

Expanding national vocational education and training statistical collections

Private provider engagement



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR PRIVATE
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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E & T THINKING

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NCVER

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About the research



Expanding national vocational education and training statistical collections: Private provider engagement

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Nationally recognised training in Australia has grown significantly over the last ten years. We have good data on publically funded training but only relatively poor coverage of privately funded training that is delivered by private registered training organisations.

In this report, the authors provide insight into the barriers to collecting data on students and their enrolments from private training providers.

The authors suggest a number of strategies to encourage the participation of private providers in the official data collection, including:

- providing clear definitions on data requirements, stability in these requirements over time, and support for providers who currently have no knowledge of the current data standards
- simplifying the data-submission process through web and other broad interfaces in a secure environment
- collecting the information through a central agency, not state and territory training authorities
- supplying software to assist providers in the collection of the required information
- ensuring any system developed also meets other reporting needs (such as those of the Australian Quality Training Framework)
- developing a set of protocols regarding the use of any data to ensure confidentiality and agreement that it is not be used for provider-benchmarking purposes
- providing useful reports and other services to providers in a timely manner as a 'pay-off' to supplying information to the national collection.

These findings are helpful in designing a better VET data collection and reporting system, one that covers all nationally recognised training.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Contents

Tables	6
Executive summary	7
Introduction	10
Incomplete national VET statistics	10
What's in it for providers?	10
More recent events	11
The present research	12
Research method	13
Phase 1 method: Focus groups to identify barriers and facilitators	14
Phase 2 method: The survey of Australian Council for Private Education and Training members	15
Phase 3 method: Focus groups to test identified strategies	15
Results	17
Phase 1: Identifying barriers and facilitators in providing statistical returns	17
Phase 2: Survey results	19
Phase 3: Testing of strategies identified as facilitating registered training organisation participation	23
Discussion and strategies	24
What data to collect	24
Who should collect the data	25
Issues of data collection	26
Strategies to facilitate participation in a national VET statistical collection	27
The research as consultation	28
Limitations of the research	28
References	30
Appendix 1: Survey questions	31
Support document details	37

Tables

1	Respondent registered training organisations by full-time student enrolments	19
2	Respondent registered training organisations by part-time student enrolments	19
3	Student data current collection and willingness to provide to a national database	20
4	Strategies and services that would encourage registered training organisations to contribute to a national database	22

Executive summary

Purpose

The research reported here was intended to identify the barriers and facilitators to the participation of private education and training providers in the supply of data to the national vocational education and training (VET) statistical collection. In addition, the research process developed a number of strategies to assist private registered training organisations (RTOs) to participate in the training market and tested those strategies with the industry.

The larger context for the research can be found in the growing recognition that the private provision of VET in Australia has grown into a thriving industry that makes a considerable contribution to the national training effort. However, the nation holds only poor data on the size of this contribution, its profile, or its participants. From the private training sector viewpoint, that is an unsatisfactory position since it does not develop a public perception of the value of the sector to the nation; it is also unsatisfactory from a government perspective in that, without a clear knowledge of the total VET effort, there can only be partial planning of future growth in VET, its outputs, its contribution to the economy and economic development, and to its role in providing greater equity.

In summary, the purposes of this research are:

- ✧ to identify the barriers to private providers in supplying statistical data to the National VET Provider Collection
- ✧ to identify drivers that would encourage private providers to supply those data
- ✧ to identify some data requirements that private providers would either not be able to, or would not wish to, provide to the National VET Provider Collection
- ✧ to develop and provide strategies that would assist private provider participation.

Method

After initial consultation with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to establish the types of statistics they would wish to collect from private providers, the research process, which comprised three phases, began.

The first phase of the research, where national focus groups were developed, was concerned with discussions about data collection and the barriers and facilitators encountered. These focus groups involved people from the private training sector in a series of focus groups designed to identify and discuss the issues associated with expansion of the collection of national private sector VET data. Focus groups provided an opportunity for a broad discussion of the issues.

A survey constituted the second phase of the research. Using the data generated by the focus groups in Phase 1 of the research, a survey questionnaire was developed for use in Phase 2, which was circulated to the full membership of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. The survey focused on the barriers and facilitators to data collection and provided a further opportunity for providers to have direct input to the data-collection process.

Phase 3 involved a further round of focus groups across the nation, this time focusing on the strategies—and testing them for their usefulness—that may be useful in facilitating provider participation in a national VET statistical collection. From the survey results, the research team generated a set of strategies to assist private providers to participate in the National VET data-collection system.

Because the research itself represented a valuable opportunity for consultation with private providers and an opportunity to include providers in the thinking as it developed, the process of the research was as important as its outcomes. For that reason, focus groups formed the most effective data-collection method for ensuring meaningful consultation, and the focus groups were conducted in the spirit of a participative meeting. In addition, the survey was an opportunity to involve providers not otherwise able to attend a focus group. Finally, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training kept information about the project flowing out to its entire membership each week in the council's electronic newsletter.

Focus groups were organised in each mainland state of Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. Local providers were invited to participate at their own state council office. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary, meaning that there are limitations to how well the findings represent the entire Australian Council for Private Education and Training membership.

Strategies to facilitate provider participation

The formulation of the following strategies to facilitate private provider participation in a national VET statistical collection is an outcome of this consultative research process.

- ✧ A data-collection process which takes into account the data required for government planning and to be used by the private training sector for business, publicity and political purposes is possible. A government data collection would include:
 - ◆ enrolments by qualification
 - ◆ competency outcomes
 - ◆ gender, age, nationality, location and perhaps other equity data on each learner.
- ✧ Other data may be collected by the private sector at the same time but stored and used by the private sector for its own purposes. Hence, there is a case for a private provider controlled and owned data-collection process that feeds part of the data collected into a national database but retains the rest of the collected data for the use by the private sector only, to meet its own purposes.
- ✧ The objectives pursued in collecting the data and the uses to which the data will be put need to be very clear and very public. Consultations with private and public providers should be part of the process of developing and publicising those objectives.
- ✧ The data-collection agency appointed to undertake the task of collection, storage and reporting needs to be politically and commercially independent and certainly independent of any VET purchasing function. In addition the agency will need to work to a published set of service standards and ethical expectations.
- ✧ Providers need to be assured that the data they provide to the national VET data collection will also serve the requirements of the state jurisdiction relevant to each provider.
- ✧ A memorandum of agreement (or similar instrument) between the collection agency and providers should be able to guarantee reliability and stability in the data provided to the national collection over a given period of time. The frequency and form of the collection should also be a part of that agreement. Changes to these matters would occur at the time when the agreement is re-negotiated.
- ✧ The appointed collection agency should make available, free of charge to each provider, a standard agreed set of reports, with more specialised reports available on a fee-for-service basis. Customised reports should also be available on request. In the main, reports should be available

online, with other reports provided direct to customers as electronic files where appropriate. The report service needs to be highly responsive and well publicised.

- ✧ Providers need to be guaranteed anonymity and protection from inadvertent identification in published reports or analyses. To ensure that anonymity is maintained, data should only be capable of disaggregation to a regional level.
- ✧ In relation to the provision of data by providers to the collection agency, data format requirements need to be excel-based and capable of web upload or direct email attachment. There is room for the development of an excel-based data format that could be used by providers who are not already adequately equipped, or for those who may wish to migrate to a different system that will enable smoother data uploads.
- ✧ Professional development needs to be made available to private providers and focus on the requirements of the data format and uploads, data definitions and ranges. This professional development could be conducted as local forums by professional associations such as the Australian Council for Private Education and Training with the backup assistance of a helpline.

Introduction

Incomplete national VET statistics

While the national VET statistics collection in Australia is well established, well used and well respected, there has been concern over a number of years that a major shortcoming in the collection is the absence of large amounts of data from non-TAFE providers and particularly from market-based private providers. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Strategic Plan 2007 notes this as an issue to be addressed.

Clearly, as the contribution to total vocational education and training (VET) effort from the non-technical and further education (TAFE) providers has increased as a consequence of the marketisation of VET, so too has the size of the problem of the gap between the statistical collections and the actual size of the National VET effort. As an example, as early as 2004 the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) reported that in New South Wales there were 792 registered VET providers, of which 455 were private training providers. It is useful, however, to observe that the remaining 337 providers were comprised of publicly funded VET organisations or providers operated by individual enterprises, by industry groups or by professional associations. The same report also notes that 673 interstate providers operated in New South Wales, taking the total to 1465 providers in that state alone.

More recently, contributions to the twentieth-fifth anniversary forum of NCVER made similar but more detailed points about the inadequacies in current data collection. In their contribution to that forum, Knight and Cully (2007) make the specific point that there is an absence from the data collection of 'recognised VET ... funded from other sources, both public and private and delivered by non-TAFE providers' (p.39). Not 'knowing the full score' is the way that Knight and Cully describe the silence in the statistics of much of the national VET effort and outcome. In his paper at the same forum, Tom Karmel (2007) works through an impressive list of shortcomings in the national statistical collection and draws attention to difficulties in the National VET Provider Collection. It is common sense to accept the Knight and Cully view that there are several challenges to be addressed in further developing the national training statistics and that it would be unwise to try to address too many of these challenges in the one project. Accordingly, the project reported here is quite tightly focused for that reason. Similar attention has been drawn to this matter in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on Australian VET—*Learning for jobs*.

What's in it for providers?

While there is apparently little published research on the issues of motivating people and organisations to participate in official statistical data collections, there is some research that is relevant. Particularly useful in the context of this research is a paper from officers from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (Rosen et al. 1999), reporting reasons given by organisations for not returning data to that bureau. The interpretable reasons were associated with issues of time and busyness, a feeling there should be payment, problems of systems incompatibility, lack of interest and a protest against government intrusion into their business.

We expect to find many of those reasons among Australia's private VET providers. However, we also expect there to be other factors operating.

VET in Australia is marketised and, as shown above, has developed a large number of businesses whose core function is the provision of VET. To be successful, businesses need intelligence about the size of the market, how well the market is being provided and trends in the market and the products available. Some private providers currently have incomplete and inadequate data on which to base business and product development and an inadequate basis on which to benchmark their own performance against others. On the other hand, some private providers have sophisticated business models from which they can determine developing markets.

Additionally, from time to time the private sector in education and training is profiled in the media over the misdemeanour of an individual provider. These stories are most typically about a provider that has become insolvent and has left paid-up students with no course to attend or complete. A more complete statistical collection would enable these stories to be placed in the wider context of success and would enable members of the public to form a more accurate impression of the reliability of the private sector. In the same way, a statistical collection more inclusive of private providers would also allow greater public understanding and appreciation of the contribution of the VET provider sector to the overall national training effort and greater understanding of these contributions at a political level.

More recent events

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF 2007) has seen the introduction of the AQTF Quality Indicators Resources Package. Within that framework there are three major quality indicators, as well as clear guidance on their measurement and the tools to do this. The three quality indicators are:

- ✧ learner satisfaction
- ✧ employer satisfaction
- ✧ competency completion.

It is this last indicator that is of most interest here, since the tool to be used is the Competency Completion Online System and includes a requirement for providers to report on:

- ✧ qualifications—enrolments and completions
- ✧ units of competency—enrolments and completions.

It has been mandated that, from 1 July 2009, providers must commence entering these data into the Competency Completion Online System (CCOS) either directly or via other data-collection programs like the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS). Currently, only the registered training organisation providing the data has access to their own data for the purpose of generating reports as part of the continual improvement process. At this stage, a full investigation involving the relevant stakeholder groups needs to be completed to determine if this data set has any value to the VET sector, and in particular the private sector.

At the same time, during 2008 the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC) commissioned the Allen Consulting Group to examine the '... range, quality and scope of the current data collections, to examine the limitations and gaps in existing data collections and to develop a range of measures that will complement current and future policy arrangements' (Allen Consulting Group 2008, p.viii).

The Allen Consulting Group analysis and report was guided by three principles:

- ✧ The scope and coverage of the national VET data collection should reflect the business requirements of the VET system for data at the student, provider and jurisdiction levels.
- ✧ VET data should be of sufficient quality and utility to meet the requirements of students, providers, jurisdictions and other stakeholders.
- ✧ VET data should be collected, analysed, stored and made available in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible (2008, p.viii).

The report recommended a number of strategic directions to achieve those three principles.

In its response to the Allen Consulting Group report, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training agreed with the need for better data collection, retention and use, but argued that the case needs to be specifically built to show the link between the burden to providers of collecting and reporting these data and the business value to the individual registered training organisation. In their response, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training said:

To develop a national VET data strategy, there must be agreement from the suppliers of the data (public and private providers) about their contributions, including how the data will be collected with minimum regulatory impact using clear and transparent processes. Agreement must also be reached about how the data will be used so that the supplier of the data can see a direct correlation in output for effort.

(Australian Council for Private Education and Training 2008, p.6)

The present research

It is in this context of change and different expectations that this research was developed and conducted. The research was designed and conducted with the clear view that the process of the research would be important, along with the outcomes. It was important that private providers were included in a consultative sequence of activity and had considerable opportunity to be heard in developing the research outcomes. The research was conducted through the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, using an experienced VET researcher and practitioner to assist.

The purposes of this research were:

- ✧ to identify the barriers to private providers in supplying statistical data to the National VET Provider Collection
- ✧ to identify drivers that would encourage private providers to supply that data
- ✧ to identify some data requirements that private providers would either not be able to, or would not wish to, provide to the National VET Provider Collection
- ✧ to develop and provide strategies that would assist private provider participation.

Research method

The research in this project needed to adopt methods that not only collected the required data but also presented an opportunity for the involvement of private registered training organisations in the consultative process. The research was as much a vehicle for developing these discussions with registered training organisations as it was a vehicle to provide the data that would assist in informing the research questions.

In August 2008, prior to commencing the research, the project team met with personnel from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and the National Training Statistics Committee to get a statement of the VET statistics being sought from private providers. Those two organisations informed the team that:

- ✧ They don't need unit-level statistics although ultimately that would be good.
- ✧ What they do need are the numbers who enrolled and the numbers who completed each qualification.

The AQTF Quality Indicator suite of products will capture the data but these are very definitely designed and provided only for individual registered training organisation use to support their own continuous improvement. Some private providers already provide some or all of their data through AVETMISS.

Other specific interests of NCVET expressed at the time were:

- ✧ the ways people currently have for collecting their registered training organisation data and then have this report provide some indications on how to go forward and provide strategies on how to collect data from all providers to create a truly national VET collection
- ✧ the 'halfway house' organisations who already report on publicly funded programs but who also have privately subscribed programs.

The logic of the research process was to initially involve people from the private registered training organisation sector in a series of focus groups that would provide an opportunity to identify and discuss the ideas associated with expanding the national VET data collection to include the private sector. Additionally, there needed to be an opportunity for private providers to talk about what the barriers and facilitators might be to them and their registered training organisation in participating in the national VET data collection. Focus groups provided an opportunity for a broad discussion of these issues. Accordingly, the first phase of the research, which developed focus groups across the nation, was aimed at discussion of the idea of data collection and the barriers and facilitators.

The data generated by the focus groups in Phase 1 of the research were then used to develop the questions in a survey that would be made available to the full membership of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. The survey represented the second phase of the research. From the survey results a set of strategies was generated that could be expected, on the basis of the data collected in the earlier focus groups and the survey, to assist private providers to participate in the national VET data-collection system. The purpose of Phase 3 focus groups was to discuss these strategies and test them for their likely value.

Focus groups were organised through the local Australian Council for Private Education and Training offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. Council members

in each of the states with an ACPET office were invited to attend a focus group in their state. The invitation provided plain-language information on the purposes of the research, its voluntary nature and the questions that would be addressed in the focus group. Also included were the date and times of scheduled focus group sessions. Local members registered for a session through their local office. Numbers in the focus groups were limited to around eight, with more focus groups organised if required. Focus groups were conducted by the same research personnel in all locations.

The ethics framework guiding the research was the code of conduct developed by the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association.

Phase 1 method: Focus groups to identify barriers and facilitators

Thirteen focus groups of providers, in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra and Perth, were conducted. Thirty-seven providers were represented by 43 individuals. Providers ranged across small to very large enterprises, some with a mix of publicly and privately funded students, some with only private students and some enterprise-based providers. Providers were invited on a state-by-state basis through an invitation sent electronically to all members. Members who wished to join a focus group then responded to advise this, and to further advise which group they would join. Although originally it had been planned to conduct regionally based focus groups, there were too few providers who wished to avail themselves of this opportunity. Accordingly, any regional respondents were placed into a metropolitan-based focus group.

Focus groups took around 60 to 90 minutes. Confidentiality of participation was assured to participants and focus group sessions were audio-recorded with the agreement of the participants. Focus group questions were generated by the project team and enhanced through discussion with providers as opportunity allowed.

The focus group questions were:

- ✧ How do you believe your business planning and operation could be enhanced with better access to training and education statistical data?
- ✧ What sort of data would be most useful to you?
- ✧ What sort of data do you already use?
- ✧ How do you currently collect, store and manage that data?
- ✧ How would you want to access and use data from a national collection?
- ✧ What data would you be able to provide to the database?
- ✧ What problems might there be for you in providing the data?
- ✧ What needs to be done to assist you to provide that data?
- ✧ What sort of organisation would you wish to provide the data to and with what safeguards?

Demographics of the participants recorded were:

- ✧ size of registered training organisation—small, medium, large
- ✧ enterprise-based or not
- ✧ a mix of publicly funded and privately subscribed programs or are they only privately subscribed?

Data from the audio-taped focus groups were transcribed in summary form. The transcripts were then analysed for the common themes and statements and a composite list of these statements and themes was generated for the focus groups. The themes were used to organise the statements and

the statements were then assigned to a theme, together with an indication of whether each statement was often said by a participant or if it was said only by a small number or perhaps by only one respondent.

The data from the focus groups appear in more complete form in the support documents to this research and in summarised form in the results section of this report.

Phase 2 method: The survey of Australian Council for Private Education and Training members

The intention of the survey was to, first, include a wider number of private providers into the consultative process. Second, the survey would provide further ideas on barriers and facilitators than would be possible through the smaller number of participants in the focus groups. Third, the survey gave the opportunity to gauge the relative importance placed by private providers on each of the ideas that had emerged from the Phase 1 focus groups. The survey was not designed nor intended to be representative of the views of ACPET members.

The survey instrument was designed by the project team on the basis of the data generated in the Phase 1 focus groups and with the objectives of the survey in mind. Questions in the survey were designed to cover the range of issues identified in the focus groups, and the response alternatives under each question were designed to cover the range of barriers and facilitators identified. A ranking process was chosen so that respondents rank-ordered the importance for them of each of the suggested statements associated with each question. Ranking was preferred over Likert scales to ensure that there was some discrimination between the alternative statements, rather than perhaps having respondents rate every alternative in any given question at the highest level of importance.

Once developed, the questionnaire was provided to colleagues of the project team to comment on face validity, ambiguities and questions that would be difficult to answer. On the basis of that feedback several adjustments were made and the survey committed to Survey Monkey. Australian Council for Private Education and Training members were then advised of the survey and their opportunity to undertake it within the time period provided—a couple of weeks. Members were also advised that the survey was anonymous and that their responses would not be traceable to them or to their registered training organisation. They were also informed of the voluntary nature of participation.

The response rate to the survey was close to 10 per cent of Australian Council for Private Education and Training's membership. This group of respondents was representative of the membership in terms of location, size, scope, delivery style and type of clients. The majority of survey respondents had not attended the focus sessions and therefore added to the breadth of the demographic group. The response from the survey was never expected to provide data representative of the entire Australian Council for Private Education and Training membership and therefore provided an acceptable sample size.

Quantitative data from the survey were collated automatically by the survey tool. The qualitative responses were analysed by the project team and summarised into single-concept sentences.

Data from the survey are summarised in the results section of this report and appear in full in the support documents.

The survey questions and response options appear as appendix 1.

Phase 3 method: Focus groups to test identified strategies

The method employed in this phase of the research was very similar to that in Phase 1.

Eleven focus groups of providers in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra and Perth were conducted. Fifty-one providers were represented by 68 individuals. Providers ranged across small to very large, some with a mix of publicly and privately funded students, some with only private students and some enterprise-based providers. Providers were invited on a state-by-state basis via an invitation sent electronically to all members. Members who wished to join a focus group then responded to advise their response, and to further advise which group they would join.

Focus groups took around 60 minutes. Participants responded to an electronically distributed invitation from the Australian Council for Private Education and Training.

Confidentiality of participation was assured to participants, and focus group sessions were audio-recorded with the agreement of the participants. Focus group questions were generated by the project team from the Phase 1 focus group issues and the results of the survey. Eleven questions were developed and placed under one of three headings:

- ✧ data collection
- ✧ use of data
- ✧ management of data and collection process.

These questions were:

Data collection

- Q1 Who will collect the data?
- Q2 What data will be collected?
- Q3 How will the data be collected?
- Q4 When will the data be collected?

Use of data

- Q5 What reports will be available?
- Q6 When will reports be available?
- Q7 How will reports be made available?

Management of data and its collection

- Q8 Who has ownership of this data?
- Q9 What type of support will be available for implementation and future requirements?
- Q10 How will future requirements be managed?
- Q11 Who will oversee decision-making?

Demographics of the participants recorded were the same as collected for Phase 1.

Data from the audio-taped focus groups were transcribed in summary form. The transcripts were then analysed for the statements and ideas generated under each focus group question. Because these focus groups were responding to a definite set of strategies and ideas, the range of response is commensurately limited. Statements made only by one or two participants have generally not been included in the results here.

The data from the focus groups appear in more complete form in the support documents to this research and in summarised form in the results section of this report.

Results

Phase 1: Identifying barriers and facilitators in providing statistical returns

Summary of main results from focus group sessions

There was little hostility at an industry or sector level towards the idea of contributing statistical data on student demographics, enrolments and completions. The data required currently by AVETMISS were generally seen as reasonable, useful and capable of being forwarded to a central collection. However, it must be stressed that providers who only offer fee-for-service programs (and therefore no government-funded programs) do not have a working knowledge of AVETMISS and would need additional support to implement this type of data collection. Providers observed however that the pay-off in advantages to them to collect and forward such data needs to be in the form of useful services gained from it. A very transparent data model was seen as useful here to enable participants to see what was being collected, the definitions of the items being collected, how each item links with other data and how the data are used and by whom.

At an individual provider level there was greater concern expressed about:

- ✧ the efficiencies and the support for the systems developed to collect the data
- ✧ the way in which education and training government bureaucracies sometimes fail to understand the issues at a provider level
- ✧ privacy of individual providers and the ways in which the data could be used and misused.

Representatives of providers almost universally saw that capturing private provider data to the national collection would provide significant advantages to the nation, their industry and their business. Specific advantages and opportunities identified were:

- ✧ more focused public and private expenditure on VET in the light of better national, state and regional data
- ✧ greater public understanding and appreciation of the contribution of the VET provider sector to the overall national training effort and greater understanding of these contributions at a political level
- ✧ data that would provide evidence-driven market, business and strategic planning at provider level and would include enrolment and outcome statistics by program, student demographics and movement in patterns of enrolments
- ✧ the capacity for providers to benchmark performance against national, state and regional indicators
- ✧ evidence that competitive market forces and government-funded places are working equitably between public and private providers.

However, while providers were comfortable about student data, they would not be comfortable with the provision of financial, staffing and other operational data.

Providers participating in the focus groups reported that they already basically collect the sort of data required by AVE'TMISS and that, where there was a need to meet AVE'TMISS requirements with the collection of some extra data, this would, generally speaking, not cause any particular problem, except in the case of additional compliance costs incurred. It is important at this point to consider the private providers who have had no experience with this type of database.

There was a generally expressed view, however, that definitions of the data to be collected are important and need to be clear and well understood. Additionally, there is a need for a clear definition of what are considered to be VET courses and therefore the population of data to be collected.

There was concern that the requirements of state and Commonwealth government agencies are different and that this provides a layer of complexity and collection costs that should be minimised through sensible government-level negotiation and agreement. As highlighted in the principles for data collection, duplication must be avoided.

Similarly, there was concern that data requirements would be unstable and increase the demands placed on providers. Streamlined and predictable systems are needed. It is vital that there is a stable length of time for users of any system before any change is implemented. The view here was that there should be agreement that certain data would be collected over a period of a number of years and that the requirements would not change within that period. At the conclusion of that period, a new agreement on the data to be collected would be negotiated and developed, which would then remain stable over the next period.

Also of concern were the possible software and hardware requirements that might be associated with collection, with a view that there may be some need to support providers with professional development to ensure that new requirements could be met. Additionally, users must be guaranteed time-responsive technical and user support.

There was an expectation that any such professional development and advice would be available as a free service as part of the incentive package to participate. There was also the suggestion that the government is entitled to collect data on the courses they fund as a part of the service and, therefore, that government should be prepared to pay providers for the provision of their statistical data from fee-for-service courses.

Annual reporting was not seen as problematic, although some providers observed that this made some data more than 12 months old before they could access it. That time lag reduces its value for planning and marketing purposes. Related here was the view that there needs to be an all-in approach to the data collection so that all providers participated. Without that, non-participants would be unfairly advantaged through use of the data supplied by others. Outputs from the statistical collection would need to be provided quickly after data collection if the reports are to be current and useful. The suggestion has been for twice a year.

Access to the data was seen to be a sensitive issue. Providers do not wish to be identified through the data. It was confirmed that a central collection agency would make their own data available to providers and beyond that, only aggregated data would be available at a national and state level. There was concern that accidental and inadvertent provider identification could occur with data where, for example, only one provider possessed an identifying characteristic. Care and judgment would need to be taken by the central agency with any reporting where this inadvertent identification may occur.

Participants saw the characteristics of a central collection as being:

- ✧ commercially and politically independent of government influence
- ✧ knowledgeable about VET
- ✧ competent and capable of building an international reputation as an authority
- ✧ clear in its ethical and service standards

- ✧ clear in its policies on access and confidentiality
- ✧ capable of providing professional reports determined by the collection agency as useful to the industry; reports on request by individual providers or provider groups; reports on request by other groups with legitimate interests
- ✧ capable of being independent in fielding media questions that can be answered through statistical data about VET.

There was also suggestion that the central collection agency needs to be accredited by the industry. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training was seen by a number of participants as an appropriate collection agency since it fulfils the criteria above, it understands the sensitivities and requirements of its membership and is accountable to its membership.

Participants also suggested that a certain level of reporting should be available free of charge to providers as part of their participation.

Phase 2: Survey results

Detailed statistical results of the survey can be found in the support documents for this project. What is shown below in this report is a summary of the major results.

Eighty-three private provider registered training organisations responded to the survey within the time period provided, representing close to ten per cent of ACPET membership. Of those, 17 had attended one of the earlier focus groups and 66 had not.

Respondent registered training organisation characteristics

Sixty-one respondent registered training organisations were mainly focused on domestic students and 22 providers had a majority of international students, either onshore or offshore.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the enrolment characteristics of the respondent registered training organisations.

Table 1 Respondent registered training organisations by full-time student enrolments

Number of FT students	No of RTOs	% of sample
Under 200	48	57.8
200 to 1000	26	31.3
Over 1000	9	10.8

Table 2 Respondent registered training organisations by part-time student enrolments

Number of PT students	No of RTOs	% of sample
Under 200	60	72.3
200 to 1000	18	21.7
Over 1000	5	6.0

Thirty-seven respondent registered training organisations were enterprise-based and 46 were not.

Most respondent registered training organisations operated in one state only, but 21 (25.3%) operated across more than one state. Institutional classroom-based delivery was most common among respondent registered training organisations, with 73.5% of the sample reporting that as the major form. Workplace delivery was the major mode for 19.3% of the sample, while online delivery represented 8% of the sample. The majority of respondents (71.1%) only conducted fee-for-service programs with no government funding, while the rest of the sample was about equally split

between, also including government-funded programs on a user choice basis or government-funded on a not-user choice basis.

The highest qualification offered by 60.2% of the sample was advanced diploma or diploma; certificate IV was the highest for 21.7% and certificate III for 8.4%.

Survey responses

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of respondent registered training organisations that currently collect each element of student data and the number and percentage that would be willing to provide each of these elements of data to a national database.

Table 3 Student data current collection and willingness to provide to a national database

Data element	Current number	%	Willing number	%
Course code and name	82	98.8	83	100.0
Gender	79	95.2	76	91.6
Date of birth	80	96.4	66	79.5
Nationality	71	85.5	68	81.9
Main language at home	57	68.7	55	66.3
Special target group	49	59.0	50	60.2
Address	82	98.8	47	56.6
Highest previous qual'n	65	78.3	54	65.1
Student outcomes	60	72.3	59	71.1
Publicly/private funded	39	47.0	44	53.0

The survey showed that approximately 18 different software packages are used across respondent registered training organisations for the collection and maintenance of student record data.

Question 14 of the survey asked respondents to rank the benefits of a national VET database for the public image of the private VET sector. The mean rank order of the statements provided to respondents for ranking was:

- Rank 1: Greater understanding at the political level of the private sector contribution
- Rank 2: More informed government expenditure on VET
- Rank 3: Provision of data to facilitate a more powerful lobbying position with stakeholders
- Rank 4: Greater public understanding and valuing of the contribution made by private providers
- Rank 5: Better public image for private providers.

Question 15 asked respondents to rank statements on the value a national VET database would have for the business development and operations of a private registered training organisation. The rankings for these statements below were in fact very similar, with only a small separation in the mean rankings. Statements were ranked as follows:

- Rank 1: Greater understanding and valuing by employers of the private sector contribution
- Rank 2: More balanced, transparent and accountable public-private funding mix
- Equal rank 2: Ability for providers to benchmark their own performance against national and state indicators
- Rank 3: Data to inform individual provider-based strategic and market planning and development contribution.

Question 16 was open ended and asked respondents if they saw any advantages in a national VET database that included private providers and that were not listed in the statements available for response to questions 14 and 15. Several different advantages were stated and summarised as:

- ✧ training trend identification
- ✧ possible RPL (recognition of prior learning) value to students as they change provider
- ✧ better targeting of AQTF audits
- ✧ communities being able to gauge their level of training for work readiness.

Question 17 asked respondents to rank the items that would give them most difficulty in contributing to a national database. The mean ranking of the statements was:

- Rank 1: Marginal labour and other costs associated with collection
- Rank 2: Staff professional development
- Rank 3: Acquiring suitable software and computer platform
- Equal rank 3: Maintaining confidentiality of student records
- Rank 4: Collecting the data at the point of enrolment.

Question 18 was open-ended and asked respondents to identify any other difficulties they may experience. These can be summarised as:

- ✧ benefits to registered training organisations as opposed to costs to participate
- ✧ changeability in data requirements or software requirements
- ✧ double-handling or double entry of data
- ✧ different requirements by different authorities and jurisdictions
- ✧ data misinterpretation and misuse
- ✧ long-term storage and archiving.

Question 19 asked respondents to rank-order the importance to them of each of the statements of concern provided in the questionnaire. The mean ranking was:

- Rank 1: Unstable and ever-changing government data requirements
- Rank 2: Maintaining the privacy of my own registered training organisation in published reports
- Equal rank 2: Inadequate precision in the definitions of what data are to be provided
- Rank 3: Security of my data in government agencies
- Equal rank 3: Who will have access to what levels of data?

Question 20 was open-ended and asked if respondents had any other concerns. These can be summarised as:

- ✧ potential for detrimental and manipulative use of the data
- ✧ competitor accessing of the data
- ✧ privacy, where the number of providers in a category is low
- ✧ misleading completion data since not all learner intent is about completion
- ✧ a poorly thought-through system.

Question 21 asked respondents to rank-order the importance of a number of characteristics identified for any potential data collection and storage agency. The mean rankings were:

- Rank 1: Commercially and politically independent
- Equal rank 1: Clear in its policies on access and confidentiality
- Rank 2: Clear in its ethical and service standards
- Rank 3: Knowledgeable about VET.

Question 22 asked respondents to rank order the importance of a number of services to be provided by any appointed collection and storage agency. The mean rankings were:

- Rank 1: Capable of providing professional reports determined by the collection agency as useful to the industry
- Rank 2: Reports on request by individual providers or provider groups and reports on request by other groups with legitimate interests
- Rank 3: Capable of fielding media questions that can be answered through statistical data about VET
- Rank 4: Capable of building an international reputation as an authority.

In open-ended question 23, other possible characteristics and services identified were:

- ✧ a legal obligation on confidentiality and security
- ✧ high standards of data integrity and reliability
- ✧ media comment needs to be handled very carefully
- ✧ online access to registered training organisations of their own data
- ✧ auditing of ethical standards of the collection agency.

Question 24 asked respondents to tick any of a number of strategies and services that would help them to contribute to a national VET database. Table 4 shows each of these strategies and services and the percentage of respondents (number of respondents in brackets) who ticked each.

Table 4 Strategies and services that would encourage registered training organisations to contribute to a national database

Strategy or service	%	Number
Provision of either free or at-cost suitable software	78.3	65
A free telephone help desk while you are installing the software and becoming familiar with it	74.7	62
Clear definitions for data to be collected	95.2	79
Development of a service that provides regular standard reports to you on a national and state basis—free of charge	88.0	73
Development of a service that provides tailored reports provided to you at your request and cost	50.6	42
Development of a vigorous and evidence-based marketing and image-building program for private VET providers	63.9	53
Development of web-based database access with appropriate levels of security	72.3	60
Payment to your RTO for its contribution to the national statistical database	63.9	53
Provision of initial professional development of key staff at no cost to you	84.3	70
Assurance that data requirements would remain stable over a specified period of time, with changes negotiated at specified intervals	88.0	73
Development of clear service and ethical standards for the collection agency	84.3	70

Other strategies and services identified in open-ended Question 25 can be summarised as:

- ✧ identification of non-legitimate operators through the data
- ✧ protection from further data requests from other authorities and jurisdictions
- ✧ higher education providers that already have very suitable student records software that could be used
- ✧ data-collection software and processes interfacing with current software used across the sector
- ✧ speedy data analysis and report availability
- ✧ data requirements the same as other collections such as AVETMISS or VET FEE HELP.

Phase 3: Testing of strategies identified as facilitating registered training organisation participation

The full data from the focus group discussions are provided in the support documents. What are summarised below, as major outcomes of the focus groups, are those strategies that commanded considerable agreement within and across the focus groups. These were:

- ✧ Data collection should be through a single national agency, with a single national set of data requirements. Participants were particularly concerned that different government agencies and jurisdictions would wish to make their own data demands, which would add substantially to the burden of collection and data contribution.
- ✧ The agency appointed needs to have a strong understanding of VET.
- ✧ Data to be collected should be currently required Competency Completion Indicator data (Qualifications: enrolments and completions; Units of competency: enrolments and completions), age, gender, postcode of learner (or notation as an international student) and employment status.
- ✧ Data to be collected and provided to a national statistical database should be data which are useful for VET planning at a government level. That includes enrolment and outcomes data by qualification and unit of competency and certain demographic data such as age, gender, nationality and location. Data to be supplied to the national database do not include data that can be used for other purposes such as benchmarking private registered training organisation performance or other individual registered training organisation performance data.
- ✧ The stability of data to be collected and the processes for its collection are extremely important. A memorandum of understanding between the government and the collection agency is required to clearly identify the data to be collected and the processes; and that memorandum of understanding needs to have a known and agreed currency. As changes are made, they need to be negotiated through the memorandum of understanding. In turn, the collection agency would have understandings with the individual providers.
- ✧ Data should be collected twice a year and report production/availability should be as rapid as possible following submission. If the data are to be useful to registered training organisation business planning, they have to be as current as possible, moving them from just being a statistical collection to being a working tool.
- ✧ The reports to be made available will provide data by qualification, unit of competency and demographics such as age, gender, industry, nationality and by national, state and regional geographic basis.
- ✧ Reports should be made available online or as special reports by request.
- ✧ No fees will be associated with the collection and input of the data once it is in maintenance mode, and no fees will be applied to the provision of a standard set of reports agreed through the memorandum of understanding. Special further reports may attract a fee.
- ✧ During system set-up there will be a need for financial support to registered training organisations for software and professional development. The precise amounts of that financial assistance need to be calculated on an empirical basis.
- ✧ Data collection and input to be excel-based and capable of interface with a wide number of currently used registered training organisation student record systems.
- ✧ The appointed collection agency should be assisted in its decision-making by a steering committee, which during the development phase will need to represent all stakeholders quite widely. Once established, the maintenance of the data-collection system can be overseen by a smaller group that is nevertheless still representative of stakeholders.

Discussion and strategies

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training believes there is a strong need for all data collection to be based on a set of principles as listed below:

- ✧ Transparency: each registered training organisation will have access to its own data.
- ✧ Security and confidentiality: individual registered training organisation data will not be available to any third party without prior consent.
- ✧ Integrity: data are valid, minimal and current.
- ✧ Efficiency: compliance and administrative burden will be minimised.
- ✧ Legal conformity: data access arrangements should respect the legal rights and legitimate interests of all stakeholders, that is, intellectual property, privacy and confidentiality.
- ✧ Formal responsibility: access arrangements should promote explicit, formal institutional practices, that is, rules and regulations.
- ✧ Interoperability: there should be technological and interoperability between systems.
- ✧ Accountability: performance of data access arrangements should be subject to periodic evaluation by user groups.
- ✧ Sustainability: consideration should be given to the sustainability of access to data as a key element of the infrastructure.

What data to collect

The history of education and training provision in Australia is largely a history of public provision, with education and training organisations that are typically government-funded and operated. While there has always been a vigorous private sector in schools and in pre-schools, it is only a more recent development in VET and in higher education. As the commitment of the nation increases towards private provision of VET, so too do we need to modify a government and public service view that VET is an industry sector that needs their control and intervention. Apart from the legislative requirements in Australia that relate to conducting business honestly and safely, with adequate protection of consumers, there is little reason to believe the private VET sector needs greater government surveillance or control than any other sector of Australian business.

Accordingly, it is argued here that a national VET statistical collection needs to be developed with very clear objectives in mind. These objectives are discussed in the Allen Consulting Group (2008) draft report, and relate to the need for governments to have available statistical data that, in summary provide:

- ✧ data on the size of the national training effort
- ✧ data on the outcomes of that training effort in terms of the national skills and knowledge stock
- ✧ data on who is participating and where, to enable monitoring of equity and participation among different groups in the community, including the geographic location of that participation. These data suggest the legitimacy of demographic data collections associated with age of participants, gender, nationality and location of the participant.

The research conducted for this report indicates that private providers generally accept the need for the nation to have a statistical collection system that provides:

- ✧ a measure of the size of the national training effort
- ✧ an indication of the national skills stock and changes in that stock
- ✧ a picture of who is participating and gaining from VET and who might be missing out.

These data are partially provided under the new AQTF 2007 obligations for registered training organisations to provide performance data on enrolments and completions by qualifications and by units of competency. Those provisions would need to be enhanced with student demographic data on age, gender, geographic location and perhaps nationality or ethnicity. The research indicates that private providers largely already collect that data.

Less defensible as part of a national VET statistical collection is the inclusion of data that enable government to benchmark individual private registered training organisation performance or data that provide the capacity for government intervention in the business of a private registered training organisation other than where that registered training organisation may have received government funding for a specific or non-specific purpose. Participants in the research were clear, however, in their acceptance that where government had funded a course, a service, or a group of participants, then government is entitled to seek input and performance data. The concern was that these data should not be expected by government where there had been no government funding.

At the same time, there is a case for data collection from private registered training organisations that enables them to conduct their own benchmarking, marketing and market intelligence efforts and enables the private sector to project an evidence-based public image that attests to the vigour, size and contribution of the sector to the national effort. Hence, there is a case for a private provider-controlled and owned data-collection process that feeds some data collected into a national database but retains the rest of the collected data for the use by the private sector only to meet its own purposes.

If there is to be a private sector database which feeds some of its data into a national VET database administered by government, then there is wisdom in developing these two databases, each with the other in mind. Also needing to be developed at the same time are the collection requirements, the definitions of the data to be collected and the administrative mechanisms to be used to protect public and private providers alike from constant data requirement changes. The research in this project has indicated that providers are mindful and accepting of the fact that data requirements do vary from time to time, but they expect this to be done in a planned, controlled and negotiated way.

Who should collect the data

The research showed very clearly that providers wanted the data to be collected and stored by agencies that are politically independent and which had an understanding of VET and VET data. It was also stressed that the agencies be independent of the regulatory and government VET purchasing functions. The issue here was the potential misuse of data: the picture of national effort and participation that was built up as a consequence of the data collection being used to evaluate and benchmark providers, and then the data used as part of a purchasing decision equation. Concern was also widely expressed in focus groups that the data would be used by government agencies to favour the purchasing of services from public sector institutions at the expense of private providers. Both NCVET and ACPET were seen by participants as independent and competent and acceptable as data collection and storage agencies, as was the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). There was no enthusiasm for the development of a new agency to develop and conduct these services.

Public data were seen by participants as belonging collectively to government and to the private sector, ownership of the data relating to private provision to the providers and to the collection

agency. It was crucial to participants that individual providers were not identifiable through the publication of any part of the national statistical collection, such that precautions would need to be taken to ensure that there were limits on who could disaggregate the data and to what level. Care would need to be taken to ensure that inadvertent revelation of provider identity could not occur through such artefacts as the uniqueness of a particular provider's course profile in a given geographical region.

There was an expectation among participants that the agency(ies) that collect the data and publish reports from it would develop considerable authority in the public and government eye. That authority would be, in the case of the national effort and participation data, the agency appointed to collect all VET data in Australia; in the case of the private VET sector that agency would be the one appointed to collect and retain the data on private effort.

A major concern among participants was the propensity for government agencies to continually change their data-reporting requirements, with an attendant cost burden on providers as they prepare for new demands in terms of collection, input and storage, reporting and staff development.

Probably of greater concern was the potential for different state jurisdictions and other agencies to demand further data. There was acknowledgment that there are different data needs among different agencies and jurisdictions and that there are legitimate needs for data requirements to change over time. However, there was a strong desire to ensure that these different expectations and changes in expectations be developed and managed such that providers are given ample warning. There was a sense that some demands may be made on a 'nice data to have' basis, or that change would be often and sudden—however legitimate the need. The research here indicates that providers expect that collection agencies will negotiate data needs with the sector, develop through a memorandum of understanding the data needs for a given period of time, and then renegotiate the memorandum of understanding as changes to data collection are required.

Issues of data collection

Seen as important was avoiding double-handling in the data-collection, recording and storage processes and its provision to a collection agency. This was seen largely as a matter of ensuring that different data needs and reporting requirements were clearly understood by all and that the data definitions were also clearly understood. There was a perceived need for the requirements and definitions to be widely published. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that providers would need some staff development sessions to ensure these were widely understood. Staff development sessions for providers were seen as achievable through collective forums that are regionally based and through the provision of a helpline.

Also contributing to an avoidance of double-handling would be the thoughtful provision of data-input processes that were friendly to both the data-collection processes used by providers at the point of enrolment and their ongoing student record-keeping. Although the research indicated that a wide variety of student record-keeping software is used, an excel-based web-input system which will accommodate the vast majority of provider input should be possible. Although not revealed in this research, the researchers are of the opinion that there will be private providers who have very crude systems of record-keeping and who may need more assistance than others to develop their record-keeping and provide their data to a statistical collection.

The research indicated that there is likely to be a need for assistance of a financial nature for some providers if they are to participate in a national data-collection process and that there will be widespread need for staff development to assist personnel in registered training organisations to upload data to a central collection. Again though, this assistance will probably be manageable through locally based forums and a helpline.

There was neither strong feeling nor strong indications from participants about how often the data should be collected. Every six months or once a year were the most preferred options, with perhaps the reporting dates being the same as for higher education, such that providers involved with both VET and higher education could enjoy a common date for both. There was comment from a number of participants that the reports representing the outcomes of the data collection should be available in the same timeframe as input. In other words, if the data are input every six months, reports should be available six months later. The most useful access to those reports was generally seen as online, with password-protected access by individual providers to their own data. Levels of access to different data sets were also acknowledged as potentially desirable, depending on what data are finally collected and by whom.

It was generally felt that whoever collects the data should provide a certain agreed set of outputs free of charge as a provider's entitlement as part of participation in the national data-collection process. Beyond that, the collection agency may charge for specialised reports, or reports customised to the request of an individual provider or group of providers.

Strategies to facilitate participation in a national VET statistical collection

A number of strategies to facilitate private provider participation in a national VET statistical collection can be suggested as outcomes of this consultative research process.

- ✧ There is room to consider the data requirements required for government planning purposes separately from the data that would be used by the private training sector for business, publicity and political purposes. A government data collection would include:
 - ◆ enrolments by qualification
 - ◆ competency outcomes
 - ◆ gender, age, nationality, location and perhaps other equity data on each learner.
- ✧ Other data may be collected by the private sector at the same time but stored and used by the private sector for its own purposes.
- ✧ The objectives pursued in collecting the data and the uses to which the data will be put need to be very clear and very public. Consultations with private and public providers should be part of the process of developing and publicising those objectives.
- ✧ The data-collection agency appointed to undertake the task of collection, storage and reporting needs to be politically and commercially independent and separate from any VET purchasing function. In addition, the agency will need to work to a published set of service standards and ethical expectations.
- ✧ Providers need to be assured that the data they provide to the national VET data collection will also serve the requirements of the state jurisdiction relevant to each provider.
- ✧ A memorandum of agreement (or similar instrument) between the collection agency and providers should be able to guarantee reliability and stability in relation to data requirements for the national collection over a given period of time. The frequency and form of the collection should also be a part of that agreement. Changes to these matters would occur at the time the agreement is re-negotiated.
- ✧ The appointed collection agency should make available, free of charge to each provider, a standard agreed set of reports, with more specialised reports available on a fee-for-service basis. Customised reports should also be available on request. In the main, reports should be available online, with some other reports provided direct to customers as electronic files where appropriate. The report service needs to be highly responsive and well publicised.

- ✧ Providers need to be guaranteed anonymity and protection from inadvertent identification as a consequence of analyses and reports. As a guide, for published reports data should only be capable of disaggregation to a regional level, provided anonymity is maintained.
- ✧ For the provision of data by providers to the collection agency, data-format requirements need to be excel-based and capable of web upload or of direct email attachment. There is room for the development of an excel-based data format that could be used by providers not already adequately equipped, or for those who may wish to transfer to a different system that will enable smoother data uploads.
- ✧ Professional development needs to be made available, focusing on the requirements of the data format and uploads, the data definitions and ranges. This professional development could be conducted as local forums with the backup assistance of a helpline.

The research as consultation

An important role of the current research was to initiate a series of consultations with private providers who are members of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. We approached this in a number of ways:

- ✧ Focus group consultations were set up in each state using the facilities and premises of the ACPET office in that state. In that way the research was brought as geographically close to the membership as possible.
- ✧ All communications with the ACPET membership about the research and its activities were sent through the ACPET email news service to all members, such that all members were invited to all events. Planned focus group sessions were conducted in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to accommodate the number of people attending.
- ✧ The survey was provided to enable all members to have input and to include those members who were not able to attend a focus group through reasons of distance, other commitments at the time, or insufficient interest.
- ✧ ACPET's Research and Policy Manager provided comment and promoted the research in each of ACPET's weekly newsletters to the membership.

Although the research participants represented only a minority of ACPET members, there is little reason to believe that members have not heard of the project, or that they will be taken by surprise by an initiative to collect and contribute data to a national database. We believe that our research participants were skewed towards the more sophisticated and advanced thinkers among providers, such that the views expressed to us are probably not entirely representative of the complete membership. However, we do believe that the research has captured the major barriers and enablers to participation and that the strategies developed can be applied with some confidence across the membership. In other words, we believe the research has been successful as a consultative process as well as a vehicle for collecting data and offering insights to the issue of a national VET statistical collection.

Limitations of the research

This research was conducted among the membership of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. While the council is the peak body in Australia representing the private education and training sector, its membership does not include all private operators. Accordingly, the research did not access those non-member organisations. Participation in the research conducted among ACPET members was voluntary for research ethics reasons: to ensure non-coercion and for practical reasons associated with the difficulty in any case of enforcing participation. As a result, the research participants are likely to represent a more sophisticated and

aware group of ACPET members, those who have thought about the broader national issues of their industry and who are interested in events outside their own business.

The researchers have no evidence to suggest that the broader private education and training industry would have views different from those identified by the research, but the industry is comprised of widely different forms of providers and personalities of operators. Hence, as any implementation of a national statistical collection process goes forward, there will be operators who express views different from those expressed in this research.

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Appendix 1: Survey questions

Respondents were advised in ranking that 1 meant 'most important'

1. Indicate if you attended a focus session during Phase I of this project.

1 - Yes

2 - No

2. Number of employees (full-time, part-time, contractual)

1 - Under 20

2 - Over 20 but less than 100

3 - Over 100

3. Number of full time students enrolled per annum

1 - Under 200

2 - Over 200 but less than 1,000

3 - Over 1000

4. Number of part time students enrolled per annum

1 - Under 200

2 - Over 200 but less than 1,000

3 - Over 1000

5. Are you an enterprise registered training organisation?

1 - Yes

2 - No

6. Which of the following represents the largest number of your students? Tick one box only.

1 - Domestic students

2 - Onshore international students

3 - Offshore international students

7. Please indicate whether you operate nationally or in selected states and/or territories. You may tick more than one box.

1 - Nationally

2 - Queensland

3 - New South Wales

4 - Australian Capital Territory

5 - Victoria

6 - Tasmania

7 - South Australia

8 - Western Australia

9 - Northern Territory

8. Please indicate which type of delivery you use most frequently. Please tick one box only.

1 - Workplace delivery

2 - Institutional (classroom) delivery

3 - Online delivery

4 - RTO run commercial business i.e. salon

5 - Other

9. Please indicate which type of funding represents the largest share of your business. Please tick one box only.

1 - Fee for service (no government funding)

2 - Government-funded programs (not user choice)

3 - User choice (apprenticeships & traineeships)

4 - Other

10. Please indicate the highest qualification level you deliver (Australian Quality Framework - AQF). Please tick one box only.

1 - Advanced diploma/diploma

2 - Certificate IV

3 - Certificate III

4 - Certificate II

5 - Other

11. Indicate what student data you currently collect. You may tick a number of boxes.

1 - Course code and name

2 - Gender

3 - Date of birth

4 - Nationality

5 - Main language spoken at home

6 - Special target group i.e. Indigenous, disability

7 - Address

8 - Highest relevant qualification attained previously

9 - Student outcomes

10 - Whether student was publicly or privately funded

12. Indicate what student data you would be willing to provide to a national VET database. You may tick a number of boxes.

1 - Course code and name

2 - Gender

3 - Date of birth

4 - Nationality

5 - Main language spoken at home

6 - Special target group i.e. Indigenous, disability

7 - Address

8 - Highest relevant qualification attained previously

9 - Student outcomes

10 - Whether student was publicly or privately funded

13. What software package or type of program/system do you currently use to collect and store student records?

14. Rank the following statements (using number 1 as the highest) in order of the benefits a national VET database would have for the public image of the private VET sector. Please do not use NA.

1 - Greater public understanding and valuing by the public of the contribution made by private providers

2 - Better public image for private providers

3 - More informed government expenditure on VET

4 - Greater understanding at the political level of the private sector contribution

5 - Provision of data to facilitate a more powerful lobbying and bargaining position with stakeholders

15. Rank the following statements (using number 1 as the highest) that a national VET database would have for the business development and operations of a private RTO. Please do not use NA.

1 - More balanced, transparent and accountable public/private funding mix

2 - Greater understanding and valuing by employers of the private sector contribution

3 - Data to inform individual provider-based strategic and market planning and development

4 - Ability for providers to benchmark their own performance against national and state indicators

16. Do you see any other advantages not listed in the previous two questions?

17. Rank what you would have the most difficulty with (use number 1 for the most difficult) in contributing to a national VET database. Please do not use NA.

1 - Collecting the data at the point of enrolment

2 - Acquiring suitable software and computer platform to run it

3 - Staff professional development

4 - Maintaining confidentiality of the student records

5 - Marginal labour and other costs associated with the collection

18. What other difficulties do you expect to confront?

19. Rank which concern is of most importance to you (use number 1 for the most important) in contributing to a national VET database. Please do not use NA.

1 - Maintaining the privacy of my own RTO in published reports

2 - Unstable and ever-changing government data requirements

3 - Security of my data in government agencies

4 - Inadequate precision in the definitions of what data is to be provided

5 - Who will have access to what levels of data

20. What other concerns do you have?

21. Please rank in order of importance the characteristics (using number 1 for the most important) for any agency appointed to collect and store data from private providers. Please do not use NA.

1 - Commercially and politically independent

2 - Knowledgeable about VET

3 - Clear in its ethical and service standards

4 - Clear in its policies on access and confidentiality

22. Please rank in order of importance the services (using number 1 for the most important) for any agency appointed to collect and store data from private providers. Please do not use NA.

1 - Reports on request by individual providers or provider groups; reports on request by other groups with legitimate interests

2 - Capable of providing professional reports determined by the collection agency as useful to the industry

3 - Capable of fielding media questions that can be answered through statistical data about VET

4 - Capable of building an international reputation as an authority

23. What other characteristics and/or services would you want to see in any collection agency?

24. Tick the following strategies and services that would help you to contribute to a national VET database.

1 - Provision of either free or at cost suitable software

2 - A free telephone help desk while you are installing the software and becoming familiar with it

3 - Clear definitions for data to be collected

4 - Development of a service that provides regular standard reports to you on a national and state basis – free of charge

5 - Development of a service that provides tailored reports provided to you at your request and cost

6 - Development of a vigorous and evidence-based marketing and image-building program for private VET providers

7 - Development of web-based database access with appropriate levels of security

8 - Payment to your RTO for its contribution to the national statistical database

9 - Provision of initial professional development of key staff at no cost to you

10 - Assurance that data requirements would remain stable over a specified period of time, with changes negotiated at specified intervals

11 - Development of clear service and ethical standards for the collection agency

25. Are there any other strategies and/or services you can suggest that would help you to contribute to a national VET database?

Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Expanding national vocational education and training statistical collection: Private provider engagement—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2232.html>>.

- ✧ Detailed results of phase 1 – Focus groups
- ✧ Detailed results of phase 2 – Survey
- ✧ Detailed results of phase 3 – Focus groups



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