

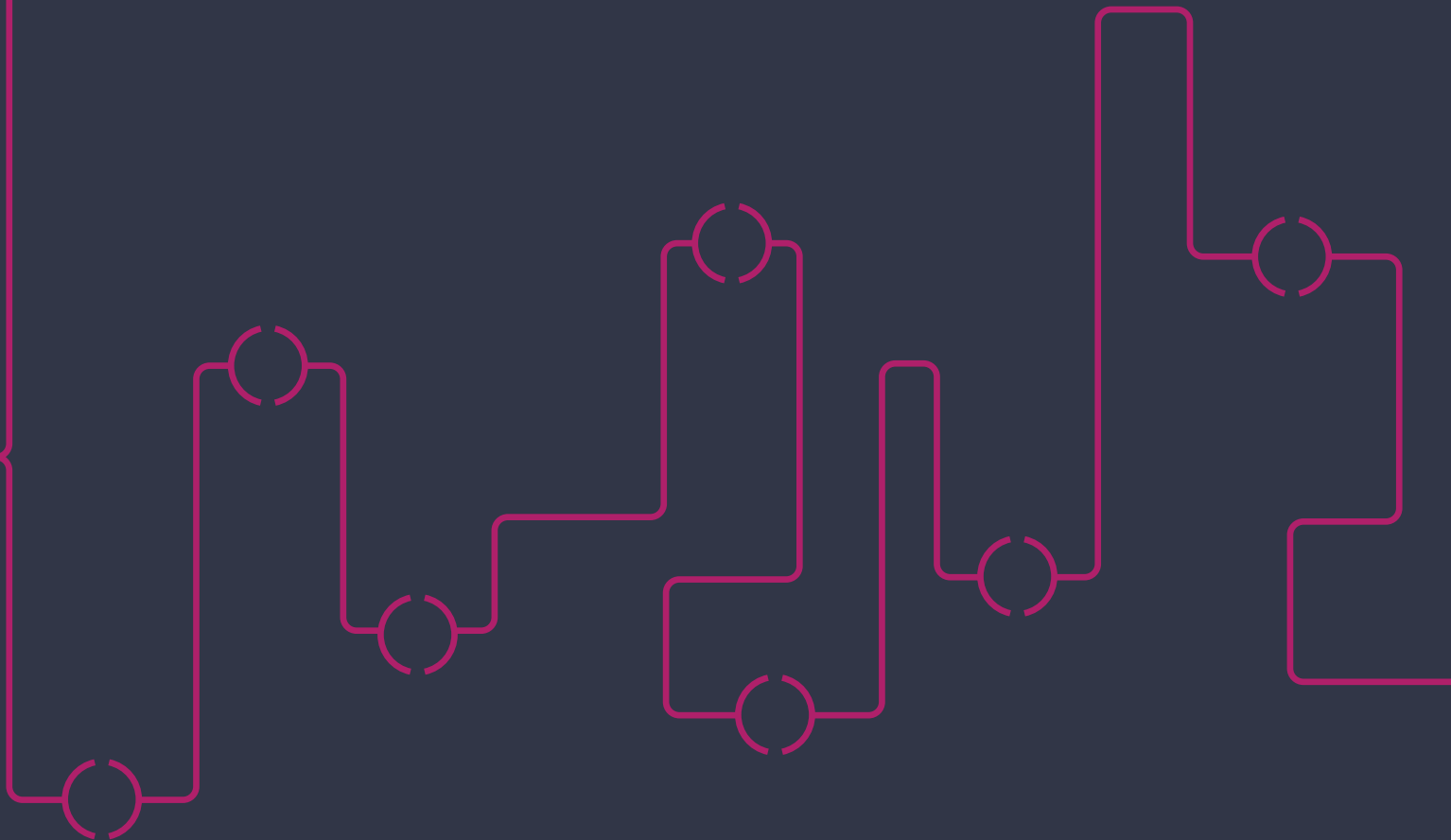


Australian Government
Australian Skills Quality Authority

ASQA

ASQA's strategic review of online learning

Insights paper No. 1



The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is undertaking a strategic review of online learning in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. We initiated the strategic review in 2020, prompted by the significant number of providers who shifted delivery online in response to the circumstances created by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This insights paper shares findings from three popular 'Feedback Loop' webinars held as part of the strategic review between December 2020 to May 2021.



Insights papers series

This paper is the first in a series that will be periodically published throughout the strategic review. The series is designed to build on the success of the innovative 'feedback loop' approach of collaboratively sharing learnings and building understanding.

Future papers will include a focus on the findings of a series of focus groups with VET and Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) who experienced shifts to online as a result of COVID-19, as well as the results and early findings of a detailed provider survey of online learning from February-March 2021. The provider survey was designed and administered in collaboration with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

As part of finalising the strategic review in early 2022, we will host a webinar that focuses on learnings and seek your input on actions and recommendations going forward that can support embedding quality online learning in the VET sector.

This incremental approach—engaging with the sector on our findings through the insights papers and feedback loop webinars while the strategic review progresses—helps us to understand from you what is needed to support quality online learning. The project's updated [Terms of Reference](#) provide more detail on the purpose, scope and timelines of the strategic review.

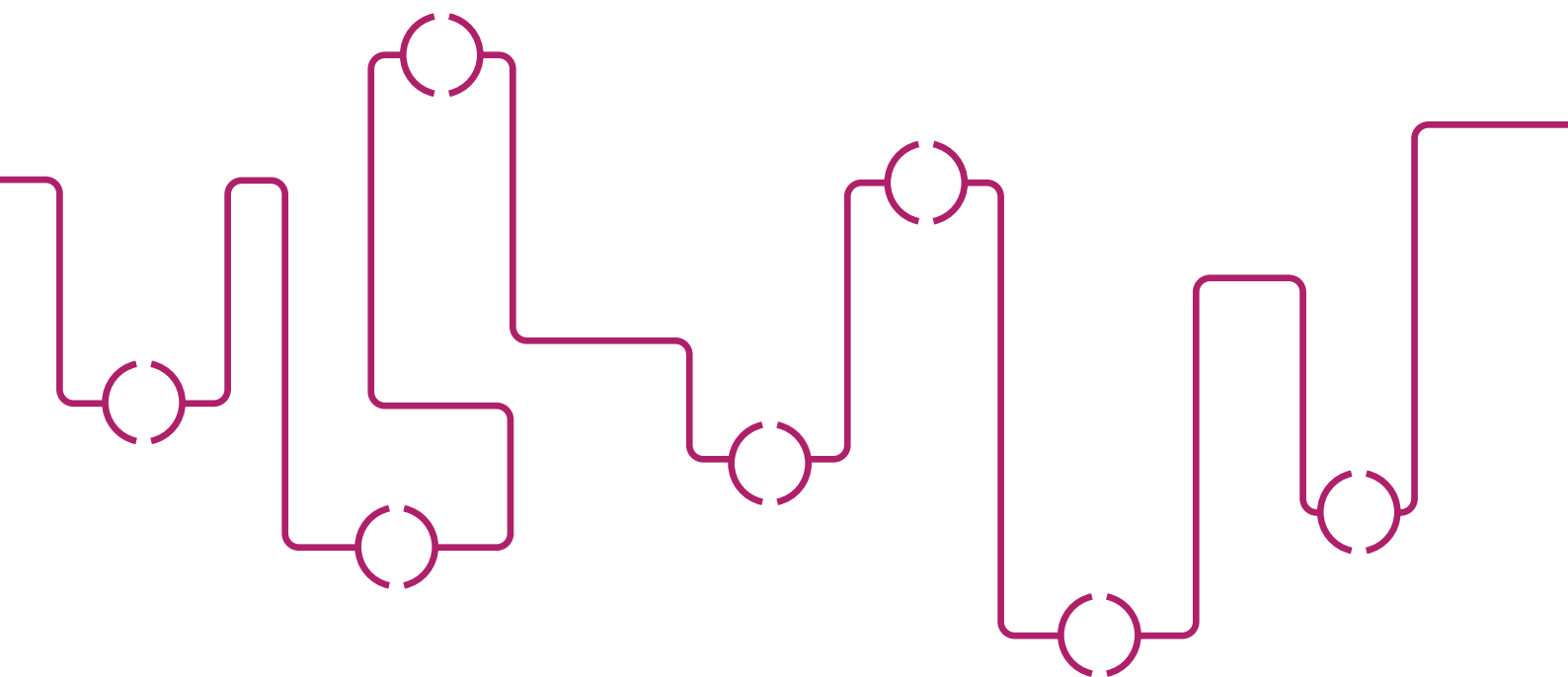


VET sector engaging with online learning

ASQA is collaborating with our stakeholders in addressing the needs of the sector.

NCVER is undertaking a Skills Senior Officials Network (SSON) research project on online learning. NCVER's recently published report, *The online delivery of VET during COVID-19: part 1*, is based on analysis of Total VET Activity data for 2019 and 2020 and preliminary findings from the provider survey undertaken with ASQA.

The strategic review is also paying close attention to other changes underway in the sector. The Education Industry Reference Committee's (IRC) rapid response to COVID-19 included identifying what the skills needs are in existing units of competency. This led to the development of a skill set on e-learning supported by the Skills Service Organisation PWC Skills for Australia (Deliver e-Learning Skill Set [TAESS00018](#), released October 2020). The next phase of the Education IRC work is looking at assessment. This will require new units and will consider how to assess well online, ensuring providers cover the rules of evidence and principles of assessment while maintaining the integrity of what is delivered.



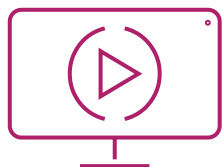


Webinars at a glance

The Feedback Loop webinars were iteratively developed and delivered based on point-in-time priority sector needs as identified in preceding webinars. Recordings are available on the [ASQA Strategic Review webpage](#). The second and third webinars introduced the interactive application Slido to ask audience questions, including polling the audience and up-voting (showing agreement with questions posted by audience members in the webinar by clicking on an icon). The significant growth in audience size with the delivery of each feedback loop webinar, from 548 attendees in the first webinar to 1215 attendees in the most recent webinar, is evidence of a strong interest in the sector for guidance in delivering quality online VET.

Webinar	Focus	Date	Attendees	Live audience questions	Slido poll Questions	Slido poll average audience engagement
Feedback Loop 1 'Building e-learning capability in the VET sector'	Online learning capability	7/12/20	548	64	N/A	N/A
Feedback Loop 1 Follow-up Discussion	Online learning compliance	3/3/21	748	82	5	44% (1,651 Slido poll votes)
Feedback Loop 2 Online Learning: 'Beyond PDFs and Zoom'	EdTech awareness & capacity	6/5/21	1,215	131	4	45% (2,165 Slido poll votes)

Source: ASQA 2021



Feedback Loop 1 webinar

The first webinar held as part of the Strategic Review of Online Learning 'Feedback Loop' series focused on discussion of the new TAE 'Deliver e-learning' Skill Set, the challenges of training in COVID-19, and ideas for building online learning capability. The webinar featured short presentations from ASQA and industry representatives, as well as a 30-minute live Q&A panel session.

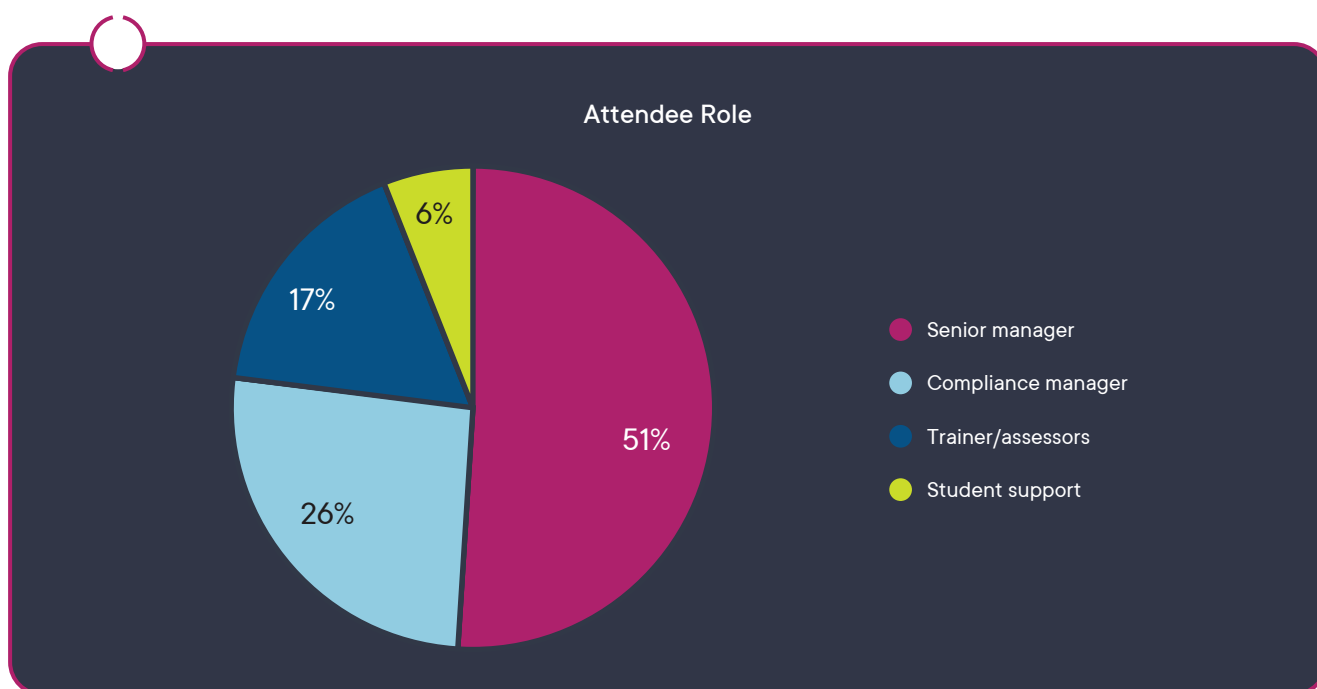
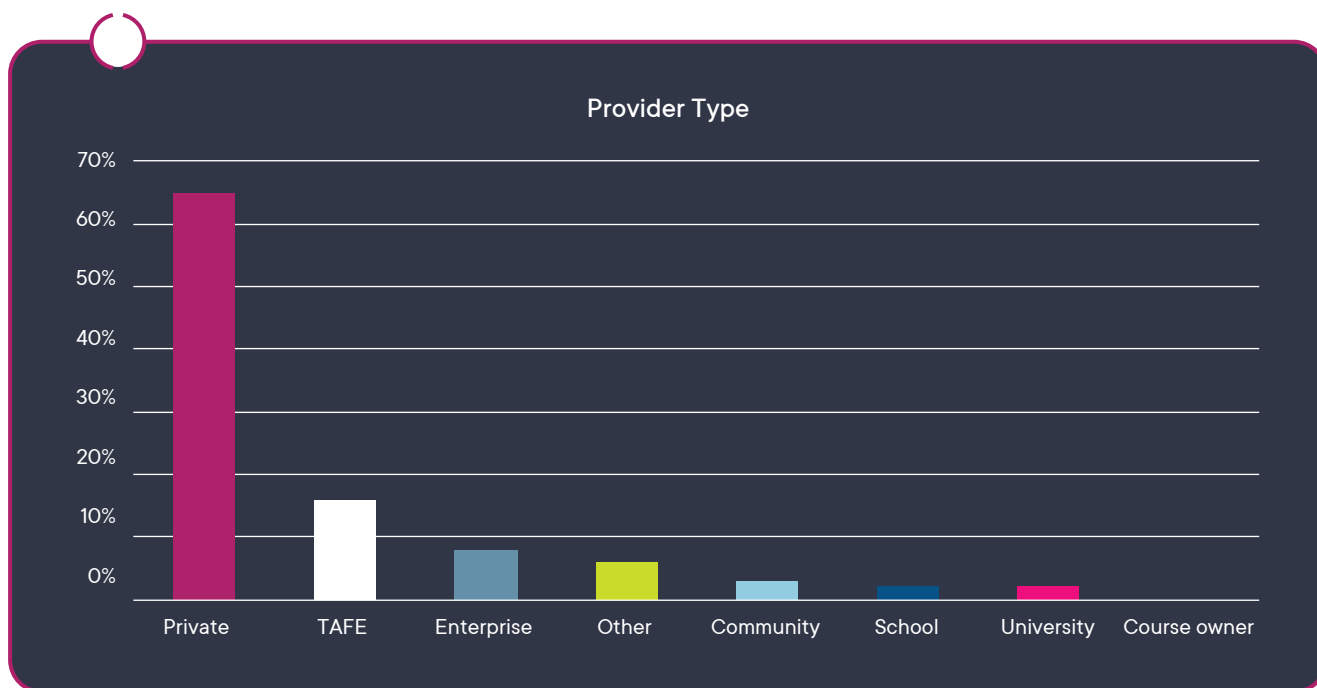
Feedback Loop 1 Follow-up Discussion webinar

Following on the success of the first feedback loop webinar, the second webinar in the series was designed to explore popular questions in more detail. Eight audience questions were selected that focused on how to best maintain compliance when delivering VET online and were directed to specific panellists for a response, followed by a 30-minute live Q&A panel session.



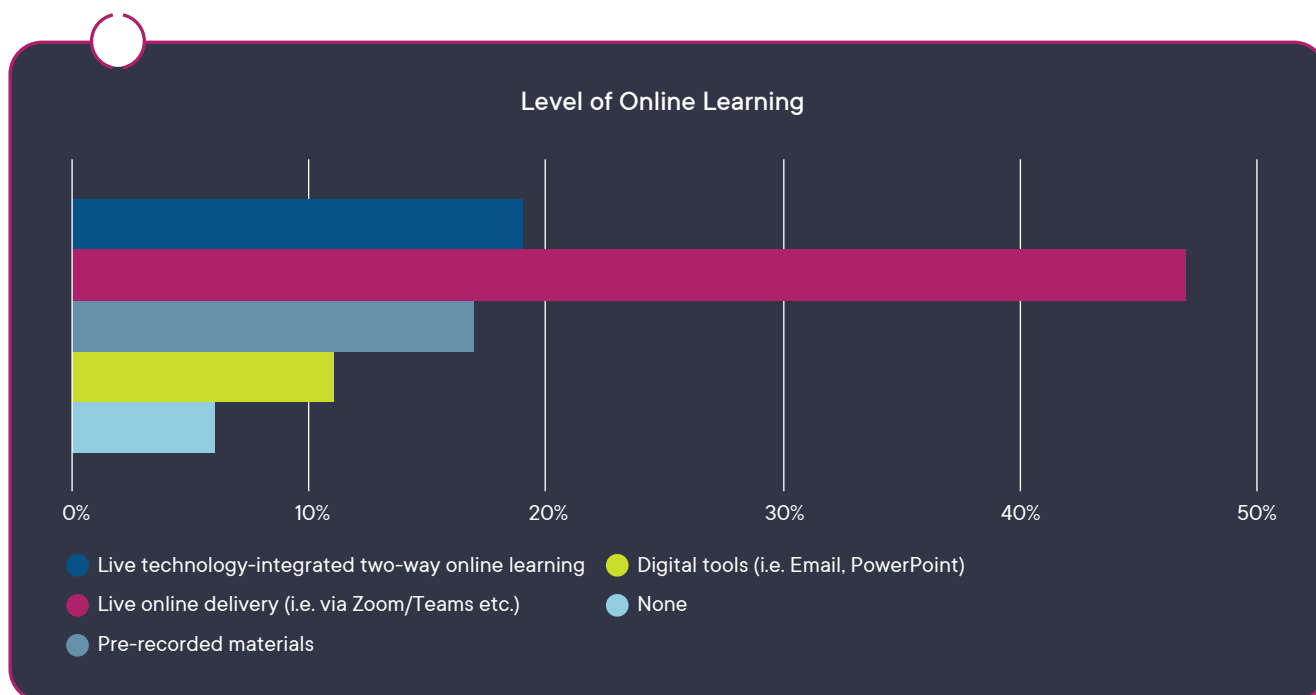
Slido results

Polling showed that attendees of the follow-up Feedback Loop 1 webinar were largely senior managers, or compliance managers, from private training organisations.



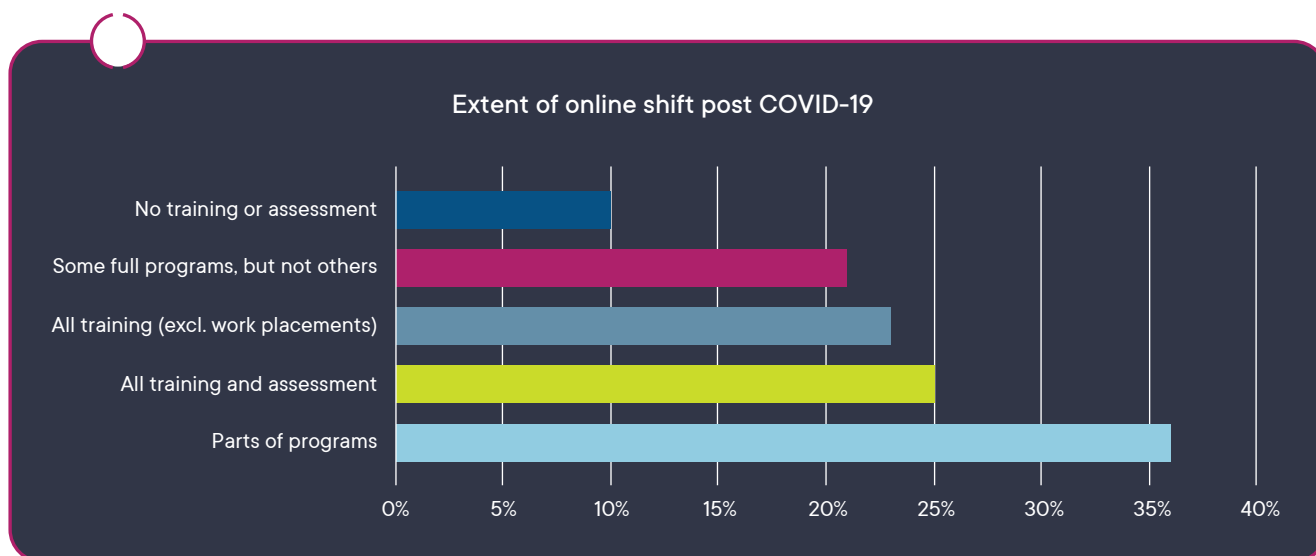


When asked to broadly classify their organisation's use of online learning, webinar attendees responded with:



Note: The 'online learning' categories used in this graph were developed for ease of respondent interpretation in the context of being used in a rapidly administered Slido poll. Using these categories was not intended as validation by ASQA. We are currently considering development of possible 'online learning' categories or classifications.

Webinar attendees were asked whether or not they shifted to online learning in response to COVID-19, as well as the extent of any shift. Responses showed that only 90 per cent of attendees moved some training or assessment online in response to COVID-19.





Many attendees reported having changed the training programs they offer as a result of COVID-19:

54%

introduced new programs in response
to government funding

46%

introduced short programs/
micro credentials



Feedback Loop 2 webinar: Online Learning: Beyond PDFs and Zoom

The third feedback loop webinar, 'Online Learning: Beyond PDFs and Zoom', focused on education technology (EdTech) options. We use the term EdTech here to refer to a range of integrated information, communication and related technologies that are used to facilitate learning and teaching. The focus of this webinar on EdTech was based on the significant number of audience questions from earlier webinars in the series around EdTech and online VET delivery. Short presentations from a VET consultant, provider, and quality assessor, were followed by a 1-hour live Q&A panel session.



Slido results

The poll survey yielded some interesting results, including that while over half of respondents had delivered some training or assessment online prior to COVID-19, 84% shifted some (or more) training or assessment online in response to COVID-19.

Participants were asked via a free-text question what EdTech solutions their organisation currently uses. Common solutions included Zoom, Moodle, Teams and Canvas. However, 'none' and 'nil' were also common answers provided by respondents.



When asked about their organisation's capacity to deliver high-quality online training and assessment, most respondents self-reported an ability to deliver high-quality online training and assessment. Over half of respondents rated their capacity as at least 7 out of 10 (with one being poor, and 10 being excellent). Nearly all respondents revealed some room for improvement.




Key Insights

Online learning compliance

Audience questions suggest the majority of providers are committed to ensuring the delivery of compliant online training and assessment. Above all else, providers were most interested in what was required to maintain compliance when delivering VET online.

Common audience questions:



What constitutes appropriate online delivery? For example, is there a requirement to deliver live online classes, or are recorded classes acceptable?



How can RTOs ensure that the online assessment of practical skills is compliant?

Many wanted to know whether forms of online delivery were equivalent to face-to-face methods. For instance, in terms of requirements for live vs. pre-recorded/self-paced online training, virtual classrooms, and workplace simulations. You can hear a webinar panellist speak about their experience developing and using a virtual classroom here [!\[\]\(faf942dc3e59ce8eb64b4ac481eca7e0_img.jpg\)](#).

Participants also sought increased clarity around the challenges of meeting compliance requirements in an online environment. For example, how to deliver training online and maintain compliance with direct observation requirements of the training package, ratios, obtaining evidence of online assessment (such as video evidence), and broader online learning related record-keeping. You can hear webinar panellists speak about what is an acceptable online simulated environment here [!\[\]\(cf531ed27e91483460120fcc057b3901_img.jpg\)](#).



Experience and advice of other providers

Webinar attendees enjoyed the opportunity to hear from other providers, including advice on how to deliver high-quality and compliant online learning. Participants sought advice on how to monitor student attendance online, ensure assessment integrity online, and most effectively structure ratios of face-to-face and online learning components (blended learning). To hear a webinar panellist describe software solutions for monitoring student attendance and managing student records, click here [▶](#).

Common audience questions:



Do you have any particular advice for RTOs delivering online in an asynchronous learning environment?



How do you monitor attendance?

Participants also commonly enquired about the features of best practice online learning and were interested in the level of sophistication of other providers in delivering VET online. There was high engagement in the concept of the online learning continuum. To hear a webinar panellist explain this concept, click here [▶](#).

The type of discussion and peer engagement evident in the webinars indicates a strong willingness in the sector to continuously improve, and of a widespread desire for ongoing resources to support continuous improvement in online delivery.



Student needs and support

Many of the questions raised and up-voted during the webinars were student-centric. Webinar participants expressed strong interest in learning more about how to enhance student interaction and engagement in online learning. Attendees wanted practical tips and solutions that they could rapidly implement. You can hear webinar panellists speak about systems that can support the engagement of students learning online here [\(▶\)](#).

Common audience questions:

Where can we access the research showing student preference for face-to-face training?

What would you consider as 'online attendance'? Should we require students to activate their cameras throughout the class?

Participants also enquired about the practicality of delivering online learning to remote students, and how they could support students to overcome tech issues. Interestingly, there were some contrasting views displayed around student learning mode preferences. Some attendees emphasised that the content of their training, general student mode preference, and average level of student digital literacy made many facets of online learning unsuitable for their students. Others took the view that the perception that students have a preference for face-to-face learning rather than online learning was a myth. You can hear a webinar panellist speak about how to support students with low levels of online learning technology familiarity here [\(▶\)](#).







Trainers and assessors

During the webinars, several questions and comments were raised in relation to the challenges for trainers and assessors to deliver and design VET for an online environment. Many attendees sought guidance on how they could support building the online learning capability of trainers and assessors, particularly in addressing tech issues and tailoring pedagogy (the methods of teaching) to an online setting with particular sensitivity to the needs of adult learners (andragogy).

Common audience questions:



Would you agree that one of the biggest issues in using learning technologies for enhancing training and assessment is the lack of skilled learning designers?



How do trainers effectively change their own current pedagogical beliefs to confidently train simultaneously in both VR/AR and physical face-to-face spaces?

EdTech

EdTech was a common discussion point across the webinars. In general, webinar participants appeared to have limited exposure or experience with EdTech tools. Providers who were using EdTech tools commonly cited use of delivery platforms such as Zoom and Teams, and learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle and Canvas.

Common audience questions:



What are the hallmarks of an appropriate LMS for RTOs to deliver courses online?



What program are you using to link to your SMS to record attendance?

Providers were very interested in finding out more about the functionality, compliance, integration, and costs of EdTech options. They were particularly curious about learning management systems and virtual and augmented reality tools, and how they could best use these tools to deliver more interactive and engaging online learning. Providers expressed high interest in examples of recommended EdTech tools, especially ones that were low or no cost. You can hear a webinar panellist speak about how EdTech can potentially save providers time and money here [!\[\]\(626ce8ac21792b9405bfddfea8e0c96a_img.jpg\)](#).



International education

The challenges of delivering online learning in international education during COVID-19 were raised by a number of people during these webinars. In particular, providers sought information on intentions in relation to the implementation and status of the temporary flexible regulatory arrangements that were introduced in response to COVID-19.

Common audience questions:



For CRICOS, who do we need consent from to switch from face-to-face to online?



Will the ESOS Act be amended?




ESOS Act providers and temporary flexible regulatory arrangements

The *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018* (National Code 2018) is a legislative instrument made under the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act).

Standard 8.19 of the National Code allows registered providers to offer overseas students up to one-third of their course online.

In response to COVID-19, the allowance for full online delivery was temporarily extended ESOS Act providers delivering VET or ELICOS courses, even though it is not fully compliant with the ESOS Act.

While ASQA is an ESOS agency under the ESOS Act, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) is responsible for administering the Act. Any changes that occur will be noted on DESE's website and through communications from ASQA.

Providers commonly advocated for amendments to the ESOS Act to remove or reduce the restrictions to online learning for international students. This is likely to remain a salient issue for ESOS providers at least until Australia's borders re-open to overseas students. You can hear a webinar panellist responding to a question about this issue here .



Online Learning Resources

To view the full Feedback Loop webinars:

- [Feedback Loop 1 webinar](#)
- [Feedback Loop 1 Follow-up Discussion webinar](#)
- [Feedback Loop 2 webinar – Online Learning: Beyond PDFs and Zoom](#)

To find out more about ensuring you are delivering high quality and compliant online learning, visit our education and guidance [webpage](#) on online training and assessment.

Look out for the next insights paper

We will continue to share findings through this series, with a commitment to building understanding and support for the continuous improvement in online learning.

Keep your eyes peeled for the next insights paper, updating you on insights from focus group consultations with VET and English language students.

Please contact the team at StrategicReviews@asqa.gov.au if you have ideas to share!

Defining 'online learning'

ASQA draws on research by the National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER [2019](#)) to use a definition of online learning that describes it as training delivered primarily via the internet ([ASQA website](#)).

As part of the strategic review, we are considering identification of ways to bring greater clarity to terminology used in relation to online learning and delivery in the VET sector.