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VET

COAG targets closer than official count

by Jeremy Gilling

Two of the ambitious VET targets the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has set may be much closer to fulfilment than they realise. It all comes down to what is and isn't counted.

COAG has called for a halving of the proportion of Australians aged 20 to 64 years without qualifications at certificate III and above, and a doubling of the number of diploma and advanced diploma completions, between 2009 and 2020.

Now it turns out that a substantial proportion – perhaps as much as 20 per cent – of the VET qualifications issued at these levels may not be officially counted.

Every qualification issued under the Australian Qualifications Framework is, at least in theory, centrally recorded as a condition of RTO registration, but only publicly funded training is tallied.

Now a survey of enterprise registered training organisations indicates that they issued an

estimated 90,000 nationally recognised qualifications in 2008, and that “most of these are neither government funded nor captured as part of annual VET effort data, according to the Enterprise RTO Association (ERTO), which conducted the survey.

Official data from the NCVER shows the VET system issued 335,000 VET qualifications in 2007. If just half of these 90,000 qualifications aren't captured in the official figure, the true count would be nearly 15 per cent higher.

NCVER general manager, statistics, Sandra Pattison, agreed that the official training picture is incomplete.

“It's a data gap, but we're working on strategies to encourage them [private and enterprise RTOs] to provide this information,” she said. “The national agreement for skills and workforce development covers training generally – not just publicly funded training – so it's important that we plug this gap.”

ERTO executive officer Anthony Tyrrel said

he understood that DEEWR didn't release data on privately funded training because of privacy and commercial-in-confidence concerns, but a DEEWR spokesperson said discussions on broadening the scope of the collection to include information on privately funded training activities have commenced.

The ERTOA survey found that qualifications issued by enterprise RTOs are on average at lower levels than for the VET system as a whole – an estimated 45 per cent are at certificate I or II, compared to 31 per cent system-wide; 13 per cent are diplomas and advanced diplomas, compared to 15 per cent nationally.

The survey also found that over 60 per cent of enterprise RTOs accessed external funding, mainly trainee incentives and PPP funding, with 20 per cent saying they would let their RTO status lapse if external funds were no longer available.

The top three training packages used in enterprise RTOs were business services, transport and logistics, and public safety.