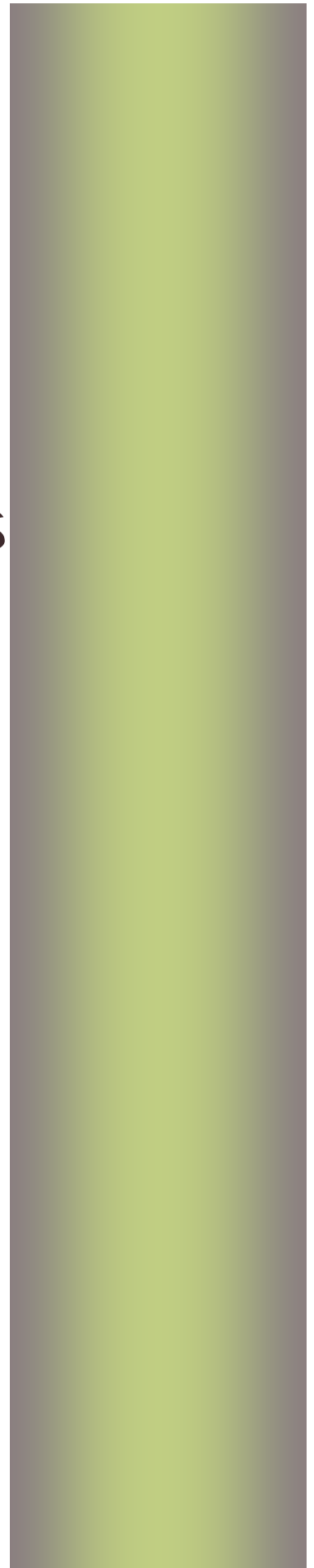


A Unique Student Identifier for Australia's Vocational Education and Training System

**A Consultation Paper about
introduction of a USI in VET**

VET National Data Strategy Action Group

July 2010



Executive Summary

The Ministerial Council for Tertiary Educational and Employment (MCTEE) at its meeting of 28th April 2010 agreed to a public consultation process in furthering the business case for a Unique Student Identifier (USI) for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia.

This document is a public consultation paper approved by MCTEE on 9th June 2010.

Information for respondents can be found at the end of this paper.

Recent National Policy Decision

On 7 December 2009 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) gave in principle support for the introduction of a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Unique Student Identifier (USI):

COAG Communiqué - 7 December 2009

Unique Student Identifier (USI):

Improving data collections for all education sectors is of critical importance to Australia. A national student identifier could track students as they progress through education and training and would further support a seamless schooling, VET and higher education experience for students. It would also provide valuable data to facilitate a VET system that is more responsive and flexible.

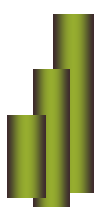
COAG gave its in-principle support for the introduction, from 2012, of a national unique student identifier for the VET sector that is capable of being fully integrated with the entire education system, and could involve early childhood education. COAG agreed that the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) will develop a business case for the introduction of a national unique student identifier and report back at its first meeting in 2010.

Potential Benefits of Adopting a Unique Student Identifier (USI) for VET

A USI is a tool and enabler, not an end in itself. A USI for VET has the following potential benefits:

- greater capacity for individuals to manage their learning and skills development, gain credit for their existing learning, obtain transcripts of their education and training qualifications or achievements, and identify learning options
- improving the capacity of providers to verify learners' existing achievements, give informed information and advice, give assistance and counselling where required, and meet the national archiving requirements
- enhancing the decision-making capacity of policy makers through greater understanding of skills formation in the working age population, of pathways and trends, and more complete and accurate management information and statistics
- facilitating the introduction and management of entitlement funding models.

In addition, a USI is seen as a foundation element to improving transparency of the VET systems, not simply for individuals, but also for VET system performance. A USI would allow better tracking of COAG outcomes as they are currently expressed.



Scope of Application of a USI

The Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment at its meeting of 28th April agreed, in principle, the minimum scope of application for a USI as it applies to the VET sector. It was agreed that in order to maximise the benefits of a USI and establish a credible long term cost/ benefit, this minimum scope should include that:

- it is of national scope and application and covers the operation of all RTOs
- it applies at all AQF levels,
- it encompasses public and private RTOs regardless of whether a provider or its students are publicly or privately funded,
- it applies to international students enrolled in any AQF qualification with an Australian training provider whether onshore or off-shore,
- it applies across all accredited programs

This scope requires that there must be clear and definable benefits for the clients that fall within its scope (students, education and training providers, researchers and policy makers and funding administrators).

Public Interest and Sensitivities Associated with Introducing a USI

Any introduction of a USI will raise public interest. These issues may include:

- matters of protection of individual privacy
- levels of information, use and its security
- balancing system transparency with business commercial-in-confidence interests
- business 'burden' in its implementation and maintenance costs
- costs to all governments, noting that different jurisdictions have already committed some investments in this area.

It is for these reasons that wider consultation is an essential process in informing a future business case.

Coordination Required If a USI Covers All Education and Training Sectors

COAG's direction of November 2009 was to establish a national USI for the VET sector that is capable of being fully integrated with the entire education system.

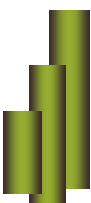
This requires a further dimension in complexity in ensuring any solution in VET can be more widely applied to achieve overall system integration with other sectors.

Costs in Establishing a USI and Evaluating Potential Benefits

There are expected to be (a) costs to establish and maintain a USI including costs of ongoing safeguards and verification of any national system, and (b) costs in developing the tools and services that then are enabled by its existence.

Any business case needs to explore, in depth, whether or not potential benefits can be realised and over what time frame.

Costs will potentially impact on training providers and consequently on consumers.



Background

The generally discrete nature of the Australian education system and its sectors, both within or across jurisdictions, has meant that any one individual is typically allocated multiple student identifiers throughout their learning journey. This journey may span early childhood, schooling, vocational, higher and also adult education sectors.

Whilst a student identifier may be effectively used at a single provider level to track students, the lack of a portable, national, system wide and 'unique to individual' identifier has long been highlighted as a major limitation in being able to understand, analyse, plan for and optimally fund the complex and interrelated national education and training systems that support individuals in their life long learning. The need for a unique student identifier is further heightened by greater family/learner mobility and policies that increasingly emphasise demand driven funding environments.

On 7 December 2009 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) gave in principle support for the introduction of a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Unique Student Identifier (USI):

COAG Communiqué – 7 December 2009

Unique Student Identifier (USI):

Improving data collections for all education sectors is of critical importance to Australia. A national student identifier could track students as they progress through education and training and would further support a seamless schooling, VET and higher education experience for students. It would also provide valuable data to facilitate a VET system that is more responsive and flexible.

COAG gave its in-principle support for the introduction, from 2012, of a national unique student identifier for the VET sector that is capable of being fully integrated with the entire education system, and could involve early childhood education. COAG agreed that the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) will develop a business case for the introduction of a national unique student identifier and report back at its first meeting in 2010.

The introduction of a USI across VET is one of a suite of initiatives being progressed through the National VET Data Strategy (NDS). There are eight inter-related projects under the NDS that, if collectively and successfully implemented, will massively improve the collection, compilation, analysis and use of data across the national VET system (Appendix 1).

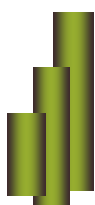
Such gains will be even greater if a USI in VET is capable, as required by COAG, of being integrated with all parts of the national education and training system.

The Baird Report¹ has recently recommended that a USI also be extended to international students.

A USI is seen as a foundation element to improving transparency in the VET system by:

- Monitoring VET system performance

¹ Review of Education Services for Overseas Students (Australian Gov. March 2010) – See Recommendation 12 b.



- Tracking of COAG outcomes
- Improving access to student records across institutions and states

Any introduction of a USI would also closely coincide with the new national regulatory environment given the establishment of the National VET Regulator and National Standards Council agreed by COAG, and the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) regulating higher education (in the first instance), with these regulators scheduled for start from 1st Jan 2011.

Purpose of this Consultation Paper

COAG has directed the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) to develop this business case. This project is the responsibility of the National VET Data Strategy Action Group working to the Data and Performance Measurement Principal Committee reporting to MCTEE.

This public USI Consultation Paper seeks to gain input and views from all relevant stakeholders to inform optimal implementation of the COAG decision to introduce, from 2012, a national USI for the VET sector.

Rationale for a Unique Student Identifier

The COAG decision to implement a USI is premised by the definable benefits for students, education and training providers, researchers and policy makers and funding administrators. The potential benefits are explored below:

VET Students

The establishment of a USI will improve the capability of students to access their academic achievement information and empower them to use that information to advance in further training, skills recognition and employment opportunities.

- This expectation will potentially be met through parallel development of 'e-portfolio' products that are anticipated to be created in tandem with the development of the national VET Data Portal Project (Appendix 1). E-portfolios are successfully used to foster skills development and lifelong learning, support workers facing redundancy, track continuing professional development and support articulation of training opportunities.
- It is recognised that developments of this type undertaken in the past have faltered on access control issues, privacy and verifiability of information held on the individual. However, the introduction of an Australia-wide USI for VET students becomes the 'enabler' for 'e-portfolio applications'.

These products and services would fall under the general categories of:

National Qualification Register

A qualifications register provides a central repository for the permanent storage of student achievements. Such a register exists in some States.

Under the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) learners' records should be archived and retrievable for a period of at least 30 years.

RTOs have archiving systems but few, apart from large public sector institutions, could guarantee that their records would be retrievable in that time period. In addition, there is a



widely held view among RTOs that the 30 year requirement is unrealistic in terms of business life cycles.

VET students would benefit from a national qualification register that can provide protection if they need to verify their achievements after a VET provider has gone out of business.

There is currently variable protection of students records if an RTO suddenly closes. Qualifications registers address this uncertainty.

No national qualification register currently exists in Australia.

Qualifications Register- Safeguarding Achievements.

In 2009, Western Australia followed South Australia's and New Zealand's lead in mandating its own VET Client Qualifications Register (CQR). The register allows the training recognition council (TAC) to keep a permanent record of student achievements for the various requirements of students and employers. It also provides a mechanism for RTO's to store their student records without associated storage costs. To make it work, the CQR requires the data fields relating to local student identifiers, basic demographics for confirmation and qualification details. RTO's lodge their data through the local 'data portal' – RTONet.

Under normal circumstances when education providers are the issuing authority for testamurs, there is cost and inconvenience to access records. This is made worse if training has been conducted by several training organisations over a period of time. It is estimated that 30% of students that have participated in the publicly funded VET system have undertaken training with multiple providers.

Provider participation in an effective national qualification register would assist in improving confidence in Australia's VET system. This confidence building may become particularly crucial in terms of recruiting overseas students.

Skills Builder type products

These products offer students better support to help them build on the skills and qualifications that they acquire through various training programs. These products are also called Skills Bank, and Skills Passport.

Students often complete parts of qualifications of which they are not aware. In addition, students are often not fully aware of the potential to undertake further training to complete a full, higher level qualification. Many are also unable to describe their education and training experience in a way that is meaningful for employers.

In tandem, with the Qualifications Register, web based strategies can enable students and graduates to access records of attainment and other evidence of skills and work experience.

The concept could be expanded to provide information to the user on 'additional' training or education required to complete qualifications.

This concept empowers individuals, helping them negotiate with training and education providers regarding gap training requirements and RPL possibilities.



There are a few working examples of this type of approach across the VET system. A number are in a fledgling stage and many are embedded in public provider databases. These working

E-portfolios – Way to Go.

International and domestic evidence demonstrates the value of such electronic portfolios ('e-portfolios') to empower students to manage learning as they move between and beyond formal education and training institutions. One precedent for the full-service approach is found in the facilities available to individuals and providers from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), made possible by that country's national student identifier.

In Great Britain, a survey evaluation of the use of an electronic 'Skills Account' is pointing to a bright future for the product. Almost all respondents thought that the 'Skills Account' was a good idea with almost 80% believing that the product will encourage them to undertake future learning. Adult learners, in particular, perceived the main benefits as better and more regular support and advice regarding progression to higher level courses.

In Australia, it is mooted that such a web based 'skills builder' tool could conceivably address the issue of disadvantaged jobseekers churning through Certificate I/II level courses or completing parts of higher qualifications, particularly when these courses are undertaken through different training organisations. This application would empower individuals to explore their education and work options, including whether their current skills can be aggregated to a higher level qualification of greater value in the job market or assessing the extra study required to complete a qualification, or to move occupations. Jobseekers would presumably use this collated information about their skills, experience and formal education

examples demonstrate improved recognition of skills, increased take-up of skilling opportunities and reduced duplication of training.

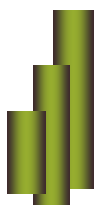
Summary of Benefits for VET Students

The USI will potentially provide greater capacity for individuals to manage their learning and skills development, obtain learning records, gain credit for prior learning, and identify future options.

Providers

Providers will potentially benefit from participation in a USI and a national qualifications register because:

1. A USI will enable RTOs the opportunity to take the quality of their service to another level. They will have improved capacity to verify learners' existing achievements, give informed information and advice and give assistance and counselling if required. This level of service encourages customer loyalty and builds brand. It is good for business.
2. The initiatives also serve as major selling points for the attraction of students. The use of e-portfolio type products, facilitated by a USI, presents an important marketing tool for providers. It potentially encourages up to an estimated 4 million Australians who have trained in the publicly funded VET system over the last 10 years and not received a qualification to re-enter the training market.
3. They provide a cost-effective way of meeting the archiving requirements of the AQTF.
4. Providers could assure students that their training records would be secure and accessible in the advent of closure of their business and that they could effectively participate in programs and gain the benefits that are facilitated by e-portfolio type products.



Summary of Benefits for Providers

Involvement in a USI will improve the capacity of providers to verify learners' existing achievements, give informed information and advice, give assistance and counselling where required, and provide an avenue to meet the archiving requirements.

VET Researchers and Policy Makers

To this group the USI provides an efficient means of obtaining information about recognised education and training activity and to provide a clearer picture of VET client behaviour. For example, implementation of the USI could help determine the quantum (and movements in the quantum) of total VET training activity in terms of skills levels and occupational areas.

Also, pathways taken by students into, across and out of the VET system which tend to be non-sequential will also be more apparent.

For system managers, it provides an efficient means of obtaining information about total recognised education and training activity.

For State Training Authorities it has the potential to simplify and make more timely the national VET data collection.

From this greater understanding of the VET market both funding and regulatory decisions may be more appropriately applied, generating efficiencies in the both the public and private training systems.

Summary of Benefits for VET Researchers and Policy Makers

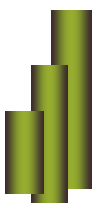
A USI provides the opportunity for enhancing the decision-making capacity of policy makers through greater understanding of skills formation in the working age population, of trends regarding the provision of training, and more complete and accurate management information and statistics facilitating the introduction and management of entitlement funding models.

VET Funding Administrators

Another aspect of USI policy involves the management of student 'entitlements' where the government subsidy for training is limited to an amount of training products that can be accessed by the student. Increasingly within Australia funding will be based on a student entitlement (eg the Youth Compact agreed by COAG).

For funders, effective management reduces 'double dipping' by students and improves equity of resource allocation.

1. Do you agree that these are the major potential benefits that would be enabled by the introduction of a USI in VET?
2. What other potential benefits may arise from, or be enabled by, introduction of a USI?
3. Are there other countries and other industry sectors (eg health) that have pursued USI – type initiatives of this kind that may be informative?
4. What benefits have accrued, and what lessons have been learned from such examples?



Implementation of a VET USI

COAG's direction is to establish a national USI for the VET sector that is capable of being fully integrated with the entire education system, potentially also covering early childhood education.

This provides a further dimension in complexity in ensuring any solution in VET can be more widely applied (indeed any solution applied in VET may be better sourced from current practices in other sectors).

The business case for any USI will have to be based around credible cost benefit evidence. Costs will include establishment, maintenance and ongoing safeguards and verification of any system. These costs will potentially impact on providers and consequently on consumers.

Scope of Application of a VET Unique Student Identifier

The Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment at its meeting of 28th April 2010 agreed, in principle, the minimum scope of application for a USI as it applies to the VET sector². It was agreed that in order to maximise the benefits of a USI and establish a credible long term cost/ benefit, this minimum scope should include that:

- it is of national scope and application and covers operation of all RTOs
- it applies at all AQF levels,
- it encompasses public and private RTOs regardless of whether a provider or their students are publicly or privately funded,
- it applies to international students enrolled in any AQF qualification with an Australian training provider whether onshore or off-shore,
- it applies across all accredited programs

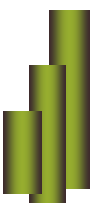
This scope requires that there must be clear and definable benefits for the clients that fall within its scope (students, education and training providers, researchers and policy makers and funding administrators).

At a minimum, the scope of application of any USI in VET should be all activity that is under the AQTF or formally articulates with this. Learning that is not under the AQTF is difficult to define without ambiguity and is not within scope of the USI.

The VET USI should also cover both public and private VET. If a USI is extended to the broader education and training system the equivalent scope would have to be similarly defined, that is, the USI should apply to all education and training programs that are formally recognised.

A requirement to obtain a USI for all learners will need to be mandated in the AQTF standards for RTOs. Currently many non-TAFE providers fall outside the scope of the USI type arrangements presently implemented by states. While a VET USI system could commence in 2012, it may be several years before all VET sector activities are covered.

² A potential consequence is revision of AQTF2010 Guidelines to accommodate a USI into the future.



5. Are there other principles that should be considered?
6. Should the minimum scope of application be less than that above, and why?
7. Must it cover non-accredited training, if so, how might this be practically included?

Implementation approaches with VET

Through preliminary consultations four key options for approaching the implementation of a Unique Student Identifier (USI) were identified and have been given preliminary consideration:

1. Statistical matching of data from different providers to identify learners enrolled in VET with different providers and/or over time.
2. A unique student identifier system within each state with a statistical approach applied at the national level to support research, information about learner pathways etc.
3. A unique student identifier system within each state with a national system that draws information from the eight state systems and assigns a single, national student identifier that is then fed back to states.
4. A single national system - taking precedence over any state system - that assigns a unique national student identifier to each person when they first enter the VET or education system.

A range of advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these options are presented in Appendix 2.

8. Which approach (ie Options 1-4 in Appendix 2) is better and why?
9. Is there an alternative approach that should be considered?

Implementation within VET and also across Sectors

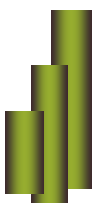
COAG's direction is to establish a national USI for the VET sector that is capable of being fully integrated with the entire education system, potentially even covering early childhood education.

This brings to consideration alternative implementation pathways, for example:

- a USI in schooling to build on the new student identifiers for National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) that are introduced at Year 3 in schools; or
- Alternately a new USI could be integrated with the Commonwealth Higher Education Students Support Number (CHESSN). This uniquely identifies students and remains constant from year to year and is designed to manage and monitor Commonwealth assistance entitlement for students under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

A particular boundary area that needs to be considered is students undertaking VET in school.

If a USI is extended to the broader education and training system it would apply across all education and training programs that are formally recognised and delivered by accredited providers, such as schools, universities and special education centres. For the early childhood education sector the appropriate scope is all registered early childhood education



centres and the children who attend these (a distinction between child care and early childhood education may need to be made).

A preliminary map of the impact of a USI on the VET sector alone and then extended to all education and training sectors is provided in Appendix 3.

These examples show that alternate models need to be considered to ensure the outcomes are capable of being integrated with schools and higher education.

10. What are the opportunities for establishing a USI for VET which build off the identification systems existing, or being developed, in schools (NAPLAN) and higher education (CHESSN) systems? Are there others?

What information should be collected and stored?

As a minimum, any state or national database established for a USI needs to record sufficient information to identify individuals without ambiguity. Additional information to support accurate matching is desirable provided that it does not compromise privacy and confidentiality.

Realising all the potential benefits of a USI will require collection of (or access to) additional information. For example, for students to develop 'skills builder' type products they will need access to information such as course and subject completions, the education or training provider where these were achieved, and apprenticeship and traineeship completions.

11. What student information should be collected and stored and for what purpose/benefit?

12. Is it possible and practical to define a nationally agreed and mandated USI data set that specifies and also restricts access to data sets?

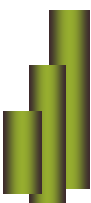
Individual privacy and provider confidentiality concerns

Addressing issues of privacy and confidentiality will be a very major factor in the successful design and implementation of a USI for VET. Victoria and New Zealand have highlighted the importance of ensuring that USI privacy requirements are understood and addressed in all phases from planning to implementation.

A key issue arises because of the need to transfer personal information to and from a central agency in order to manage the system. Confidentiality and privacy issues will need to be addressed through: strong assurances and commitment to accepted privacy principles (such as the Unified Privacy Principles), and; governance arrangements that ensure these are followed. These matters can be expected to be subject of detailed legal advice.

Key elements of a privacy and confidentiality policy for a USI might include:

- An unambiguous statement of commitment to accepted privacy and confidentiality principles
- Protocols that cover the allowed collection, use and release of client information
- Use of 'banking-standard' encryption when potentially identifying information is transferred



- An independent national agency to run the system acceptably secure and independent to both individuals and providers
- Governance arrangements that ensure that privacy principles are being followed
- A USI communications strategy to promote public confidence and awareness.

13. Are these elements correct, and what additional privacy and confidentiality policy issues should be considered?

14. How might such issues/concerns be addressed, and are there other relevant best practice examples that can be considered and adopted?

Governance Arrangements

Preliminary consultation indicates that for a USI to be acceptable to all stakeholders it will need to be managed within a governance arrangement that provides clear separation from government education and training providers.

Without this separation, not all sectors may wish to be involved due to potential concerns with commercial-in-confidence data being insufficiently safeguarded.

At the national level, a representative governance group is needed to develop and manage data standards, procedures, protocols and operation of the national USI facility. Consistency with ABS data standards and collections will also be needed.

It is noted that some jurisdictions have a 'board of studies' which is not involved in operational government education and training and has established relationships with the government and non-government school sectors, with tertiary admissions centres, and in some cases with VET providers because of the VET in Schools program. Such entities might be an alternative hub for a USI in states, but this would need to be carefully evaluated.

Implementing a state and national USI will also require effective linkages with other arrangements, including the AQTF standards for RTOs, the national VET data collections managed by NCVER, the state and national apprenticeship and traineeship data management systems, and the data collections managed by Australian Government departments for specific programs.

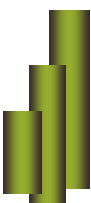
The possible impacts of USI options are captured in Appendix 4, viewed from the standpoint of major stakeholders.

15. What might be the most appropriate governance arrangements in establishing a national operational USI for VET? What might be system specifications to support issuing of a USI; any data assembly, compilation, verification; and security of access to de-personalised data?

16. Are there additional governance issues that need to be considered?

Costs

A comprehensive cost estimate of the implementation of a USI for VET is yet to be undertaken. However, valuable experience from other jurisdictions is currently being evaluated. New Zealand has introduced a similar system and some states in Australia have introduced components. There is also work progressing across the health sector to track individuals via unique identifiers.



A full business case evaluating a USI in VET will need to evaluate establishment and ongoing maintenance costs and which of these costs will likely be borne by the training providers. As a consequence, a full business case will need to evaluate how much of these costs are likely to be passed on to consumers.

17. What major cost elements need to be detailed in any business case?
18. Are there any priorities in considering the potential benefits enabled when constructing a benefit/cost business case?
19. Are there models or examples of USI-like systems introduced elsewhere that would be informative to study?

A Glossary of Terms is found at Appendix 5

20. Do you have any other responses to this paper?

Information for Respondents

Written submissions from all interested stakeholders are invited in response to this Consultation.

Responses will be used to further develop the business case as directed by COAG and required by MCTEE.

Respondents may wish to address either all or specific questions posed within the paper and are welcome to make additional comments.

Extracts of submissions may be made publicly available in the final business case provided to COAG, *unless a specific request is made that the submission be treated confidentially.*

If a submission or extracts of a submission are to be kept confidential *please indicate this in writing.*

Submissions are due Close of Business **20th August 2010.**

Submissions can be sent in hard copy or electronically to:

National VET Data Strategy Action Group Secretariat

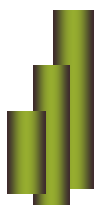
PO Box 8288,

Station Arcade, SA 5000.

Email: VDSAGsecretariat@ncver.edu.au

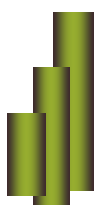
Key Dates

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 6th July 2010 | Discussion paper available on Training.com.au |
| 20th August 2010 | Responses due to Secretariat address as above |



Other National VET Data Strategy Projects Related to Unique Student Identifier

| Project | Aim | Examples of relationship to Unique Student Identifier project |
|---|---|--|
| Total VET Activity | Measure total publicly and privately funded training effort and training outcomes | Privately funded private provider training effort captured at the student level will permit broad scale application of the identifier across the VET sector |
| VET Data Portal | Development of an electronic 'one stop shop' that permits exchange of data and information among providers, students and training authorities | Has great potential to raise the visibility, and realise the benefits of the implementation, of the Unique Student Identifier. To optimise effectiveness for students, the 'portal' would permit access to student academic histories for students to access and identify individual skills gaps and appropriate skilling opportunities. |
| Protocols for data sharing | Improve access to the appropriate levels of VET data required by stakeholders through the broadening of existing data protocols | Establishment of data sharing protocols will be critical in the effective gaining of non publicly funded VET data |
| Data management practices and processes | In the national context, create better business practices and processes to improve transmission, timeliness and quality of VET data | USI data will have to be of an established standard, used to improve business practices and processes and be transmitted and validated among stakeholders in a timely manner. |
| Enhancing survey data | Gain best utility from existing VET employer and student survey practices and develop further effective surveys | USI will permit more effective targeting of client (student and employer) surveys |
| <i>Tracking Students</i> | <i>Application of a Unique Student Identifier to all VET students</i> | <i>Now expanded to links to other sectors as per COAG decision</i> |
| VET Finance data | Determine the role and purpose of the financial data and ensure the financial collection matches VET activity collections | Nil |
| VET In Schools data | Improve the timeliness and consistency in reporting of VET in Schools activity | VET USI would be applicable to this sector. |



Spectrum of approaches for implementing a national unique student identifier in VET

Approach 1: Statistical matching of data from different providers to identify learners enrolled in VET with different providers and/or over time

Advantages

Least intrusive option for providers and requires least administration for them.

Names can be encrypted to ensure that privacy of individuals is maintained.

The existing statistical agency for VET (NCVER) is well placed to do the work.

Does not clash with existing state-level student identification initiatives.

With appropriate data protocols and standards can be extended to other sectors relatively easily.

Disadvantages

Statistical matching procedures will always have some residual uncertainty.

Provides no information to help individuals manage their learning.

VET providers are likely to gain few benefits from the statistical approach.

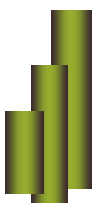
Requires very strong data standards and provider compliance with them.

Limitations of the statistical approach are likely to be greatest for disadvantaged groups (e.g. indigenous learners).

Further Notes

The statistical approach represents the minimalist option and only partially meets the various objectives of the COAG decision. It can provide valuable research information but offers little to help individuals and providers manage learning and skill development.

NCVER has already done work using this approach and proposes further work until such time as the unique student identifier approach agreed by COAG is implemented.



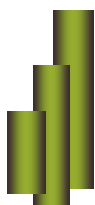
Approach 2: A unique student identifier system within each state with a statistical approach applied at the national level to support research, information about learner pathways etc.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|--|
| <p>Can provide information that helps individuals and providers manage their learning and learning programs.</p> <p>Does not clash with existing state-level student identification initiatives.</p> <p>Names can be encrypted to ensure that privacy of individuals is maintained at the national level.</p> <p>The existing statistical agency for VET (NCVER) is well placed to do the work at the national level.</p> <p>Can be extended relatively easily to all education and training sectors within each state.</p> | <p>Can do little to assist learners who move from one state to another.</p> <p>Providers operating in more than one state may have to deal with different state systems.</p> <p>Inefficiencies if jurisdictions build state specific student support systems.</p> <p>Non-TAFE providers that do not receive state funding may be reluctant to divulge information to a state agency.</p> |

Further Notes

Current state initiatives are at different stages and would need to be brought onto a common, agreed timeline, National data standards would need to be implemented within each state, and the scope would need to be agreed, particularly relating to non-AQTF activity and VET that is not government-funded in some way.

Potential impetus for development through partnering with the proposed ACARA/NAPLAN based USI process.



Approach 3: A unique student identifier system within each state with a national system that draws information from the eight state systems and assigns a single, national student identifier that is then fed back to states.

Advantages

Can provide information that helps individuals and providers manage their learning and learning programs (facilitates full range of benefits).
Ensures that learners who change state and providers operating in more than one state obtain the benefits. Does not clash with existing state-level student identification initiatives.
Providers that are unwilling to deal with a state agency could deal directly with the national body.
States that do not want to implement a state-level USI system could partner with another state or use the national system.

Disadvantages

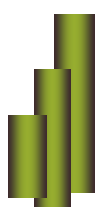
A new national agency would need to be established or the responsibilities of an existing agency extended.
Requires adequate levels of funding at both state and national level, particularly during the development phase.
Strong data standards and protocols would be needed to ensure accurate consolidation at the national level.
Extending the system to all education and training sectors is likely to be a complex task.
Ideally, the system should assign a USI when starting school, not with VET.

Further Notes

As for the previous approach above.

In essence, each state would implement a system that is similar or equivalent to the arrangements that have been operating in New Zealand for about 10 years and managed by the NZ Ministry of Education.

Leverages off existing systems and may just require simple additions to state USIs so as to be operable nationally. (Partnering with the proposed ACARA/NAPLAN based USI process?)



Approach 4: A single national system, taking precedence over any state systems, that assigns a unique national student identifier to each person when they first enter the VET or education system.

Advantages

Simplest from a 'systems' viewpoint.
Can provide information that helps individuals and providers manage their learning and learning programs.
Ensures that learners who change state and providers operating in more than one state obtain the benefits.
Avoids the problem of providers that are unwilling to deal with a state government agency.

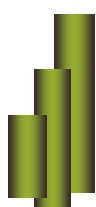
Disadvantages

Requires efficient, effective systems that allocate and transmit the USI and other information to providers and/or states.
Could undermine the resources and effort that a number of states have already invested in a USI system. Possible duplication of student services being provided in jurisdictions.
There may be political sensitivities associated with a top-down approach that compromise its effectiveness compared with a bottom-up approach.

Further Notes

Precedents for this national approach do exist (e.g. TYIMS for apprentices and trainees) but generally in situations where there is a strongly regulated or very specific learning activity.

The ACARA NAPLAN based process could be the place of issue of all VET USIs.



Appendix 3

Table 1 below shows the possible impact of scope of the USI options on various groups. In terms of learner numbers, a VET-only USI will be more limited in scope. However, its impact will extend to all RTOs in the public, private and industry/enterprise sectors, including dual-sector higher education institutions, and to all schools that run VET in Schools programs or have students doing VET that is approved as schooling for compulsory education purposes.

Table 1: Impact of the scope of the USI options on various groups and sectors

| <i>Scope of a USI ...</i> | <i>a VET-only USI</i> | <i>a USI covering all education and training</i> | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Learner group | VET sector (TAFE and other RTOs) | Government & non-gov't school sector | Public & private higher education (HE) sector |
| Children in early childhood centres | No effect | No effect until children start school | No effect |
| Reception to year 6/7 schools | No effect | Schools would need to get USI from ECECs | No effect |
| Compulsory education in secondary school | Need to get USI if VET program is approved as schooling | Schools would need to get primary-school USI | No effect |
| Post-compulsory upper-secondary, including VET in Schools (VETiS) | Need to get USI if the program is VETiS or VET is approved as schooling | Schools would need to get previous USI (could be a different school) | Minor (only a handful of upper-secondary students do HE subjects) |
| Apprentices & trainees (A&Ts) doing off-job training | Need to get USI | Need to get USI for school-based A&Ts | Dual-sector HE institutions need to get USI, otherwise no effect |
| Post-compulsory learners doing mainstream VET | Need to get USI | No effect unless a school is also an RTO | Dual-sector HE institutions need to get USI, otherwise no effect |
| Post-compulsory learners doing VET with an industry/enterprise RTO | RTO, including any auspicing RTO, needs to get USI | No effect | No effect unless AQTF auspicing provisions are used for assessment |
| Overseas students doing accredited programs (onshore or offshore) | Need to get USI | Need to get USI | Need to get USI for VET programs |
| Learners in special education or training centres | Need to get USI if centre is a RTO | Need to get USI if centre has the status of a school | No effect (HE institutions have little involvement with this group) |
| Learners doing specific-purpose Australian or state govt programs | Need to get USI | Need to get USI | Need to get USI for VET programs |
| Learners doing non-AQTF programs with ACE providers | USI not required for these programs unless the state directs this | Not applicable (few schools deliver ACE programs) | USI not required for these programs unless the state directs this |

Appendix 4

Table 2 indicates the potential impacts that the USI options are likely to have from the standpoint of major organisations.

Table 2: Impact of the USI options on organisations

| <i>Scope of a USI ...</i> | <i>a VET-only USI</i> | <i>a USI covering all education and training</i> | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Organisation(s) | VET sector (TAFE and other RTOs) | Government & non-gov't school sector | Public & private higher education (HE) sector |
| Dept of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations | Need USI for specific-purpose programs, overseas students etc. | Auditing of school statistics may need to be refined | DEEWR would have the major responsibility for USI implementation |
| Other Australian Govt departments funding learning programs | Need USI for any AQTF programs | USI would apply to all students, including those funded | USI would apply to all students, including those funded |
| Australian Govt Dept of Treasury, Finance, Prime Minister and Cabinet | Would need to agree to fund national startup and ongoing costs | Would need to agree to fund national startup and ongoing costs | Would need to agree to fund national startup and ongoing costs |
| State training authorities (STAs) | STAs would have major implementation and ongoing responsibilities | For VET in Schools | STAs would have major responsibilities for dual-sector HE institutions |
| Other state government departments funding learning programs | Need USI for any state-funded AQTF programs | USI would apply to all students, including those funded | USI would apply to all students, including those funded |
| State departments of premier and cabinet, treasury | Need to agree to funding arrangements for startup and ongoing costs | Need to agree to funding arrangements for startup and ongoing costs | Need to agree to funding arrangements for startup and ongoing costs |
| National and state departments covering privacy legislation etc. | Need to develop or approve facilitating legislation or regulations | Need to develop or approve facilitating legislation or regulations | Need to develop or approve facilitating legislation or regulations |
| TAFE and TAFE-teacher representative associations | All TAFE institutes would need to implement USI arrangements | TAFE not applicable | USI would apply to all, including those TAFEs in dual-sector institutions |
| ACPET members | All RTOs belonging to ACPET would be affected (arrangements must be simple, low-cost) | ACPET membership not applicable | Same impact as for a VET-only USI |
| Employer RTO Association (ERTO) members | All RTOs belonging to ERTOA would be affected | ERTOA membership not applicable | Not applicable |
| Organisations that represent a school sector | Affected if offer VETiS or students do recognised VET as part of schooling | USI would apply to all students | Not applicable |
| Organisations that represent higher education providers | Affected if HE institution is a dual-sector provider | Not applicable | USI would apply to all members' students |
| Special education or training providers or representative bodies | USI would apply to any programs under the AQTF | USI would apply to all students doing accredited programs | USI would apply to all students doing accredited programs |

Appendix 5

Glossary

| Word | Description |
|----------|--|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACACA | Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities |
| ACARA | Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority |
| ACE | Adult and Community Education |
| ACPET | Australian Council for Private Education and Training |
| AICTEC | Australian Information and Communication Technology in Education Committee |
| AQF | Australian Qualifications Framework |
| AQTF | Australian Quality Training Framework |
| AVETMISS | Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard |
| CHESN | Commonwealth Higher Education Students Support Number |
| COAG | Council of Australian Governments |
| CQR | Client Qualification Register |
| DEEWR | Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations |
| DFEEST | Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology |
| ECECs | Early Childhood Education Centres |
| ISAS | Institute Student Administration System |
| LUI | Learner Unique Identifier |
| MCTEE | Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment |
| NAPLAN | National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy |
| NARA | National Audit and Registration Authority |
| NASWD | National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development |
| NCVER | National Centre for Vocational Education Research |
| NDS | National Data Strategy |
| NEA | National Education Agreement |
| NIRA | National Indigenous Reform Agreement |
| NQC | National Quality Council |
| NSN | National Schools Network |
| NSOC | National Senior Officers Committee |
| NTSC | National Training Statistics Committee |
| NZQA | New Zealand Qualifications Authority |
| PDDG | Productivity Data Development Group |
| PRISMS | Provider Registration and International Students Management System |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| RTO | Registered Training Organisation |
| TAC | Training Accreditation Council |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| TYIMS | Training and Youth Internet Management System |
| USI | Unique Student Identifier |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |

