constant. For instance, CEDEFOP (2011) notes that there is no single definition of CVET and that its parameters are both variable and wide-ranging and may include on-the-job training, adult education, retraining, vocational education later in life to develop a skill not held, vocational education for those with special needs, and aspects of non-formal and informal education. In essence, CVET is considered by CEDEFOP (2014) to be part of lifelong learning and as such is ‘crucial for employability of individuals’ (p.51).

These concepts are a little broader than those applied in Germany but nonetheless they still divide learners into two distinct categories.

Key aspects of IVET and CVET internationally

We now look more closely at the key elements of IVET and CVET in the five European Union countries in question.

In these countries, IVET commences, in the main, in upper secondary school (around 15–16 years), with apprenticeships considered as IVET.⁵ Short courses, or non-qualification courses, are not included in the concept of IVET. The initial VET programs tend to be of three to four years duration, although countries such as Germany, Austria, Spain and France include some post-secondary programs in IVET. In Austria, Spain and France, this includes programs equivalent to a bachelor-level degree.

Germany and Austria also offer one- to two-year pre-vocational programs in schools for those in their final year of compulsory schooling (around the age of 15 years), which provide a pathway to either an apprenticeship or further school-based VET, in the case of Germany, or to an apprenticeship, in the case of Austria. Luxembourg provides three-year pre-vocational programs in schools for students at the lower secondary level (12–14 years), with these students then going onto school-based VET programs that incorporate work-based learning.

When considering the application of the IVET and CVET dichotomy in these countries, the following aspects are noteworthy.

5 Smith and Kemmis (2013), in a comparative analysis of national apprenticeship systems, find however that this is not the case in many other countries. Countries where apprenticeships are available for both young people and adults include Australia, England, Indonesia and South Africa, whereas in Canada and the United States apprenticeships are predominantly available for adults.

The IVET–CVET dichotomy supports the concept of lifelong learning

The application of the distinction between IVET and CVET provides strong support for the concept of lifelong learning, a concept that is considered a ‘national obligation’ in France (Centre Inffo 2019, p.2).

Having a clearly defined and widely understood concept of IVET provides people with the knowledge, technical skills and generic skills they need to move into CVET. This approach can streamline the retraining and upskilling process and potentially reduce the amount of time that displaced workers who have undertaken IVET in the past would spend outside the labour market, as any further training (undertaken as CVET) would be focused solely on their skilling needs for work.

As one of the key informants noted, in the European countries that distinguish between IVET and CVET, greater attention is given to employers training and retraining their workers. As a means of determining the extent to which this occurs, the European Union has administered the Continuing Vocational Training Survey approximately every five years since 1993⁶; the type of training employees are undertaking and the amount of money employers are spending on training are recorded. The UK administers a similar survey – the Investment in Training Survey – as a supplement to its biennial Employers Skills Survey.⁷ The point here is that the importance of continuous vocational training is acknowledged by governments, and there is an accountability and expectation placed on employers to contribute to the upskilling of workers.

The need for Australia to build a strong lifelong learning culture is supported by the Business Council of Australia (BCA; 2018) and the Australian Industry Group (2019). Such a culture encourages individuals to develop a solid education and training foundation and subsequently add to this when and as they need throughout their working lives, for the purposes of reskilling or upskilling. But as the BCA stresses, for this to occur ‘will require both a commitment and contribution from individuals, businesses and government’ (p.5). Establishing a lifelong learning culture also highlights the need for surveys on training expenditure to gain the appropriate level of information for policy analysis.

More recently, the review of the Australian Qualifications Framework called for a qualifications framework that allows for lifelong learning to ‘become a practical reality for people; it cannot stand as an abstract goal’ (*Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework final report 2019*, p.8) and that ‘the pathways to further and lifelong learning will be of increasing importance into the future’ (p.54). Spain and France, for their part, fully embrace the related concept of lifelong education⁸ by supporting not only vertical pathways through vocational or technical qualifications from IVET through to CVET, as the other countries in focus do, but horizontal pathways between vocational and general education or academic programs at the post-secondary level, achieved through the formal recognition of relevant qualifications (Centre Inffo 2019; Sancha & Gutierrez 2019).

6 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/continuing-vocational-training-survey>>.

7 See, for example, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-employer-skills-survey-2017>>.

8 See footnote two re distinction between lifelong learning and lifelong education.

Implications of the delivery of IVET and CVET for specific teacher qualifications

The trend for IVET educators in the countries in focus is for a stronger emphasis on pedagogical and andragogical skills, which is reflected by the fact that these teachers are often trained and qualified similarly to schoolteachers. This stands in contrast to CVET teachers, who are generally viewed and certified as trainers. In Germany, for example, several bodies are responsible for trainer and teacher training arrangements. In relation to IVET, teachers at vocational schools must have a minimum of a university teaching qualification, as well as have completed a period of preparatory practicum service. In-company trainers responsible for the training of apprentices are required to sit an exam to demonstrate they have the necessary pedagogical and professional skills, as determined by the relevant industry ‘chamber’. These chambers (for example, chamber of industry and commerce, chamber of skilled crafts) provide various courses to assist in-company trainers to develop the required competencies. BiBB recommends the completion of a 115-hour course by in-company trainers in preparation for the exam (Hippach-Schneider & Huisman 2019, pp.41–3). In Austria, in addition to the required university-level qualification, IVET teachers are also required to demonstrate or gain up to three years of relevant occupation-related professional experience before they can be fully qualified (Wagner 2016).

With respect to teachers or trainers who deliver CVET in the countries of interest, there are generally no immediately obvious higher education requirements for educators, with the focus instead on the qualifications required to teach IVET programs. In Spain, however, a minimum qualification to teach CVET programs is stipulated: the trainer must hold a qualification higher than the one they are delivering, have at least one year of (practical) experience, and hold some form of qualification in teaching methodology for adults (Sancha & Gutierrez 2019, p.40).

In the Australian context, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is currently the minimum qualification for VET trainers and teachers. Smith (2019) reflects that in the past issues have arisen with the teaching of this qualification, which has required the introduction of a high degree of regulation, as well as a compliance framework for providers who want to deliver it. Before the introduction of the requirement for the certificate IV, degree-level qualifications were required for VET teachers.

Guthrie and Jones (2018), however, note that the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015⁹ broadened the mandated qualifications for delivering and assessing training in VET to include the certificate IV, diploma, or higher-level qualifications in adult education. The mandated qualifications also include higher-level qualifications in language, literacy and numeracy. The 29 March 2019 amendment to the standards¹⁰ updated the trainer and assessor qualification requirements.¹¹

9 <<https://www.asqa.gov.au/about/australias-vet-sector/standards-registered-training-organisations-rtos-2015>>.

10 <<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2019C00380>>.

11 See also Knight, White & Granfield (forthcoming).

It is interesting to note that the Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Agreement¹², for example, has capability statements and stipulated requirements beyond the certificate IV for teaching staff as they move up the pay increments for their classification. For example, progression beyond the second increment point of their classification level is contingent on their completing an approved qualification of teacher training at AQF level 5, with an AQF 6 or above level qualification required for moving beyond the fifth increment point.

Skill sets or short courses

Short or non-qualification courses are specifically excluded from IVET in the countries examined. However, they are important to the concept of lifelong learning and so are relevant to CVET training. In Australia, while many training package skill sets (which are formal sub-sets of qualifications) are undertaken as part of what could be considered CVET, notably for compliance or upskilling, there are some skill sets that could be considered more foundational in nature or in the realm of what would be IVET, one example being a training package skill set on digital literacy. This situation means that the designation of skill sets or short courses as purely CVET in Australia is problematic. This issue is also discussed later when summarising the views of experts who were consulted. The 2019 AQF review discussion paper also notes that short-form credentials have many purposes, including, for example, as enabling and foundation courses for pathways into AQF qualifications.

12 <<https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/victorian-tafe-teaching-staff-agreement-2018>>.



The Australian context: a system for all

We commenced this project interested in whether the concept of IVET and CVET, as utilised in many international countries, could be similarly applied to the Australian VET context. This was not an unreasonable consideration given a recommendation from the review of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF; 2019) was for the AQF to better acknowledge different learner needs through more contemporary qualification design.

To investigate this proposition, we posed the following questions to representatives of provider and practitioner-related organisations, skills service organisations, researchers and an employer union. Their expert knowledge of what may constitute initial VET and continuing VET prompted us to approach these individuals for their views on this topic¹³:

1. Should VET programs while undertaken at school be excluded from IVET on the premise that IVET is post-school? However, should school-based apprenticeships be included as IVET if they are completed?
2. Similarly, should pre-vocational courses, such as foundation courses, be excluded from IVET? This would include pre-apprenticeships as well. This question is asked since these courses are designed to lead to VET courses or apprenticeships, rather than employment.
3. Do all apprenticeships/traineeships fall into IVET as they do in some countries, or could some be considered CVET?
4. Should IVET start at certificate level III? A large proportion of certificate I/II courses are undertaken while still at school or as foundation courses leading to other VET courses. A possible exception to this could be traineeships at certificate II level, which may be expected to have an employment outcome.
5. Should there be an age range for distinguishing between IVET and CVET? That is, should the definition of IVET be restricted to those aged 18–25 years (assuming the exclusion of school-based VET is applied)? This would mean that people undertaking VET, even for the first time, after the age of 25 years would be considered CVET learners. This could even apply to mature-age workers who have not previously undertaken VET. Is this reasonable or sensible?
6. Should skill sets and other short courses be purely the domain of CVET?

Does the dichotomy work for Australia?

It became apparent from the consultations that viewing VET in Australia as a dichotomy of initial and continuing VET represents an inadequate approach and that a more sophisticated and nuanced conceptualisation is required, one that recognises the role of the Australian VET system as catering for all people, at all ages and stages in life. This multi-purpose role

¹³ The number of respondents is presented in table A1. Details relating to how the respondents were selected and approached is provided with this table.

for VET becomes clearly apparent when examining enrolment data by age. For example, in 2018, for nationally recognised training¹⁴:

- 54% of enrolments in nationally recognised programs are by 25 to 64-year-olds
- By qualification level, the proportion of 25 to 64-year-olds enrolled in VET varies from 29% for certificate II enrolments to 74% for certificate IV enrolments
- 48% of 25 to 64-year-olds enrolled in VET already held a certificate III or above as their highest prior qualification
- 34% of 25 to 64-year-olds enrolled in VET were in full-time employment when they enrolled, with 17% employed part-time, and 28% either unemployed or not in the labour force
- 39% of 25 to 64-year-olds enrolled in VET who had no post-school qualifications were either unemployed or not in the labour force.

It is worth noting that the type of course or learning that those aged 25 years or older require is often not a complete qualification. Indeed, the data show that, for this age group, 33% of enrolments were at the sub-qualification level¹⁵ (including 28% enrolled in subjects only). This compares with 15% of 15 to 24-year-olds (with 11% enrolled in subjects only).

We can also see differences in learners by looking at students' (non-apprenticeship or traineeship) reasons for undertaking the training.¹⁶ For the 18 to 24-year age group, and for those who responded to this question¹⁷, the most common reason for enrolling in a nationally recognised program was 'to get a job' (38% stated this), followed by 'personal interest or self-development' (15%). For those aged 25–64 years, 'to get a job' (27%) was also a main reason, as was 'I wanted extra skills for my job' (15%), 'for personal interest or self-development' (12%), and 'it was a requirement of my job' (12%). Quite obviously, this variety of motivations reflects differing learner needs.

For those enrolled in subjects only, that is, not undertaking a full qualification or apprenticeship or traineeship, the distribution of reasons was somewhat different. For both age groups, the most common reason for those who responded to the question¹⁸ was 'it was a requirement of my job': 60% for 25 to 64-year-olds and 46% for 18 to 24-year-olds. This suggests, once again, that it may be difficult to categorise learners as IVET or CVET based on age but rather points to the requirement for a more nuanced categorisation.

A particularly interesting case when considering the IVET–CVET distinction is that of apprenticeships and traineeships. In the countries we examined for this report, apprenticeships were often seen as being at entry level and undertaken either mainly or exclusively by young people. However, the apprenticeship and traineeship data for Australia

14 The data given in the dot points and subsequent paragraph are derived from NCVER, Total VET Activity, 2018 (unpublished data).

15 Both nationally and non-nationally recognised courses.

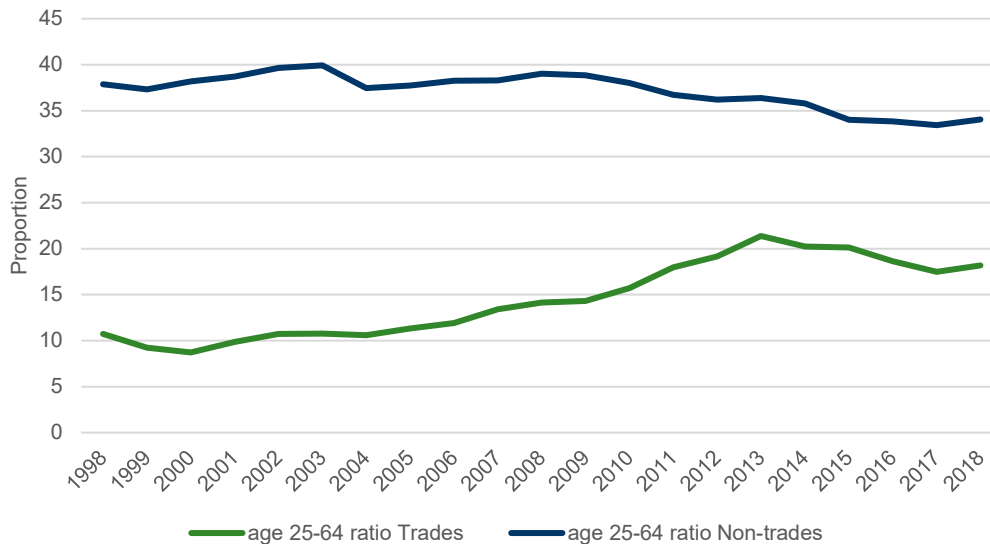
16 The data in this and the following paragraph are derived from NCVER, Total VET Activity, 2018 (unpublished data).

17 For 23% of 18 to 24-year-olds and 20% of 25 to 64-year-olds, the response to the question was 'not known'.

18 For 52% of 18 to 24-year-olds and 49% of 25 to 64-year-olds, the response to the question was 'not known'.

don't support this notion (similarly, nor in countries such as the United States, Canada, Indonesia, England and South Africa). This is amply seen by the following chart, which shows the proportion of apprenticeships and traineeships undertaken by 25 to 64-year-olds, who were not existing workers, over time (split by trade and non-trade occupations).

Figure 1 Proportion of apprenticeship and traineeship commencements by 25 to 64-year-olds who were not existing workers 1998–2018



Source: NCVET National Apprentice and Trainee Collection 1996–2018, unpublished data.

We can see that the proportion of trade commencements by 25 to 64-year-olds who were not existing workers increased up until 2013 (with a slight decrease or levelling out since then). By contrast, the proportion of non-trade commencements has decreased slightly over the period. In 2018, 18% of trade commencements were by 25 to 64-year olds who were not existing workers, as were 34% of non-trade commencements – a significant cohort of post-entry age learners.

Hargreaves, Stanwick and Skujins (2016), in examining the changing nature of apprenticeships, identified that changes to the apprenticeship system over time have facilitated a greater level of flexibility, which has included initiatives to encourage more adult apprentices and also alternative training models. In particular, the proportion of adult apprentices completing a trade apprenticeship in two years or less has increased over time.

While we can see from the above data that a variety of learner types are enrolled in the Australian VET system, some key informants indicated potential support for the application of the concept of IVET and CVET to the Australian VET system, at least in some form. In this context, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) provided a paper outlining their position. Their view of the purpose of the VET system is, 'the production of skilled and adaptable workers productively employed in the economy in occupations related to their training' (2019, p.3). To achieve this purpose, the AMWU proposes three distinct roles for the VET system:

- preparatory vocational studies, which are curriculum-based (and industry-endorsed), not aligned with the AQF, and encompassing VET in Schools and industry-endorsed pre-apprenticeships and other pre-vocational programs

- initial VET, comprising nationally recognised training directly aligned to the skill needs of a particular job
- continuing VET, which by definition is post-IVET and can be undertaken for a variety of purposes, such as career progression and dealing with changes to the nature of work and industry.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union was not alone in highlighting the distinct role that foundation courses play. Other respondents raised concerns that, if a strict distinction were applied, such courses were at risk of being in 'definitional limbo', as the course itself may not enable initial employment but it does facilitate it. Further discussion of where foundation-type courses sit in the Australian VET system is presented later in this report.



Experts views on IVET and CVET

This section presents the collated responses to each of the questions that were posed to the key informants. It begins with a summary table.

Table 2 Summary of expert views to consultation questions

Question	Comment
1	The majority of respondents supported the notion of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships being included in IVET. There were mixed responses regarding school VET programs being excluded, with some agreeing, some disagreeing and others not providing a direct response.
2	About a half did not agree that pre-vocational courses should be excluded from VET, with quite a few respondents being comfortable with the lack of a direct link to a vocational outcome. For some others though, the lack of a direct vocational outcome meant that they should be excluded from IVET. It was also noted that these learners had diverse circumstances so they could not be neatly categorised.
3	Few respondents believed that all apprenticeships should be considered IVET but rather highlighted the complexities of the Australian VET system.
4	Most did not agree that IVET should start at certificate III level, emphasising the important role of certificate II qualifications, in particular traineeships, that lead to employment.
5	Overwhelmingly, respondents said there should not be an age range distinguishing IVET and CVET, citing the circumstances of people where their first engagement with VET may be later in life.
6	The majority believed that skill sets and other short courses generally belong in the realm of CVET, although it was pointed out that some are used as pathways into work.
7	See actual responses below.

Question 1: Should VET programs undertaken while at school be excluded from IVET on the premise that IVET (leading to employment) in Australia is post-school? However, should school-based apprenticeships be included as IVET if they are completed?

The notion of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBAT) included in the concept of IVET was supported by the majority of respondents. However, one respondent (researcher) raised the point about completion of the SBAT; namely, how many students actually complete a SBAT while at school? This respondent suggested that very few would, and in fact having such a definition of SBAT completion would likely be restrictive. This respondent raised a further query: if the SBAT student completed their apprenticeship post-school, would this still be considered IVET? Alternatively, if the SBAT student did not complete it post-school but undertook other vocational options, would they still be considered as undertaking IVET?

Responses to whether VET in Schools programs should be excluded from the concept of IVET were mixed. Five respondents supported the proposition that VETiS programs be excluded from IVET. As noted earlier, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union considers VETiS programs to be more preparatory or foundational in nature and as such should not be viewed as initial VET.

Another respondent (researcher), who felt that VETiS programs should be excluded from IVET, raised the issue of post-school intent, referring to a review of VET within ACT public

schools, undertaken in 2015 by the Centre for International Research of Education Systems (CIRE) at Victoria University, for the ACT Education and Training Directorate. In a survey of students undertaking VETiS programs, this study found that the two most common reasons given as to why the student was undertaking the VET program¹⁹, representing approximately 20% of all responses, was because they wanted to work in that industry area following school (n = 106) or because they wanted to gain new knowledge and skills (n = 112). The next two common reasons, representing approximately 13% of responses, was that the course looked interesting (n = 69) or they wanted to learn in a more hands-on way (n = 67) (Centre for International Research on Education Systems 2015, p.91, table A-5). The point here is that many students were undertaking the VET programs without any intention of seeking employment in the particular industries in which they were gaining units of competency. The perceived lack of a clear link with, or orientation to work, was also the issue raised by three other consultation participants.

Support for including or viewing VETiS programs as IVET was given by seven respondents, with many highlighting the important role such programs can play in helping young people to develop employability skills and in establishing pathways to further education and/or employment.

Five respondents did not provide a direct response to the question of whether VETiS programs should be excluded from IVET, instead raising concerns or issues with the dichotomising of VET as initial or continuing. Two of these respondents acknowledged that such a categorisation would be useful for funding reasons but, beyond that, questioned the usefulness of doing so, given that the current structure of the Australian VET system provides access training for the first time to people at any stage in life, and ongoing access to training thereafter, for whatever reason. One of these respondents (researcher) posed the fundamental question: is the definition of 'initial' being applied to the learner or the learning? That is, the distinction between IVET and CVET is person-dependent. For what is an IVET program in the context of one person could be CVET in another.

Yet another respondent (researcher) was concerned that the application of a dichotomous definition would preclude valid and necessary foundation-type training activities, programs and qualifications, including some VETiS programs. The importance of this type of training, and where it could 'sit' is discussed further in question two and later in this report.

Question 2: Should pre-vocational courses such as foundation courses be excluded from IVET?

As with the first question, responses to this question were mixed, but many highlighted the issue of foundation skills courses and where they are best placed.

Four respondents agreed that pre-vocational courses should be excluded from IVET, with the lack of clear vocational outcomes a key consideration in their decision. Although one respondent (researcher) suggested that if 'pre-apprenticeship courses were better understood by employers and industry, the outcomes might be better, and pathways

¹⁹ Multiple responses were permitted to this question and as a consequence there were 503 responses to this question.

improved'. The AMWU's position on pre-vocational courses, including foundation skills, has been stated earlier.

Eight respondents did not agree that pre-vocational courses should be excluded from IVET. Many acknowledged and were comfortable with the lack of direct vocational outcomes and emphasised the role of such courses in helping to develop generic occupational or employability skills, as well as providing pathways for individuals into further education and training. Other feedback also emphasised that a direct link between training and occupational outcomes does not always apply. One respondent (SSO) made a particular point about the value of pre-apprenticeships in facilitating initial employment.

The remaining respondents did not consider that they could answer this question directly. Two acknowledged the role of pre-apprenticeships in facilitating initial employment but could not support foundation skills as IVET. One of these respondents (researcher) elaborated on where to 'place' pre-vocational or foundational courses, given their relative distance from immediate vocational application. He noted that the diversity of sociodemographic characteristics and intent among learners in these types of programs (for example, language, literacy and numeracy; disadvantage, disability and other personal issues) may need to be addressed before any serious vocational engagement can be considered. A more significant issue for this respondent, beyond whether such programs should/should not be considered as IVET, is the ability of the programs to 'meet their "mission" and the extent to which there may be unreasonable expectations about outcomes from [the programs], given the circumstances of those undertaking them'.

This respondent also made the point that, given the sociodemographic characteristics of the learners generally undertaking pre-vocational type programs, highly skilled and experienced VET teachers are often required to provide this training. This is an important point, as identifying learner types will provide pointers on the learning required and therefore the teaching required.

It is interesting to note that soon after the completion of the consultation phase of this project the final report of the review of the Australian Qualifications Framework was released. In this report, the Expert Panel for the review proposed a revised qualifications framework, whereby certificate I could be considered as pre-vocational and could encompass:

foundation skills needed to access a vocational pathway such as reading, writing, numeracy and entry level digital technology skills; [and] basic knowledge and skills needed to prepare for work or work experience or a probationary period in a specific field. (Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework Final Report 2019, p.40)

The Expert Panel also suggested that certificate II level qualifications be considered as an 'initial vocational certificate'. The Australian Government has now accepted the findings of the review in relation to VET, contingent on discussions with state and territory governments.²⁰

²⁰ See <<https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/new-future-vet-and-higher-education>>.

Question 3: Should all apprenticeships/traineeships fall into IVET as they do in some countries, or could some be considered CVET?

The responses to this question highlighted the complexity of the Australian VET system. While countries such as Germany, which apply the IVET–CVET distinction, have apprenticeships/traineeships falling squarely in the domain of IVET, a similarly unequivocal response cannot be applied here. Only three respondents agreed that all apprenticeships/traineeships should be considered as IVET, irrespective of the age of the individual.

As shown earlier, the proportion of those aged 25 years or older commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship is not insubstantial. As such, many commencing an apprenticeship bring with them previous education and/or work experience. Based on such characteristics, the learner may not be considered IVET, but the learning may be initial – a point raised by many respondents. Therefore, undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship could be considered as IVET or CVET, depending on the learner characteristics.

The following quote from one respondent (researcher) demonstrates the complexity:

Some apprentice and traineeship programs may be clearly IVET. Some will be clearly CVET, as they are post-initial and draw on and enhance whatever was undertaken in initial VET. So that might include deepening skills relevant to the IVET through another qualification, skill set, short course, micro credential. If they continue to work in the same occupational area (e.g. building and construction) but undertake management training to become a site supervisor or project manager is that IVET or CVET, or a bit of both? Probably CVET. But: Is what we are actually talking about here enabling *career pathways*?

Thus, this all seems to ignore the importance of pathways into, through and beyond VET. The importance of career choice and circumstance and finally occupation and context is that a plumbing apprentice may be undertaking IVET to gain certification and registration in that trade, but what if they already have another trade or occupation? Then are they clearly CVET or CVET viewed from one context (career choice and enhancement, or career change) OR are they IVET in the context of starting a new career and gaining the ‘initial’ qualification that is required to practise in that occupation/trade/vocation?

So, there is an argument of perspective that can entertain the notion of initial and continuing being equally valid, but dependent on the frame of reference.

Question 4: Should IVET start at certificate level III qualifications?

The majority of respondents did not agree with the proposition contained in this question, with almost all highlighting the importance of certificate II qualifications, particularly traineeships, which lead to employment.

Two respondents (researchers), however, suggested that, excluding traineeships, having IVET commencing at a certificate III level would signal that the training has a clear vocational outcome.

One respondent (government) outlined reasons why it might not be helpful to consider IVET as commencing at a particular qualification level. This respondent suggested that, instead,

accounting for the typical or intended labour market outcome would be a better determinant. That is, for some occupations, a certificate II is the requirement to enter the labour market, while for other occupations, a diploma may be the minimum entry-level requirement. Put another way: is the qualification meant to lead to direct employment outcomes?

Question 5: Should there be an age range for distinguishing between IVET and CVET?

The responses to this question were overwhelmingly negative. Given the concept of VET providing opportunities for people at all ages and stages of life, a blanket rule is not considered sensible. As one respondent noted, 'it sends the wrong message about life being a learning continuum' (SSO). Another SSO representative provided examples that highlighted why a person may have their first engagement with the VET system much later in life, including those unemployed following secondary school and who have never undertaken VET; recently arrived migrants aged over 25 years; and those affected by industry transition and who may have worked in the same or similar jobs for many years, jobs that required no VET qualifications.

One respondent (government) suggested that a more valuable indicator than age may be prior attainment. The rationale for this suggestion was that a learner with no prior vocational experience typically lacks the knowledge that underpins key skills, as well as the essential capabilities contextualised to their field of education. They therefore may require assistance with, first of all, gaining fundamental pedagogical knowledge and hence the support of a teacher with the relevant pedagogical or andragogical qualifications rather than a trainer who would facilitate skills acquisition or deepening.

Another respondent from an SSO did support the concept of having a distinct age range to distinguish between IVET and CVET learners: those aged 24 years or younger would be classified as participating in IVET; those aged 25 years or older would be classified as participating in CVET.

Question 6: Should skill sets and other short courses be purely the domain of CVET?

In the main, yes. Skill sets and other short courses were considered by most respondents as a means for addressing gaps in training or for upskilling or reskilling – a means for encouraging continuous learning. As one researcher noted, skill sets, short courses, micro-credentials and licensing are 'tactical' elements of formal training, which are necessary to enhance practice or deepen an individual's skills and capabilities, thus promoting their opportunity for career progression.

Four of our respondents, however, did not agree that skill sets and other short courses should be considered purely as CVET. For these respondents, one of the purposes of skill sets and other short courses was to act as a pathway into work, particularly for those who already held educational qualifications in an unrelated field or a different educational sector. One respondent (SSO) noted that such training allowed an employer to take on and skill-up a new employee relatively quickly and without significant cost to the employer. Another respondent (researcher), however, who did agree that such training should be considered as CVET, made the point that employers appreciate skill sets as they give the

employee just-in-time training, but not enough to equip the employee with sufficiently more new skills to enable them to move onto other jobs.

Question 7: Are there any other considerations that we should take into account in our scoping of parameters for IVET and CVET? What is your view of these other considerations?

Respondents proposed the following issues, which either emphasised earlier contributions or raised related issues:

- The benefits flowing from dichotomising VET delivery as either initial or continuing need to be made significantly clear before the concept is applied.
- Initial VET, however conceptualised, is more in the domain of occupational preparation and needs to have a greater educative component in the foundations of the occupation, while continuing VET is relevant to for improving/upskilling within a job or changing jobs.
 - One respondent (practitioner-related) suggested that initial VET needs to be accredited and credentialled to enable an individual to demonstrate their fitness to enter employment in an occupation. Such a requirement would not be necessary for continuing VET, with the exception of licensing requirements.
 - Another respondent (SSO) considered the current system to be well suited for IVET but suggested there are opportunities to reform the system to better cater for the need for CVET training.
- Following on from the point above, one respondent from a research organisation emphasised that CVET in particular should focus on the needs of the learner and their work:

Hence, models of CVET need to go beyond ‘teach me’ approaches, albeit in workplaces or education institutions, and focus on processes that engage with and support workers’ learning.
- As some respondents indicated in previous responses, if a distinction is to be made between IVET and CVET, it could be, as one respondent (government) noted, ‘transformational’ to the way in which VET is funded:

Specifically, it could help determine WHAT is funded, FOR HOW MUCH, and BY WHOM [original emphasis]. Funders could, for instance, opt to fund IVET, with its great degree of pedagogical inputs, more contact hours, and greater need for learning infrastructure, at a much higher rate than CVET. Moreover, the distinction could result in more nimbleness in short courses, and ultimately lead to a more responsive system, with greater industry engagement, and potentially, more industry funding.
- The recent review of the AQF is an obviously relevant consideration in this discussion and any typologies and definitions of IVET and CVET, if they were they to be endorsed, would likely depend on the outcomes of this review, which have been approved in principle.

A definitional matrix

The learner and the learning: the two dimensions

We began this project with what may be considered, in hindsight, a naive idea, that of categorising VET delivered in Australia as either initial or continuing – naive because it only provides for an either/or solution, where in fact Australian VET encompasses many nuances and options.

As the consultations clearly highlighted, a far more subtle and sophisticated approach is required, one that takes account of both the learner – as they move through their life and work journey – and the type of learning they undertake at the various points along this journey.

Based on the discussions and insights from various experts, including representatives from one particular skills service organisation, we present a definitional matrix that goes some way to acknowledging the complexities of the Australian VET system (table 1, presented in the Overview). We recognise that this is only one representation and it may well require further refinement, but it is a starting point for consideration and debate on how such an artefact might work in the Australian VET system to optimise the outcomes of the system.

The future

So how do we move forward with this framework and how can we ‘operationalise’ it? The matrix provides potential analytical opportunities, some of which may be used to inform VET policy and also contribute to the current reforms to the system. Some examples of this are discussed below.

One potential opportunity presented by the classification is the capacity to define students and courses more precisely within data collections. For example, the Certificate IV in Process Manufacturing is mostly undertaken by people who are already employed full-time, meaning that these learners could be considered either career developers or career changers. As an alternative example, there will be some qualifications that are largely being undertaken by young people with no post-school qualifications, say, as an apprenticeship. They could be seen as career starters (and, by extension, initial VET).

Identifying students and courses within the collections more clearly thus provides indicators to allow more effective tailoring of delivery and funding.²¹ In relation to the example of the qualification being undertaken by young people with no-post school qualifications, the qualification could therefore include a greater level of content knowledge and have a greater focus on employability skills to cater for the particular learner group, which in itself will have consequent implications for the funding of these qualifications (possibly at a higher rate than other courses), as well as for the skills and experience required of the teachers. Better tailored delivery may also serve to increase completion rates for the

²¹ With respect to current funding arrangements, some states already provide subsidies for students based on whether they are a new worker (akin to our concept of ‘career starter’) or an existing working looking to upskill or reskill (similar to our concept of ‘career developer’ or ‘career changer’).

qualifications. Of course, the process of identifying students and courses in the collections as per the matrix is no easy task and there will always be 'grey areas', necessitating further consideration.

Other tools, such as the Australian Core Skills Framework, are available to complement the information contained within the data collections and could be used to assess the existing capabilities of learners and help to determine what training a learner should undertake to optimise their outcomes from VET.



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Appendix

Consultation approach

Identified stakeholders were sent a discussion paper via email and invited to provide responses to seven questions either via email or telephone.

The stakeholders of interest for this project represent provider and practitioner-related organisations, skill service organisations, employer union, statistical body and researchers. These stakeholders were selected due to their expert knowledge of initial and continuing VET.

Invitations to participate were emailed to 21 key informants, of which 16 participated. The Project Advisory Committee members were also invited to participate, with one subsequently doing so.

Table A1 The number of informants by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Number
SSOs	5
Provider-related	1
Practitioner-related	2
Researchers	7
Union	1
Government	1



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