The Student Outcomes Survey – An Overview

Prepared by the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit
(http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning)

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1. Background

The Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) is a national survey of Vocational Education and Training (VET) students conducted after they complete their training. It collects information and perceptions on the student’s educational history, the course (program) they studied, and any employment before, during or after the course. Most information can be satisfactorily analysed at national, state and institutional levels.

The SOS is conducted in the year after the student completes their training. It has always included a sample of graduates and, since 1999, a sample of module completers. Generally, graduates and module completers are analysed separately, although comparisons can be made between the two.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) first conducted the survey in 1995 when it was known as the Graduate Destination Survey. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has managed it annually since 1997. There have been relatively few modifications over the years thus the majority of the information, at least from 1997 onwards, can be examined as time series.

2. Who is surveyed?

2.1 Graduates

Graduates are defined as students who attended a TAFE institution in Australia and who completed a Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Associate Diploma, Diploma, Advanced Diploma or a Bachelors degree and who had an Australian address as their usual address. The latter exclusion is particularly notable for RMIT given its relatively high number of overseas students. Up to, and including, the 1999 survey there was an additional requirement that the program must have had a duration of at least 200 hours or one semester. However this restriction was relaxed to simply exclude persons who undertook only recreational or hobby (short courses) from the 2000 survey onwards.

2.2 Module completers

Module completers are defined as students who are not graduates, and who attended a TAFE institution in Australia successfully completing some of the training in a program, irrespective of the number of hours of the training, and who left the TAFE system. As with graduates, only those with an Australian address are included in the sample. Those who undertake only recreational or hobby (short courses) are excluded.

2.3 Number of Responses

Table 1 below indicates the number of responses obtained from each of graduates and module completers between 1997 and 2002 and the level at which analysis is appropriate.

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1 In 2000, NCVER unintentionally included some overseas fee paying students in the sample.
Table 1: Number of Responses 1997-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Year</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th></th>
<th>Module Completers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Analysis Level</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis Level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses Nat’l State RMIT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Responses Nat’l State RMIT</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>60,746 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>0 No No No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>66,607 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>0 No No No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>63,198 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>4,152 Yes Yes No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41,660 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>7,922 Yes Yes No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>39,426 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>30,128 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>41,807 Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>8,257 Yes Yes No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of writing (March 2003) NCVER are planning to only survey enough graduates for analysis at the National, and possibly the State levels in 2003. Sufficient module completers would be interviewed for analysis at all levels. However, this position is being reviewed and the IRCU are hopeful that there will be sufficient graduates to produce analysis at the institutional level.

2.4 Response Rates

In recent years the graduate response rate has been around 52% nationally. The response rate for module completers tends to be a few percent lower.

Response rates for RMIT are usually slightly below the national rates: for example in 2002 the national response rate for graduates was 52% compared to an RMIT response rate of 48%.

It is likely that changes to the survey in 2003 will cause response rates to drop, probably into the range 40-45%. This is essentially the result of cost saving measures whereby fewer resources will be directed at following-up non-responders.

3. What information is available?

The SOS questionnaire collects basic demographic and program information from each respondent. Broadly, it also collects information at three different reference points:

1. *Before starting training*, particularly collecting information about training and employment activities over the six months prior to commencing their program.
2. *During training*, collecting information regarding program characteristics, sources of income, reasons for doing the training, and employment activities.
3. *At the end of May in the year after completion of training*, obtaining information about employment status and opinions of the training.

Appendix A provides a greater level of detail regarding the information available. Although this specifically relates to the SOS 2002, most of the information is available every year.
4. Where can I access more information?

Information can be accessed from a variety of sources:

- NCVER publish an annual report with comprehensive analysis and commentary at the national level. It also includes some analysis by state, but no analysis by institution. Most of these reports are available on the web at [http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistics/surveys/index.htm](http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistics/surveys/index.htm).

- NCVER publish an annual report tailored to each institution. The RMIT report includes detailed analyses and comparisons with statewide and national statistics. It is available from the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit – contact Andrew Brion. Where applicable, this report contains analyses of both graduates and module completers. It does not include analyses at the program level.

- A summary report of key 2002 RMIT results for graduates can be found on the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit website at [http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/outcomes.php](http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/outcomes.php). Click on “RMIT Student Outcomes Reports”, logon*, and then click on “RMIT VET Graduate Outcomes (2000 - 2002)”. This report compares RMIT’s overall performance with national and state figures: it also compares RMIT’s performance with other Victorian institutions.

- The ratings for RMIT programs on eighteen separate scales (see Section 5), and seven summary groups such as “Teaching Instruction”, can be analysed online by using the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit’s “Item by Item Analysis”. This analysis can be done either at the faculty or program level. Data relating to graduates for 1999-2002 is available. Output can be viewed online and stored in Acrobat (.pdf) and Excel (.xls) formats. Go to [http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/outcomes.php](http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/outcomes.php). Click on “RMIT Student Outcomes Reports”, logon*, and then click on “Item by Item Analysis of CEQ and SOS”.

5. The SOS Scales

RMIT has traditionally made good use of the eighteen scaled questions that measure graduates’ perceptions of their programs. In particular RMIT has made use of the questions relating to Teaching and Instruction, for example in measuring Teaching Quality as part of its Profiles Process. This section therefore provides some additional information about the scales.

From the 2003 survey onwards, each state will be permitted a great deal of latitude in terms of whether they continue using these questions, or not. Thus there is a possibility that the time series will be disrupted in subsequent years.

At the time of writing, it is believed that Victoria will retain seventeen of the eighteen questions in their current form, but will modify the question relating to the overall quality of the training. This will probably be replaced with a five-point Agree/Disagree scaled question instead of the current ten-point Poor/Excellent scaled question. We are not absolutely certain of the plans of the other states, although it is likely that Western Australia will change all the questions in some way.

5.1 The current SOS scales

Graduates are asked to rate eighteen aspects of their program on a ten point scale ranging from ‘Poor’ to ‘Excellent’. The eighteen items are grouped according to the following program aspects:

- Teaching, Instruction
- The Training
- The Equipment and Resources
- Access
- Administration and Information
- Student Support Services
- Overall Opinions

For methodological purposes consistent with the Higher Education Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data, the items have been grouped into summary scales according to the course (program) aspect they address.

Below is a brief description of each SOS summary scale.

Teaching, Instruction (TIS)

- Your instructors’ knowledge of subject content.
- The instructors’ ability to relate to students.
- The balance between instruction and practice.
- Making methods of assessment clear.
Training Scale (TRS)

- The subject content in reflecting industry practice.
- The presentation of training material.

Equipment Resources Scale (ERS)

- The quality of the equipment provided for you to practise your skills.
- Having enough equipment to practice skills.
- Access to library and learning resources.

Access Scale (ACS)

- The convenience of both venue and class times.

Administration and Information Scale (ADMS)

- The information received when choosing training.
- Administration - handling of enquiries, enrolment, fee payment, results.

Student Support Services Scale (SSS)

- The information about careers and jobs available to you.
- Student counselling services.

Overall Opinions Items (OI)

- The usefulness of the training for your job prospects.
- The qualification in terms of being well regarded by employers.
- The training value for money.
- The overall quality of the training.

Analyses undertaken by the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit (IRCU) in interpreting SOS data have been developed to allow similar methodology to that employed in interpreting Higher Education CEQ data.

The major difference (because of the format of the questionnaire) is that for SOS data percentage responses of ‘above average’ or ‘excellent’ have been analysed rather than ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ as used in the CEQ.

Care should be taken in comparing results across universities. Differences in discipline ranges and student profiles need to be considered when analysing results.

References

1997-2001 NCVER National Student Outcome Survey Reports
### Appendix A

Information available from the Student Outcomes Survey 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. About You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In which country were you born?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Do you speak a language other than English at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How well do you speak English?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you consider yourself to have a permanent and significant disability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you have any of the following conditions? (visual, hearing etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Before Starting Your Course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What was the highest level of secondary schooling you completed before starting …?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Length of time since leaving secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Educational qualifications or trade certificates completed previously</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. Six months Before Course</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Type of institution studied at in the past six months (if any)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether had a job for more than two weeks in the last six months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Basis of employment (wage earner, not wage earner, self-employed, employer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation and main tasks of main job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Industry of main job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hours per week worked in main job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Entitlement to sick leave or paid holiday leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Did you actively look for work during the six months?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D. About Your Course of Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Did you have to move from your usual address to do the course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What was the main reason you moved from your usual address?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dates started/finished course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hours per week attended classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mode of delivery (classroom, workplace etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mode of delivery of the majority of the course (classroom, workplace etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most satisfying mode of delivery (classroom, workplace etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recognition for prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did you enrol … because it was part of an apprenticeship or traineeship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sources of income while doing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What was your main reason for doing the course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did the course help you achieve your main reason?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. Employment During Final Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Whether had a job for more than two weeks in the final semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support provided by employer (paid fees, time off etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether employer/business the same as the one before the course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued overpage)
Appendix A
Information available from the Student Outcomes Survey (cntd.)

F. Your work situation at 31 May 2002
- Did you have a … job of any kind … at 31 May 2002?
- On what basis are you employed in your main job at 31 May 2002?
- Whether employer/business the same as the one during the course
- Entitlement to sick leave or paid holiday leave
- Occupation and main tasks of main job
- Industry of main job
- Is your employer/business a government department or agency?
- How many people work for your employer/business at your workplace address?
- How many people work for your employer/business in total in Australia?
- Hours per week worked in main job
- In your main job … how much do you usually earn?
- Job related benefits received as a result of completing the course
- How long did it take you to find a job after completing the course?
- Is your main job the first full-time job you have ever had?
- How relevant is the course to your main job?
- Are you actively looking for work?
- Are you looking for work … in the same field as the field of study for the course?

G. Further Study
- Whether enrolled in further study
- Level of qualification enrolled in
- Hours per week attend/will attend classes
- Where did you enrol to study the course?
- Name of institution enrolled at
- Name of course enrolled in
- What is your main reason for studying the qualification?
- Recognition for prior learning
- Is the field of study for this course in a similar field to the course studied (last year)?

H. Opinions on the course
- How would you rate, on average, the following aspects of the course?*
- Which of the above aspects are the three most important for you?
- Would you enrol for another course at the same institution should the need arise?

I. Optional Question
- Name and address of employer/business

* Further information about these scales can be found in Section 5