

# National VET Research and Evaluation Program

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide information to the Australian VET research community about how the National VET Research and Evaluation Program operates.

The program is managed by NCVER on behalf of the Australian National Training Authority. The National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC) which is a special committee of the NCVER reporting to the NCVER Board oversees and guides the management of this program.

NREC is made up of 12 members as follows:

- Chair - NCVER Board member
- 4 nominees of ANTA Chief Executive Officers
- 3 NCVER nominees of individuals who have experience and expertise in VET research and evaluation
- 2 ANTA Board industry nominees
- 1 ANTA nominee
- 1 Commonwealth nominee:

NCVER was contracted to run the national program of VET research from 1997-2000 and has recently been contracted for a further 3 years to manage the program until 2002. Prior to this the ANTA Research Advisory Council managed the program.

The research projects have generally resulted from a call for researchers to submit expressions of interest and full project proposals to the NCVER. In order to encourage diversity and creativity within research in the VET sector, the research program is open to any researcher or research organisation to participate in. Each round is advertised in the national media. All submissions are evaluated by the National Research and Evaluation Committee who select the successful projects. On occasions specific research projects are commissioned.

Over the period 1997-1999 NREC has funded three types of project:

- Research projects which address key research priorities that have been identified by the National Research and Evaluation Committee
- Research projects which address issues which have been raised by researchers through the open category.
- Consolidation studies which are generally short 3-6 month studies to review all the literature in a given topic so as to consolidate the findings from this body of work and identify any gaps.

In addition to funding research, NREC funds are used to manage the program, to enhance and maintain the VOCED database and to disseminate the results of the research. During the period 1997-1999 77% of the funding was spent on research and management of the research program, 16% was spent on dissemination and 7% was spent enhancing the VOCED database.

This paper gives a broad overview of the following aspects of the National VET research and evaluation program:

- National VET research and evaluation strategy
- Basic statistics on the program
- Research priorities that have been addressed
- Consolidation Studies
- The process to identify priorities for 2000
- Research priorities for 2000
- Assuring the quality of the program
- Dissemination of the program
- Challenges still facing the program

## NATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

National Research and Evaluation Strategy for Vocational Education and Training in Australia 1998-2000 provides the framework for all research and consolidation studies.

In this document 6 priorities for national VET research and evaluation are identified:

- Economic and social implications of VET
- Employment and the workforce
- Pathways from school to work
- Outcomes of the VET sector
- Quality of provision of VET
- Future issues affecting the VET sector

This strategy will soon be further developed to bring it in line with the ANTA National Strategy for VET 1997-2003 (a Bridge to the Future) and current work being undertaken by ANTA resulting from its major marketing project.

## BASIC STATISTICS REGARDING THE 1998 AND 1999 FUNDING ROUNDS

The figures below provide information regarding number of expressions of interest received, who has conducted national VET research during this period, the type of research that was funded and the number of projects undertaken.

### Success rate

Over the last two funding rounds (1998 and 1999) NREC received a total of 307 expressions of interest that resulted in 56 projects. On this crude measure, the success rate for submissions during this period was approximately 18%. In addition during this period a further 10 projects were commissioned.

### Who is doing all the research?

During this period VET research was conducted mainly by:

- university research centres (60%)
- private consultants (32%)
- TAFE institutes (5%)

### What type of projects were funded?

In terms of the three categories of research that are generally funded (research projects addressing key priorities, research projects under the open category and consolidation studies)

- approximately 70% of the research funding addressed key priority areas
- approximately 24% of the research funding addressed issues raised through the open category
- approximately 6% of the research funding went into consolidation studies.

### How many national VET research projects are there?

Over the period 1997-1999 113 projects were funded: 51 are complete and 62 are still in progress. Of these 62 projects 12 are from the 1997 round, 14 are from the 1998 round and 36 are from the 1999 round. In addition NREC inherited 27 projects funded under ANTARAC in 1995 and 1995.

Of the 113 projects, 32 were consolidation studies and 81 were research projects.

## RESEARCH PRIORITIES 1997-1999

During the first three years of the contract to manage National VET research the following priorities were nominated by NREC and research projects were funded accordingly:

1997	1998	1999
equity	return to the enterprise of an	Australia's apprenticeship/traineeship

	investment in training	system
job change/industry outlook	changing nature of work	training/learning culture
schools and VET	evaluation of CBT	participation/entitlement to training
small business	cross sectoral studies (scoping studies)	outcomes of VET
training market	lifelong learning	evaluation of training packages
consolidation studies	internationalisation of VET	evaluation of frontline management initiative
workplace learning		
future visions and VET		

Other themes which have been dealt with across the three funding rounds include:

- Outcomes of VET
- Assessment (particularly a competency-based approach and how to improve the validity and quality of assessment in a competency-based approach)

## CONSOLIDATION STUDIES

The general themes that have been dealt with through consolidation studies include:

- equity groups
- language and literacy
- international comparisons of VET systems
- on-line delivery
- range of other issues including market reform, small business, outcomes of VET, assessment

Appendix A to this paper provides a complete list of the consolidation studies undertaken to date within the national VET research program.

## PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING NATIONAL VET RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 2000

During the period October 1999 - January 2000 NCVER consulted with representatives of the following organisations to ask their views on what the priorities for VET research should be.

Organisation
ANTA
DETYA
All State/Territory training authorities
ACTU
ACCI
AIG
BCA
Institutes of TAFE
Industry Training Advisory Boards
AVETRA members

A total of 70 people met with NCVER staff to put forward their views on research priorities. In addition a fax questionnaire was sent to TAFE directors, directors of national and state industry training advisory boards and AVETRA members. The questionnaire listed the priorities that had emerged to date as a result of consultations and asked respondents to nominate the top six key issues that they felt required further research. The response rates were good for TAFE Institutes and ITABs. The response rate for AVETRA members may not be accurate given that it is unclear how many of the people who were sent the questionnaires are still AVETRA members. However to receive 37 responses was encouraging.

	No. of questionnaires sent out	No. of responses received	Response rate
TAFE Institutes	79	52	65%
ITABs	86	36	42%
AVETRA members	300 (??)	36	8%

The priorities which have been identified for VET research in 2000 are based on the consultations and questionnaire responses as well as:

- what is known so far about the findings of the marketing strategy being undertaken by ANTA

- the proposed work programs of the other ANTA funded research centres and partners
- the existing program of research in VET.

## **NATIONAL VET RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 2000**

As a result of this consultation process, NREC has identified the following priorities for National VET research in 2000:

- the quality of VET provision
- the new VET professional
- management and leadership in training organisations
- new/generic skills for the workforce
- flexible learning and teaching
- outcomes of VET

Major issues such as equity/social inclusion, lifelong learning and training packages form key aspects of each of the priorities identified and therefore have not been listed as separate priorities. They are an integral part of each theme.

In addition the open category encourages researchers to put forward proposals that address:

- long range strategic issues in VET research
- any other priorities for VET research not already nominated.

The long range strategic questions include:

1. What has been the impact of the development of an open market in the VET sector?
2. What is the overall performance of the national VET system?
3. How well is the national VET system placed to meet the needs of all segments of the learning community?
4. What models of learning communities are there in Australia and what lessons do these communities have for the VET system as it embraces the concept of lifelong learning?
5. What are inclusive models of participation that address the needs of students at risk?
6. What are client perspectives on value for money in VET?
7. What are the cross-sectoral issues that need further research and to what extent is the education system 'seamless'?
8. How does the VET industry compare with other systems which operate federally - for example - health and industrial relations?

## **ASSURING THE QUALITY OF THE PROGRAM**

The aim of the National Research and Evaluation program is to conduct research in the vocational education and training sector which is applied in nature, which looks beyond specific contexts and which produces outcomes with applications to both policy and practice.

In 1999 ANTA funded a review of the national program of research. The review noted that the quantity of VET research had increased over the period 1997-99 and that there had been some improvement in quality.

In order to ensure that the aim of the program is achieved and that there is substantial improvement in the quality of the program, quality approaches have been built into all stages of the research process:

1. Identification of research themes and priorities
2. Selection of projects
3. Conduct of the research
4. Presentation of the research report
5. Contact with and feedback from the research community and users of VET research

Activities which address the issue of the quality of the program are detailed below.

<b>1. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH THEMES AND PRIORITIES</b>
<b>Activity</b>

<p>During the period September 1999 - February 2000 NCVER met with representatives of ANTA, DETYA, state and territory training authorities, employer groups, ACTU to find out what these groups believe the research priorities for VET should be. In addition a fax questionnaire was sent out to all national and state Industry Training Advisory Boards and Directors of TAFE Institutes as well as AVETRA members asking them to nominate 6 key issues that require national VET research.</p> <p><b>Additional quality measures planned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of international trends and developments and research that is being conducted overseas</li> <li>• Adopting a system of references to ensure that research addresses the critically important current policy issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. SELECTION OF PROJECTS</b></p>
<p><b>Activity</b> NCVER has changed the selection procedure as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants for funds are required only to submit a single project proposal rather than an expression of interest and a project proposal</li> <li>• All members of the National Research and Evaluation Committee are involved in the selection process through being members of specialist panels which each evaluate the proposals within a given priority/theme.</li> <li>• Briefing notes and clear guidelines for project proposals are produced</li> <li>• Applicants are encouraged to use the VOCED database in order to keep up to date with current research in the field</li> <li>• Applicants are given 6 weeks to prepare their project proposals</li> <li>• Non-VET sector applicants are encouraged to develop partnerships with VET sector research staff based in training organisations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional quality measures planned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide better feedback to those applicants who narrowly missed being shortlisted.</li> <li>• Include the general feedback sheet developed for those who were unsuccessful in the last funding round in the information kit for the next round.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. THE CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH</b></p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to provide feedback to researchers throughout the project, NCVER has built into the contract a requirement for two interim reports and draft final report to be submitted for external review.</li> <li>• Other initiatives taken by NCVER include organising meetings of groups of researchers who are all working on a common theme (eg apprenticeship system, training/learning culture).</li> <li>• NCVER is seeking to expand its pool of external reviewers and has written to NREC members asking them to identify potential reviewers for specific themes/priorities for research. NREC also asks researchers to nominate names of reviewers.</li> <li>• NCVER has developed set of questions for reviewers to answer when providing feedback to researchers.</li> </ul> <p>If a reviewer expresses concern about a project, then the National Research and Evaluation Branch intervenes to assist the researchers in better achieving the outcomes of the project by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding a teleconference or meeting with the researchers to discuss reviewer concerns and getting agreement on how the concerns are to be dealt with.</li> <li>• Arranging for another VET researcher to provide mentoring/guidance to the research team conducting the research (in the case of researchers who do not have a strong VET background).</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional quality measures planned</b> Seek feedback from researchers on the value of the review process and the feedback they received.</p>
<p><b>4. THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT</b></p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCVER has developed an author's kit and report template to ensure that all reports are presented in house style and are no longer than 100 pages (research reports).</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All research reports are edited by professional editor before being sent to marketing and publishing for printing.</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional quality measures planned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve on the author's kit by providing more guidance for the writing of executive summaries and more guidance on the structure of the final report.</li> <li>• Develop a set of criteria which must be met if the report is to be published</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. CONTACT WITH AND FEEDBACK FROM THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY AND USERS OF VET RESEARCH</b></p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A newsletter is sent to all researchers on a quarterly basis. So far two newsletters have been produced and a third is in preparation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional quality measures planned</b></p> <p>There are plans to develop a process at the end of each project of getting feedback from researchers on the work they did, problems encountered, support provided by NCVER, areas for improvement. Options being considered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sending out a questionnaire to researchers</li> <li>• holding a debrief session with researchers</li> <li>• arranging for an external reviewer to gather feedback from researchers and report to NCVER.</li> </ul> <p>NCVER is currently working on how best to get feedback from users of VET research.</p>

## **DISSEMINATING THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

At NCVER, the dissemination, marketing and publishing division is responsible for publishing the outcomes of the NREC-funded research program, the NCVER in-house research program and the reports produced by the statistics division.

Dissemination is being achieved through 3 main means:

- the web (<http://www.ncver.edu.au>)
- a range of publications
- a range of workshops/seminars/forums

In addition NCVER provides opportunity for VET researchers to hear about and discuss their work through a range of activities. Further details of each of the dissemination activities as well as the initiatives to support VET researchers are provided below.

### **The web**

The NCVER web-site has sections devoted to:

- research
- statistics
- library, including VOCED database
- reading room
- news and events

NCVER is currently in the process of upgrading the research pages on the web.

Research pages can be searched by theme, by topic and by author. For each project undertaken through the NREC funding program and the in-house program of research, a project description listing aims of project, methodology, proposed outcomes and contact details of researcher is listed. Once the project is complete, the executive summary of the report is placed on the web. There are plans to place complete research reports on the web as well as links to other interim products of the research (for example conference papers).

### **Range of publications**

The main product of a research project is either a research report or a review of research:

1. The research reports are the main product of each research project and are generally 100 pages in length. At present approximately 200-500 copies are printed and they are distributed to subscribers and to a range of key stakeholders such as college directors, college libraries, ANTA, DETYA, State training authorities. They are also available for sale through the NCVER catalogue. The distribution and notification processes for the publications are being reviewed at present.
2. Reviews of research are essentially consolidation studies which analyse all the research undertaken in the last 10 years in Australia on a certain theme (for example on-line delivery, VET and non-English speakers) and which identify gaps in the research. They are distributed free to subscribers and to the range of stakeholders identified above. They are also available for sale through the NCVER catalogue.

Besides these main products, NCVER produces a range of other publications which either summarise the outcomes of research or promote the research.

### **Summarising the outcomes of NCVER research**

1. *Research at a glance* - a short 8 page publication that summarises the research on particular themes. To date two have been produced:
  - Small business and VET
  - Early school leavers

Others in this series currently being developed are research at a glance on:

- competency-based training
- life long learning
- the changing nature of work
- workplace learning

2. *Research says* - a quarterly newsletter which is distributed widely in the sector by email and in print. This publication summarises very briefly the outcomes of research which has recently been completed. It also provides information on key initiatives and developments in the sector and includes summaries of key VET documents produced outside of NCVER.
3. *Australian Training Review* is produced quarterly and is a magazine which invites articles from VET researchers, policy makers and teachers about research and initiatives in VET. Researchers who conduct NCVER research are encouraged to submit light, magazine style articles on their work and thus it can be used to alert its readership to the outcomes of NCVER research. It is distributed free mainly to TAFE colleges and Industry Training Advisory Boards. It is also available for sale in newsagents.
4. Submitting articles to professional magazines (for example Australian TAFE teacher) and journals about specific NCVER research projects.
5. Supporting the publication of the half-yearly AVETRA journal *Australian New Zealand Journal of VET*. VET researchers are invited to submit papers to this journal. This journal is available to subscribers and AVETRA members.

### **Promoting NCVER research**

NCVER and NREC-funded research is promoted by various means:

1. Publication of a catalogue listing all NCVER publications. This catalogue is also published on-line. In the future sales will be made using e-commerce.
2. Producing flyers about groups of research projects (eg life long learning, competency-based training, VET and people with a disability) and sending these out to people and organisations most likely to be interested in the research.
3. Placing advertisements in magazines about projects which are relevant to the readership of the magazine.
4. Maintaining the NCVER display and information booth at a range of major conferences. The NCVER display includes a computer with on-line facilities to showcase the web-site, the VOCED

database and the range of information that is on the NCVET website as well as samples of NCVET printed materials.

### **Workshops, forums and seminars**

1. NCVET has plans for a series of Research Forums to be held in different states and territories throughout the year. The aim of these forums is to showcase the results of a suite of projects and to provide an opportunity for practitioners to discuss research findings with researchers.
  - The first CBT research forum was held in Adelaide. There are plans to repeat this forum in Perth and Sydney later this year.
  - Other forums planned include the Changing nature of work and its implications for VET to be held in Melbourne, Hobart and Brisbane later this year.
2. Policy briefing workshops have been held in each capital city throughout 1998 and 1999. The aim of these workshops was to present findings of the research program to representatives of the state and territory training authorities. There are plans to extend this program of briefings to providers this year.

### **Other activities to support the national VET research**

In addition to dissemination activities, NCVET has taken steps to provide more information and support to VET researchers through:

1. Upgrading the VOCED database so that it includes abstracts of articles related to VET produced by a wide range of overseas journals and monographs dated from 1995 to the present
2. Hosting the annual No Frills Conference which aims to provide VET researchers and practitioners with an opportunity to present papers on work in progress and provides an opportunity for VET researchers to discuss their findings.
3. Producing a quarterly newsletter distributed free to researchers who are undertaking projects under the National VET research and evaluation program
4. Holding workshops at the AVETRA conference to introduce researchers to the NCVET author's kit and report template.
5. Hosting researcher workshops during the life of a project. The aim of these is to bring VET researchers who are all working on the same theme (for example return on a training investment, changing nature of work, lifelong learning, Australia's apprenticeship system) so that they can discuss work in progress and preliminary findings with each other. This also provides an opportunity to consider the most appropriate ways of reporting and disseminating the findings. Value-added products based on project synergies are also possible.

### **CHALLENGES STILL FACING THE PROGRAM**

The main challenge facing the program at present is to develop ways of evaluating the impact of the research program - is it making a difference. Further challenges relate to the management of the program and dissemination:

- If research reports are not read, what outcomes should we be funding researchers to produce?
- Should we develop criteria for publication and require that these criteria be met in order for a report to be published?
- Is web publishing the way to go?

NCVET welcomes dialogue with AVETRA members regarding these challenges and any other issues that AVETRA members would like to raise concerning the program.

## APPENDIX A

A list of the consolidation studies undertaken during the period 1997-1999 as part of the national VET research program.

Vocational education in schools	R Ryan
Assessor training programs	R Docking
Returns to enterprises from investment in VET	S Billett
Flexible delivery of training	P Kearns
Learning in the workplace	P Hager
Quality assurance in VET	P Hager
Entry-level training	D Lundberg
Competition and market reform in the Australian VET sector	D Anderson
A brief history of the evaluation of VET in Australia	R McDonald, G Hayton
Public and private training provision	K Barnett
VET and small business	J Gibb
Alternative VET pathways to indigenous development	B Boughton
VET in rural and remote Australia	S Kilpatrick, R Bell
VET for people with disabilities	N Buys, E Kendall, J Ramsden
The changing nature of work and patterns of work and implications for VET	P Waterhouse, B Wilson, P Ewer
Impact of generic competencies on workplace performance	J Moy
VET and training for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds	V Volkoff, B Golding
Impediments to the employment of young people	M Wooden
Assessing in VET	A Bateman, S Gillis
Internationalisation of VET	P Smith, S N Smith
VET in Australian correctional institutions	B Semmens, J Oldfield
Globalisation and its impact on VET	B Hobart
Outcomes of VET	T Dumbrell
Demand issues in VET	S Kilpatrick
Literacy & Numeracy in VET	M Watson
Practice and Policy in adult literacy and numeracy since 1990	I Falk
The purpose, nature and utility of work placements in VET courses; evidence from the cross-sectoral literature	E Smith
A review of on-line learning	B Harper
All that glitters is not gold: on-line delivery of education and training	R Brennan
International comparisons of VET systems	J Keating
International benchmarking of VET	T Wyatt
Entitlement	R Curtain

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