

National Centre for Vocational
Education Research

2009 strategic plan



Introduction

This strategic plan provides the framework for the operations of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) over the next three years. It describes NCVER's roles and responsibilities, the environment in which it operates, and some key aspects of its forward work program. It also presents a more detailed work plan for the next 12 months (beginning January 2009).

About NCVER

NCVER was established in 1981 as a not-for-profit company owned by the Commonwealth and state and territory ministers with responsibility for vocational education and training (VET). It is a professional, independent body at arm's length from government. The company initially conducted research and managed the development of national curriculum and learning resources for the technical and further education (TAFE) sector, at a time when Australia had little real research capacity in vocational education and training.

NCVER's role has developed significantly since its creation. Today, NCVER collects, manages, analyses, evaluates and communicates research and statistics about vocational education and training and the links between education and the labour market more generally.

As a not-for-profit company, NCVER uses its resources to maximise the amount of high-quality, impartial information and research available for policy-makers and practitioners, within the boundaries of prudent financial management. Recognising that the quality of its work is built on its staff, NCVER strives to recruit high-quality people and to develop them fully. NCVER aims to be forward looking and to anticipate and respond to changes in public policy and VET practice.

NCVER's vision is:

for policy and practice in vocational education and training to be based on sound evidence.

NCVER's mission is:

to be Australia's leading provider to governments, the sector, industry and the community of high-quality, independent information on vocational education and training.

NCVER has six broad areas of activity:

- undertaking a strategic program of vocational education and training research, including the management of a number of the national research competitive grants programs, and the analytical program of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
- collecting and analysing national VET statistics and survey data

- collecting and making available research findings on VET from across the world through the VOCED research database
- disseminating the results of research and data analysis
- building links with similar international organisations to foster comparative analysis and collaborate on issues of mutual interest
- undertaking commercial consultancies.

NCVER provides research and statistical information to a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- ministers and their departmental officers and advisers
- Commonwealth and state and territory training authorities
- VET practitioners and providers
- teachers and schools
- Australian businesses and enterprises
- international agencies
- industry training advisory bodies
- employer- and employee-based associations/ organisations
- community organisations.

Corporate values

NCVER's values are:

- achieving quality and professionalism
- being customer-focused and outward looking
- striving for innovation and continuous improvement
- maintaining independence and integrity
- building strong and effective relationships with others
- promoting collaboration and teamwork.

Principles of practice

The following principles of practice guide NCVER's work:

- Analysis will be transparent and replicable.
- Methodology will follow sound statistical practice and be open to scrutiny.
- Statistical and research results (excluding commercial consultancies) will be published, provided that quality standards are met.
- Release dates of publications will be available, and any embargo conditions will be clear.
- Statistical and research results will either be descriptive or attempt to test research questions, and will avoid advocating a particular position.
- NCVER data and library resources will be available to all groups and individuals equally, under the conditions spelt out in NCVER's policy for the provision of VET information, available at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/aboutncver/statistics/data.html>>.

The environment

NCVER's focus is firmly on statistics and research that will inform policy and practice in the VET sector. Thus its work needs to be fully aware of the environment in which the sector operates. At present, key environment factors include:

- the recent deterioration in general economic conditions, with geographic regions and industry sectors facing differing economic prospects and significant impacts on parts of the community
- a strong emphasis on skills development by the Australian Government, within a framework encompassing early childhood education, schools and VET; there is also a focus on trade training and higher-level skills
- the Australian Government's focus on the role of VET in promoting social inclusion
- an emphasis on outcomes and accountability following the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decisions regarding funding
- the formation of a national strategic view on the future funding of VET
- a greater focus on competition and contestability in the VET sector to drive responsiveness, with 'market design' emerging as a critical issue
- a reassessment of the relationship between VET and higher education following the completion of the Bradley review of higher education and the Cutler review on innovation, with the Bradley review recommending an expansion of NCVER's role to cover tertiary education more broadly
- the completion of the National VET Data Strategy undertaken by the Allen Consulting Group for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- a focus on the physical environment and hence the need for the training system to respond to changes in industry driven by water shortages and the introduction of emissions trading
- long-term challenges relating to the ageing of the population.

NCVER's work is also fashioned by the research priorities endorsed by ministers for 2009, based on advice developed by the NCVER Board after extensive consultation with national stakeholder organisations. The five agreed research priority areas for 2008–10 are:

- *Growing the labour supply*: by examining how VET can support greater participation in the workforce, especially for equity groups whose participation is relatively low
- *Motivating individuals to participate in VET*: by understanding why people choose to, or not to, participate in VET, what drives demand for VET and what outcomes it offers participants in the medium-to-long term

- *Sustaining a skills base through apprenticeships and traineeships*: by identifying ways of maximising the number of people who complete their apprenticeship or traineeship
- *Enhancing the productive capacity of enterprises*: by ensuring that employers are well-placed to maintain the skills of their workers and to adapt to new work practices and technologies
- *Enabling VET providers to compete effectively*: by identifying the barriers VET providers face in operating effectively within a competitive environment.

More detail on these priorities can be found at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/aboutncver/research/priorities2007.html>.

NCVER over the next three years

A threshold issue for NCVER is the governmental response to recommendation 46 of the Bradley review to, among other things, expand the purpose and role of NCVER so that it covers the whole tertiary education and training sector. If this recommendation is accepted, then NCVER's role will be significantly broadened and involve a rethink of research priorities as well as the coverage of its statistical data. In the meantime, the specific priorities listed below focus on providing evidence for developments in policy and practice in Australia's vocational education and training sector. In recognition of the need to ensure that this evidence is understood and used, dissemination and building strong relationships with stakeholders continue to be critical to NCVER fulfilling its role.

Specific priorities are:

- *Stakeholder management*: to continue to develop and strengthen NCVER's relationships with its key stakeholders. As a particular priority, develop strong links with Skills Australia and support its work.
- *COAG reforms*: to engage with the COAG stream of work on indicator development and performance measurement in VET. Establish a relationship with the COAG Reform Council, with a view to promoting the effective use of NCVER's data holdings and expertise in this area.
- *Quality assurance*: to continuously improve the approach to internal quality systems management, to achieve superior-quality research and products.
- *Statistical collections*: to play a pivotal role in developing VET data systems following on from the National VET Data Strategy report, the implementation of the Productivity Places Program of the Australian Government and the finalisation of funding agreements between the Australian Government and the states and territories. There is an expectation that business practices and the electronic platform of the major collections will need to be fundamentally redeveloped over a period of some years.

- *Research*: to capitalise on expertise in this area and build research capacity. In 2009 NCVER's in-house research will focus on:
 - disadvantaged groups of learners such as Indigenous people and those with a disability, with a view to building a collaborative arrangement with the new VET Equity Council, as well as a focus on VET and social inclusion
 - VET sector institutional arrangements
 - apprenticeships and traineeships.
- *Improve the timeliness of research outputs*: to streamline the quality assurance processes between commissioning and the publication of results, while emphasising the importance of high standards of quality.
- *Make more effective use of communication technologies*: to allow the dissemination of a greater range of research and statistics within the limited resources available.
- *Human resources*: to recruit well, strengthen the internal skill base of employees and develop a strong and cohesive team.

NCVER's work plan for 2009

The core of NCVER's work is research, the VET student and financial collections, the apprentice and trainee collection, the Student Outcomes Survey (and other surveys from time to time), the analytical program of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, the management of national competitive research grants (including the new Research, Innovation and Expansion Fund grants as part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth analysis program), and the development of the VOCED research database.

The research to be undertaken in-house or commissioned through the national competitive grants program during 2009 is informed by the research priorities endorsed by ministers for 2008–10. A major component of the commissioned work is being undertaken by four university research groups—the Melbourne Institute at the University of Melbourne, the Social Policy Evaluation Analysis and Research Centre at the Australian National University, the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia, and the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney—which have been engaged to carry out three-year programs of research. These focus on growing the labour supply (priority one), motivating individuals (priority two) and enhancing enterprise capacity (priority four).

NCVER will also be undertaking major projects on apprentices (priority three) and will be disseminating the findings from the body of work it commissioned on building the capability of the VET workforce and on a competitive training market (priority five). Further commissions during the year will allow NCVER to fill gaps in the national priority areas.

NCVER's 2009 research program is presented below according to the dissemination themes highlighted on NCVER's website, namely:

- students and individuals
- teaching and learning
- industry and employers
- the VET system
- VET in context.

Expected completion dates are indicated where possible.

Students and individuals

This theme deals with the main client group of VET and hence contains the largest number of projects. This group comprises individuals across all post-compulsory schooling ages and ranges from early school leavers to older persons re-engaging with the workforce.

Commissioned work to be published in 2009:

- Private returns to VET (mid-2009)
- The incidence and wage effects of over-skilling among employed VET graduates (mid-2009)
- Labour market dynamics: The role of VET (mid-2009)
- The role of education in labour market outcomes of people with disabilities (late 2009)
- Skill matches to job requirements (mid-2009)
- Job requirements and lifelong learning for older workers (mid-2009)
- Issues concerning participation in VET for low-skilled and low-paid workers (early 2009)
- Cultural dimensions of Indigenous participation in vocational education and training (late 2009)
- Brokering successful Indigenous employment outcomes (mid-2009).

Major projects underway in 2009:

- VET as an antidote to persistent over-skilling
- The role of VET in preventing the scarring effect of unemployment on youth
- Who works beyond the 'standard' retirement age and why?
- Skill (mis)matches and over-education of younger workers
- Differing skill requirements across countries and over time
- The inclusion of a series of questions on access to training in the Australian Work and Life Index conducted by the Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia.

NCVER will complete three research reports from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth:

- A review of the LSAY survey instrument (early 2009)
- The effect of completion of Year 12 on later labour market outcomes (late 2009)
- Student income support and education and training participation in Australia (early 2009).

NCVER will write a number of briefing papers or reports from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth:

- Indigenous youth pathways (mid-2009)
- The impact of extended VET options in schools on intention and achievement of young people (mid-2009)
- The extent that 'at risk' is a transitory state (mid-2009)
- The gap year between school and university (early 2009)
- The effect of working part-time on school results, for an inquiry being undertaken by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (early 2009).

Four research projects under this theme on youth transitions have been commissioned using the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth:

- Searching for the first 'real' job (2010)
- Why some low-performing students go on to have successful employment and further study outcomes, while others do not (2010)
- The relationship between educational attainment of young people and their wellbeing (2010)
- The relationship between occupational expectations of high school students and their actual occupations in adulthood (2010).

NCVER will commence projects on:

- the costs of training by looking at what individuals in training forego, through an analysis of the 2006 Time Use Survey (late 2009)
- synthesising research on VET and social inclusion (mid-2009)
- the nature of VET information for students with a disability (early 2009)
- a statistical publication back-casting time series based on VET students and courses and apprenticeship and traineeship data (late 2009).

NCVER will publish an *At a glance* on older workers (mid-2009).

Teaching and learning

High-quality teaching and learning are fundamental to the effectiveness of VET. Different styles of teaching and learning and different delivery methods will suit the needs of different groups of learners. In recent years NCVER has paid particular attention to good practice strategies in language, literacy and numeracy training.

Commissioned work to be published in 2009 includes:

- practitioner-driven changes to teaching and learning (mid-2009)
- international perspectives on innovation in teaching and learning in vocational education and training (mid-2009)
- a summary of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Program (late 2009)
- a new social capital paradigm for adult literacy (mid-2009).

Major projects underway in 2009:

- Practitioner experiences with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

NCVER will:

- publish an *At a glance* on informal learning (early 2009)
- complete a paper on competency-based training, building on work undertaken for TVET Australia (mid-2009)
- undertake a review of training products, undertaken for TVET Australia in conjunction with the Ithaca Group (early 2009).

Industry and employers

Industry and employers are at the heart of the VET system. The major areas of interest in 2009 are the apprenticeship and traineeship system, the cost of training, and productivity.

Commissioned papers to be published in 2009:

- Enhancing future productivity: The interdependence of workers, employers and VET (mid-2009)
- Reasons for training: Why Australian employers train their workers (mid-2009)
- Employers' perspectives on employing equity group members (late 2009)
- Characterising high-quality traineeships (mid-2009).

Major commissioned projects for 2009:

- Workforce development in the childcare industry
- Workforce development in meat processing industries.

NCVER will undertake a range of projects focusing on this theme:

- completion of a 2008 project on the cost of apprenticeships (early 2009)
- a statistical publication reporting on data from the new Apprenticeship and Traineeship Destination Survey (late 2009)
- the value of completing an apprenticeship, to be based on the data from the new Apprenticeship and Traineeship Destination Survey (mid-2009)

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- the impact of traineeships on productivity (mid-2009)
- the 'true' cost of training for existing workers, based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) time usage survey (late 2009)
- the links between adult literacy and numeracy levels, vocational education and employment, based on the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (late 2009)
- the return on a trade for the self-employed (late 2009).

The VET system

This theme concerns the institutional structure of the VET system and the surrounding policy framework.

Commissioned work to be published in 2009:

- VET and competition (late 2009)
- New directions in European VET policy and practice (mid-2009).

Major commissioned projects for 2009:

- Higher education in VET
- Encouraging learner mobility through crediting VET.

NCVER will undertake:

- a new edition of the popular NCVER publication, *The development of TAFE in Australia*, but with a focus on the VET system more generally (early 2010)
- a project on TAFE efficiency, which will explore the factors that positively or negatively impact on college or institute efficiency (mid-2009)
- an investigation into how TAFE institutes measure their performance (early 2009)
- an *At a glance* on student movement between VET and higher education (mid-2009).

VET in context

VET operates within a broader societal context. In 2009 the work plan for this theme encompasses regional and international perspectives.

Major commissioned projects for 2009 include:

- a regional analysis of employment of tradespersons
- a paper commissioned under the Research, Innovation and Expansion Fund comparing the work and further study transitions of young men and women in Canada and Australia based on longitudinal data.

NCVER will undertake:

- an update of the VET atlas, which provides VET data by region
- the publication of the background report prepared for the OECD 'learning for jobs' review undertaken in 2008 (early 2009)

- a chapter for the Elsevier *International Encyclopedia of Education* on the impact of globalisation on VET (early 2009).

NCVER will also publish the results of its in-house project investigating the impact of NCVER research on policy and practice and how to measure this impact.

Building researcher capacity

NCVER has identified the need to build researcher capacity in the VET sector by attracting experienced researchers from outside the sector; encouraging early career researchers and supporting people in the sector to undertake research.

A range of initiatives will continue in 2009 including:

- a number of academic research scholarships to be awarded to VET practitioners
- the continuation of community of practice scholarships, including a mentoring program specifically targeting novice researchers to embark on a practical research project
- an NCVER fellowship scheme which will encourage experienced researchers to embark on a VET research project using NCVER data.

NCVER will publish papers by 2008 scholarship holders.

In addition, nominations will be open for the second VET Researcher of the Year to be awarded at the Australian Training Awards in November 2009. Initiatives to broaden research networks and encourage research teams within the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation (NVETRE) Program are also continuing.

Stakeholder communication

Doing the research is only half the job. At NCVER, understanding what information the stakeholders need and how and when they need it is critical to having an impact on policy and teaching practice. NCVER is always looking for ways to engage with stakeholders more effectively and improve its dissemination methods. NCVER presents its work through face-to-face briefings, publications, the website, public events, the media and other activities. In 2009, the focus will be on efforts to improve the use of communication technologies and more efficient publishing practices.

Ongoing dialogue and feedback from stakeholders is critical for shaping how NCVER does business. In 2009, NCVER will embark on a formal program of market research to gauge how well NCVER engages with and meets the needs of stakeholders.

Highlights of the NCVER dissemination calendar in 2009 will include a major national research forum towards the end of 2009 on youth transitions to showcase the work from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, and NCVER's annual 'No Frills' conference, which will be held in Ballarat in July 2009. NCVER will also be further developing its online dissemination services with the addition of web conferencing.

A range of policy round tables and lunches will be hosted to promote discussion on various issues, including a policy round table on VET and competition to be held in February 2009 and joint Melbourne Institute and NCVER policy round tables in Melbourne and Canberra to showcase and discuss the results of the research program's first year of work. An event involving the Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis and Research Centre is also likely to be held in the first half of the year. Workshops will be conducted for VET practitioners on innovation in teaching and learning.

International activities

With an emphasis on maintaining links with international organisations, NCVER's international effort helps to ensure that Australian VET sector developments are seen in an international context and assist Australia's strategic interests as appropriate.

In 2009, the main focus of NCVER's international activity will be on information networking and in contributing to activities relevant to transnational quality and governance.

NCVER will participate in the 2009 Big Skills Conference being organised by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, including membership of the reference group.

NCVER will maintain its links with sister organisations (including the Bonn-based UNESCO–UNEVOC International Centre, the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the Chinese Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education and the SEAMEO Voctech International Centre in Brunei).

NCVER will undertake a project in 2009 to showcase the significant international work on offshore quality and the joint project conducted with the Australian Government that contributed to the OECD thematic review of VET.

Tom Karmel, NCVER's Managing Director, will continue as editor of the vocational education and training section of the new edition of the *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, to be published by Elsevier.

Consultancy services

NCVER's goal is to maintain a substantial level of consultancies to provide a wider range of experience for staff, build the organisation's critical mass and strengthen links with stakeholders. In general, projects will cover all costs and be in areas that align with NCVER's expertise and research.

The consultancy services area aims to continue its recent trend of achieving modest increases in new project activity. We expect that project activity will return a small surplus to NCVER in 2009.

NCVER will continue its focus on securing fewer, but individually larger, strategic projects to provide opportunities for staff to be involved in important work with stakeholders.

NCVER will strengthen its links with existing stakeholders and develop new ones. Existing clients include Australian and state government departments and organisations, and industry bodies. A particular focus for 2009 will be on supporting the activities of Skills Australia.

In addition to commercial consultancy work, NCVER will continue to provide expert advice to a range of steering committees on an expenses basis.

Continuous improvement

In line with its corporate values and the need for accountability, NCVER is wholly committed to a program of self-scrutiny and continuous improvement. Accordingly, NCVER aims to ensure the relevance and quality of the work it undertakes.

As noted earlier, NCVER will conduct a comprehensive market research exercise designed to elicit the views of stakeholders on NCVER's services and performance.

A range of other projects will be undertaken to ensure that effective use is made of NCVER's websites and communication technologies, with the introduction of web/video conferencing, changes to the appearance of the NCVER website, user registration to enable NCVER to understand stakeholder use of its websites, and an investigation into the feasibility of a new content management system and web platform for the website. In addition, a major redevelopment of VOCED will be commenced in order to build on advances in technology that enable more efficient storage and sharing of information.

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