

Review of the Survey  
of Employer Use and  
Views of the VET  
System:  
approach for the  
2013 survey





**Australian Government**  
**Department of Industry**

# Review of the Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System: approach for the 2013 survey

National Centre for  
Vocational Education Research

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# Contents

Overview	4
The 2013 survey onwards	6
Questionnaire	6
Mode of interview	13
Sample design	13
Conclusion	15
<b>Tables</b>	
1 Final list of core data items in the 2013 survey	7
2 Final list of non-core data items in the 2013 survey relating to choice of training provider (non-core A)	8
3 Final list of non-core data items in the 2013 survey relating to employee skill levels and employers' reasons for training (non-core B)	8
4 List of data items available from the 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 surveys and to be included in the 2013 survey	9
5 Desired accuracy levels of key indicators from the 2013 survey	13
6 Key survey indicators used in the design of the 2011 and 2013 samples	13
7 Sample size for the 2013 survey by state, industry and employer size group	14

# Overview

The national Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System has been in its current form since 2005 and, with the introduction of the new National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, it was considered timely to review the survey to ensure it continued to meet the needs of users.

In 2011, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) undertook a review of the survey and sought feedback on future content and methodology of the survey.

The review was conducted in three stages and involved:

- the release of a discussion paper in March 2011 seeking feedback from users on the survey's future content and methodology (see <[www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2349.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2349.html)>)
- the release of a paper in early September 2011 summarising the feedback received to the discussion paper and a proposed approach for future iterations of the survey (see <[www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2430.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2430.html)>)
- a webinar in mid-September 2011 discussing the proposed approach with key users of the survey, who provided strong support for the proposed approach.

Feedback to the review indicated that users could be grouped into two categories. The first comprised those who required the survey for performance reporting, where the accuracy and reliability of the survey were crucial. The second category of users comprised those interested in how much training is provided and why employers make the training decisions they do.

Users were satisfied with the current survey methodology, although there was interest in introducing an online completion option to the survey.

This feedback was consolidated and an approach proposed that received strong support from users. Following development and testing, the content and methodology for the 2013 survey has now been finalised.

This paper outlines the approach for the 2013 national Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System, based on the review, subsequent amendments to the survey content and the methodology resulting from pilot tests of the questionnaire, online questionnaire testing, and advice from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on sample design.

The 2013 national Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System:

- retains the scope and purpose of the four previous biennial surveys
- is conducted by computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) with about 9000 employers, in which:
  - all employers are asked a set of core questions of approximately five minutes in length on their engagement and satisfaction with the vocational education and training (VET) system

- these employers are then to be divided into two groups and each asked a different set of questions, no more than five minutes in length. The first group will be asked to answer questions on their choice of provider; the second group will be asked for detailed information on employee skill levels and employers' reasons for training.

To maintain the time series, questions from previous iterations of the survey have been retained where possible, with new questions developed only where needed.

# The 2013 survey onwards

Given the feedback and interest from users in understanding why employers make the training decisions they do, including the amount of training provided, a number of options, in which cost and respondent burden were balanced, were considered for the survey from 2013 onwards.

Based on feedback to the discussion paper of March 2011, the approach agreed for the 2013 survey was to:

- retain the scope and purpose of the survey. The core purpose of the survey is to collect information on employers' engagement and satisfaction with the VET system. The scope of the survey is all organisations in Australia with at least one employee.
- explore the feasibility of introducing an online completion option to the survey
- seek advice from the ABS on the survey sample design
- conduct a ten-minute interview with about 10 000 employers in which:
  - all employers will be asked a set of core questions of approximately five minutes in length on their engagement and satisfaction with the VET system
  - these employers will then be split into two groups and each asked a different set of questions, no more than five minutes in length (non-core questions), with the first group answering questions on their choice of provider, and the second providing detailed information on employee skill levels and employers' reasons for training.

Based on this approach, further work has been undertaken to determine the survey's final content and methodology. This involved:

- developing and testing the questionnaire with core and non-core data items
- developing and testing an online completion option
- seeking advice from the ABS on the sample design and the number of employers to be contacted to achieve the desired accuracy levels for seven key survey measures.

## Questionnaire

Using the list of data items proposed for the 2013 survey, a draft questionnaire was developed. Where possible, questions from previous iterations of the survey were retained (particularly for core items), with new questions only developed where needed.

The draft questionnaire was evaluated using cognitive testing to determine how well respondents' understood the questions and whether they could provide meaningful answers. In June 2012, cognitive interviews were held with 23 employers, 12 using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) and 11 using the online version of the questionnaire. Both questionnaires performed well. Respondents generally understood the questions, found the wording clear and the subject matter relevant to them and their organisations. As a result, very few changes were made to the questionnaire for the pilot test.

In August 2012, a pilot test with 502 employers was conducted to further test the questionnaire and mode of interview (CATI and online) and to estimate the average time taken to complete the survey.



A total of 340 employers completed the survey by CATI, while 162 used the online version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire performed well in the pilot test and again only minor changes were made to the final questionnaire. The changes included the removal of two questions due to the poor quality of information collected and the time taken to answer the questions. The first asked employers if they agreed with a number of statements about the national VET system, while the second asked employers who had engaged with the VET system what skills and capabilities should have been included in the training and their satisfaction with their employees' acquisition of those skills. Neither question was given a high priority by users.

The final list of data items for the 2013 survey are shown in tables 1, 2 and 3. The list of data items from the 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013 surveys are provided in table 4.

**Table 1 Final list of core data items in the 2013 survey**

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<b>Organisation characteristics</b>
Industry (ANZSIC 06)
State of operation
Total number of employees
Whether organisation is a registered training organisation (RTO)
If RTO, whether training mainly to own employees or service to other organisations/individuals
Whether informal training offered in last 12 months
<b>Training strategy</b>
Whether organisation experienced any difficulties recruiting staff in past 12 months
<b>Vocational qualifications as a job requirement</b>
Whether organisation ever had jobs that require vocational qualifications
Percentage of employees who had jobs requiring vocational qualifications
Level of satisfaction with vocational qualifications in providing employees with skills required for job
<b>Apprenticeships/traineeships</b>
Whether organisation ever had employees undertaking apprenticeships/traineeships in last 12 months
Percentage of employees who were apprentices or trainees
Level of satisfaction with training providing apprentices/trainees with required skills
<b>Nationally recognised training</b>
Whether organisation ever arranged or provided for employees to undertake nationally recognised training in last 12 months
Percentage of employees provided with nationally recognised training
Level of satisfaction with nationally recognised training in providing employees with required skills
Unaccredited training
Whether organisation ever arranged or provided for employees to undertake unaccredited training in last 12 months
Percentage of employees provided with unaccredited training
Level of satisfaction with unaccredited training in providing employees with required skills

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ANZSIC = Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification.

**Table 2 Final list of non-core data items in the 2013 survey relating to choice of training provider (non-core A)**

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**Apprenticeships/traineeships**

Types of organisations used to conduct formal training for apprentices/trainees

Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of formal training for apprentices/trainees

Reasons for using main type of training provider

Satisfaction with main type of training provider (relevance of skills, equipment and facilities, cost, flexibility, trainers, assessment)

**Nationally recognised training**

Types of organisations used to conduct nationally recognised training

Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of nationally recognised training

Reasons for using main type of training provider

Satisfaction with main type of training provider (relevance of skills, equipment and facilities, cost, flexibility, trainers, assessment)

**Unaccredited training**

Types of organisations used to conduct unaccredited training

Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of unaccredited training

Reasons for using main type of training provider

Satisfaction with main type of training provider (relevance of skills, equipment and facilities, cost, flexibility, trainers, assessment)

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**Table 3 Final list of non-core data items in the 2013 survey relating to employee skill levels and employers' reasons for training (non-core B)**

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**Training strategy**

Rating of employee proficiency levels

Reasons employees not fully proficient at their job

Whether there is an impact on the organisation if employees not fully proficient at their job

If employees not fully proficient at job, effect on business

If employees not fully proficient at job, what things has organisation done to cope

Reasons for recruitment difficulties

**Vocational qualifications as a job requirement**

Reasons organisation has specific jobs that require vocational qualifications in last 12 months

Reasons for dissatisfaction with vocational qualifications in providing employees with skills required for job (if dissatisfied)

**Apprenticeships/traineeships**

Reasons organisation has had apprentices/trainees in last 12 months

Reasons for dissatisfaction with training providing apprentices/trainees with required skills

**Nationally recognised training**

Reasons organisation arranged for employees to undertake nationally recognised training in last 12 months

Whether majority of training was for full qualification or specific subjects/modules

Reasons for dissatisfaction with nationally recognised training in providing employees with required skills

**Unaccredited training**

Reasons organisation arranged for employees to undertake unaccredited training in last 12 months

Whether comparable nationally recognised training available when choosing unaccredited training

Reasons for providing unaccredited training to employees over nationally recognised training

Reasons for dissatisfaction with unaccredited training in providing employees with required skills

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**Table 4 List of data items available from the 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 surveys and to be included in the 2013 survey**

Data item	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013		
					Core	Non-core A	Non-core B
<b>Organisation characteristics</b>							
Industry (ANZSIC 93)	✓	✓	✓				
Industry (ANZSIC 06)		✓	✓	✓	✓		
State of operation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Sector	✓	✓	✓				
Total number of employees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Number of permanent employees	✓	✓	✓				
Number of full-time employees	✓	✓	✓				
Occupational distribution of organisation	✓	✓					
Whether organisation is a registered training organisation (RTO)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
If RTO, whether mainly provide training to own employees or to other organisations	✓	✓	✓		✓		
<b>Training strategy</b>							
Whether organisation has business plan	✓						
Staff training part of business plan	✓						
Importance of training to overall business strategy	✓						
Ways organisation currently determines training needs of staff	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Rating of current skill level of employees relative to needs of the organisation	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Whether organisation experienced any difficulties recruiting staff in past 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons for recruitment difficulties	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Occupations of recruitment difficulties		✓					
What has organisation done to address these difficulties	✓	✓	✓				
<b>Informal training</b>							
Organisation done any of following in last 12 months:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
▪ supervisors provided informal training as required							
▪ provided/arranged for relevant training for new technology/equipment							
▪ provided training manuals or software for self-directed study							
▪ contributed to cost of university study							
▪ contributed to cost of VET study							

Data item	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013		
					Core	Non-core A	Non-core B
<b>Vocational qualifications as a job requirement</b>							
Whether organisation ever had jobs that require vocational qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons organisation (does not have/no longer has) specific jobs that require vocational qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Percentage of employees in organisation that had jobs requiring vocational qualifications in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Whether jobs require full or part qualification		✓	✓	✓			
Occupations of employees that had jobs requiring vocational qualifications in last 12 months	✓	✓					
Reasons organisation has specific jobs that require vocational qualifications in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Importance of employing people with vocational qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Level of satisfaction with vocational qualifications in providing employees with skills required for job	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons for dissatisfaction	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Suggestions for improvements	✓						
<b>Apprenticeships/traineeships</b>							
Whether organisation ever had employees undertaking apprenticeships/traineeships in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons organisation does not have apprentices/trainees	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Whether know where to look for information about recruiting apprentice/trainee		✓	✓				
Percentage of apprentices/trainees who undertook formal training in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Expect number of apprentices/trainees to increase, stay the same, decrease in next three years		✓	✓				
Whether number of apprentices/trainees increased, stayed the same, decreased in last 12 months				✓			
Expect number of apprentices/trainees to increase, stay the same, decrease in next 12 months				✓			
Occupations of apprentices/trainees in last 12 months	✓	✓					
Reasons organisation has had apprentices/trainees in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Method of hiring apprentices/trainees	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Reasons for using a group training organisation to hire apprentices/trainees	✓	✓	✓				
Types of organisations used to conduct formal training for apprentices/trainees	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of formal training for apprentices/trainees	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Reasons for using main type of training provider	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Level of satisfaction with the quality of training from main training provider	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Importance of apprenticeships/traineeships in meeting skill needs	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Level of satisfaction with apprenticeships/traineeships in meeting skill needs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Data item	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013		
					Core	Non-core A	Non-core B
Reasons for dissatisfaction	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Suggestions for improvements	✓						
<b>Nationally recognised training</b>							
Whether organisation ever arranged or provided for employees to undertake nationally recognised training in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons organisation does not have employees who have undertaken nationally recognised training	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Whether know where to look for information about nationally recognised training		✓	✓				
Percentage of employees provided with nationally recognised training in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Whether nationally recognised training was for full qualification or for specific subjects/modules		✓	✓				✓
If both, was the majority for a full qualification or for specific subjects/modules		✓	✓	✓			
Expect amount of nationally recognised training to increase, stay the same, decrease in next three years		✓	✓				
Whether amount of nationally recognised training increased, stayed the same, decreased in last 12 months				✓			
Expect amount of nationally recognised training to increase, stay the same, decrease in next 12 months				✓			
Occupations of employees provided with nationally recognised training in last 12 months	✓	✓					
Reasons organisation arranged for employees to undertake nationally recognised training	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Who conducted MAJORITY of nationally recognised training (external provider or internally)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Types of organisations used to conduct nationally recognised training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of nationally recognised training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Reasons for using main type of training provider	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Level of satisfaction with the quality of training from main training provider	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Importance of training leading to a nationally recognised qualification	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Level of satisfaction with nationally recognised training in providing employees with required skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons for dissatisfaction	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Suggestions for improvements	✓						
<b>Unaccredited training</b>							
Whether organisation ever arranged or provided for employees to undertake unaccredited training in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Percentage of employees provided with unaccredited training in last 12 months	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Expect amount of unaccredited training to increase, stay the same, decrease in next three years		✓	✓				
Whether amount of unaccredited training increased, stayed the same, decreased in last 12 months				✓			

Data item	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013		
					Core	Non-core A	Non-core B
Expect amount of unaccredited training to increase, stay the same, decrease in next 12 months				✓			
Occupations of employees provided with unaccredited training in last 12 months	✓	✓					
Reasons organisation arranged for employees to undertake unaccredited training	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Who conducted MAJORITY of unaccredited training (external provider or internally)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Types of organisations used to conduct unaccredited training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Types of organisations used to conduct MAJORITY of unaccredited training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Reasons for using main type of training provider	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Level of satisfaction with the quality of training from main training provider	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Whether comparable nationally recognised training available when choosing unaccredited training	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Reasons for choosing unaccredited training over nationally recognised training	✓	✓	✓				✓
Level of satisfaction with unaccredited training in providing employees with required skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Reasons for dissatisfaction	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
<b>Overall improvements to the VET system</b>							
Suggestions for improvements to the VET system		✓	✓				

## Mode of interview

The main aims of the pilot test were to determine whether:

- the telephone questionnaire could be successfully modified to become an online questionnaire
- whether responses differed between the telephone and online questionnaires.

Although the online version generally performed well, the pilot test showed that the online and telephone questionnaires elicited different responses to the satisfaction questions, with online participants tending to report lower satisfaction ratings than telephone respondents. The pilot test also found that some respondents were electing to use the online option as a way of politely refusing to complete the telephone survey, with no intention of actually completing it. Given these findings, the online completion option will not be used for the 2013 survey.

## Sample design

The ability to measure change over time, particularly at the state and territory levels, prompted a review of the sample design. The ABS was engaged to examine the survey sample design and provide advice on the number of interviews required to improve the accuracy of the core data items on employer use and satisfaction with VET for the 2013 survey.

Using data from previous iterations of the survey, the ABS designed the sample to achieve the accuracy levels shown in table 5 for seven key survey indicators (table 6). The ABS advised that these levels of accuracy could be achieved for the 2013 survey by interviewing approximately 9050 employers (rather than the 10 000 employers originally proposed in the second paper outlining the approach for future iterations of the survey). The distribution of the sample by state, industry and employer size is shown in table 7.

**Table 5 Desired accuracy levels of key indicators from the 2013 survey**

Level	Desired standard errors (SEs) on estimates of proportions
Australia	0.01
State	0.025
Industry (ANZSIC 06)	0.05
Employer size group	0.015

**Table 6 Key survey indicators used in the design of the 2011 and 2013 samples**

Key survey indicator
Engagement with vocational education and training system
Engagement with formal vocational qualifications
Engagement with apprenticeships/traineeships
Engagement with nationally recognised training
Satisfaction with formal vocational qualifications
Satisfaction with apprenticeships/traineeships
Satisfaction with nationally recognised training

In the 2013 survey, as for the 2011 survey, employers will be selected according to the location of their head office and randomly selected and stratified by:

- state (each of the eight states and territories)
- industry (19 ANZSIC 2006 divisions)
- employer size (small = 1–9 employees, medium = 10–99 employees, large = 100 or more employees).

**Table 7 Sample size for the 2013 survey by state, industry and employer size group**

Level		Sample size	
Australia		9 050	
State	1	New South Wales	2 086
	2	Victoria	1 504
	3	Queensland	1 402
	4	South Australia	908
	5	Western Australia	994
	6	Tasmania	701
	7	Northern Territory	587
	8	Australian Capital Territory	868
Industry	01	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	738
	02	Mining	200
	03	Manufacturing	487
	04	Electricity, gas, water and waste services	208
	05	Construction	1 057
	06	Wholesale trade	468
	07	Retail trade	557
	08	Accommodation and food services	540
	09	Transport, postal and warehousing	573
	10	Information media and telecommunications	496
	11	Financial and insurance services	471
	12	Rental, hiring and real estate services	337
	13	Professional, scientific and technical services	770
	14	Administrative and support services	340
	15	Public administration and safety	215
	16	Education and training	288
	17	Health care and social assistance	474
	18	Arts and recreation services	244
	19	Other services	587
Employer size group	1	1–9 employees	5 680
	2	10–99 employees	2 127
	3	100 or more employees	1 243



# Conclusion

There are two key areas of focus for the Survey of Employer Use and Views for 2013. They are to:

- maintain and improve performance reporting against key measures
- improve understanding of employers' training decisions.

These priorities have driven some changes to the survey's content and design.

We have introduced new question modules on choice of training provider, employee skill levels and employers' reasons for training into the 2013 survey. These new modules have been designed to capture information relating to the drivers of training choice – a key stakeholder requirement identified during recent consultations.

Key questions from previous survey iterations have been retained to enable performance reporting over time, with improvement made to the accuracy of engagement and satisfaction measures across key reporting segments (state, industry and employer size). The improved sample design means more reliable and useable data from the survey – another area of importance to stakeholders.

Introducing an online response option remains a priority for further survey iterations, dependent on future testing and an increased appetite amongst employers to use this format to complete the survey.



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