AQTF 2007

Building Training Excellence

Learner Survey Guide

Overview of the learner survey

Introduction

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

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

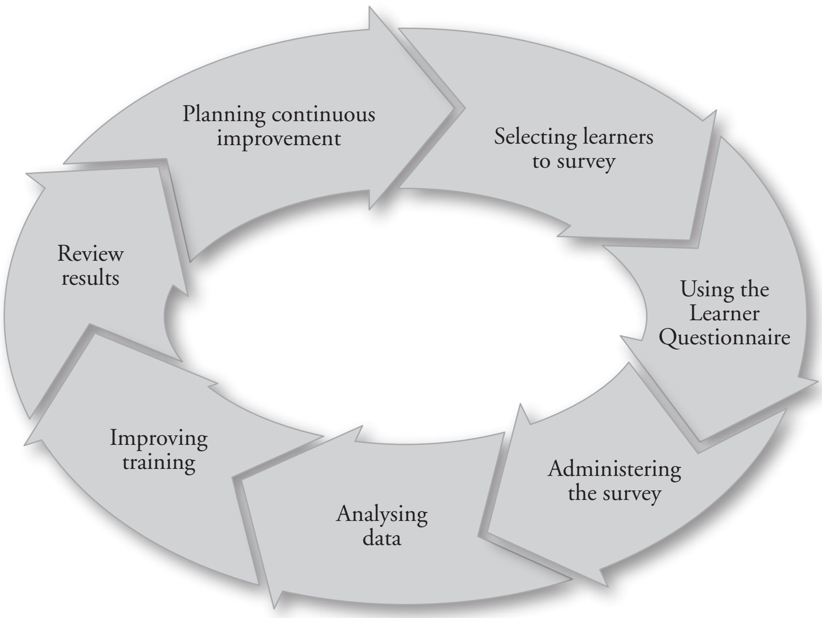
Many RTOs already have resources and systems in place to manage their survey activities. A range of these have been considered in the design of the learner survey and instrument. The suggestions in this guide are intended to support and enhance any existing survey activities.

The learner survey is designed to provide information against the AQTF 2007 Learner Engagement Quality Indicator. This Quality Indicator focuses on whether learners are engaging in activities likely to promote high-quality skill outcomes and includes learner perceptions of the quality of their competency development and the support they receive or have received from RTOs.

Managing learner feedback

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

- selecting learners to survey
- using the Learner Questionnaire
- administering the survey
- analysing data.



Using learner feedback

Feedback from learners is used routinely in education systems and organisations to obtain information on the quality of education and training. Broadly, depending on the collection approach, such information can be used by RTOs to:

- support continuous improvement activities
- provide alternative measures of education and training outcomes
- attract, engage and retain learners
- indicate whether learners are engaging in good learning practices
- manage relationships with clients and stakeholders.

More specifically, collecting data from learners helps RTOs assess their performance against 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 learners to survey

Identifying the target population

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

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

- all learners enrolled in nationally recognised training where the training is being delivered by an Australian RTO, either in Australia or overseas.

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

RTOs should prepare a list of all learners in the target population. It is important that each learner only appears once in the target population list. Each learner 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.

In general, the target population list should be similar in relevant ways to the list prepared for your competency enrolment and completions data. You may like to document differences between these two lists to help you interpret your survey results.

Deciding who to survey

RTOs should collect learner feedback data from across the full range and level of areas in which they deliver training. RTOs may meet this requirement by collecting data from learners in two different ways:

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

Conducting a census of all learners

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

When a census approach is used, RTOs should seek to obtain feedback from a minimum of 50% of their target population. Standard research methodology recommends that the RTO follows 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 50 learners decides that the most valid and efficient approach to collect feedback data is to conduct a census of all learners.

The RTO defines their target population and notes which learners are excluded. They prepare a list of learners and classes to facilitate onsite and email surveying.

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

A medium RTO with around 7,000 learners uses a census approach to collect feedback data because it is easier to manage within the organisation and gives all learners the opportunity to 'have a say'.

The target population is defined by excluding certain learners and deleting duplicate learner records from the list.

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

A large RTO with around 35,000 learners uses a census to collect feedback data because it is easier to manage within the organisation, gives all learners the opportunity to 'have a say', and enables the policy and planning managers to disaggregate results for particular departments and units.

The target population is defined by excluding certain off-shore learners from the population and sourcing a list from the student management system. Students undertaking more than a single course are identified and duplicate entries are removed.

The policy and planning unit prepare packages of survey forms to nominated staff and an email to be sent to all target learners. Departmental personnel administer surveys to student clusters while they are on campus, working to achieve a response rate from at least 50 per cent of the population.

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

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

Surveying a sample of learners

In many situations, it may not be practical or necessary to collect data from all learners. Collecting data from a sample of learners can yield as much information as a census of all learners 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 select a sample that best suits their needs. The following general considerations are provided to help RTOs ensure they are sampling an appropriate range and number of learners.

If a sample approach is to be used, RTOs need to determine which groups, if any, divide their learner 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 learner mix to identify groups that should be considered in sampling. Factors to consider include campus location, qualification, faculty or field of education, and various learner demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and study load.

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

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

Standard research methodology recommends that the RTO follows 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.

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

A small RTO with around 1,000 learners decides to collect feedback from a sample of their learners so that different information can be collected from the learners not included in the current sample.

To design this sample, the RTO considers how best to classify their learner population into groups that, taken together, reflect their training operation.

After considering possibilities, they choose to structure their collection to produce results, for different delivery locations or campuses.

A response rate of 50 per cent is assumed, and the RTO surveys 100 learners per location to capture 50 responses.

Together, these responses are seen to offer a representative picture of the training being provided by the organisation.

A medium-size provider has around 5,000 learners structured within six faculties. To enhance the efficiency and precision of their survey operations, the RTO decides to use a sampling approach that will generate results for identified business units.

Learners are divided into faculty groups and within each faculty in terms of one of three qualification levels. There are 18 groups in total.

A census of all learners is conducted in smaller faculty/level groups. In larger groups, a 60 per cent response rate is assumed, and samples of 120 learners are randomly selected and sent a survey, which yields around 70 responses per group.

Together, all survey responses are seen to offer a representative picture of the training being provided by the organisation.

A large provider has around 25,000 learners structured within six faculties. To enhance the efficiency and precision of their survey operations, the RTO decides to use a sampling approach that will generate results for identified business units.

Learners are divided into faculty groups and within each faculty in terms of one of three qualification levels. There are 18 groups in total.

A census of all learners is conducted in smaller faculty/level groups. In larger groups, a 60 per cent response rate is assumed, and samples of 120 learners are randomly selected and sent a survey, which yields around 70 responses per group.

Together, all survey responses are seen to offer a representative picture of the training being provided by the organisation.

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

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

Focus of the LQ

The Learner Questionnaire (LQ) is designed for online or paper administration in less than 15 minutes to currently enrolled learners. The same LQ form is used for learners enrolled in all forms of training, including apprenticeships and traineeships.

The LQ is designed to measure several areas of education and training, including four broad domains and 10 summary scales. Note that these areas relate to learning and education rather than to any specific training 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
	Clear Expectations	clarity of training plan and approach
	Learning Stimulation	extent to which training stimulated people to learn
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
Learner Engagement	Active Learning	participation in active learning linked with high-quality outcomes

The LQ contains 35 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’.

Domain	Scale	Label	Item
Training Quality	Trainer Quality	LQ1	Trainers encouraged learners to ask questions.
		LQ2	Trainers made the subject as interesting as possible.
		LQ3	Trainers had an excellent knowledge of the subject content.
		LQ4	Trainers explained things clearly.
	Overall Satisfaction	LQ5	Overall, I am satisfied with the training.
		LQ6	I would recommend the training to others.
		LQ7	I would recommend the training organisation to others.
	Effective Assessment	LQ8	I received useful feedback on my assessments.
		LQ9	Assessments were based on realistic activities.
		LQ10	The way I was assessed was a fair test of my skills and knowledge.
		LQ11	The training organisation gave appropriate recognition of existing knowledge and skills.
	Clear Expectations	LQ12	It was always easy to know the standards expected.
		LQ13	I usually had a clear idea of what was expected of me.
		LQ14	Trainers made it clear right from the start what they expected from me.
	Learning Stimulation	LQ15	I was given enough material to keep up my interest.
		LQ16	The amount of work I had to do was reasonable.
		LQ17	The training was at the right level of difficulty for me.
Work Readiness	Training Relevance	LQ18	The training focused on relevant skills.
		LQ19	The training prepared me well for work.
		LQ20	The training had a good mix of theory and practice.
	Competency Development	LQ21	I developed the skills expected from this training.
		LQ22	I learned to work with people.
		LQ23	I identified ways to build on my current knowledge and skills.
		LQ24	I developed the knowledge expected from this training.
		LQ25	I learned to plan and manage my work.
Training Conditions	Training Resources	LQ26	Training resources were available when I needed them.
		LQ27	The training used up-to-date equipment, facilities and materials.
		LQ28	Training facilities and materials were in good condition.
	Effective Support	LQ29	Training organisation staff respected my background and needs.
		LQ30	The training was flexible enough to meet my needs.
		LQ31	The training organisation had a range of services to support learners.
Learner Engagement	Active Learning	LQ32	I set high standards for myself in this training.
		LQ33	I pushed myself to understand things I found confusing.
		LQ34	I looked for my own resources to help me learn.
		LQ35	I approached trainers if I needed help.

The LQ contains items that can be used to obtain information on training characteristics and learner demographics. These are consistent with national data specifications such as the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED).

The items seeking information about training characteristics and learner demographics are included on an optional second page. The page should be printed and administered only if RTOs feel this data will help understand responses provided by learners. This page can be printed on the reverse side of the first page.

As an alternative, RTOs may choose to pre-populate this information from existing records. If so, they will need to identify the survey form that is distributed to learners so that data can be linked, and to ensure that existing records are valid and contain all relevant data. In general, it is easier to simply administer the second page.

The national LQ is only available in English and assumes a reading level of around 15 years old. If it is anticipated that learners will not be comfortable with this level of written English then provisions should be made to assist them to complete the survey. Note that LQ items are presented in a random order rather than in domain or scale groupings.

The LQ 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 LQ

It is important to ensure that the paper LQ 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 LQ 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 LQ 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.

Learners 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 LQ

The online LQ includes an introductory page, a page asking learners about their training, a page seeking feedback on training details, and a page seeking information about learners. 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 LQ is designed to be administered to current learners. It is probably best to administer the LQ 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.

Although not designed specifically for this purpose, it is possible that the LQ could be administered towards the start of training to enable the collection of baseline data. Analyses might then compare quality assessments at the start and end of training. If an RTO chooses to use the LQ in this way, it is important to check that the instrument is appropriate for such administration and that the results will be useful for quality assurance and education.

The learner survey can be administered onsite, online, by mail, or by telephone. The standard national LQ is provided in paper and online forms. Telephone surveying of current learners is less common and a standard national script has not been developed. RTOs wishing to interview learners over the telephone will need to develop a script based on the standard paper questionnaire.

Decisions about the mode of administration are shaped by a range of factors, including training contexts, learner characteristics, availability of survey resources, and feasibility and technical considerations. Learners who train on campus in class groups may be best surveyed in class. People who learn in a workplace may be best surveyed by linking from an email to an online system. People who conduct large amounts of learning onsite might be best reached using mail. A multimodal approach is generally best as this offers learners a range of response options. The use of online and paper surveying, however, requires integration by the RTO between paper and online systems.

RTOs need to consider how best to integrate the LQ into any current data collection activities. If necessary, the LQ may be administered concurrently with other instruments. Alternatively, the LQ 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 LQ to distribute to the learners 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 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 learners who are selected to take part in the survey.

The LQ can be distributed, completed and collected during training time. In general, 15 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.

In certain situations, it may be necessary to assist individuals complete the survey form. This may be the case when learners have identified disabilities.

For mail administration, the LQ 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 learners. 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 learners 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 learners have already responded to the form.

The LQ can be administered online. To do this, learners should be supplied with an internet link. These may be sent to learners 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 learner contact details and send the cover letter via email. A sample email cover letter is available. A reminder email should be sent to learners 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 learners by a member of the RTOs senior management.

RTOs can send learners one of two different internet links. Either the same link may be sent to all learners, or each learner 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 learners 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 learners 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 learners 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 to assist with the process of converting learner' responses into data that can be analysed. Responses can be coded before or during data entry and response verification.

Data analysis and reporting should also commence as soon as possible after the completion of data entry. SMART can be used to enter data directly or import data that have 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 using a statistical package for further analysis.