Submission
by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

To
Productivity Commission

COAG Reform Agenda: VET reforms

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is an independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about tertiary education and training. This submission provides information on the statistics and research findings relevant to the inquiry into the:

(a) impacts of reforms to vocational education and training on productivity and workforce participation, and
(b) initiatives for supporting young people and disadvantaged groups to make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment.

1. The impact of VET reforms on productivity and workforce participation

Indicators: (a) Growth in training participation in VET and (b) in higher VET qualifications

Data

NCVER can provide data from its Students and Courses to examine the growth in training participation in VET (including VET in Schools) and in higher VET qualifications. This includes information on the completion of courses and qualifications for Australia as a whole and for jurisdictions. This information can be broken down by age group, industry sector, Training Package and occupation. Information can also be provided for the different equity groups (indigenous, disability, and English as a Second language). High level data from these collections reveal that in 2010 there were 1.8 million VET students in the VET system. There was a 5.4% increase in student numbers from the previous year. The number of Indigenous students, students with a disability and students from non-English speaking backgrounds increased by 11.3%, 9.1%, and 6.7% respectively. There were 393900 qualifications completed with 40% at the Certificate III level.


Data from the Contract of Training (COT) collection can be used to report on similar activities for apprentices and trainees, trade and non-trade. This can also be done by industry and by Training Package. Information can also be provided for the different equity groups (Indigenous, disability, and English as a Second language.) In 2010 there were 314 000 commencements representing an increase of 15.7%. There were 168 400 completions, and 139 900 cancellations. There was a 21.9% increase in commencements for the trades, and a 13.1% increase for the non-trades compared with the previous year.

Across all collections information can be provided for those who live in regional and remote areas (using the ABS Remoteness Score (ARIA+)). For all collections bar the COT Collection information for disadvantaged groups can be reported in terms of the SEIFA index.

The VET Atlas can also be used to identify participation in VET of different groups in different locations. [http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/atlas/aus/aus.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/atlas/aus/aus.html)

**Indicator: Growth in employment outcomes**

NCVER can also provide data from its *Students’ Outcomes Survey* on growth in employment outcomes for those who participate in training. It can do this both for those who undertake full courses and those who undertake single modules. It can use the SEIFA index to report data for disadvantaged groups. [http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2315.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2315.html)

**Completed research**


2. Supporting young people to make successful transitions to employment or further education and training

**Indicators: Strengthened pathways between school, employment and further education**

**Data**

We can look at the concept of pathways in terms of where people start off and where they end up, that is, origins and destinations. In this regard NCVER can provide information from the *Apprenticeship and Traineeship Destination Survey*, to evaluate the further training and employment benefits of making a decision to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship. This survey can also be used to provide data on the destinations of those who have decided to undertake pre-vocational programs. [http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2262.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2262.html). The Student Outcomes Survey (including, SOS online) can be used to understand the benefits of different pathways for other VET students including employment and wage outcomes. [http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/sos_online.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/sos_online.html)

Data from the Higher Education Statistical Collection and publications investigating the extent of traffic between VET and Higher Education and vice versa, can also be used to understand issues such as credit transfer between VET and higher education. However there are limitations in deriving too many inferences from the data on transfer in both directions (Curtis 2009, Moodie (forthcoming)). This is because not all studies are based on large data sets representative of the whole population, and may be subject to selection bias.

**Indicator: Successful transitions for young people and disadvantaged groups**

**Data**

Information from NCVER data bases including Students and Courses, Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY), Students Outcomes Survey, and Apprenticeship and Traineeship Destination Survey can be used to investigate transitions.


**Completed research— pathways**


Work in progress: Moodie G (forthcoming), The role of educational institutions in fostering vocations, NCVER, Adelaide

Completed Research — disadvantaged groups


Liu J & Nguyen N (forth coming) Successful youth transitions, NCVER, Adelaide


Nechvoglod L, 2010, New Learner Markets: Reaching hard to reach learners prepared for Department of Planning and Community Development, Adult Community and Further Education, Victoria


Work in progress

McVicar D, (forthcoming) Promoting social inclusion for disadvantaged groups, NCVER, Adelaide,

Cocks E (forthcoming) Social and Economic outcomes for apprentices and trainees with a disability, NCVER, Adelaide

Shah C (forthcoming) Role of Social Inclusion: geographic and regional aspects, NCVER, Adelaide

3. A responsive and quality training system (Improving system transparency, teacher quality and quality assurance)

**Indicator: Greater transparency in reporting to support informed choice for consumers (individuals and businesses)**

*Data*

The need for greater access to comprehensive information about quality and availability of training is essential if VET clients are to access information they require for making informed choices about their training. The issue of transparency has become even more important with the expansion of the training market and increased moves to introduce training entitlements. A more comprehensive provider collection would help governments make sensible resource allocation decisions and implement effective quality assurance systems (Karmel 2011). Initiatives to introduce more transparency and a comprehensive provider collection have faltered because training providers are not voluntarily supplying the necessary data to NCVER. Karmel argues that if these limitations are to be removed the provision of data needs to be mandated.

In the meantime there are some positive developments with the acceptance of new data sharing protocols that means that NCVER can report information at the RTO level for VET that is publicly-funded at a high level. In principle agreement to introducing a case for a unique student identifier is also encouraging.

**Indicator: Improving VET teacher quality**

*Data*


There is currently not a national VET workforce or collection although many states have their own surveys.

**Indicator: Increased rationalisation of quality indicators**

*Data*

NCVER provides a system for the collection of aggregate data from RTOs to inform quality indicators. Data includes number of enrolments, number of completions for each qualification and unit of competency. RTOs can download reports for their organisations to provide to state registering and accrediting bodies.

NCVER has also been involved in the auditing of AQTF standards for state and territory registering bodies for the National Audit and Registration Agency (NARA). This audit examined NARA’s approach to auditing RTOs and found that NARA was generally compliant with the AQTF standards for registering bodies. Suggestions were made for process improvements related to increasing the consistency between auditors with respect to language used, recordkeeping and report construction. [http://www.nara.tvetaustralia.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/51198/NCVER_Audit_Report_-_September_2009.pdf](http://www.nara.tvetaustralia.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/51198/NCVER_Audit_Report_-_September_2009.pdf)
Completed research

Total VET Activity

Unique student identifier

Quality of VET teachers

VET workforce

Quality assurance

4. A demand driven-system: Increased competition

Indicator: Increased competition in training provision (including contestable funding)

Data

The NVER data base ‘Students and Courses’ can be used to look for growth in the number of RTOs involved in the provision of publically-funded VET. http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2383.html

Completed research

NCVER has published a book of essays and responses to these essays, around the issues of ‘competition’ and ‘contestability’. There was not unanimous agreement on all issues between the essay writers and commentators. There was, however, general acceptance of perceived risks associated with a state retreat from the training market, and with the need for high quality information. High quality information for consumers (individuals and businesses) and governments is essential irrespective of whether we believe in planning for training supply or leaving it to consumers to determine what training should be provided. Another publication reports on interviews with a number of commentators about the future for the VET sector. This report points to the need for more effort to be applied in articulating the role of VET in the tertiary education sector.
5. Reduce the gaps in foundation skills for work age population

**Indicator: Increase in literacy and numeracy levels**

**Data**

The ‘Students and Courses’ data base holds information on the completion of different courses. Interrogation of the data base could provide us with information on outcomes from different curriculum aimed at improving language literacy and numeracy and foundation skills (including the Certificate in Spoken and Written English, Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA used in Victoria and Western Australia), Certificate I in Women’s Education, Certificates I & II in Introduction to Vocational Education (IVEC I & II) now revised into the Certificates I and II in Education and Skills Development (South Australia and the Northern Territory).

**Completed research**

NCVER has recently held a forum in which participants discussed issues around the building of foundation skills. The forum agreed that the priorities for governments were to target those most in need of training and support, use sustainable funding models for programs, apply suitable measures for program evaluation. Other recent research has examined the effectiveness of adult education processes which use the strengths, aspirations and capacities of individuals as starting points, and at how employers view their role in improving literacy and numeracy skills of their workers. It has published a discussion paper called 'Building the Foundations' [http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2345.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2345.html).

NCVER has also developed a wiki on their website which provides a list of resources and publications about adult literacy. Research topics ranged from adult literacy teaching and learning approaches and outcomes, to the professional development needs of literacy practitioners. Topics also covered various literacy practices and delivery approaches across Indigenous and ethnic communities, industry, volunteer and community settings. [http://www.adultliteracyresource.edu.au/](http://www.adultliteracyresource.edu.au/)


Work in progress

Data

NCVER is currently undertaking a project to map the performance levels of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey to those of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). The ACSF is the framework used to verify outcomes for the Commonwealth Government’s Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. The LLNP and WELL programs provide information on a very small proportion of the population—some 100 000 per year—who fall within the COAG target area.

An earlier feasibility study indicated that mapping between the ALLS and ACSF frameworks is possible. The follow up research is a larger-scale research study investigating whether performance levels on the ALLS literacy and numeracy scales can be reliably mapped to the performance levels of the ACSF. This would mean that the ACSF performance levels could be used as a proxy for ALLS performance levels. This would make it possible to provide more frequent information on the literacy and numeracy development of identified target groups of the adult population than is available from the large-scale international testing programs.

Research underway

NCVER has recently contracted two studies that will focus on the language, literacy and numeracy area. The first will explore how production workers in competitive manufacturing enterprises learn literacy and numeracy practices and in their training. The second will concentrate on numeracy issues and investigate the capacity of the VET workforce to meet the numeracy needs of working-aged Australians. This study will also be focused on production workers in the manufacturing sector.