AQTF 2007

Building Training Excellence

Employer Survey Guide

Overview of the employer survey

Introduction

The employer survey is designed to be conducted by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) on a routine basis to collect data from employers of learners participating in nationally recognised training.

This employer survey guide provides information to assist RTOs administer the employer survey in ways that are likely to deliver valid and reliable results. It provides information about a high-quality Employer Questionnaire (EQ) designed to collect data that is relevant, comprehensive and useful in the context of the Australian Quality Training Framework 2007 (AQTF 2007).

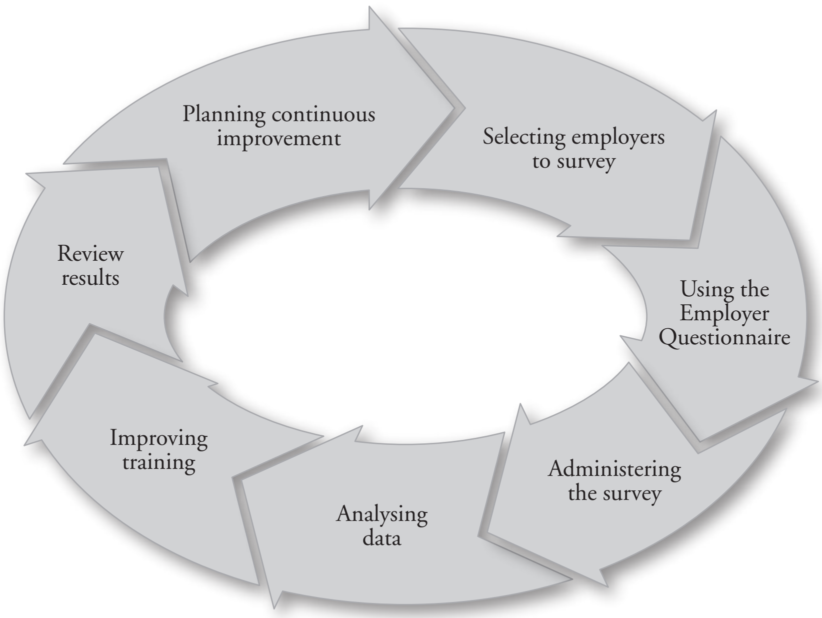
Many RTOs already have resources and systems in place to manage their survey activities. A range of these have been considered in the design of the employer survey processes and instrument. The suggestions in this guide are intended to support and enhance any existing survey activities.

The employer survey is designed to provide information against the AQTF 2007 Employer Satisfaction Quality Indicator. This Quality Indicator focuses on employer evaluation of learner competency development and the relevance of learner competency for work and further training, as well as employer evaluation of the overall quality of the training and assessment.

Managing employer feedback

Designing, collecting and responding to employer feedback is a cyclical process that combines business analysis, survey management, and educational review. This employer survey guide focuses on the following administrative aspects of the collection:

- selecting employers to survey
- using the Employer Questionnaire
- administering the survey
- analysing data.



Using employer feedback

Feedback from employers is used in education systems and organisations to obtain information on the quality of education and training. Broadly, employers' views provide a perspective on the quality of training and graduate outcomes that complement the perspective provided by learners and RTOs. In general, such information can be used by RTOs to:

- support continuous improvement activities
- provide proxy measures of education and training outcomes
- build and manage relationships with employers.

More specifically, collecting data from employers helps RTOs assess their performance against all of the AQTF 2007 Essential Standards for Registration and most of the underpinning Essential Elements. In short, the data can help support continuous improvement processes to ensure that:

- the RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations
- the RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients
- management systems are responsive to the needs of clients, staff and stakeholders, and the environment in which the RTO operates.

Selecting employers to survey

Identifying the target population

An important first step in administering the employer survey is to define the target population for the employer survey. The scope of the target population determines the generalisability of survey results. The target population does not necessarily include all employers linked with the RTO. Certain employers may be deliberately excluded from the employer survey. Other employers may be excluded accidentally, although efforts should be made to minimise the extent to which this occurs.

In general, the target population for the employer survey is defined as:

- all employers of learners who are enrolled in nationally recognised training (including AQF qualifications or units from AQF qualifications and short courses) where the training is being delivered by an Australian RTO, either in Australia or overseas.

Such employers may have directly purchased training for their employees, may have employer graduates from the RTO, or may be supervising employees in the workplace. While some RTOs provide training to employees of many enterprises, others may have training relationships with just a few employers or none at all.

To assist with continuous improvement, RTOs may choose to include employers in their target population who are not linked with nationally recognised training. These employers should be distinguished from those linked with nationally recognised training for the purposes of analysis and reporting.

RTOs should prepare a list of all employers in the target population. It is important that each employer only appears once in the target population list. Each employer should only receive one survey in any particular survey administration. Depending on the source of the population information, this may require the deletion of duplicate records.

Many considerations may shape RTOs' decisions about which employers to include in their employer population. Population definition is critical, as it shapes the representativeness and hence validity of survey results.

Employers clearly play a major role in many, if not most training activities, and many RTOs already collect data from these stakeholders. For many, identifying employer stakeholders is a relatively routine operation. Other RTOs may need to think in more detail about the characteristics of their employer stakeholders, and about how feedback data should best be collected.

In broad terms, the relevance of the employer survey depends on the level of direct contact that a training provider has with current employers of their learners, and with the nature of those employers.

The most direct link exists when employers have purchased training from a training provider, where a training provider trains an apprentice or provides workplace experience, or where an employer directly employs an RTO's graduates. In such instances, employer contact information will already be held by RTOs.

In certain instances, collecting information from employers may not be possible or relevant given training, learner or industry characteristics. Not all learners are employed or have a current link to an employer. Where learners are currently self-employed or the majority become self-employed upon completion of training, it may be that learners and employers are in fact the same people, and it is therefore not sensible to administer the employer survey.

In certain instances, perhaps most frequently in enterprise training contexts, the trainer and employer may be closely related or even the same person. The identification of target employers in the context of an enterprise RTO, for instance, may be best managed by the training manager. Where an RTO trains learners who work in a franchise business, the appropriate point of contact may be a central human resources manager, a store manager, or a direct supervisor.

Deciding who to survey

Where there is a direct employment relationship between the employer and the learner, the RTO must use the Employer Questionnaire.

RTOs may meet this requirement by collecting data from employers in one of two different ways:

1. conducting a census of all employers in the target population
2. collecting data from a sample of the employer population.

RTOs are encouraged to collect employer feedback data from across the full range and level of areas in which they deliver training. In recognition of circumstances where the RTO is also an enterprise and where the use of the Employer Survey may be impracticable, an Enterprise RTO (an enterprise or organisation where training is not core business and where training is provided to their own employees) may negotiate the provision of agreed relevant data, including enterprise specific data already collected, with their registering body.

Conducting a census of all employers

Many organisations run a census to gather a more complete picture of employers' perceptions of the quality of training provision and to provide all employers with an opportunity to provide feedback on the training and education provided to their employees.

When a census approach is used, RTOs should obtain feedback from a minimum of at least 50 per cent of their target population. Standard research methodology recommends that the RTO follow the following two step approach towards achieving this goal:

- distribution of the survey to the target population as determined, and
- at least one follow up to non-respondents.

A small RTO with 200 employed learners decides that the most valid and efficient approach to collect feedback data is to conduct a census of all employers.

The RTO defines their target population and notes which employers are excluded. They prepare a list of employers to facilitate telephone, mail or email surveying.

The RTO secures responses from at least 50 per cent of all their employers so that the results are representative of their employer population.

A medium-size RTO with 2,000 employed learners decides, given the complexities associated with contact lists, that the most valid and efficient approach to collect feedback data is to conduct a census of all employers.

The RTO defines their target population and notes which employers are excluded. They export a list of employers from the customer management system to facilitate telephone, mail and email surveying.

The RTO secures responses from around 30 per cent of employers on the first approach. They make two subsequent approaches and manage to top their yield of responses up to 45 per cent.

A large RTO with 35,000 employed learners decides to conduct a census of all learners as this is an approach that will best support benchmarking with a comparative organisation.

The RTO identifies those learners who are employed in ways connected to their training. The RTO removes students who are not employed, which in turn defines the population of employers. They export a list of employers from the student management system and ready this for telephone, mail and email surveying.

The RTO uses an initial email approach to secure responses from around 15 per cent of employers. They make subsequent telephone to those who have not yet responded and manage to increase their yield to 35 per cent. A final round of telephone calls brings the yield up to 40 per cent.

To recap, to prepare for a census of all employers, RTOs should:

1. define the target population
2. prepare a list of all employers in the target population
3. obtain feedback from at least 50 per cent of the employers in the target population

Surveying a sample of employers

In many situations, it may not be practical or necessary to collect data from all employers. Collecting data from a sample of employers can yield as much information as a census of all employers provided that the sample is of a sufficient size and is representative of the target population.

Each organisation varies in its size and structure, and it is necessary for RTOs themselves to design a sample that best suits their needs. The following general considerations are provided to help RTOs ensure that they are sampling an appropriate range and number of employers.

If a sample approach is to be used, RTOs need to determine which groups, if any, divide their employer population into representative groups. Such groups should be selected to ensure that the sample is representative of the target population. RTOs should review the structure of their organisation, their training provision, and their employer mix to identify groups that should be considered in sampling. Factors to consider include campus location, industry, qualification level, and faculty or field of education.

The EQ should be administered to an appropriate number of employers in each of the identified groups. This can be achieved by collecting data from all employers within a group (effectively conducting a census of each group) or by collecting data from a sample of employers within each group. More specifically:

- if data are to be collected from all employers within a group, RTOs should obtain feedback from a minimum of at least 50 per cent of the group's population, although there is still likely to be considerable value in capturing feedback from fewer employers
- if the sample approach is used, it is generally accepted that responses from a minimum of 50 employers is required in order to draw inferences about all employers in a specified group
- data should be collected from all employers when the potential sample size is less than 50.

It is important to ensure that sampled individuals are representative of the group to which they belong. To achieve this, sampled employers should be selected randomly from the list of all employers in the group.

It is not possible to offer a single prescriptive approach given the variations among RTOs. The important point is that each RTO plans an approach that is likely to be of most value in their organisation.

A small RTO has around 1,000 learners, many or most of who are employed. The RTO decides that results provided by a sample of employers will provide sufficient information for quality assurance purposes.

To design their sample, the RTO starts by considering how best to classify their employer population into groups that, taken together, reflect their training operation.

After considering possibilities, they choose to structure their collection to produce results for their main industry groups.

The RTO assumes a 30 per cent response rate for each industry group. They survey 150 employers within each group to capture 50 responses.

A medium-size RTO has around 10,000 learners, many or most of who are employed. The RTO decides that results provided by a sample of learners' employers will provide sufficient information for quality assurance purposes.

To design their sample, the RTO starts by considering how best to classify their employer population into groups that, taken together, reflect their training operation.

After considering possibilities, they choose to structure their collection to produce results for their five main industry groups.

The RTO assumes a 30 per cent response rate for each industry group. They survey 150 employers within each group to capture 50 responses.

A large RTO with about 25,000 learners make preparations to capture feedback from the employers who purchase their training. The RTO decides that results provided by a sample of learners' employers will provide sufficient information for quality assurance purposes.

The RTO starts by considering how best to classify their employer population into groups that reflect the breadth of their training operations.

After considering possibilities, they decide that the information needs of management will be best served if they deliver results for each of the six campuses on which training is delivered.

Based on the results of previous surveys, the RTO assumes a 15 per cent response rate for each campus. They survey 2,000 employers overall to capture 300 responses spread across the six campuses.

To recap, to prepare for surveying a sample of employers, RTOs should:

1. define the target population
2. prepare a list of all employers in the target population
3. determine which groups, if any, stratify their target population
4. obtain feedback from all employers in a target group, or obtain feedback from at least 50 employers in a target group.

Using the Employer Questionnaire

Focus of the EQ

The Employer Questionnaire (EQ) is designed for online, paper or phone administration in less than 10 minutes to employers of currently enrolled learners. The same EQ form can be used for employers of learners enrolled in all forms of nationally recognised study and training provided by RTOs, including apprenticeships and traineeships.

The EQ is designed to measure several areas of education and training, including three broad domains and seven summary scales. Note that these areas relate to learning and education in general rather than to any specific training or employment focus or context.

Domain	Scale	Scale description
Training Quality	Trainer Quality	competence and effectiveness of trainers and teachers
	Overall Satisfaction	overall satisfaction with the education and training
	Effective Assessment	appropriateness and effectiveness of assessment
Work Readiness	Training Relevance	relevance of the training for work
	Competency Development	assessment of competencies developed in the training
Training Conditions	Training Resources	quality and appropriateness of learning resources
	Effective Support	support provided to help people learn

The EQ contains 30 items that provide measurement of these areas. Response to each of these items is provided on a four-point response scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

Domains	Scale	Label	Item
Training Quality	Trainer Quality	EQ19	Trainers were effective in their teaching.
		EQ17	Trainers had good knowledge and experience of the industry.
		EQ21	Trainers were able to relate material to the workplace.
	Overall Satisfaction	EQ12	Overall, we are satisfied with the training.
		EQ14	We would recommend the training to others.
		EQ13	We would recommend the training organisation to others.
	Effective Assessment	EQ18	Assessments were based on realistic activities.
		EQ16	The way employees were assessed was a fair test of their skills and knowledge.
		EQ15	The training organisation gave appropriate recognition of existing knowledge and skills.
		EQ4	Assessment was at an appropriate standard.
Work Readiness	Training Relevance	EQ9	The training focused on relevant skills.
		EQ27	The training prepared employees well for work.
		EQ22	The training had a good mix of theory and practice.
		EQ20	The training was an effective investment.
		EQ6	The training reflected current practice.
		EQ11	The training was effectively integrated into our organisation.
	Competency Development	EQ10	Our employees gained the skills they needed from this training.
		EQ24	The training has helped our employees work with people.
		EQ26	The training helped employees identify how to build on their current knowledge and skills.
		EQ28	Our employees gained the knowledge they needed from this training.
		EQ29	The training prepared our employees for the demands of work.
Training Conditions	Training Resources	EQ1	The training used up-to-date equipment, facilities and materials.
		EQ5	The training resources were appropriate for learner needs.
		EQ25	Training resources and equipment were in good condition.
	Effective Support	EQ23	The training organisation acted on feedback from employers.
		EQ7	The training organisation developed customised programs.
		EQ3	The training organisation was flexible enough to meet our needs.
		EQ2	The training organisation dealt satisfactorily with any issues or complaints.
		EQ8	The training organisation provided good support for workplace training and assessment.
		EQ30	The training organisation clearly explained what was expected from employers.

The national EQ is only available in English and assumes a reading level of around 15 years old. Note that EQ items are presented in a random order rather than in their domain or scale groupings.

The EQ has been designed, developed and validated by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) through a process involving focus groups, cognitive interviews, pilot testing, psychometric analysis, and review by educational and technical experts.

Preparing the paper EQ

It is important to ensure that the paper EQ prints correctly. This may require adjusting certain print settings. These settings may vary for different computers and software, but in general:

1. in Adobe Acrobat Reader, go to the **File** menu and click **Print**
2. click **Properties**, select the **Paper/Quality** tab, and then **Advanced**
3. go to **Policy** under **Document Options** and **Printer Features**
4. select the policy titled **Nearest available size**, no page adjust
5. go to **Edge to Edge** under **Document Options** and switch to On
6. press **OK** to return to the document

The EQ is designed so it can be scanned by certain types of optical scanning machines. There are many different scanners, and their requirements may differ. **Before you print or administer any survey forms, please check and confirm scanning requirements with the person who will be managing your scanning.**

The EQ contains a respondent identification field. This is a blank space on the form where RTOs can overprint a respondent identification number. Such numbers can be used for managing the distribution of forms, linking with existing databases, analysing responses, or following up on specific responses.

Employers may provide more and better quality feedback when they are able to remain anonymous. If RTOs prefer to identify their survey forms, appropriate changes should be made to the cover note to ensure that potential respondents are informed of the identification process.

The online EQ

The online EQ includes an introductory page and a page asking employers about their employees' training. The online survey is accessed via an internet link. Further details about managing and using the online instrument are provided in the guide for this system.

Administering the survey

Planning the administration

As the population specification suggests, the EQ is designed to be administered to employers of current learners. It is probably best to administer the EQ towards the end of a period of training. This definition is relative to the training and means that the survey will be administered by RTOs at different times throughout the year. The precise timing is best determined by each RTO. In a course that runs for a few weeks, for instance, it may be towards the end of the second week. In training programs running for a few years, it may be towards the end of the final year.

The employer survey can be administered onsite, online, by mail, or by telephone. The standard national EQ is provided in paper and online forms. A sample telephone script has been developed to assist RTOs that wish to interview employers. RTOs should modify this sample script to suit their local contexts and needs.

Decisions about the mode of administration are shaped by a range of factors, including training and industry contexts, employer characteristics, learner characteristics, availability of survey resources, and feasibility and technical considerations. Employers who work in offices may be best surveyed using an email and online approach. Employers who work onsite may be best contacted by telephone, or an appointment made for a face-to-face interview. A multimodal approach is generally best as this offers employers a range of response options. The use of multiple modes, however, requires integration by the RTO between paper, online and interview systems.

RTOs need to consider how best to integrate the EQ into any current data collection activities. If necessary, the EQ may be administered concurrently with other instruments. Alternatively, the EQ may be used to replace current instruments.

RTOs are encouraged to take a number of steps to engage potential respondents in providing feedback about their training. Engaging people in survey processes involves pre-survey planning and promotion, capturing and stimulating the interest of respondents, and encouraging completion and return.

Ultimately, each RTO is in the best position to determine which survey design best suits their needs. Information can be sought from a range of training and support resources that will be made available to RTOs. RTOs are encouraged to record key design decisions to help understand and interpret results.

Administering the survey

The details of survey administration depend on a range of factors, but a few general considerations can be noted. As with survey design, survey administration will vary for a number of reasons, and RTOs are encouraged to document key aspects of the process. Such records can help demonstrate the reliability and validity of survey processes and results.

If paper forms are to be used, RTOs should make enough copies of the EQ to distribute to the employers who are selected to take part in the survey. If the online survey is to be used, RTOs should obtain internet links for their survey.

A sample cover letter is available. RTOs should modify this sample cover letter to suit their context and needs. If paper forms are to be used, RTOs should make enough copies of their cover letter to distribute to the employers who are selected to take part in the survey.

The EQ can be distributed, completed and collected onsite. In general, 10 minutes should be set aside for this process. Ideally, such administration is managed by an individual who is independent of the routine training and learning process.

For mail administration, the EQ and a cover letter should be printed, folded and packaged into envelopes along with an RTO-specific reply-paid envelope. Mailing labels should be affixed and the letters despatched to employers. In general, most responses to a mail survey would be expected to have been received by the RTO around two to three weeks after posting. To sustain the momentum of response, a reminder note or additional survey package could be sent to employers around 14 days after the original mail out. A second reminder might be sent two weeks following the first reminder and a month after the initial distribution. These reminders can be targeted to non-respondents if the RTO is able to identify which employers have already responded to the form.

The EQ can be administered online. To do this, employers should be supplied with an internet link. These may be sent to employers in a range of ways. They could be copied into letters, emailed, provided on a portal or learning management system, or provided on an intranet.

To distribute the internet link by email, RTOs should merge email cover letters with employer contact details and send out the cover letter via email. A sample email cover letter is available. A reminder email should be sent to employers between seven and 14 days after the first email, with a subsequent final email around two weeks later. It may help to enhance response rates if internet links are sent to employers by a member of the RTOs senior management.

RTOs can send employers one of two different kinds of internet links. Either the same link may be sent to all employers, or each employer may be sent a unique internet link. Regardless of which approach is used, it is vital that the internet link appears as an 'active link' to employers when they receive the email. Online advice on how this can be managed is provided by Microsoft (see: http://support.microsoft.com/kb/912679). Response rates are likely to plummet if employers are unable to access the survey by simply clicking on the link, as opposed to having to manually copy and paste the link into the internet browser.

Analysing data

Collecting feedback from employers is an important but preliminary part of any survey cycle. The critical next step is converting data into results that can be used for quality assurance and improvement.

The Survey Management, Analysis and Reporting Tool (SMART) has been developed by ACER to play a key role in this process by assisting RTOs to convert survey data into reports that can be used for quality management.

Data entry should commence as soon as possible after the receipt of survey responses. A codebook is available that provides information on the codes used in the EQ. Data analysis and reporting should commence as soon as possible after the completion of data entry. SMART can be used to enter data or import data that has been entered in another program or online system. Standard national paper forms can also be sent to an external agency for scanning.

Survey data can be analysed in a range of ways using a number of different software. SMART is designed to assist RTOs analyse survey data and report results and data. Data entered into SMART can also be exported and read into a statistical package for further analysis.