

# Review of SSO Training and Development Needs and Evaluation of the SSO Accredited Online Training Program

## Progress Report 1

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# 1. Project Overview

## 1.1 Introduction

Within the Department of Education and Training (DE&T), the Teacher and School Service Officer (SSO) Development Unit has responsibility for the coordination of system-wide high quality professional development for SSOs.

In February 2006, DE&T commissioned Taylor Nelson Sofres Australia Pty Ltd (TNS) Social Research to conduct a review of SSO training and development needs and to undertake an evaluation of the SSO Accredited Online Training Program. This Review and Evaluation includes three phases of data collection:

- in-depth interviews;
- a survey; and
- focus group meetings

TNS Social Research has completed the first phase of the SSO training and development needs review and evaluation. Thirty-four (34) in-depth interviews have been conducted with the following people; SSOs, Registered Training Organisation (RTO) staff, Principals, representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group and representatives from the two relevant union bodies - the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and the Australian Education Union (AEU).

The findings from the in-depth interviews will be used to develop a mail out survey which will be sent to a sample of 5,000 SSOs. In the final stage of the research, focus groups will be conducted to explore and confirm key training and development recommendations.

Currently there are over 13,000 SSOs working in Victorian government schools.

SSOs make a valuable contribution to the overall operations of the school. SSO positions are diverse and cover the delivery of support services which include school administration and operations (e.g. human resources, finance, facilities, grounds maintenance), school support services (e.g. library, laboratory, information technology, out of school care, canteen), teacher and student support (e.g. classroom assistance to teachers – integration, multicultural education).

Staff employed at SSO3 level, manage a range of administrative and operational functions, offer critical strategic advice and support to Principals and School Councils, and liaise with DE&T central and other government agencies. Their responsibilities impact significantly on the school or group of schools within school administration and operations and the delivery of student and educational services. This report relates to

staff employed at SSO 3 level such as, Business Managers/Bursars, School Administrators and senior managers in IT.

Staff employed at SSO 2 level, under direction, provide broad administrative support to the school or delivery of services that support teachers, students and the school leadership team. Their roles include providing technical support to teachers in laboratories and libraries and may also include finance managers.

Staff employed at SSO1 level, undertake a range of administrative and teaching support tasks, under specific direction. Many of the SSOs at this level provide front office administration and are the first point of contact between the wider community and the school itself. Teacher aides (Multicultural, General and Integration) and teacher support staff (Science, IT, Language, Food Technology) are also predominantly at the SSO 1 level.

## 1.2 In-depth interviews

Tables 1 – 3 provide a breakdown of the interviews completed.

**Table 1. Overall Interview Breakdown**

Who	Total interviews conducted	Breakdown
School Service Officers (SSOs)	21	See tables 2 and 3 for breakdown
Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)	6	4 currently in the network <sup>1</sup> 2 that are no longer in the network
Principals	3	1 Primary School 1 Secondary School 1 Special School
Representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group	2	1 Regional Professional Learning representative 1 Metropolitan Professional Learning representative <sup>2</sup>
Union representatives	2	Australian Education Union (AEU) Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	

<sup>1</sup> There is a network of RTOs that delivers the SSO Accredited Online Training Program statewide. When the training program commenced in 2001 the network consisted of 15 RTOs. Seven RTOs have since withdrawn from the network. Currently there are eight RTOs in the network.

<sup>2</sup> The Regional SSO Professional Learning group consists of a representative from each region who has been nominated by the Regional Director to take responsibility for SSO professional learning. This group has been established to support the development of a professional learning strategy responding to SSO needs. Interviews as described in this report were conducted with members of this group who were unable to attend the 2 May 2006 meeting with DE&T. The views of members who did attend this original meeting serve to validate interview findings.

**Table 2. Detailed SSO Interview Breakdown**

Total and Category	Area	School Type
6 SSOs who completed the Accredited Online Training Program	2 Metropolitan 4 Regional	5 Primary 1 Secondary
4 SSOs who withdrew from the Accredited Online Training Program	2 Metropolitan 2 Regional	1 Primary 2 Special Schools 1 Secondary
4 SSOs currently enrolled in the Accredited Online Training Program	3 Metropolitan 1 Regional	1 Primary 3 Secondary
7 SSOs with no knowledge of the Accredited Online Training Program	3 Metropolitan 4 Regional	3 Primary 2 Special Schools 2 Secondary

**Table 3. Number of SSOs interviewed at each SSO level**

SSO Level	Area	School Type
13 SSO1s	8 Metropolitan 5 Regional	6 Primary 2 Special 5 Secondary
4 SSO2s	1 Metropolitan 3 Regional	2 Primary 1 Special 1 Secondary
4 SSO3s	1 Metropolitan 3 Regional	2 Primary 1 Special 1 Secondary
<b>TOTAL: 21 SSOs</b>	10 Metropolitan 11 Regional	10 Primary 4 Special 7 Secondary

Interviews were conducted from 8-31 May 2006 by Kimberly Fravil, Dr. Scott Phillips, Shane Compton and Carla Tooley. The length of interviews varied according to the respondent. Phone interviews with SSOs generally took 15 to 20 minutes, while RTO interviews averaged 45 minutes. The interviews with Principals and representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group lasted 20-30 minutes. Interviews were audio taped when permission was granted to assist with analysis and reporting.

In general, respondents agreed to provide feedback on SSO training and development needs, and, where applicable, on the Accredited Online Training Program. However, a number of SSO respondents had either not completed the Accredited Online Training Program or were less than satisfied with it. A small number of these SSOs refused to be audio taped for privacy reasons. In these cases, interviewers took extensive notes and the responses of these SSOs are included in this report.

## 2. Review of SSO Training and Development Needs

SSO interview respondents were asked to describe their training and development needs. All SSOs expressed a desire to access training to help them to do their job better. Principals, RTOs, SSO union representatives and representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group were also asked their views on SSO training and development needs.

### 2.1 SSO skills requiring further development

Specific skills requiring further development mentioned by SSOs included:

- Communication skills to enable effective communication with teachers, parents and students
- Basic computer and internet skills
- Mediation skills in order to better respond to teachers and parents
- Understanding and responding to diversity
- Skills in helping support children's learning, particularly those with learning disabilities and autism
- Behaviour management skills with a focus on anti-bullying and anger management
- Leadership skills such as managing teams
- Teamwork skills.

The need to develop better communication skills was mentioned by all levels and categories of SSOs, particularly in relation to communicating with parents and teachers. Integration aides were more likely to mention the need to develop child centred skills such as supporting student learning, behaviour management, and understanding and responding to diversity, while teamwork and leadership skills were more likely to be reported by administrative staff and business managers as needing development. Mediation skills were desired by all staff in order to improve internal school relationships, and effective liaison with parents.

Specific skills training appealed to many SSOs as they felt it was more likely to improve their performance, increase their value to the school and their sense of feeling valued by the school, and could result in career progression and possibly increased remuneration.

For example one respondent reported undertaking information technology training and audio / visual training which directly related to their work. This was then taken into account during their performance review and resulted in a salary increase.

The CPSU representative stated that all SSOs should receive induction support, particularly related to their job description and responsibilities.

## 2.2 Barriers to SSO training and development

All respondents with the exception of one, mentioned that their schools do not provide backfill for SSOs (i.e. when an SSO is absent from the workplace) making it difficult to be released to attend professional development or training during work hours.

Many SSOs said that lack of time was a barrier and that even if training was provided outside school hours it would not make a difference to their uptake of training due to competing personal priorities. There was, however, an element who said they would make time. The barriers of time are expected to be explored further in the quantitative component of the research.

***“If you want to do something, you just find the time”***

***(School Service Officer 2)***

The cost of training was also a barrier. In some cases, SSOs were required to pay for their own training, but in other instances where the schools did pay for SSO training, the budget was still limited.

SSO respondents reported not always having easy access to computers and the internet at their school. This made it more difficult to complete any online training during working hours.

Most SSO respondents felt that there was no expectation by their Principal or school for them to undertake any professional development or training.

Some SSOs indicated that they felt undervalued by their school when it came to training and development. They said they didn't feel valued as contributing and professional members of staff as they are not given a great deal of support to undertake professional development or training.

***“At the end of the day you will always be the SSO at your low level, and the teachers get priority.”***

***(School Service Officer 1)***

SSOs in administrative roles were the only respondents who reported having a clearly defined career path, depending on the size of their school. Integration aides said they had no career path, unless they chose to move into an administrative role, and as most integration aides reported wanting to stay in the classroom environment, this did not seem like an option for them. SSOs in small schools were more likely to report feeling stuck in their current positions unless they moved to a larger school.

Principal respondents acknowledged that, although there are some SSOs with clear career paths, career development for SSOs is often unsatisfactory, particularly for

integration aides. In larger schools, career paths seemed clearer, with a Principal from a large school identifying an SSO1 Range 1 (specialist/lab technician) who had progressed to SSO1 Range 2 (Office/Clerical), and then SSO2 Range 4 (Bursar), to SSO2 Range 5 (Assistant Finance and Business Manager), and SSO3 Range 7 (College Business Manager)<sup>3</sup>.

The primary inhibitor noted by Principals as limiting access for SSOs to undertake training was backfilling, with other factors including time, and funding support. There was a preference by Principals for SSO training to be conducted 'in-house', on school premises, to minimise time and cost.

Principal respondents also noted that as a result of SSOs typically being on a low pay rate, many have second jobs after school or on weekends, and therefore have little capacity to undertake after-hours training and development.

Both union representatives felt the major barriers to SSOs receiving training are the lack of funding and no support to backfill.

***“The school gets a certain amount of funding for training of SSOs; I am undertaking the training but am not getting any allowances for it. The school gets allocated money and they need to put that back to SSOs and then give them the time to do it”***

***(School Service Officer 1)***

### 2.3 Enablers of and Motivators for SSO training and development

Some SSO respondents reported having a professional development plan while others reported not having a plan. The presence of a plan was associated with accessing training.

A few SSOs and RTOs indicated that enhanced self-esteem and perceptions of professionalism amongst SSOs were benefits of undertaking training and development.

Most SSO respondents indicated a preference for training and development to be a mix of formal and informal, offsite and onsite training opportunities. This preferred training would include both classroom observation and workplace-based evaluation and learning.

Networking with other SSOs is also of interest and was mentioned by SSOs who have attended regional SSO conferences.

Some SSO respondents listed their major motivation for undertaking training and development was to further their career. A few SSOs said they undertook training to

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<sup>3</sup> The new SSO structure effective from 14th April 2005 collapses the former seven level structure into three levels. Previous SSO levels 1 -2 now make up SSO 1 range 1 -2, SSO 3-5 now make up SSO 2 range 3 - 5, SSO 6 - 7 now make up SSO 3 range 6 - 8.

both do their job better and enhance their career, but the majority of SSOs said being able to do their job better was their main motivation.

All three Principals interviewed, reported offering their SSOs some type of training, with some backfilling to allow SSOs time release for training. However, these schools preferred in-house training due to budgetary constraints. There appears to be a perception that in-house training is preferable due to the lower cost element as opposed to the benefits of professional learning connected and close to the core work. A professional learning strategy will need to challenge this assumption. Only one Principal reported setting aside a specific dollar amount (\$400) for training for each SSO.

One of the union representatives said that most SSOs are not in their position for the money but are 'no-nonsense, heads down, tails up, get the job done' people. They are interested in professional learning to further their skills to enable them to improve their day-to-day work. As such, in-house training provided by schools in short periods either during school hours or immediately after school would be best suited to responding to SSOs' professional learning needs.

Both union representatives feel that there is a need for greater acknowledgement of the work of SSOs and an increase in professional learning opportunities particularly for SSO1s. This could lead to improvements in their performance and their career progression.

***“A career path is only possible with ongoing professional development.”  
(Union representative)***

## 2.4 Recommendations for improving SSO training and development opportunities

The following recommendations for improving SSO training and development opportunities were provided by SSOs, Principals, representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group, union representatives and RTOs.

- Schools should be encouraged to support SSOs to enable them to develop a professional development plan to ensure an organised response to meet SSO training and development needs.
- Greater recognition and acknowledgment of the effort and commitment exhibited by SSOs in undertaking training and development is required.
- Training and development should meet the needs of both SSOs who want to learn how to do their current job better and those who want to further their career.
- Training programs should incorporate more opportunities for practical skills development directly linked to SSO work, e.g. communication and confidentiality, handling conflict and difficult people, theories on how children learn, IT skills, first

aid, and government policy and legislation to help SSOs understand the public sector environment in which government schools operate.

- Training and development opportunities should include a mix of online, workshops (both internal and external) and workplace learning.
- There should be greater access to computers and online learning in the school setting.
- Mentoring programs for inexperienced SSOs would allow them to share and gain knowledge from more experienced SSOs.
- If backfill is unavailable, schools could provide opportunities for training and development to be undertaken immediately after school in 2-3 hourly sessions.
- Schools could overcome some budgetary constraints by grouping together to fund SSO training.
- Training should be developed for SSOs confined to classroom support who want to move across to administrative roles in order to progress to a higher level.

### 3. Evaluation of Accredited Online Training Program

South West TAFE (SWTAFE) was contracted in 2001 by DE&T to undertake the development and provision of the SSO Accredited Online Training program. The SSO Accredited Online Training Program was developed to meet the workplace needs of SSOs working in Victorian government schools. SWTAFE manages the delivery of the training program through a network of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The program is conducted totally online via the TAFE Virtual Campus (TAFE VC).

The training is based on the Australian National Training Authority endorsed Public Services Training Package. The training package provides core competency units covering generic skills and knowledge relevant for public education and allows specialist units to be included from any other training package.

The SSO training framework consists of three course levels, Certificate III in government (consists of eight 'streams'), Certificate IV in government and Diploma in government. Certificate III supports the mainstream roles; administration, teacher aide roles - general, integration and multicultural and teacher support roles which include library, science, information technology and food technology. The 54 units are provided as online training materials. Agreements between the Network Manager SWTAFE, and a network of RTOs support the online enrolment of learners and the online delivery of the training.

Whilst the intended purpose of the Accredited Online Training Program was to enable SSOs to gain a formal qualification on completion of the course, as time evolved, some SSOs chose not to enrol in the entire course but to undertake role specific units in order for them to do their job better (obtaining certification was not seen as important).

It is also possible for learners to apply for and receive Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) against the relevant qualification level within the SSO training framework.

Recent evidence indicates that participation rates in the SSO Accredited Online Training Program have been very low. Since the commencement of the program in late 2001 and until June 2005, only 142 SSOs had completed their set study goals, representing only 1% of all SSOs<sup>4</sup>. This prompted a survey which was conducted by SWTAFE in conjunction with DE&T to be distributed to participants who had withdrawn from, or not completed the training program or the units they enrolled in. The results of that survey suggested a need to evaluate the efficiency of the training program and the extent to which the training and development needs of SSOs are being met, as well as

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<sup>4</sup> Set study goals could be that a participant completed the entire course or completed only units they had enrolled in. For example, they may have only enrolled in one unit and completed it and this is still classified as a completion of set study goals. This figure of 142 cannot be broken down to show which were course completions and which were just unit completions.

whether there is scope to improve the course content, the delivery and the assessment tasks.

From the 34 interviews conducted<sup>5</sup> SSOs provided the most detail and insight into the Accredited Online Training Program. Some SSOs appreciated that the program allowed them to work at their own pace and convenience. A number said the program provided a sense of accomplishment and professional esteem. While many SSOs felt that the learnings from the Accredited Online Training Program transferred into their work, for example the course improved computing skills, resulting in improved efficiency in the work place, the majority of SSOs identified a number of weaknesses with the training program. They said the content was repetitive, irrelevant and outdated. The lack of face-to-face contact made the course difficult, no guidelines were provided on what was expected, and it was difficult to get feedback from the RTOs. While additional tutor support had been provided by two RTOs, SSOs reported that there was a great need for face-to-face contact.

The RTOs interviewed were able to provide specific insights into how the delivery and content of the Accredited Online Training Program might be improved. They reported varying experiences (as outlined in 3.3 below) with the Accredited Online Training Program. Some RTOs said there was very little interest in the program which was why their enrolment figures were low, while others had or have capacity enrolments which some believed were due to their regular tutor support.

As neither of the union representatives were familiar with the Accredited Online Training Program they were unable to provide feedback.

The Accredited Online Training Program is currently being undertaken by both trainees (those seeking employment as SSOs) and existing SSOs. Many trainees are school council employees who enrol in the training and are hoping for a permanent DE&T position. The Accredited Online Training Program appears to be more attractive to SSO trainees seeking permanent positions, as these individuals account for a large percentage of course participants based on the trainee numbers provided by RTOs. The Accredited Online Training Program may not, therefore, be primarily serving its intended purpose of developing the skills and knowledge of the existing SSO workforce.

While there was a relatively large number of SSOs in regional areas (compared to the overall number) who participated in the online training program, there were no significant differences in the responses of regional and metropolitan SSOs. Special schools were more likely to provide assistance with tuition and/or time release to enable completion of the training program, whereas this was unlikely in mainstream schools.

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<sup>5</sup> 34 in-depth interviews were conducted with SSOs, Principals, RTOs, representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group, and representatives from the Unions

***“A lot of mainstream schools will not pay for SSOs to have training. It’s because you don’t get many full-time SSOs in mainstream schools. If you’re talking integration aides in particular, they don’t seem to consider us staff and don’t calculate us into their budgets.”***  
***(School Service Officer 1)***

### 3.1 SSO views of the Accredited Online Training Program

Many SSO respondents indicated they could not see the purpose in undertaking the Accredited Online Training Program or in obtaining accreditation, because completion of the training is not linked to career progression, and therefore does not result in a pay increase or progression to a higher SSO level. Very few SSOs had progressed to a higher level upon completion of the Accredited Online Training Program. The majority of SSOs completed the training to enable them to do their job better.

***“No recruiters out there are saying ‘we’d love to interview people who’ve got or are enrolled in the following courses’ [SSO accreditation courses] they’re not interested. It’s all very workplace-specific, software-driven selection criteria.”***  
***(School Service Officer 1)***

Many of the SSO respondents who enrolled in the Accredited Online Training Program to specifically develop job-related skills, expressed dissatisfaction with core units as not being specific enough, lacking relevance and being too academic and theory-based and hard to implement in their school setting. The core units were not explicitly linked to the SSOs’ school setting. They also indicated that some of the units are outdated in content, particularly the finance unit.

Some SSO respondents indicated that the provision of regular tutor support (weekly or even fortnightly telephone calls) helped reduce the isolation of learning and studying online. Of the two RTOs that did offer regular tutor support the participant feedback was extremely positive.

Most SSO respondents were unaware of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process that is offered in the Accredited Online Training Program to enable participants to fast track the course. Some RTOs reported that the process required for facilitating RPL credits was a time consuming effort, with little benefit to the RTO or the SSO.

### 3.2 Reasons for withdrawal from the Accredited Online Training Program

The reasons for withdrawal as cited by SSOs include:

- The difficulties in enrolling in the Accredited Online Training Program through the online registration process. SSOs reported that it was too difficult to receive

assistance from the RTO to enable them to register, so this deterred them from completing the registration process.

- The lack of orientation activities - a number of SSOs and RTO respondents indicated the need for additional orientation activities at the beginning of the Accredited Online Training Program on how to use the online units, effective studying habits and the importance of goal setting and completing assignments.
- The lack of formal structure and support - many participants found it difficult to become organised and motivated to study online as there were no set times for classes, there was limited personal contact and limited support to assist with assignments and consequently, limited feedback.
- The perception that even if you complete the Accredited Online Training Program it will not lead to career progression nor will it result in an increase in salary. This is one of the main reasons why many SSOs withdrew from or did not complete the Accredited Online Training Program.
- Repetitive content was cited by some participants.
- The lack of time release to undertake the Accredited Online Training Program resulting in difficulties to complete the course in their own time.

RTO interviews highlighted the primary reasons for withdrawal, according to feedback received from SSOs, were feelings of frustration and isolation in relation to online delivery, lack of time, lack of opportunity for career progression, and a lack of engagement with the course content and delivery.

### 3.3 RTO views of the Accredited Online Training Program

Most RTO respondents reported that the role specific units were of value, and that completion of the Accredited Online Training Program could lift the self-esteem of SSOs. However, the program requires significant content redevelopment to the core units. The role specific units were perceived as being relevant to the work needs of SSOs working as IT teacher support staff, as Teachers aides, Integration aides and Library teacher support staff, as they are derived from training packages specific to those fields. In addition, the qualification is perceived by RTOs to be transferable to similar work in other organisations.

While some RTOs reported that the primary strength of the Accredited Online Training Program is the flexibility of online learning and delivery which enables participants to study at their own pace, it was also noted as an inhibiting factor because many SSOs who were confined to classroom support had no access to computers or had very basic computer skills. It was also reported that SSOs returning to the workforce after a long period of time usually had basic computer skills if any, making it very difficult to participate in an online program.

In addition, the DE&T website was identified as being too difficult to navigate. It was mentioned that participants often wasted lots of time trying to locate materials on the website that were crucial to completing tasks and assignments.

Most RTOs mentioned that learners who participate in online training programs need to be self-motivated and highly driven. In instances where the two RTOs offered regular tutor support (e.g. weekly contact) the online training program was more successful because the support overcame the feelings of isolation.

***“SSOs often don’t feel comfortable with computers and online learning. But I’ve made sure we help them by offering support whenever they have difficulty doing things online. I have weekly contact with my SSO students. I’ll ring them or email them and make sure they are doing OK. Or they might contact me. It’s this sort of support that’s made our program so popular with SSOs.”***  
***(Registered Training Organisation)***

RTOs corroborated SSO perceptions that even if an SSO did complete the Accredited Online Training Program this would not lead to career progression.

SWTAFE is the SSO Network Manager of the SSO Accredited Online Training Program and is accountable to DE&T for providing participation rates and data relevant to the training program. All RTOs reported that SWTAFE was responsive to the needs of individual program managers, and feedback was positive about the management of the SSO Network. SWTAFE is responsible for organising the two RTO Network meetings each year. RTOs regard these meetings as important, as they demonstrate a strong commitment to sharing best practice. One RTO respondent mentioned that it would have been helpful if SWTAFE had provided a comprehensive orientation program on the mechanics of delivering online programs and included information on ‘how to log onto the TAFE virtual campus.’

Some RTO respondents and the two Regional SSO Professional Learning Group respondents felt that the Accredited Online Training Program was possibly not marketed effectively. RTOs were unsure of how best to market the program to Principals and SSOs.

RTOs reported that feedback from SSO participants indicated that their motivation to complete the Accredited Online Training Program included professional recognition, an enhanced curriculum vitae, the chance of promotion within the same school or beyond, and the opportunity to be involved in continuous learning.

### 3.4 Principal views of the Accredited Online Training Program

Of the three Principals interviewed, levels of awareness and knowledge of the Accredited Online Training Program varied. One was a strong supporter of the training program who requested that all Integration aides in his school complete the training program. The other two were less familiar with the training program.

All three Principals reported that SSO professional development was valued in their school, though the two Principals unfamiliar with the Accredited Online Training Program were less likely to recommend it to their SSOs. All three Principals agreed that gaining accreditation through the Accredited Online Training Program was not overly important.

***“Employers don’t really look for accredited training - they are interested in the practical experience in schools, using the school-based software programs”.***  
***(Principal)***

Principals felt that training priority for SSOs should be on improving their efficiency and specific job skills, rather than policy and general knowledge, which is included in the core units of the Accredited Online Training Program.

One Principal said that the majority of SSOs did not work online at school, because they are classroom support staff and don’t have desks or computers. As a result, online training was not a viable option for them.

### 3.5 Regional SSO Professional Learning group views of the Accredited Online Training Program

Representatives from the Regional SSO Professional Learning group interviewed said that regardless of the SSO’s level, all SSOs are expected to cover the same material in the core units. As a result the Accredited Online Training Program is seen as too difficult for some and not challenging enough for others, despite core unit differences between certificate levels.

They also reported that online learning may be difficult for SSOs returning to study after a long time, or for those who do not regularly use computers.

Strengths of the Accredited Online Training Program identified by the Regional SSO Professional Learning group respondents included the opportunity to gain a certificate, a formal qualification and for some, a sense of achievement.

However, these same respondents also mentioned that the lack of opportunity for salary or career progression was a disincentive for participating in the program. Other deterrents included lack of time, limited access to tutor support and unit content not being relevant.

### 3.6 Suggestions for improving online training

The content of online training needs to be engaging and include examples of practical classroom activities.

Specific SSO training needs, including interpersonal skills, technical skills and training on government legislation and policies as they relate to day-to-day operations, for example Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) training, need to form the basis of the content, and be regularly updated.

Additional guidance on how to approach online learning, along with greater telephone and face-to-face contact and assistance in the form of regular tutor support, is recommended.

A combination of online and face-to-face delivery of a training program may be worthwhile.

# Appendix A. Discussion guides

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## Interviews with SSOs re the Evaluation and the Review

### SSOs who participated in the Accredited Online Training Program

### Discussion Guide

#### In-depth Interview

<p><b>1. Introduction</b></p> <p><i>Aim: to settle respondent, explain interview purpose and what will be covered</i></p> <p><i>(2 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have received your contact information as a result of your participation in the SSO Accredited Online Training Program.</li> <li>• TNS a social research company</li> </ul> <p><i>Topic: Talking about your perceptions of SSO training needs, and your experience with the Accredited Online Training Program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taping – audio taping – so I can analyse comments later</li> <li>• 15 minutes</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce self</b> Name, school, working experience</p>
<p><b>2. Involvement in SSO program</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Understand the enrolment process for the SSO training program</i></p> <p><i>(3 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you decide to undertake the SSO Accredited Online Training Program?</li> <li>• (Did you complete the program, if not why not?)</li> <li>• What were the strengths/weaknesses of the training? What supported and/or inhibited your learning?</li> <li>• Did you achieve your goals as a result of undertaking the training program?</li> <li>• Did your learnings from the training program transfer into your work?</li> <li>• If you could provide one piece of advice to the developers of the training program, what would it be?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Training Needs</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Determine current training needs and wants of SSOs</i></p> <p><i>(9 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you undertaken any other professional learning/training during your time as an SSO?</li> <li>• How has this supported you in your work?</li> <li>• Has it aided your career progression?</li> <li>• How do you feel the training you have previously undertaken will help you in the future?</li> <li>• What would you like in terms of professional learning in content and delivery?</li> <li>• Is this type of professional learning currently available – are you able to access it? If not, why not?</li> <li>• Do you think this training will help you in your job?</li> <li>• Do you have a career path under the SSO structure?</li> <li>• If you could undertake any training now to aid you in your current job, and in the future, what would the content be?</li> <li>• How would that training be delivered?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b></p> <p><i>(1 minute)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the training program?</li> <li>• Thank and close.</li> </ul>

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## Interviews with SSOs re the Review

### SSOs who were not aware of the SSO Accredited Online Training Program Discussion Guide

#### In-depth Interview

<p><b>4. Introduction</b></p> <p><i>Aim: to settle respondent, explain interview purpose and what will be covered</i></p> <p><i>(2 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have received your contact information from DE&amp;T.</li> <li>• TNS a social research company</li> </ul> <p><i>Topic: Talking about your perceptions of the SSO training needs and your experience.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taping – audio taping – so I can analyse comments later</li> <li>• 15 minutes</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name, school, working experience</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Training Needs</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Determine current training needs and wants of SSOs</i></p> <p><i>(12 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you undertaken any professional learning/development during your time as an SSO?</li> <li>• How has this helped you in your work?</li> <li>• Has it aided your career progression?</li> <li>• What would you like in terms of professional learning/development?</li> <li>• What is your career path under the SSO structure? (Do you have a career path?)</li> <li>• If you could undertake any training now to aid you in your current job, and in the future, what would the content be?</li> <li>• How would that training be delivered?</li> <li>• How have you identified your professional development needs?</li> <li>• How has your PD plan supported you in identifying your needs?</li> <li>• What do you feel are the supportive factors in undertaking professional learning/development?</li> <li>• What do you feel are the inhibiting factors in undertaking professional learning?</li> <li>• Do you have any suggestions on how professional learning could be improved for SSOs?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b></p> <p><i>(1 minute)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank and close.</li> </ul>

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## Interviews with RTOs re the Evaluation and the Review

### RTO Discussion Guide

#### In-depth Interview

<p><b>1. Introduction</b>  <i>Aim: to settle respondent, explain interview purpose and what will be covered</i></p> <p>(5 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for agreeing to this interview</li> <li>• TNS a social research company</li> </ul> <p><i>Topic: Talking about your perceptions of the SSO training program and any feedback you may have.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taping – audio taping – so I can analyse comments later</li> <li>• 45 minutes</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name, what do you do?</li> <li>• What is your role in the SSO training program?</li> <li>• What responsibilities do you have in regards to the SSO program?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Perception of program</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Understand perceptions and purpose of SSO training program</i></p> <p>(5 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about the SSO training program...</li> <li>• What is your understanding of the goals of the SSO program?</li> <li>• What are the strengths of the program?</li> <li>• What are the weaknesses of the program?</li> <li>• How has the program developed over time?</li> <li>• How do you monitor/evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the program?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Relationship with other stakeholders</b></p> <p><i>Aim: To determine stakeholders understanding of their role in SSO training</i></p> <p>(5 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does your relationship with South West TAFE involve?</li> <li>• What responsibilities do they have in regards to the SSO program?</li> <li>• What responsibilities do you have in regards to South West TAFE?</li> <li>• What support do they offer you?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Feedback</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Determine stakeholders impression of success of SSO program</i></p> <p>(10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me in general about your participants in the SSO program?</li> <li>• Do you think the content of the program is suitable for SSOs?</li> <li>• Why do you think SSOs enrol in the program?</li> <li>• What support do you offer the participants? For example, tutors, feedback</li> <li>• A number of participants have withdrawn from the online program why do you feel this might be the case?</li> <li>• Do you know why SSOs make a decision to leave the program?</li> <li>• Do you know what motivates SSOs to complete the program?</li> <li>• What feedback have you received from SSOs regarding the training program?</li> </ul>

<p><b>5. Training Needs</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Determine current training needs and wants of SSOs</i></p> <p><i>(10 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think is needed in terms of professional development of SSOs? Why? Of what benefit will it be to SSO's work?</li> <li>• What career paths are available for SSOs? (Are there career paths available to SSOs?)</li> <li>• Do you know of other types of training currently available to SSOs?</li> <li>• Are you aware of any SSOs undertaking any alternative training?</li> <li>• Does this aid their career progression?</li>   <li>• If you could recommend any training now to aid SSOs in their current positions, what would the content be?</li> <li>• How would that training be delivered?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b></p> <p><i>(5 mins)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the program needs to do / provide in the future?</li> <li>• Thank and close.</li> </ul>

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## Interviews with members of the Regional SSO Professional Learning Group re the Evaluation and the Review

### Regional SSO Professional Learning Group Discussion Guide

#### In-depth Interview

<p><b>1. Introduction</b>  <i>Aim: to settle respondent, explain interview purpose and what will be covered</i></p> <p>(2 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for agreeing to this interview</li> <li>• TNS a social research company</li> </ul> <p><i>Topic: talking about your perceptions of training/development opportunities for SSOs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taping – audio taping – so I can analyse comments later</li> <li>• 15 minutes</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name, what do you do?</li> <li>• What is your role in regards to SSO support and/or training and development?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Perception of program</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Understand perceptions of purpose of SSO training program</i></p> <p>(3 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you familiar with the Accredited Online Training Program for SSOs?</li> <li>• What do you know? What (and how) have you heard about the program?</li> <li>• For what reasons do SSOs undertake the SSO Accredited Online Training Program?</li> <li>• What are the strengths / weaknesses of the training?</li> <li>• Do you know why some SSOs have withdrawn the program?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If not familiar move on</b></p>
<p><b>3 Perception of SSO training needs</b></p> <p><i>Aim: Understand perception of the need and importance of SSO training and career development</i></p> <p>(8 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think would be appropriate in terms of professional development for SSOs? Why?</li> <li>• What training is currently available to SSOs?</li> <li>• Does this aid their career progression?</li> <li>• Do you think there are career paths available for SSOs?</li> <li>• If you could recommend any training now to aid SSOs in their current positions, what would the content be?</li> <li>• How would that training be delivered?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b></p> <p>(2 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any further suggestions regarding SSO training and development?</li> <li>• Thank and close.</li> </ul>

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## Interviews with Principals re the Evaluation and the Review

### Principals Discussion Guide

#### In-depth Interview

<p><b>1. Introduction</b>  <i>Aim: to settle respondent, explain interview purpose and what will be covered</i>    (2 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for agreeing to this interview</li> <li>• TNS a social research company</li> </ul> <p><i>Topic: Talking about your perceptions of the SSO training and any feedback you may have.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taping – audio taping – so I can analyse comments later</li> <li>• 20 minutes</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name, school size and number of SSO staff.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Perception of program</b>    <i>Aim: Understand perceptions of purpose of SSO training program</i>    (3 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you familiar with or have you heard of the SSO Accredited Online Training Program?</li> <li>• Have any SSOs at your school undertaken the SSO Accredited Online Training Program? Why?</li> <li>• Did they complete a certificate course/s?</li> <li>• What do you see as the strengths / weaknesses of the online training program?</li> <li>• How has the program developed the capacity of your SSOs that have undertaken it? Can you describe the impact of the program on the SSOs' work?</li> <li>• Does the learning from the training aid SSOs in their work?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If not familiar with program move on</b></p>
<p><b>3. Perception of SSO training needs</b>    <i>Aim: Understand perception of the need and importance of SSO training and career development</i>    (13 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think is needed in terms of professional development for SSOs? Why – how will it benefit the SSO? the school?</li> <li>• What training is currently available to SSOs?</li> <li>• Does this build their capacity and aid their career progression?</li> <li>• What career paths are available for SSOs within your school? Are career paths available?</li> <li>• What supports and what inhibits the provision of professional learning for SSOs?</li> <li>• How are SSOs supported to identify their professional learning needs in your school?</li> <li>• If you could recommend any training now to aid SSOs in their current work, what would the content be?</li> <li>• How would that training be delivered?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing</b>    (2 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any further suggestions regarding SSO training and development?</li> <li>• Thank and close.</li> </ul>