RESEARCH REPORT

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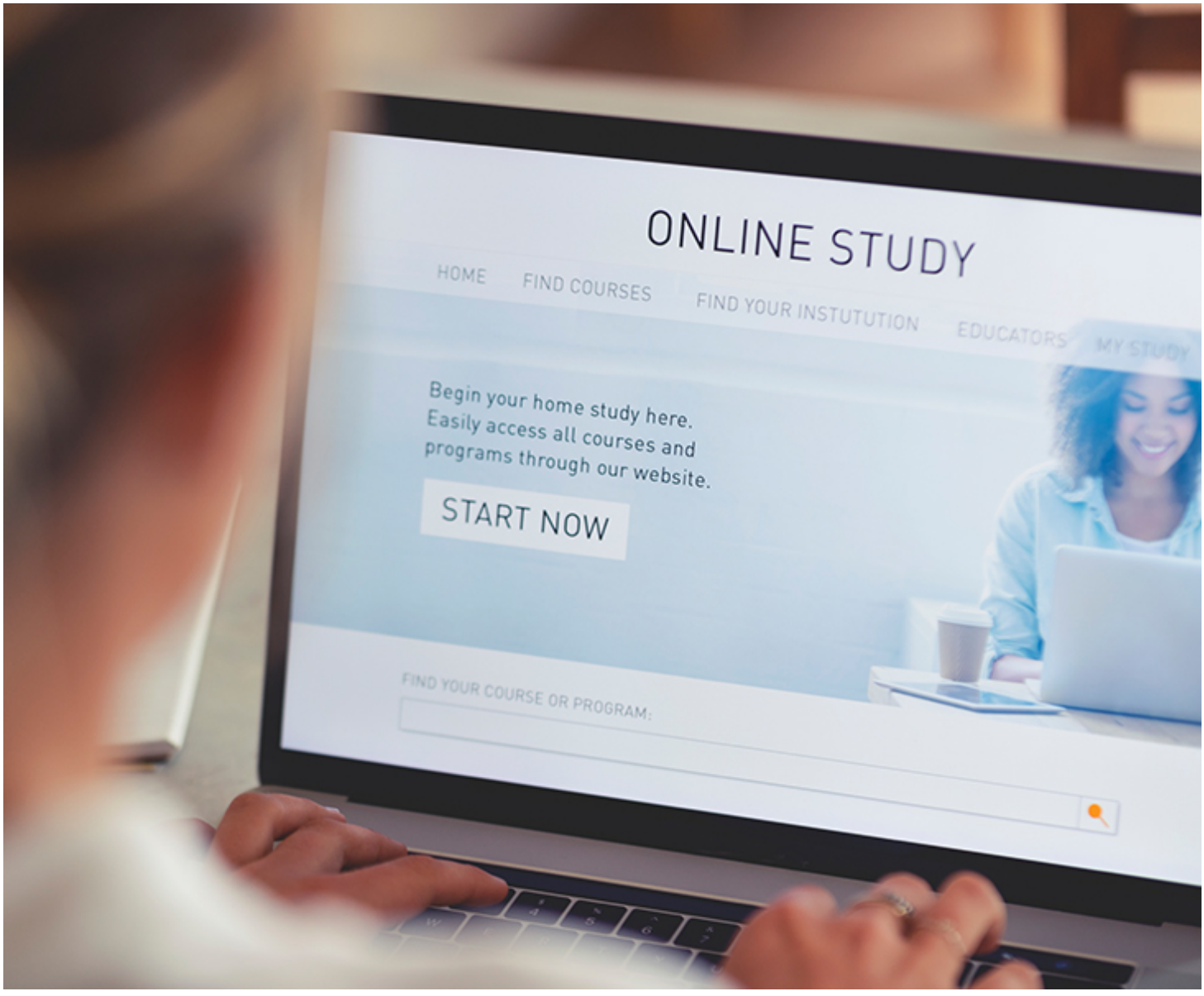
The online delivery of VET during COVID-19: part 1

Sheila Hume & Tabatha Griffin
National Centre for Vocational Education Research



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About the research

The online delivery of VET during COVID-19

Sheila Hume and Tabatha Griffin, NCVER

Efforts to contain COVID-19 through lockdowns and social distancing prompted swift changes to the delivery of vocational education and training (VET), with questions subsequently arising about the impact of this rapid transition on students and trainers/assessors. This report, the first of two, presents the initial findings on the transition to online delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this rapid shift could affect plans for the future delivery of online training and assessment. These early insights have been informed by an analysis of total VET activity (TVA) data for 2019 and 2020, as well as by preliminary findings from an online survey of registered training organisations (RTOs), administered in collaboration with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

Key messages

- There was a strong response from the VET sector to COVID-19 restrictions, with the number of subjects delivered online increasing by about 24% between 2019 and 2020.
- The shift to online training delivery was more pronounced for government-funded subject enrolments than for those funded via domestic fee-for-service arrangements (increases of 40.4% and 15.7%, respectively):
  - The increase in relation to government-funded subject enrolments in 2020 was more pronounced as fewer of these subjects were delivered online only in 2019 compared with domestic fee-for-service subjects (897 100 and 1 660 000 respectively).
  - In 2020, there were an additional 159 600 enrolments in online-only government-funded stand-alone subjects, i.e. subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program, which increased from 4.7% of all government-funded online-only training in 2019 to 16.0% in 2020.
- This move to online training in response to COVID-19 was further reflected in the survey responses of RTOs, with most (75.2%) having transitioned at least some of their training and assessment online.
- Approximately 12 months on from the commencement of COVID-19 restrictions in Australia, online training is still being offered in areas where it had not previously been, with around 71% of surveyed RTOs having maintained at least some of this initial shift to online training.
- The intention to maintain an increased level of online training and assessment is relatively high, with more than 61% of RTOs surveyed indicating they would be more likely to use blended learning in the future.

The next stage of this project will investigate in more depth the transition to online by RTOs, including future plans for online delivery.

Simon Walker
Managing Director, NCVER

Acknowledgments

An online survey of RTOs was developed and administered in collaboration with ASQA. We acknowledge and appreciate the commitment shown by ASQA to working in partnership with NCVER throughout the entirety of this survey, including the questionnaire development, data collection and analysis phases of the project. Our gratitude also extends to the RTOs who took the time to complete the online survey and share their experience with regards to COVID-19 and online learning.

In addition, we would like to thank the Project Advisory Committee members for their guidance and comments on this project.

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Executive summary

This report, the first of two reports for this project, explores the vocational education and training (VET) sector's response to COVID-19 through the increasing use of online training and assessment. The overall objective of this two-report study is to investigate the immediate response to COVID-19 by examining the transition from a face-to-face learning environment to online training and assessment. The study also aims to understand how registered training organisations (RTOs) navigated the changes necessitated by the pandemic.

The two data sources informing this report are total VET activity (TVA) data for 2019 and 2020 and high-level findings from an online survey of RTOs, administered in collaboration with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). The intention of this report is to provide an initial indication of how the VET sector responded to COVID-19.

Response to COVID-19

The data clearly reflect the VET sector's quick and decisive response to COVID-19 and its transition to online delivery.[1] The number of subjects delivered online only (external delivery mode) increased by almost 24% between 2019 and 2020.[2] Increases in subjects delivered with combined delivery modes, whereby online delivery was included as at least one component of this mode, were also reported.

This substantial shift was also evident in the survey of RTOs, with approximately three-quarters (75.2%) of those who delivered face-to-face training prior to COVID-19 moving at least some of their training and assessment online in response to the pandemic. Around one-third (34.3%) of this group transferred certain subjects/units to online delivery, as opposed to full programs. The main barriers to transitioning to online training and assessment before, and in response to the pandemic, are not dissimilar. These barriers were consistently identified as subject matter being unsuitable for online delivery and online delivery not being suitable for students.

The TVA data identified that the shift to online delivery differed by funding source, with an increase of approximately 40% for government-funded subjects delivered only online between 2019 and 2020, while domestic fee-for-service subject enrolments increased by close to 16%. Although the difference between these two funding sources is noticeable, the number of government-funded subjects delivered only online in 2019 was much lower than for domestic fee-for-service (897 100 compared with 1 660 000), which results in the percentage increases in 2020 appearing more pronounced for government-funded subjects.

Investigations of the type of training associated with these online-subject enrolments showed that for government-funded enrolments the increase occurred in stand-alone subjects, i.e. subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program, which increased from 4.7% of all government-funded online-only training in 2019 to 16.0% in 2020.

Declines in total subject enrolments were noted across most training types in 2020, with the exception of training package skill sets, which recorded an increase of 11.2% (roughly 25 800 subject enrolments). In relation to training package skill sets delivered only online, this increase was even greater, at 193.8%.

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1 The terms 'online' and 'online only' have been used in this report as a proxy for the AVETMISS field 'external'.

2 Although the administrative data subject enrolments demonstrate a shift to online training, further investigations of administrative data and survey data reveal that the extent of this transition may be larger than shown in the data if enrolment data is not updated to reflect a shift after commencement of training.

New South Wales reported the majority (63.7%) of these online-only enrolments in training package skill sets, followed by Queensland (21.4%) and Victoria (10.3%).

In terms of subject result, there was a decline of 5% in the proportion of subject enrolments recording a pass result in 2020, while continuing studies increased by more than 3%. No reportable differences for subject result when examined by funding source were identified.

Now and into the future

Approximately 12 months after the commencement of COVID-19 restrictions in Australia, only about one-quarter (25.1%) of the surveyed RTOs who had transferred some face-to-face training online had reverted fully to their pre-COVID-19 approach to training.

The survey findings demonstrate a strong pattern of RTOs continuing to offer online training in areas where it was not available prior to COVID-19. More than one-third (35.5%) of respondents had only partially returned to their pre-COVID-19 approach to training delivery, while 23.3% were expanding online delivery, with a further 11.9% continuing to operate at the same level as their initial shift online.

The ongoing and increased level of online delivery identified through the survey is reflected in the plans held by many survey respondents. More than 61% of RTOs who transitioned to at least some training online in response to COVID-19 indicated they would be more likely to use blended learning in the future.

Stage two of this study

The findings highlighted in this first report, along with ongoing feedback from project stakeholders, are informing the remaining elements of this project. The final report will bring together findings from TVA data, further analyses of the online survey and key outcomes from interviews with RTOs and the National Student Outcomes Survey.

The increasing role of online delivery

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, lockdowns and social distancing requirements posed new and unique challenges for all education institutions, including those in the VET sector.

Although COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns drove an exponential growth in Zoom 'catch ups' and Microsoft Teams meetings, the rapid and unexpected transition from a face-to-face environment to a virtual one raises many complexities for the VET sector, in particular, issues relating to the impact of the move for students and trainers/assessors, and the implications of these for the sector into the future.

Key points

In response to COVID-19:

- There has been a substantial increase in online training
- Many RTOs are still offering online training in areas that weren't online prior to the pandemic
- RTOs are now more likely to consider blended delivery modes for future training delivery

This report is the first from a current research project exploring how the VET sector has responded, and is responding, to the changing landscape caused by COVID-19.

This report brings together high-level findings from two key sources of information:

- total VET activity data for 2019 and 2020
- an online survey of RTOs[3].

See appendix A for methodological details and research questions.

The following graphic identifies the data sources that will be used to inform this project for the first and final reports.

Data sources	First report	Final report
Total VET activity	✓ 2019 and 2020 administrative training activity data	✓ 2019 and 2020 administrative training activity data
Online survey of RTOs	✓ Early findings from 2021 survey	✓ Analysis of 2021 survey findings
In-depth interviews with RTOs	✗ Occurring in second half of 2021	✓ Key findings from interviews conducted second half of 2021
National Student Outcomes Survey	✗ Not included in first report	✓ 2021 student outcomes and satisfaction data

[3] It should be noted this survey was conducted at a time (February and March 2021) when jurisdictions were experiencing differing levels of COVID-19 restrictions, as such, the diverse pandemic-related circumstances experienced by RTOs may have influenced individual responses. The survey findings present views captured at this point in time during the pandemic and should not be an assumption of post-COVID-19 or COVID-adapted plans.

Delivery of VET before and during COVID-19

Between 2019 and 2020 there was an overall decrease of about 4% in VET subject enrolments, as reported in TVA data for 2020 (figure 1), equating to a total decline of more than 1.1 million subject enrolments. This overall decline for VET has not, however, translated across to the online-only[4] delivery mode, where, in 2020, there was an increase of almost 626 700 online-only subject enrolments. Data in table 1 also show that, pre-pandemic (2019), 9.5% of subjects were delivered online-only, with this figure increasing to 12.3% in line with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 Subject enrolments by delivery mode, 2019−20

	2019		2020	
Delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%
Internal only	15 430 649	56.0	13 576 051	51.4
External only	2 617 745	9.5	3 244 413	12.3
Workplace-based only	1 806 600	6.6	1 386 836	5.2
Combination of internal and external	3 038 127	11.0	3 447 898	13.0
Combination of internal and workplace-based	1 101 428	4.0	1 018 538	3.9
Combination of external and workplace-based	1 130 246	4.1	1 262 161	4.8
Combination of all modes	1 443 514	5.2	1 443 668	5.5
Not applicable (RPL or credit transfer)	995 865	3.6	1 052 468	4.0
Total	**27 564 174**	**100.0**	**26 432 033**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Note: Grey shading indicates those delivery modes with that include some form of online delivery, either solely or in combination with other modes of delivery

There was a substantial increase in the number of subjects delivered online only between 2019 and 2020, with TVA data reporting an increase[5] of almost 24% (figure 1). The impact of COVID-19 on training delivery also extended across mixed delivery modes that include a component of online training:

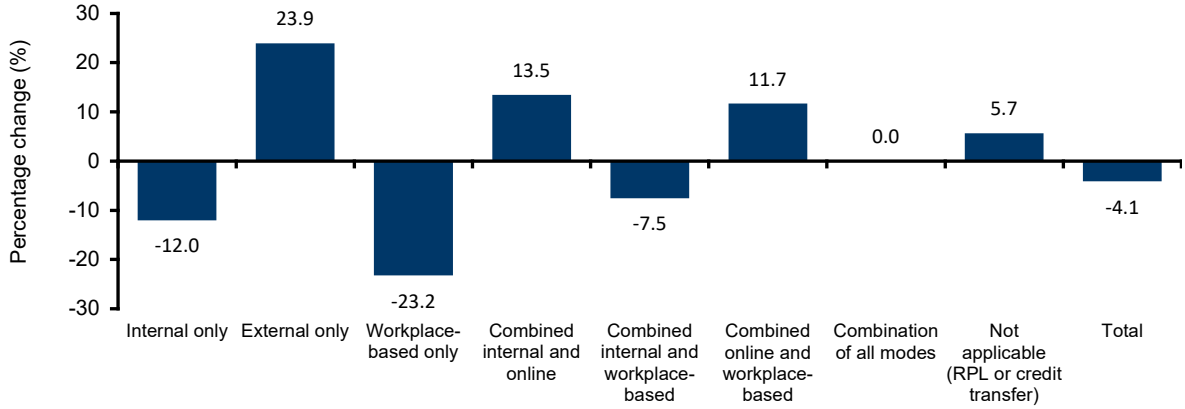
- combination of internal (for example, classroom-based) and online (increase of 13.5%)
- combination of online and workplace-based (increase of 11.7%).

In contrast, a 12% decrease was recorded in the number of subjects that were delivered in a classroom only between 2019 and 2020, with decreases also observed for subjects delivered solely in the workplace (-23.2%), and through a combination of classroom and workplace-based delivery (-7.5%).

4 The terms ‘online’ and ‘online only’ have been used in the text of this report as a proxy for the AVETMISS field ‘external’. To maintain consistency with TVA data outputs the term ‘external’ has been used in the tables.

5 The terms ‘increase’ and ‘decrease’ have been used widely in this report to describe the percentage changes (relative change) that occurred in TVA data between 2019 and 2020; this can magnify small changes, for example, an increase from 5 to 10 equates to a percentage increase of 100%.

Figure 1 Percentage change in delivery mode for subject enrolments, 2019−20 (%)



Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

The transition to online delivery varied between the states and territories (table 2), with the ACT and Queensland recording the most substantial increases. Although tables 1 and 2 provide an overall picture of delivery mode changes for subject enrolments between 2019 and 2020, an examination of these changes by funding source and jurisdiction provides a clearer picture of the shift.

Table 2 Subject enrolments with an external-only delivery mode by jurisdiction, 2019−20

	2019		2020		
External-only delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%	%change
New South Wales	1 039 618	39.7	1 304 527	40.2	25.5
Victoria	470 328	18.0	505 299	15.6	7.4
Queensland	809 230	30.9	1 103 519	34.0	36.4
South Australia	95 960	3.7	104 430	3.2	8.8
Western Australia	140 164	5.4	157 699	4.9	12.5
Tasmania	12 723	0.5	16 317	0.5	28.2
Northern Territory	5 898	0.2	7 226	0.2	22.5
Australian Capital Territory	13 969	0.5	20 468	0.6	46.5
Other*	29 855	1.1	24 928	0.8	-16.5
Total	**2 617 745**	**100.0**	**3 244 413**	**100.0**	**23.9**

Note: See appendix B for additional tables examining the other delivery modes by jurisdiction.
*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Who pays and the relationship to online delivery

The overall increase of online training has coincided with a substantial rise in the number of government-funded online-only subject enrolments, with these enrolments increasing by almost 362 600 in 2020 (an increase of 40.4%; table 3). Online-only domestic fee-for-service enrolments increased by approximately 16% (table 4).

In Victoria, government-funded online-only enrolments increased from approximately 70 400 to close to 135 100 in 2020 (an increase of more than 91%; table 3). New South Wales and Tasmania also recorded sizeable increases, at 41.7% and 41.5% respectively. Compared with the rest of Australia, Victoria was subject to the most sustained periods of lockdown and restrictions as a result of COVID-19 during 2020; hence, it is not surprising that state recorded such a substantial increase in online-only enrolments.

Table 3 Government-funded subject enrolments with an external-only delivery mode by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Government-funded subject enrolments with external-only delivery mode	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	558 841	62.3	791 920	62.9	41.7
Victoria	70 407	7.8	135 128	10.7	91.9
Queensland	141 574	15.8	184 121	14.6	30.1
South Australia	54 309	6.1	63 741	5.1	17.4
Western Australia	58 577	6.5	67 632	5.4	15.5
Tasmania	8 037	0.9	11 373	0.9	41.5
Northern Territory	1 728	0.2	2 632	0.2	52.3
Australian Capital Territory	3 588	0.4	3 080	0.2	-14.2
Total	**897 061**	**100.0**	**1 259 627**	**100.0**	**40.4**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

As shown in table 4, the delivery of online-only subjects funded through domestic fee-for-service arrangements varied across the states and territories between 2019 and 2020. A noticeable shift was recorded for the ACT with an additional 6800 subject enrolments (increase of 66.2%), while Queensland also reported a sizeable increase of 37.9% (additional 249 100 subject enrolments).

Table 4 Domestic fee-for-service subject enrolments with an external-only delivery mode by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Domestic fee-for-service subject enrolments with external-only delivery mode	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	462 700	27.9	494 393	25.7	6.8
Victoria	392 221	23.6	358 694	18.7	-8.5
Queensland	657 459	39.6	906 551	47.2	37.9
South Australia	40 403	2.4	38 920	2.0	-3.7
Western Australia	81 100	4.9	89 696	4.7	10.6
Tasmania	4 686	0.3	4 810	0.3	2.6
Northern Territory	4 155	0.3	4 553	0.2	9.6
Australian Capital Territory	10 344	0.6	17 193	0.9	66.2
Other*	6 928	0.4	6 197	0.3	-10.6
Total	**1 659 996**	**100.0**	**1 921 007**	**100.0**	**15.7**

Note: *Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Desktop research has revealed a variety of skilling initiatives introduced or expanded at both federal and state and territory levels in response to COVID-19. These skilling initiatives cover a broad range of training and are likely to incorporate classroom-based, online and other delivery modes. The broad scope of these initiatives means that it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the relationship between these and the increased levels of online training delivery. Refer to appendix B for examples of skilling initiatives introduced at a federal level, as well as a number specific to Victoria.

To investigate whether the substantial shift to online delivery for government-funded subject enrolments was in any way skewed by training package skill sets developed in response to COVID-19, comparisons were made between figures that included and excluded training package skill sets. These comparisons did not reveal any substantial impacts on the shift to online delivery in response to COVID-19 (table B7 in appendix B).

Impact of COVID-19 on training type and subject result

Training type during COVID-19

Overall, there were decreases in the number of subject enrolments between 2019 and 2020 for almost all training types, with the exception of training package skill sets. As shown in table 5, an increase of approximately 11% was reported for training package skill sets, equating to an additional 25 800 subject enrolments in 2020.

The number of subject enrolments in training package qualifications declined by about 404 900 between 2019 and 2020, yet the share of this training type increased by 1.5% in 2020, from 70.8% in 2019 to 72.3% in 2020. A sizeable shift was also reported for subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program, decreasing by more than 626 700 subject enrolments in 2020.

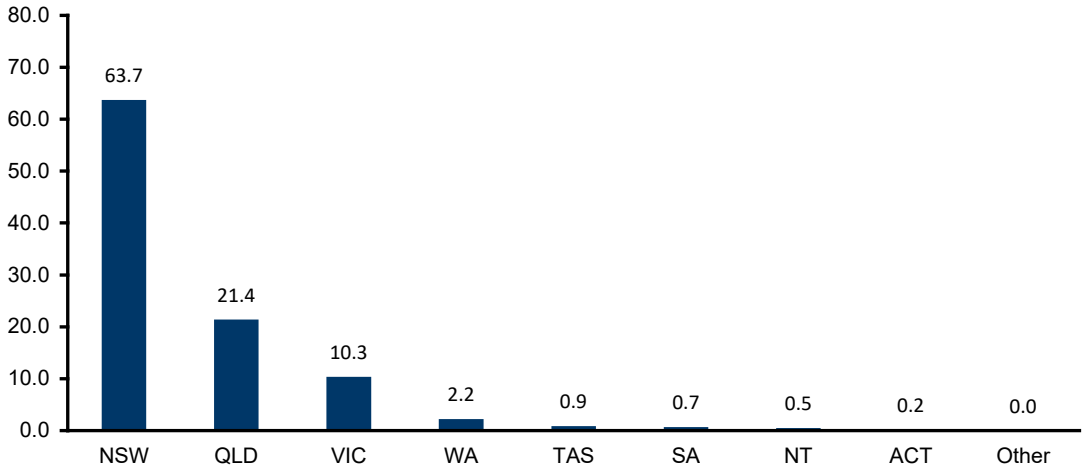
Table 5 Subject enrolments by type of training, 2019–20

	2019		2020		
Type of training	No.	%	No.	%	% change
Training package qualifications	19 505 788	70.8	19 100 906	72.3	-2.1
Accredited qualifications	1 165 258	4.2	1 076 320	4.1	-7.6
Accredited courses	268 611	1.0	231 206	0.9	-13.9
Training package skill sets	230 862	0.8	256 667	1.0	11.2
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	6 393 655	23.2	5 766 934	21.8	-9.8
Total	**27 564 174**	**100.0**	**26 432 033**	**100.0**	**-4.1**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019–20.

The rise in training package skill sets was particularly noticeable for subjects delivered online only, with an increase of almost 194% (table B8 in appendix B). New South Wales reported close to two-thirds of these online-only enrolments in training package skill sets, as outlined in figure 2, followed by Queensland (21.4%) and Victoria (10.3%).

Figure 2 Proportion of training package skill sets with external-only delivery mode, by jurisdiction, 2020 (%)



Note: Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019–20.

When examining online-only subject enrolments by training type and funding source (table 6), subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program appear to have contributed to the overall increase in online delivery for government-funded subjects. There was an increase of more than 381% between 2019 and 2020, equating to an additional 159 600 subject enrolments.

Table 6 Government-funded and domestic fee-for-service subject enrolments by type of training for external-only delivery mode, 2019−20

Type of training	2019		2020		
External-only delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%	% change
Government-funded					
Training package qualifications	812 997	90.6	969 319	77.0	19.2
Accredited qualifications	32 776	3.7	47 233	3.7	44.1
Accredited courses	739	0.1	1 508	0.1	104.1
Training package skill sets	8 690	1.0	40 140	3.2	361.9
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	41 859	4.7	201 427	16.0	381.2
Total	**897 061**	**100.0**	**1 259 627**	**100.0**	**40.4**
Domestic fee-for-service					
Training package qualifications	1 200 202	72.3	1 338 233	69.7	11.5
Accredited qualifications	32 519	2.0	44 464	2.3	36.7
Accredited courses	11 112	0.7	11 949	0.6	7.5
Training package skill sets	8 525	0.5	14 253	0.7	67.2
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	407 638	24.6	512 108	26.7	25.6
Total	**1 659 996**	**100.0**	**1 921 007**	**100.0**	**15.7**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Building on the findings from table 6, these comparisons have been aggregated in table 7, which shows that the transition to online-only training delivery is lower for the total number of government-funded subject enrolments delivered as part of a nationally recognised program (23.7%) than for the total number of subjects *not* delivered as part of a nationally recognised training program (381.2%).

When looking at who was delivering the online-only subjects that were not part of a nationally recognised program, TVA data show that TAFE (technical and further education) institutes increased enrolments in this training type from 5.6% in 2019 to 21.0% in 2020 (table B9 in appendix B). Other providers who more commonly delivered this type of online-only training in 2020 included:

- private training providers (23.5%, up from 22.5% in 2019)
- enterprise providers (13.8%, down from 15.2% in 2019).

Table 7 Subject enrolments with an external-only delivery mode comparing training type; including and excluding subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program, 2019−20

External-only delivery mode	2019	2020	
	No.	No.	% change
Government-funded (total)	**897 061**	**1 259 627**	**40.4**
Subjects delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	855 202	1 058 200	23.7
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	41 859	201 427	381.2
Domestic fee-for-service (total)	**1 659 996**	**1 921 007**	**15.7**
Subjects delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	1 252 358	1 408 899	12.5
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	407 638	512 108	25.6
Total[1]	**2 617 745**	**3 244 413**	**23.9**
Subjects delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	2 165 321	2 528 021	16.8
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	452 424	716 392	58.3

Note: [1]Total includes international fee-for service subject enrolments
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20

Further exploration of TVA data indicated, as shown in table 8, that online-only enrolments prior to COVID-19 were substantially lower for government-funded subjects (7.1%) than those funded through domestic-fee-for-service arrangements (13.4%). In terms of absolute change, the increased incidence of online-only delivery in 2020 was relatively similar for both government-funded and domestic-fee-for service, with these subject enrolments increasing by 362 600 and 261 000 respectively. As the reported number of online-only government-funded subject enrolments was lower than those funded via domestic fee-for-service in 2019 (897 100 vs 1 660 000), the difference in percentage increase in 2020 for these two funding sources was magnified because government-funded was calculated from a smaller number of enrolments in 2019. The reasons behind this difference in uptake of online training in government-funded subject enrolments prior to COVID-19 is not clear at this stage and was not investigated as a part of this project.

Table 8 Government-funded and domestic fee-for-service subject enrolments by delivery mode, 2019−20

	2019		2020		
Delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%	% change
Government-funded					
Internal only	7 532 128	59.9	6 433 117	54.2	-14.6
External only	897 061	7.1	1 259 627	10.6	40.4
Workplace-based only	1 046 160	8.3	841 887	7.1	-19.5
Combination of internal and external	1 120 018	8.9	1 235 043	10.4	10.3
Combination of internal and workplace-based	622 227	5.0	556 896	4.7	-10.5
Combination of external and workplace-based	448 797	3.6	485 824	4.1	8.3
Combination of all modes	604 732	4.8	837 951	7.1	38.6
Not applicable (RPL or credit transfer)	296 429	2.4	225 339	1.9	-24.0
Total	**12 567 552**	**100.0**	**11 875 684**	**100.0**	**-5.5**
Domestic fee-for-service					
Internal only	5 786 495	46.8	4 986 313	41.9	-13.8
External only	1 659 996	13.4	1 921 007	16.1	15.7
Workplace-based only	749 261	6.1	539 231	4.5	-28.0
Combination of internal and external	1 779 973	14.4	2 065 265	17.3	16.0
Combination of internal and workplace-based	386 330	3.1	368 833	3.1	-4.5
Combination of external and workplace-based	676 354	5.5	773 516	6.5	14.4
Combination of all modes	780 944	6.3	536 138	4.5	-31.3
Not applicable (RPL or credit transfer)	555 975	4.5	718 683	6.0	29.3
Total	**12 375 328**	**100.0**	**11 908 986**	**100.0**	**-3.8**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Subject result during COVID-19

A decline of 5% in the proportion of subject enrolments recording a pass result in 2020 and an increase of more than 3% for continuing studies (table 9) may provide some insight into the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on subject outcomes. It is conceivable that these figures were influenced by the intertwining of factors specific to COVID-19, and online learning in general. Additionally, the increase in continuing studies means that the result outcome for these enrolments is undetermined, and the full impact of COVID-19 on subject result may not be fully realised until those enrolments marked as continuing studies become either a pass, fail or withdrawal.

COVID-19 was obviously the driving force in the move to online learning in 2020, yet factors associated with online delivery in general may have contributed to the decline of the pass result and the increase of continuing studies. Earlier research has demonstrated that online delivery of VET is associated with lower

course completion rates and higher subject withdrawal rates (Griffin & Mihelic 2019[6]). It could be hypothesised therefore that the transition to online study amplified pre-existing factors associated with the online delivery of training. A further issue is the delay in work placements and practical assessments caused by COVID-19, which has been widely reported across the sector: more than 40% of respondents from the online survey reported a delay in mandatory work placements as a result of COVID-19, and an even greater proportion highlighted a delay in practical assessments (46.9%).

Table 9 Subject enrolments by result outcomes, 2019−20

	2019		2020		Percentage point difference
	No.	%	No.	%	
Result recorded					
Pass	18 966 954	68.8	16 861 454	63.8	-5.0
Fail	800 694	2.9	835 409	3.2	0.3
Withdrawn	1 837 222	6.7	2 021 026	7.6	1.0
RPL*	914 600	3.3	986 561	3.7	0.4
Total result recorded	*22 519 470*	*81.7*	*20 704 450*	*78.3*	*-3.4*
No result recorded					
Continuing studies	4 948 601	18.0	5 634 907	21.3	3.4
Not assessed^	84 780	0.3	88 428	0.3	0.0
Incomplete due to RTO closure	11 323	0.0	4 248	0.0	0.0
Total no result recorded	*5 044 704*	*18.3*	*5 727 583*	*21.7*	*3.4*
Total	**27 564 174**	**100.0**	**26 432 033**	**100.0**	

* Includes Recognition of prior learning – granted and Recognition of prior learning – not granted.

^ Not assessed refers to a non-assessable activity and includes completed and not completed; this activity is reported when the training activity in a program is designed such that a student is not required to undertake an assessment or has chosen not to be assessed in agreement with the training organisation, (<https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/62383/AVETMISS-Data-element-definitions-2_3-PORTAL-VERSION.pdf>).

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

An examination of result outcomes by funding source did not show any notable differences to the overall figures.

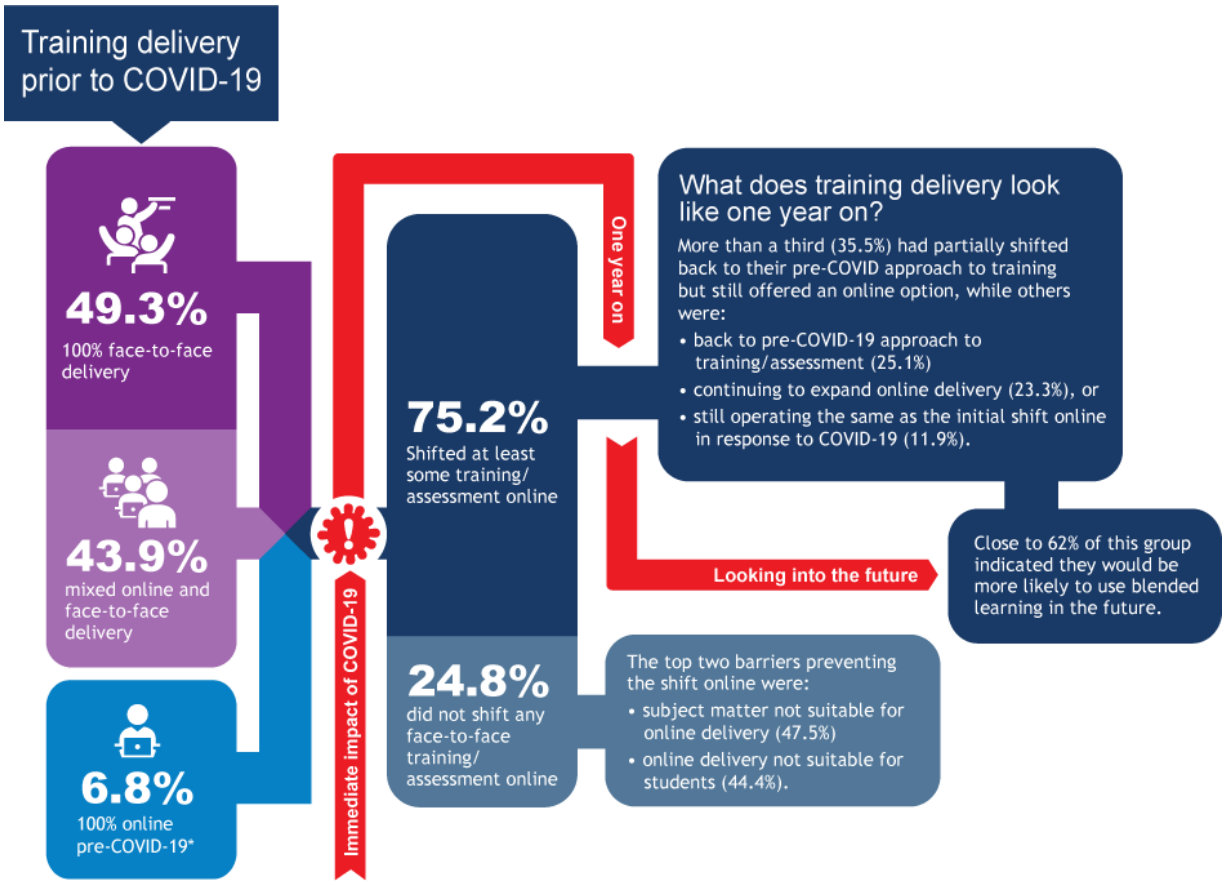
6 T Griffin & M Mihelic, Online delivery of VET qualifications: current use and outcomes, NCVER, Adelaide, 2019, viewed 15 March 2021, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/online-delivery-of-vet-qualifications>.

Early findings from training provider survey

Overview of training provider response

COVID-19 has had an undeniable impact on the VET sector, with the significant and rapid transition to online learning early in the pandemic establishing the groundwork for and influencing the likelihood of RTOs using more blended learning in the future, as outlined in figure 3.

Figure 3 The transition to online delivery in response to COVID-19, training delivery in 2021 and future intentions



Note: *Includes those who deliver 100% of training online except for practical work placements.
Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

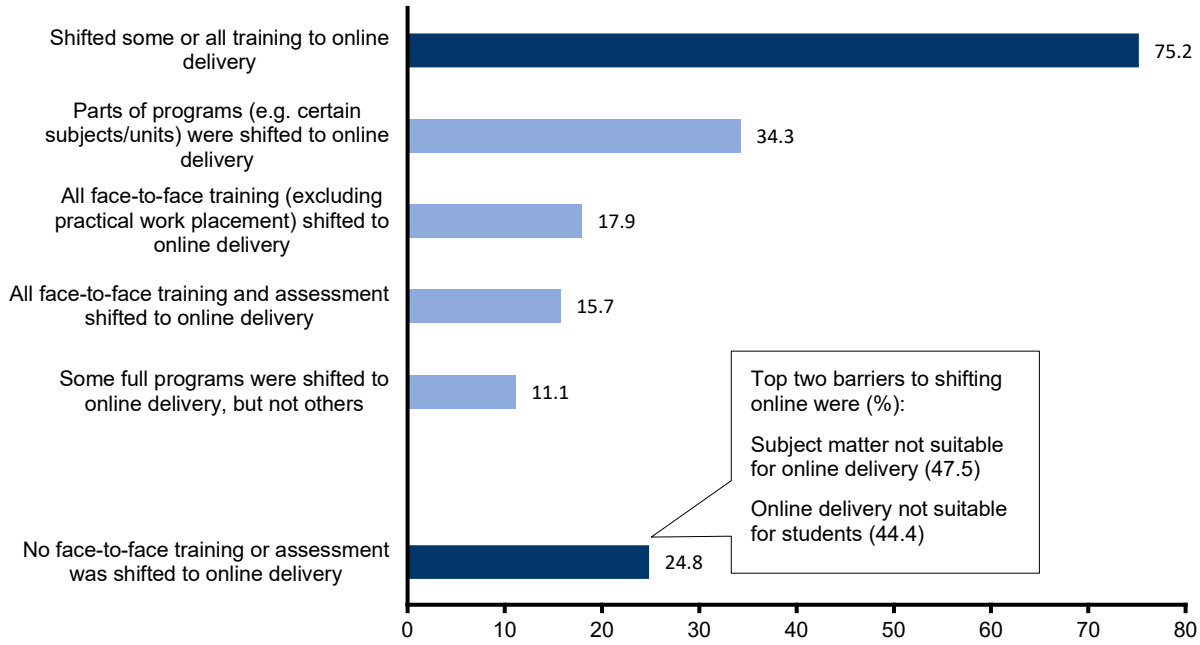
The survey findings highlighted in this report provide a snapshot of RTO responses to COVID-19, and how their future plans for training delivery have been influenced by the pandemic. A more detailed analysis of the survey findings will be provided in the final report.

Delivery of training before and during COVID-19

Although there was a substantial transition (75.2%) to partial or full online delivery in response to COVID-19 (figure 4), more than half (52.5%) of the RTOs who did not (or could not) move any face-to-face training or assessment online had to suspend either full programs or certain subjects/units. This issue raises the question of the immediate and longer-term impacts of these suspensions on students and, potentially, on RTO viability.

Among those who did not move any training online, the main barriers preventing a transition were identified as unsuitable subject matter (47.5%) and the unsuitability of online delivery for students (44.4%). The next stage of this project will explore these issues in more depth through interviews with RTO staff.

Figure 4 Incidence of shifting face-to-face training online in response to COVID-19, and barriers to shifting among those who did not move any training or assessment online (%)

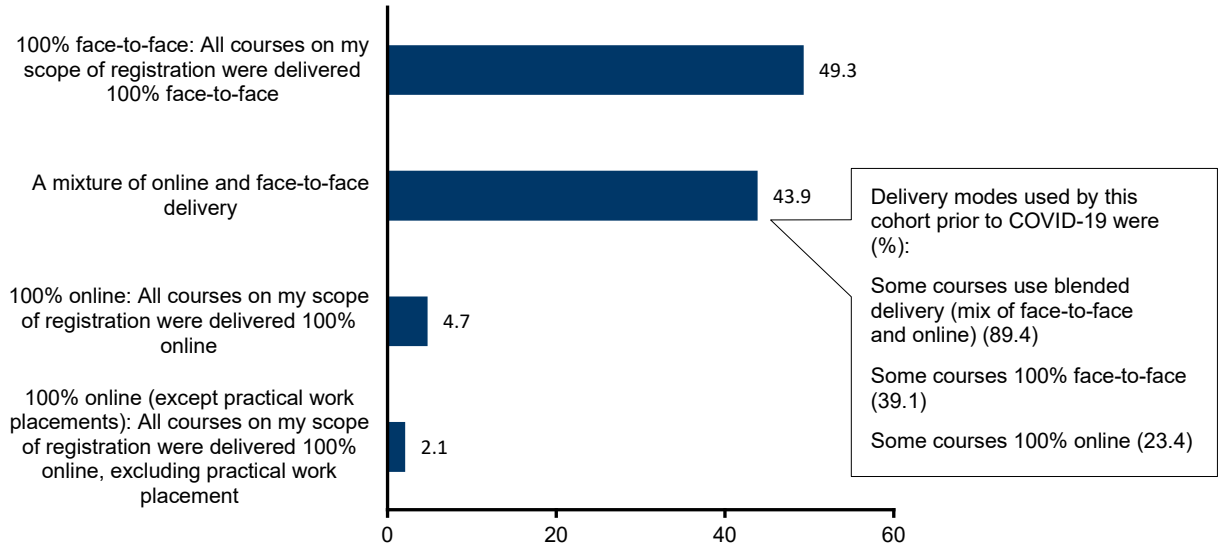


Note: The survey asked the following questions: In response to COVID-19, which of the following scenarios was most relevant to your organisation? (n = 1188); What were the main reasons for your organisation not shifting any face-to-face training online in response to COVID-19? (n = 295)

Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

Although around three-quarters (75.2%) of the training providers moved at least some training online in response to COVID-19, this was not new territory for around half (50.7%), who indicated they were already, in some capacity, delivering training and assessment online before the start of the pandemic. As outlined in figure 5, a range of delivery mode variations were identified by those who delivered a mixture of online and face-to-face delivery prior to COVID-19.

Figure 5 Incidence of offering any training/assessment through online delivery prior to COVID-19 (%)



Note: The survey asked the following questions: Prior to COVID-19, did your organisation offer any training/assessment through online delivery? (n = 1247); Which of the following delivery modes did you use prior to COVID-19? Please select all that apply (n = 547).

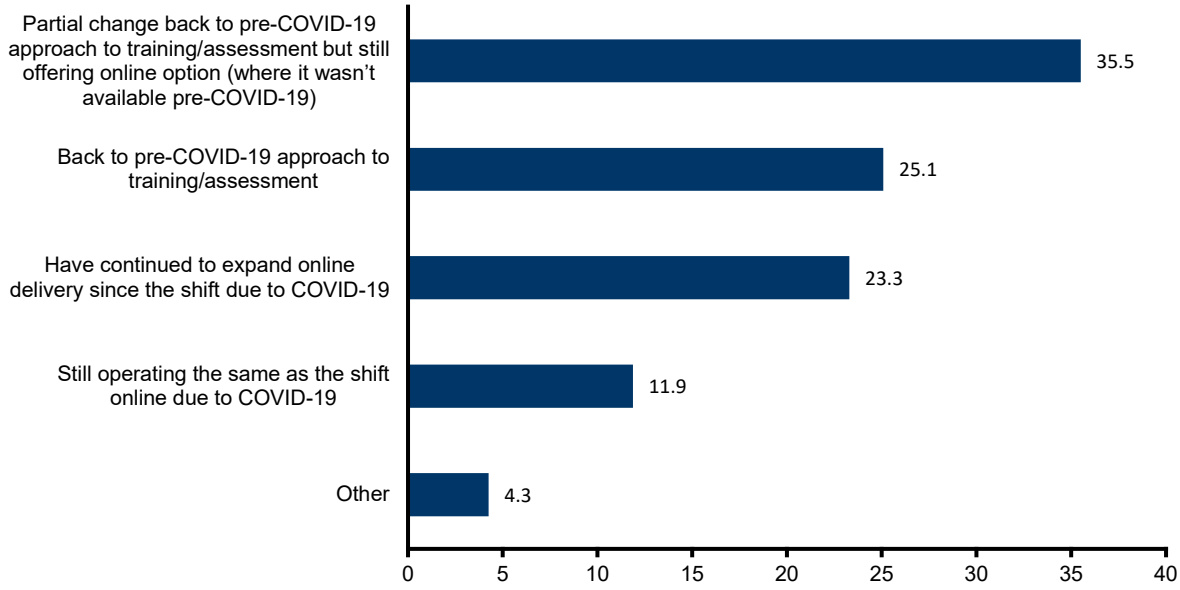
Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

Incidence of maintaining online shift

An increased presence in the online learning environment continues 12 months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. Only about 25% of the RTOs surveyed who moved training online in response to COVID-19 have fully reverted to their pre-pandemic approach to training delivery (figure 6), with many RTOs still delivering training online at levels greater than those before pandemic, as the following indicates:

- partial change back to pre-COVID approach to training/assessment but still offering online option (35.5%)
- have continued to expand online delivery since the initial shift in response to COVID-19 (23.3%)
- still operating at a level consistent with the initial shift online (11.9%).

Figure 6 Online training status of training provider in February/March 2021 (%)



Note: The survey asked the following question: Which of the following best applies to your organisation since the shift online due to COVID-19? (n = 893).

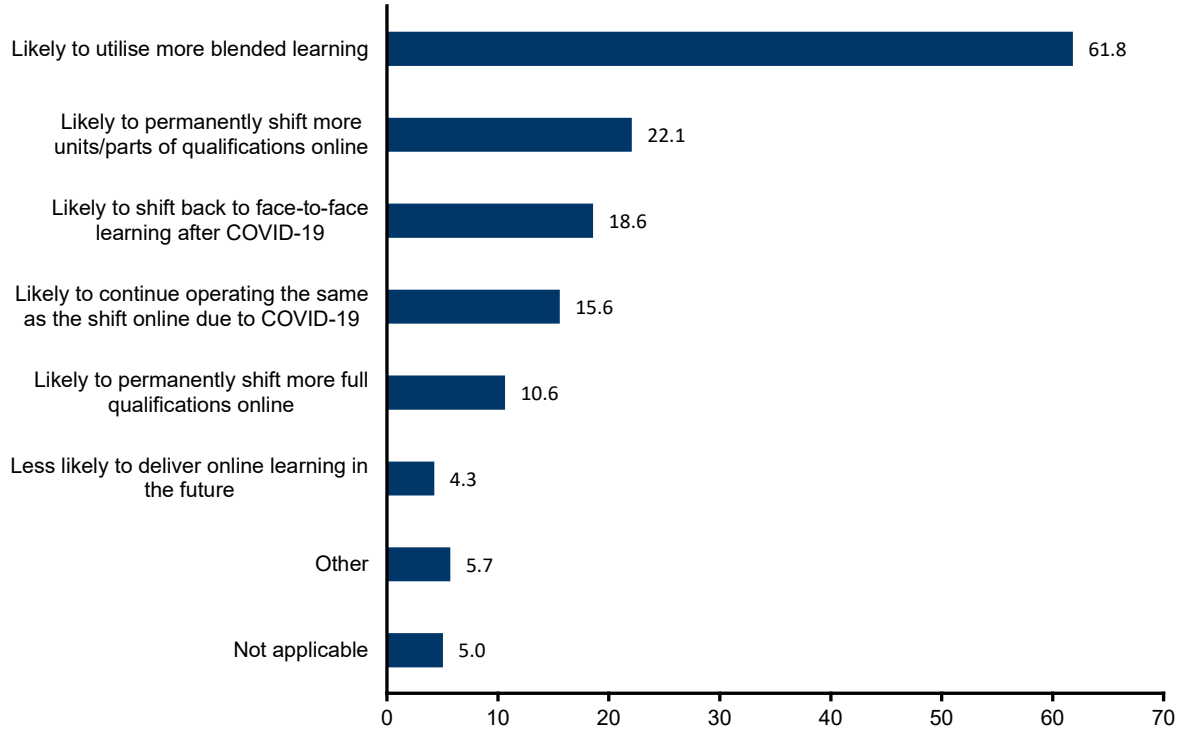
Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

Influence of COVID-19 on future plans

Training providers indicated a strong interest in incorporating more online training in the future, with 61.8% of those who moved some training online in response to the pandemic confirming that they were likely to use more blended learning in the future (figure 7). In addition, other plans to expand online learning in the future included:

- likely to permanently shift more units/parts of qualifications online (22.1%)
- likely to permanently shift more full qualifications online (10.6%).

Figure 7 Influence of COVID-19 on future online training delivery plans (%)



Note: The survey asked the following question: How has the shift online due to COVID-19 influenced your organisation's future plans regarding online delivery? Please select all that apply. Multiple response (n = 893).

Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

Appendix A

Methodology

The findings presented in this report are drawn from an analysis of subject enrolments reported in the Total VET Activity Collection for 2019 and 2020, along with a snapshot of the early findings from an online survey of RTOs, administered in collaboration with ASQA.

The intent of the TVA data analysis is to investigate changes as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic to:

- delivery mode
- subject result
- training type.

The online survey was completed by 1247 training providers, with the data collected between 19 February and 23 March 2021. Since 3280 training providers were invited to participate in the survey, this represents a response rate of 38%. Table A1 provides details of the types of training providers responding to the online survey.

Table A1 Training providers surveyed by type

Provider type	No.	%
Private training provider	951	76.3
Enterprise registered training organisation	124	9.9
Community education provider	63	5.1
School	49	3.9
TAFE	15	1.2
Accredited course owner	8	0.6
University	5	0.4
Other	32	2.6
Total	**1 247**	**100.0**

Note: The survey asked following question: What best describes your organisation? (n = 1247).
Source: ASQA and NCVER online survey of training providers, conducted February to March 2021.

As noted above, the online survey, including questionnaire development and execution, was conducted in collaboration with ASQA, which was undertaking research to help inform its 'Strategic review into online learning in the VET sector'. ACIL Allen was the fieldwork provider contracted by ASQA to undertake survey programming, distribution of survey links to ASQA's database of training providers and analysis of survey results.

Research questions

There is no single research question for this project, rather a list of research objectives guiding it:

- the extent of the shift to online delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic
- the reasons for RTOs transitioning to online delivery (given that it was not mandated) and the type of software/technology used
- whether the move to online delivery applied to all programs, or to some only, or to parts of programs, and the reasons for their application, or not (for example, strict assessment rules for training packages and/or mandatory work placements; funding source)

- the opportunities and challenges encountered in moving to online delivery, either fully or partially, for RTOs and trainers, and what suited different categories of students; what worked well and what didn't in facilitating online delivery
- if and how online delivery impacted on training and assessment practices and mandatory work placement, as well as on the quality of assessment and/or training delivery, for different categories of students or types of training
- what barriers to accessibility, student engagement, learning and course completion outcomes for different learner cohorts were identified and how these were addressed
- the extent to which shifts to full or partial online learning may have impacted on student learning outcomes and satisfaction rates
- the likelihood of RTOs changing how they deliver training in the future post-COVID-19.

The project will also attempt to determine whether any RTOs were unable to transition to online delivery and if not, why not, and the accompanying implications for learners, as well as how they plan to adapt for potentially similar situations in the future.

Appendix B

Additional delivery mode tables

Table B1 Subject enrolments with internal-only delivery mode by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Internal-only delivery mode	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	4 101 455	26.6	3 625 350	26.7	-11.6
Victoria	4 107 785	26.6	3 382 297	24.9	-17.7
Queensland	3 564 257	23.1	3 332 218	24.5	-6.5
South Australia	822 365	5.3	646 386	4.8	-21.4
Western Australia	2 026 405	13.1	1 928 372	14.2	-4.8
Tasmania	197 002	1.3	173 776	1.3	-11.8
Northern Territory	159 313	1.0	124 891	0.9	-21.6
Australian Capital Territory	161 007	1.0	163 236	1.2	1.4
Other*	291 060	1.9	199 525	1.5	-31.4
Total	**15 430 649**	**100.0**	**13 576 051**	**100.0**	**-12.0**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Table B2 Subject enrolments with a workplace-based-only delivery mode by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Workplace-based-only delivery mode	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	386 255	21.4	299 884	21.6	-22.4
Victoria	458 358	25.4	314 167	22.7	-31.5
Queensland	548 098	30.3	455 310	32.8	-16.9
South Australia	54 033	3.0	35 388	2.6	-34.5
Western Australia	267 517	14.8	222 209	16.0	-16.9
Tasmania	51 517	2.9	35 143	2.5	-31.8
Northern Territory	19 754	1.1	15 403	1.1	-22.0
Australian Capital Territory	17 511	1.0	8 673	0.6	-50.5
Other*	3 557	0.2	659	0.0	-81.5
Total	**1 806 600**	**100.0**	**1 386 836**	**100.0**	**-23.2**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Table B3 Subject enrolments with a combination of internal and workplace-based delivery modes by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Combination of internal and workplace-based delivery modes	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	249 962	22.7	240 579	23.6	-3.8
Victoria	404 514	36.7	325 197	31.9	-19.6
Queensland	255 575	23.2	244 706	24.0	-4.3
South Australia	55 443	5.0	60 287	5.9	8.7
Western Australia	71 278	6.5	81 727	8.0	14.7
Tasmania	42 372	3.8	45 793	4.5	8.1
Northern Territory	8 237	0.7	7 016	0.7	-14.8
Australian Capital Territory	10 354	0.9	9 388	0.9	-9.3
Other*	3 693	0.3	3 845	0.4	4.1
Total	**1 101 428**	**100.0**	**1 018 538**	**100.0**	**-7.5**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Table B4 Subject enrolments with a combination of internal and external delivery modes by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Combination of internal and external delivery modes	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	965 551	31.8	916 093	26.6	-5.1
Victoria	699 459	23.0	816 866	23.7	16.8
Queensland	810 339	26.7	971 121	28.2	19.8
South Australia	185 803	6.1	264 439	7.7	42.3
Western Australia	159 643	5.3	261 348	7.6	63.7
Tasmania	34 729	1.1	43 068	1.2	24.0
Northern Territory	16 697	0.5	24 328	0.7	45.7
Australian Capital Territory	137 204	4.5	134 566	3.9	-1.9
Other*	28 702	0.9	16 069	0.5	-44.0
Total	**3 038 127**	**100.0**	**3 447 898**	**100.0**	**13.5**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Table B5 Subject enrolments with a combination of external and workplace-based delivery modes by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Combination of external and workplace-based delivery modes	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	518 312	45.9	467 220	37.0	-9.9
Victoria	248 704	22.0	323 853	25.7	30.2
Queensland	301 745	26.7	399 312	31.6	32.3
South Australia	22 483	2.0	22 750	1.8	1.2
Western Australia	19 479	1.7	27 165	2.2	39.5
Tasmania	9 087	0.8	11 255	0.9	23.9
Northern Territory	2 294	0.2	3 014	0.2	31.4
Australian Capital Territory	6 170	0.5	6 573	0.5	6.5
Other*	1 972	0.2	1 019	0.1	-48.3
Total	**1 130 246**	**100.0**	**1 262 161**	**100.0**	**11.7**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Table B6 Subject enrolments with all delivery modes combined by jurisdiction, 2019−20

Combination of all delivery modes	2019		2020		
	No.	%	No.	%	% change
New South Wales	633 449	43.9	666 306	46.2	5.2
Victoria	271 782	18.8	288 975	20.0	6.3
Queensland	284 362	19.7	290 147	20.1	2.0
South Australia	72 279	5.0	57 301	4.0	-20.7
Western Australia	102 569	7.1	84 323	5.8	-17.8
Tasmania	32 801	2.3	24 789	1.7	-24.4
Northern Territory	7 125	0.5	11 467	0.8	60.9
Australian Capital Territory	31 578	2.2	16 522	1.1	-47.7
Other*	7 569	0.5	3 838	0.3	-49.3
Total	**1 443 514**	**100.0**	**1 443 668**	**100.0**	**0.0**

*Other includes subject enrolments from offshore and other Australian territories and dependencies.
Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Training package skill sets and funding source

Table B7 Subject enrolments with an external-only delivery mode split by funding source; including and excluding training package skill sets, 2019−20

	2019	2020	
External-only delivery mode	No.	No.	% change
Government-funded (total)	**897 061**	**1 259 627**	**40.4**
Government-funded (excluding TP skill sets)	888 371	1 219 487	37.3
Domestic fee-for-service (total)	**1 659 996**	**1 921 007**	**15.7**
Domestic fee-for-service (excluding TP skill sets)	1 651 471	1 906 754	15.5
Total	**2 617 745**	**3 244 413**	**23.9**
Total (excluding TP skill sets)	2 599 199	3 189 929	22.7

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Training type by online-only delivery mode

Table B8 Subject enrolments by training type with an external-only delivery mode, 2019−20

	2019		2020		
External-only delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%	% change
Training package qualifications	2 065 687	78.9	2 363 855	72.9	14.4
Accredited qualifications	69 231	2.6	96 224	3.0	39.0
Accredited courses	11 857	0.5	13 458	0.4	13.5
Training package skills sets	18 546	0.7	54 484	1.7	193.8
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	452 424	17.3	716 392	22.1	58.3
Total	**2 617 745**	**100.0**	**3 244 413**	**100.0**	**23.9**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Training type and provider type for online-only delivery mode

Table B9 Subject enrolments by training type and provider type with an external-only delivery mode, 2019−20

	2019		2020	
External-only delivery mode	No.	%	No.	%
Private training providers				
Training package qualifications	1 322 600	74.7	1 560 846	72.7
Accredited qualifications	33 326	1.9	49 358	2.3
Accredited courses	9 985	0.6	10 796	0.5
Training package skills sets	5 075	0.3	21 269	1.0
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	398 990	22.5	505 880	23.5
Total	**1 769 976**	**100.0**	**2 148 149**	**100.0**
TAFE institutes				
Training package qualifications	632 506	87.9	670 821	71.3
Accredited qualifications	32 322	4.5	39 278	4.2
Accredited courses	1 802	0.3	2 100	0.2
Training package skills sets	12 381	1.7	31 153	3.3
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	40 167	5.6	198 048	21.0
Total	**719 178**	**100.0**	**941 400**	**100.0**

External-only delivery mode	2019 No.	2019 %	2020 No.	2020 %
Community education providers				
Training package qualifications	42 216	90.5	56 314	87.3
Accredited qualifications	28	0.1	2 576	4.0
Accredited courses	6	0.0	348	0.5
Training package skills sets	21	0.0	550	0.9
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	4 365	9.4	4 710	7.3
Total	**46 636**	**100.0**	**64 498**	**100.0**
Enterprise providers				
Training package qualifications	28 192	79.7	20 079	76.6
Accredited qualifications	1 753	5.0	2 333	8.9
Accredited courses	64	0.2	143	0.5
Training package skills sets	10	0.0	47	0.2
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	5 371	15.2	3 618	13.8
Total	**35 390**	**100.0**	**26 220**	**100.0**
Universities				
Training package qualifications	24 919	84.5	30 896	83.0
Accredited qualifications	1 619	5.5	2 407	6.5
Accredited courses	-	-	71	0.2
Training package skills sets	27	0.1	365	1.0
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	2 909	9.9	3 479	9.3
Total	**29 474**	**100.0**	**37 218**	**100.0**
Schools				
Training package qualifications	15 254	89.3	24 899	92.5
Accredited qualifications	183	1.1	272	1.0
Accredited courses	-	-	-	-
Training package skills sets	1 032	6.0	1 100	4.1
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	622	3.6	657	2.4
Total	**17 091**	**100.0**	**26 928**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER Total VET students and courses, 2019−20.

Skilling initiatives

Two key Commonwealth Government initiatives that incorporated joint funding arrangements with individual states and territories were:

- National Infection Control Training Fund: this supported around 80 000 training places in fee-free or low-fee nationally accredited infection prevention and control short courses (<https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/announcements/subsidised-infection-control-training-fast-tracked-re-opening-businesses>).
- JobTrainer Fund: this provided fee-free or low-fee training places targeted at job seekers, school leavers and young people aged 17–24, with training reserved for areas of identified skills needs and/or employment growth (<https://www.dese.gov.au/skills-reform/jobtrainer-fund>).

Apart from the National Infection Control Training Fund and the JobTrainer fund, Victoria offered several other skilling initiatives, some of which were an expansion of pre-existing initiatives:

- Free TAFE program: this was expanded in response to COVID-19 to include new full qualifications in priority areas and linked jobs (<https://www.vic.gov.au/free-tafe>).

- Skilling Up Victorians: a funding package that in part helped TAFE institutes and other training providers to transition to delivering more online and remote learning (<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/skilling-victorians-get-through-coronavirus-crisis>).
- The Reconnect Program: this supported disengaged high-needs learners to re-engage and succeed in further education and employment and was expanded in October 2020 to target those unemployed because of COVID-19 or bushfires (<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/reconnect-program.aspx>).
- Working for Victoria: through this program free short courses in food hygiene and cleaning were provided (<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/skilling-victorians-get-through-coronavirus-crisis>).

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