



National Student Outcomes Survey: how to interpret survey results

National Centre for Vocational
Education Research

This document was produced as an added resource for further information on *VET student outcomes 2020*. The report is available on NCVER's Portal: <<https://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

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How to interpret the survey estimates

The sample for the National Student Outcomes Survey is selected from the National VET Provider and National VET in Schools collections, with national response rates of 33.8% for qualification completers, 27.4% for potential qualification part-completers, 26.1% for short course completers, 26.2% for potential short course part-completers and 23.2% for potential subject(s) only completers.¹

Survey responses are weighted to population benchmarks from the National VET Provider and National VET in Schools collections. As the estimates from the National Student Outcomes Survey are based on information provided by a sample rather than on a population, they are subject to sampling variability; that is, they may differ from the statistics that would have been produced had all students been included and responded to the survey.

How close the estimate is likely to be to the true population value is reflected in the confidence interval. The confidence interval can be calculated for any confidence level, but usually a level of 90%, 95%, or 99% is used. For this publication we use a confidence level of 95%, which means the probability that the confidence interval contains the true population value is 95%.

The confidence interval can be shown graphically using a black bar around the estimate (see figure A). Smaller bars correspond to more accurate estimates. The confidence interval is sometimes expressed as *Estimate +/- margin of error*. That is, the margin of error is half the width of the confidence interval. For example, in figure B, *Estimate A* is equal to 70% and the margin of error (using a confidence level of 95%) is 5%. The confidence interval for this estimate is 65% to 75%, which means we can be 95% confident the true value is between 65% and 75%.

Figure A Confidence interval and margin of error

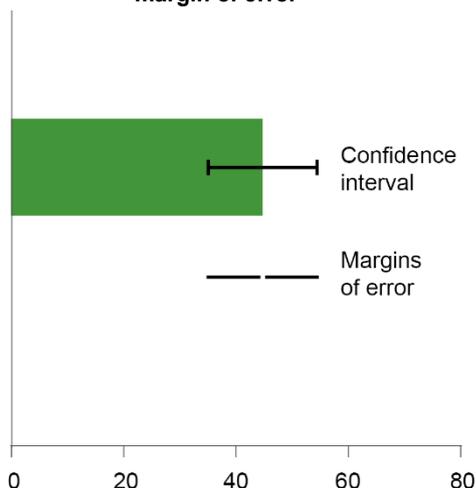
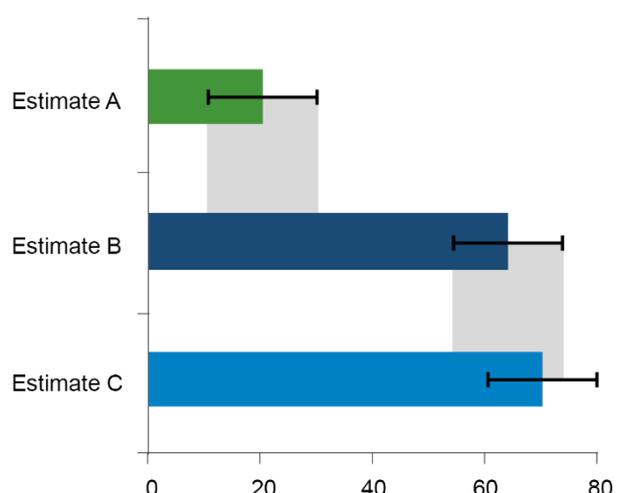


Figure B Confidence intervals



¹ At the time of sample selection, insufficient information is available from the collections to identify 'actual' qualification part-completers, short course part-completers and subject(s) only completers. Instead, a sample of 'potential' qualification part-completers, short course part-completers and subject(s) only completers is chosen, which includes continuing students. The final status of respondents is determined through survey responses.

It is important to consider the margin of error when making comparisons between groups and years, particularly when the results are close. Data users are encouraged to use the margin of error to determine if a difference between groups is statistically significant. The margin of error is available for all estimates presented in the DataBuilder.

In figure B, the black bars for *Estimate A* and *Estimate B* do not overlap. This means that it **can** be concluded with a 95% level of confidence that there is a difference between *Estimate A* and *Estimate B*. However, the error bars for *Estimate B* and *Estimate C* do overlap. This means that it **cannot** be concluded with a 95% level of confidence that there is a difference between *Estimate B* and *Estimate C*. It also cannot be concluded that *Estimate B* and *Estimate C* are similar, and further testing needs to be undertaken to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the estimates.

For further technical details about the National Student Outcomes Survey, please refer to the technical notes supporting document at <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collection/student-outcomes/vet-student-outcomes>>.



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