Thank you for the opportunity for the ABS to review 'Vocational Education and Training Workforce - Productivity Commission Draft Research Report - November 2010'.

The report makes some use of ABS data and evaluates the Survey of Education and Training (SET) as a source for information on VET activity. As the largest national survey that examines in depth the education and training of Australians, this survey offers the opportunity to investigate relationships among people's participation in education and training, their levels of attainment current labour force activity, and many other socio-demographic characteristics including income, parental characteristics and disability. The strength of the survey is its capacity to provide a multidimensional view of education and training and as such can offer many insights into the circumstances of students and graduates from the VET sector.

We note the comment that ' `total VET activity cannot be estimated reliably from SET09' (Attachment A p. B.29). While this is true, the underlying methodology of collecting data based on participation in learning in the past 12 months was adopted for consistency with the international Classification of Learning Activities (developed by Eurostat and released in 2006).

Development of the next cycle of SET, planned to be conducted in 2013, commences later this year. We would be happy to engage with NCVER and the Productivity Commission on ways to improve the collection to meet current data requirements, such as improving the capture of participation in VET over the past year, especially where the reference period spans two calendar years, or the identification of RTOs..

On a minor point, the report suggests that workers' occupations and industries in SET are collected at a more aggregated level than in the Census of Population and Housing (Section C3 on data sources, p. C.29). This is not actually the case. Both collections code to the 4-digit level for ANZSCO and ANZSIC. The difference occurs in output, where for most purposes, data in SET needs to be aggregated to produce reliable output, e.g. tables in the main publication (6278.0). Subject to confidentiality requirements and with regard to reliability, some data from SET at the 4-digit level is available on request.

The report has suggested that improvements be made to VET data through better data collections and that efforts to improve VET workforce data collection and dissemination should commence without delay through MCTEE and NCVER with development of a comprehensive instrument with which to identify, measure and describe the VET workforce. We would be happy to be involved in this review, which would also offer the opportunity for ABS to take into account the needs of the sector and maximise alignment of data items in relevant national surveys.

Yours sincerely

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