

Optimising Australia's conceptually confused National Training System:

**One economic option for post-market
vocational education and training**

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The usual disclaimers

The views expressed in this presentation are purely personal, based on my own research.

- Not the former Australian Industry Skills Committee
- Not the Industry Skills Advisory Council NT
- Not Charles Darwin University
- Not the National VET Regulator Advisory Council
- Not the Australian or NT Governments

Analysing the VET Policy Trail

- Contestable VET markets exemplify successful policy implementation
- These markets are in the decline phase of the business life cycle
- The methodology is a Foucauldian discourse analysis
- The discourses are in the form of national training system maps
- Understanding how policy has been made in the past informs what might be possible post-competitive markets
- Optimisation of a system rather than contestability amongst thousands of competitors might be a way forward.



Declining VET markets

- Birth, growth, maturity, sometimes revival and decline
- Renewed products and users, e.g.,:

VET in Schools

Digital transformations

Increased regulatory mandated qualifications

- Reduced funding, students preferring university, low esteem
- Follow Marginson's 1997 advice to 'look through the markets' to what might come next

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Theory and Method

- Foucault's archaeological era used discourse analysis when there are discontinuities to identify the rules around what can be said
- Study an object to free future thinking to change the world
- Carusi – policy defines reality and is inherently political; many commentators make claims about what education 'really is' are in fact claims about 'what it should be', i.e., a national VET system
- Mol – reality is historically contingent and is experienced in multiple ways by various groups

Executive federalism – Ryan's contribution

Goozee – 'move from TAFE to VET' subordinated VET policy-making to the introduction of national competition policies

VET policy and markets, like many other outsourced public services, are controlled by a national policy community group of experts

They participate in executive federalism which produces long-term policy stability, incremental change, validate expertise and experts

Changes in membership moves from incremental policy making to cyclical until the new members learn the rules

Painter – money is an administrative tool, ideal medium for resolving intergovernmental conflict; facilitates conceptual confusion



Conceptual Confusion

- The lack of explicit conceptual language at the research field level
- Different definitions are assigned to the same words and uncritically imported into VET, e.g., training products and services
- Particularly evident when there is no absolute of single best meaning
- Field experts become translators between the multiple realities
- Linguistically identical concepts that have alternative meanings reduce communication, support different values and produce different organisational behaviours

Stops on the VET policy Trail

Six maps of the notional national VET system

Reflect the multiple nature of reality as well as dominant discourses

Demonstrate the results of the conceptual confusion that enables executive federalism

Serve as a list of the experts of the VET policy community group

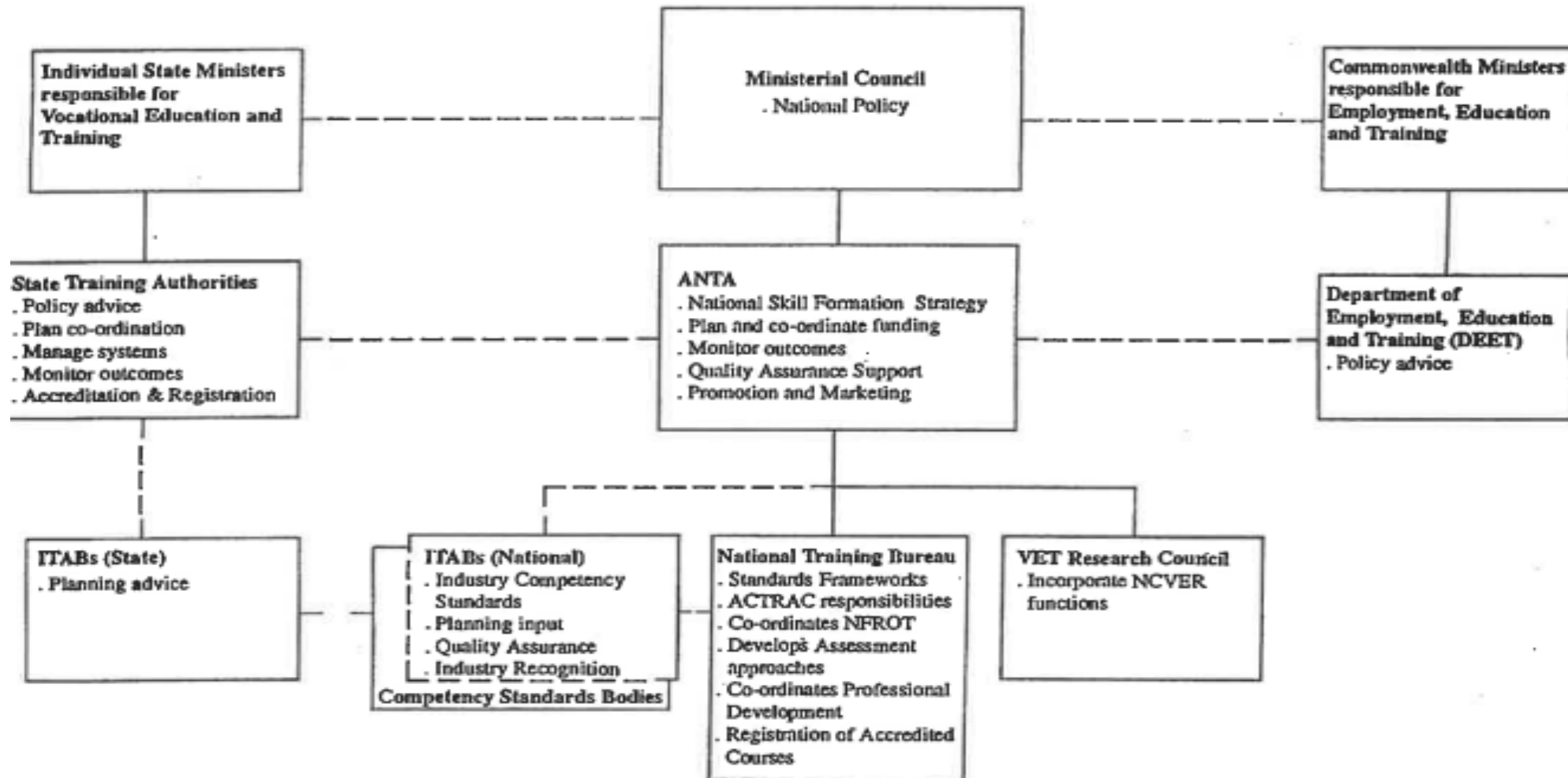
Each is a point of discontinuity, but only in terms of which version of reality is dominant at their juncture on the policy trail

NCVER is in each map, Ministers always at the top, RTOs excluded***

Students only appear in 2021 – the maps are not an education system

The Proposed National Training System 1994

THE NATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM (STRUCTURES AND ROLES)



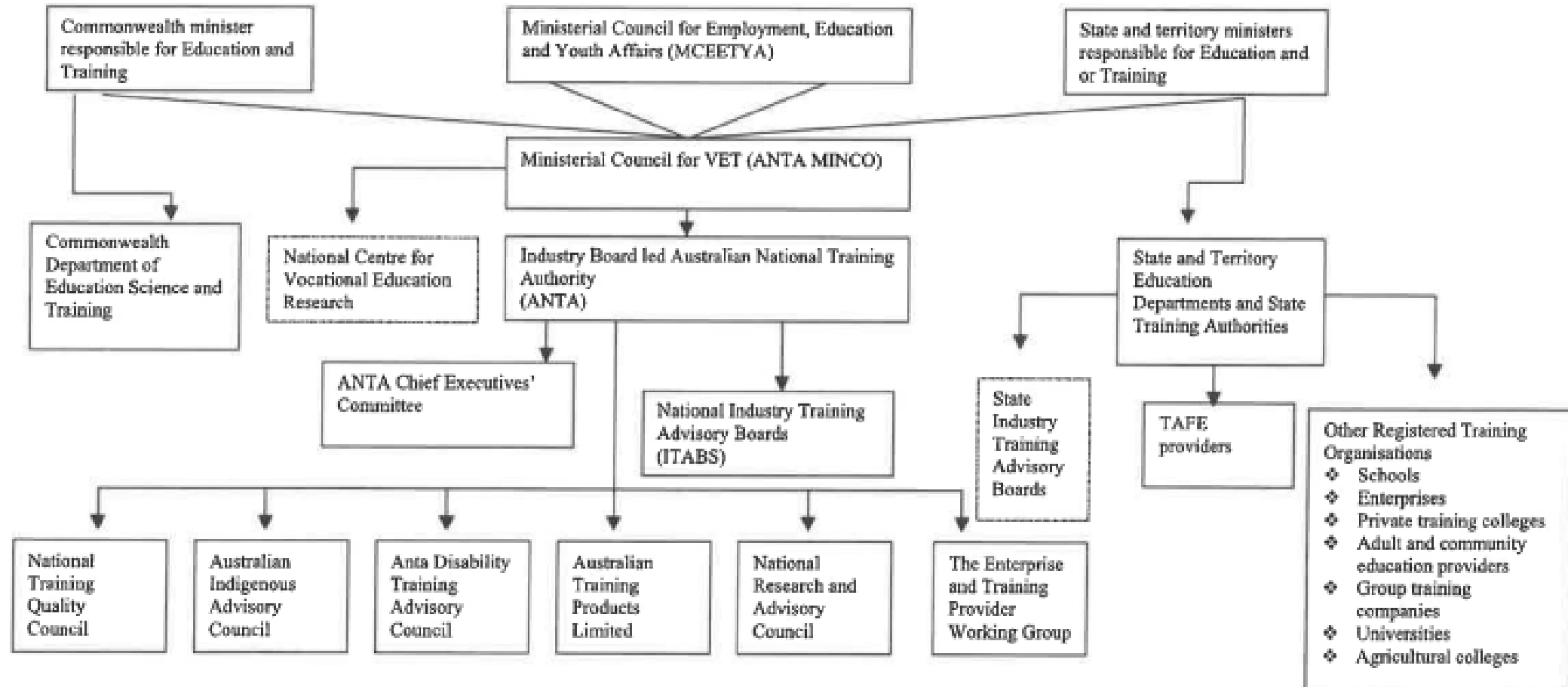


Map one: 1994

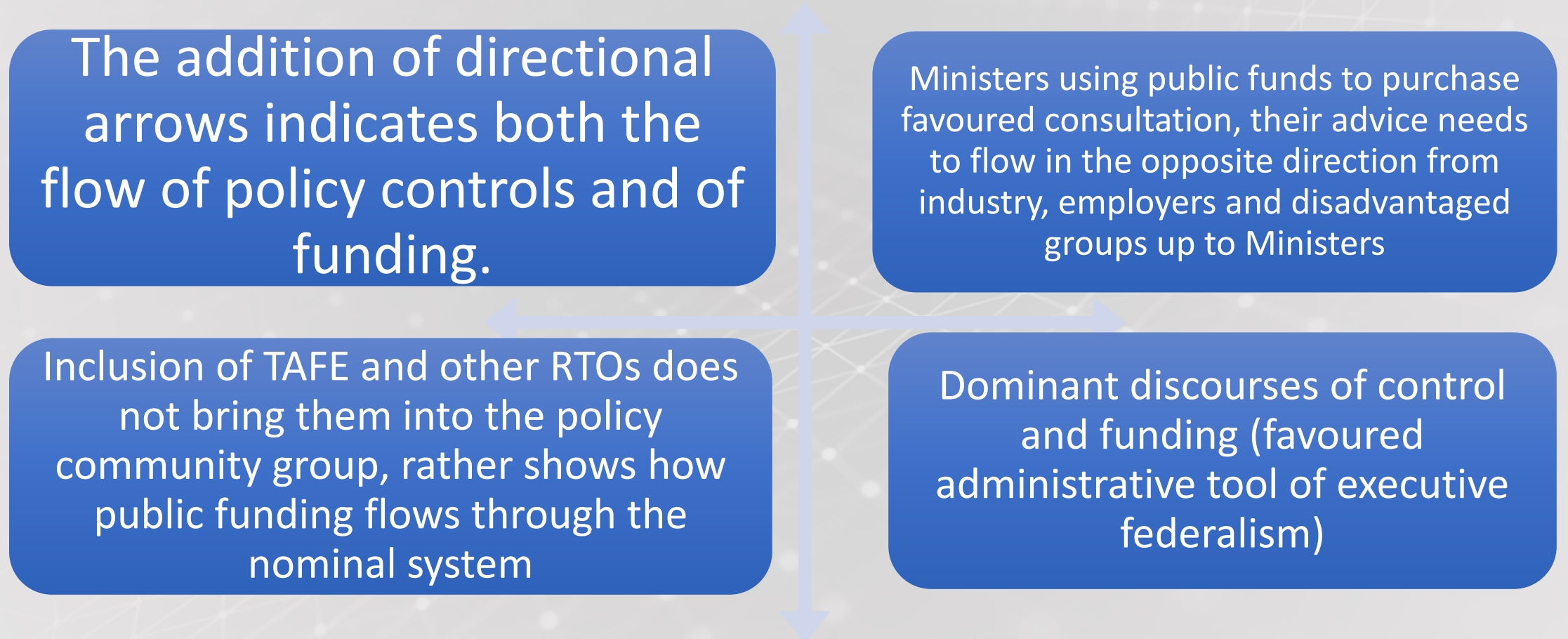
- Victims of the move from TAFE to VET – researchers and educators according to Moran and therefore missing on the map
- No directional arrows, links between the policy community experts
- Multiple consultative mechanisms in the genetics of VET
- Industry experts given prominent positions
- Start of market support arrangements with standards, provider registration and quality mechanisms, but no regulators yet
- Dominant discourse is negotiation and catering for conceptual confusion associated with creating competitive VET markets

The Australian VET System 2003

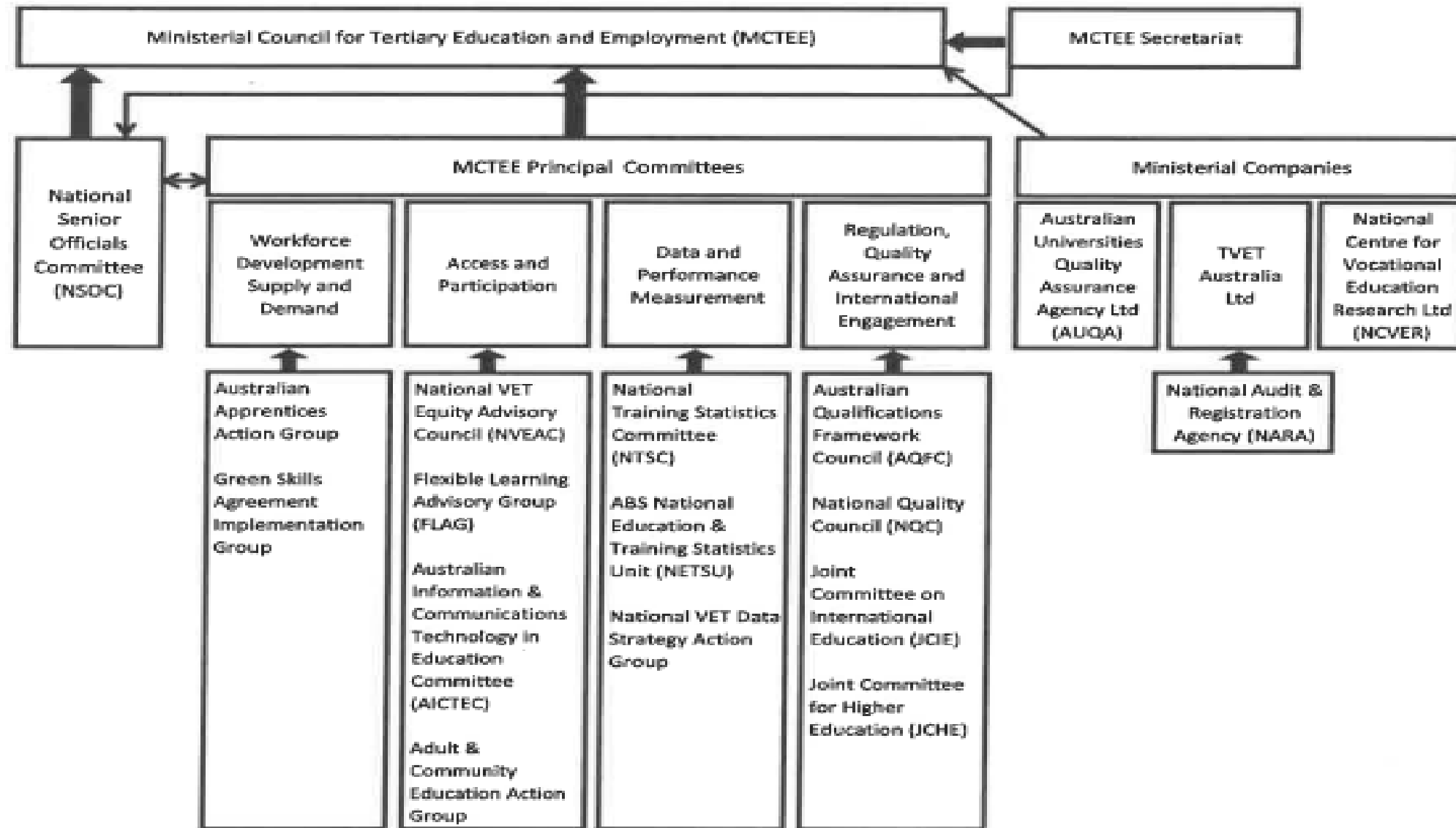
The Australian VET System



Map two: 2003



National VET Reporting Mechanisms 2010



ANTA no longer exists in favour of an intended single tertiary education system – remember Carusi!

The flow direction from the bottom of the map to the top are reversed from map two indicating flows of data and information

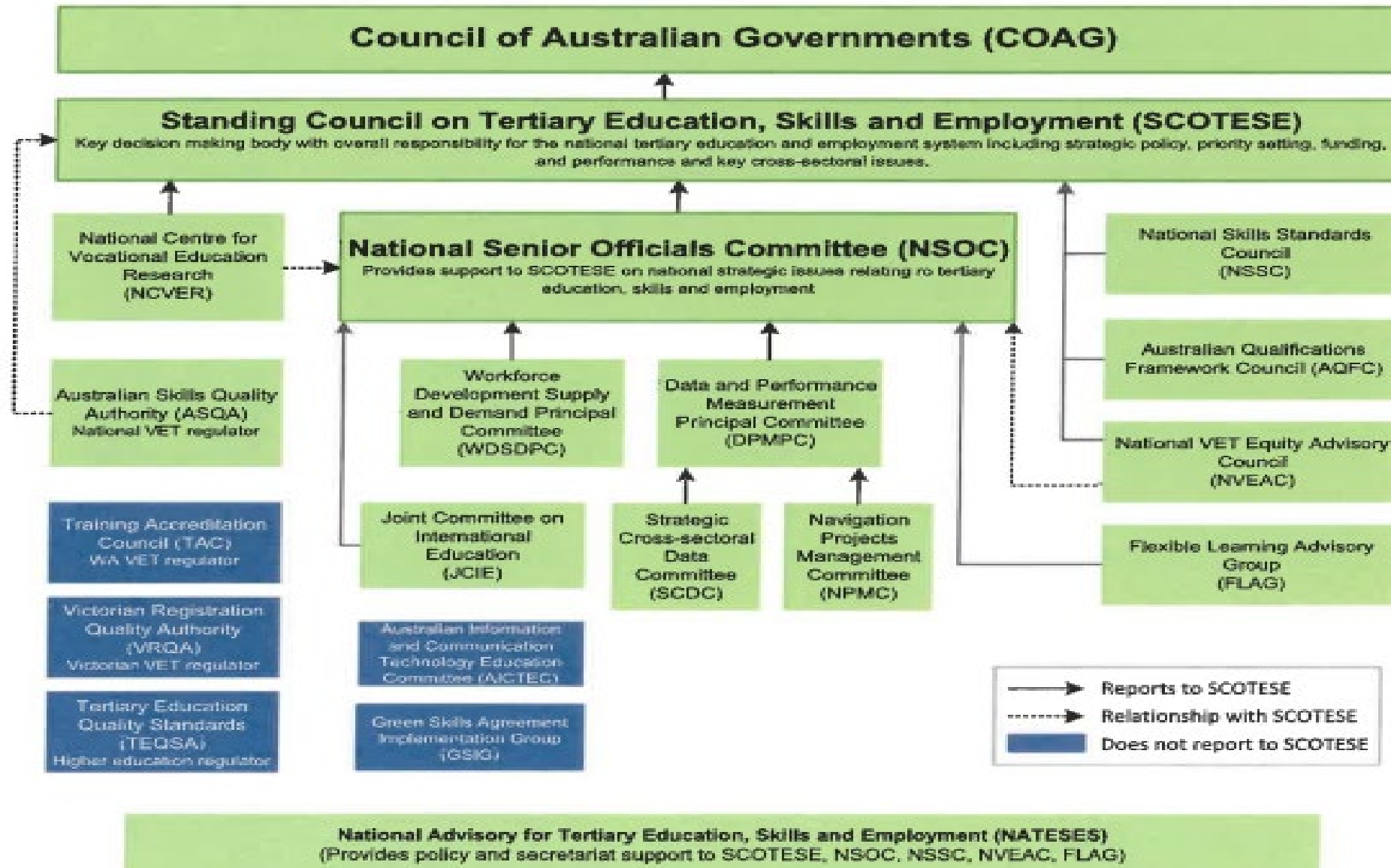
Skills senior officials join the community and RTOs are not present

Initial versions of market regulators now well established

Data and information expertise is made explicit – required to have some overview of how the market operates and how to intervene in support of the 2008 National Skills Agreement funding and targets

Dominant discourse of competitive markets

National Reporting Relationships in VET 2013



Map four: 2013

Represents a return to incremental policy making characteristic of executive federalism

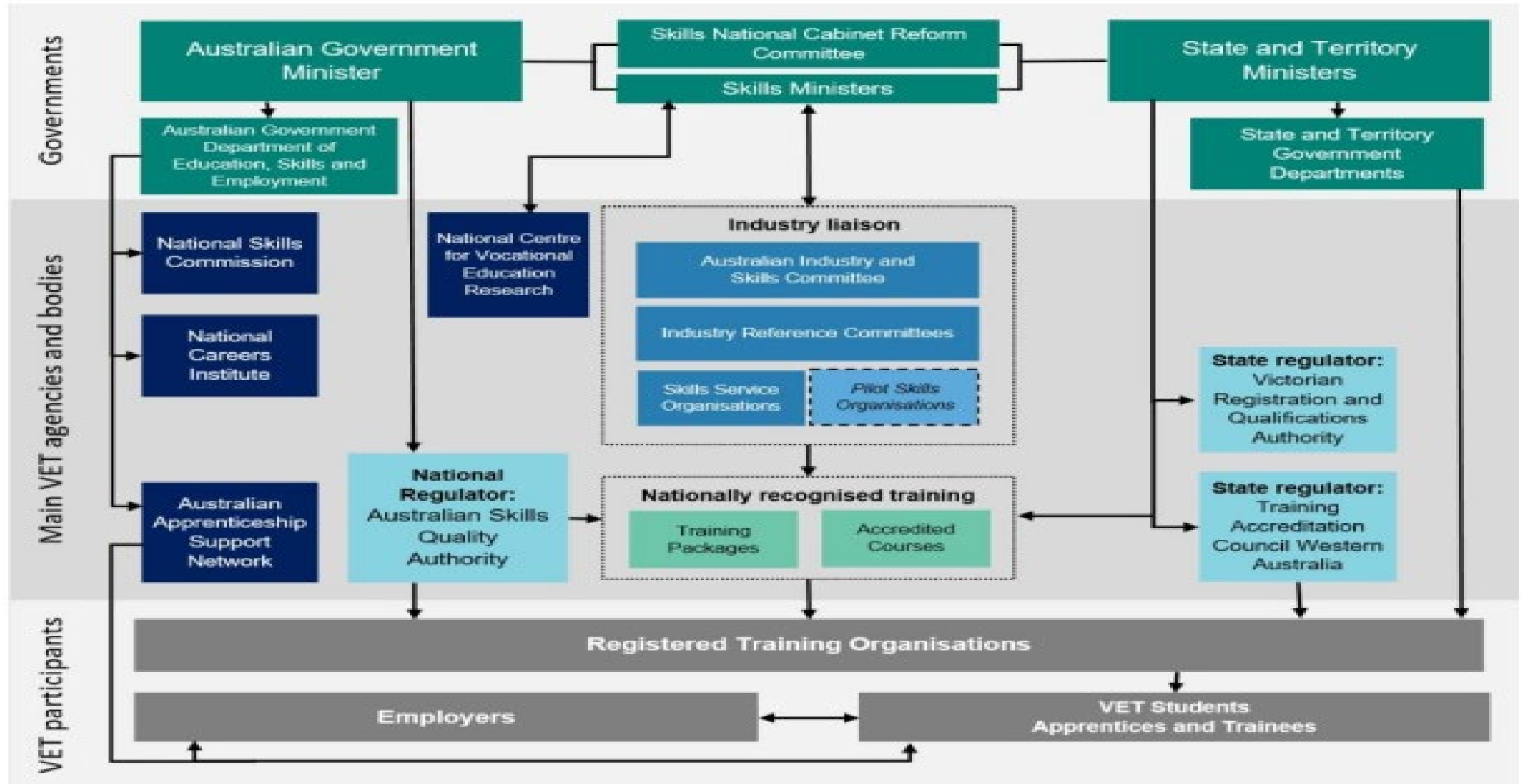
Stable VET policy community membership, national regulator

Flows of information and data from bottom to top

Extension of the national skills agreement provisions in 2012

Dominant discourses of competitive markets and data collection for market monitoring and intervention remain

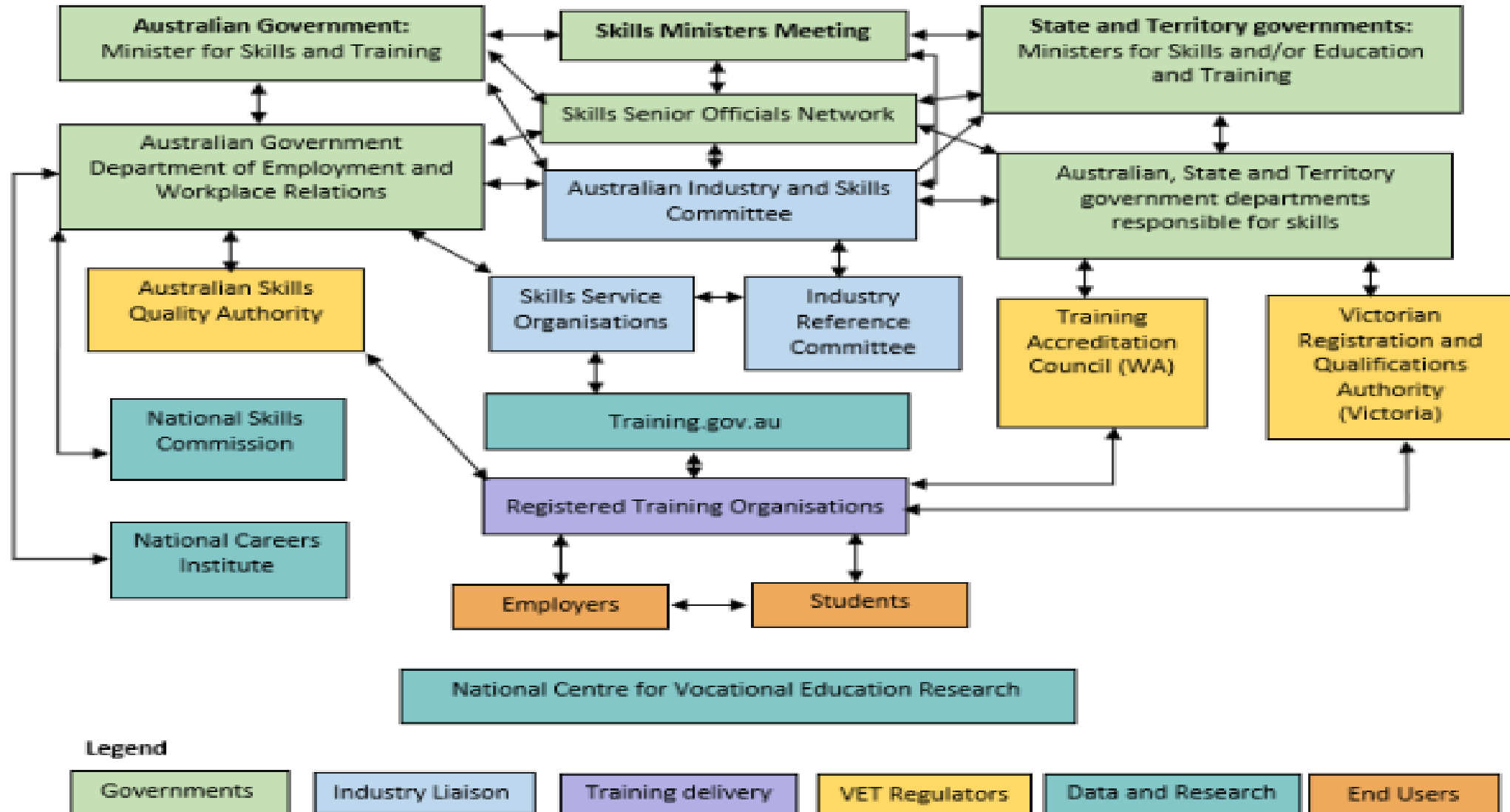
National VET System 2021



Map five: 2021

- Represents yet another discontinuity and use of cyclical policy making with new members added to the policy community group, Senior Skills Officials allegedly disappear***
- Membership proliferates to 18 (from 10 in 1994)
- E.g., National Skills Commission, National Careers Institute, Australian Industry and Skills Committee structures of IRCs and SSOs
- Students, Apprentices and Trainees appear for the first time and RTOs make a return
- Reinforces the conceptual confusion as directional arrows are reversed, predominantly from top to bottom indicating funding flows and control are back in vogue as dominant discourses

DEWR VET System Overview 2022





Map six: 2022

- The multidirectional flows indicated by the arrows in many ways takes the journey full circle to 1994, yet represents the conceptual confusion used to make executive federalism function
- Senior officials are given a central position and RTOS and students are shown, again not as part of the VET policy community group
- Expert translators are required to make this notional system operate
- It is difficult to single out a dominant discourse in the conceptual confusion
- VET remains subordinated to national competition policy, it might be possible the post-market reforms come from considering changes to competition policy

Optimisation



- Deming and approaches to total quality management
- Advocated for creating an integrated system and seeking to optimise its operation
- Unintelligently single-mindedly pursuing competitive behaviours is a political construct rather than sound economic policy
- Rather a deep understanding of how different industries and markets operate can be used to produce the best outcomes for society
- Can reduce wasteful duplication (4000 RTOs) and make sayable alternative discourses of differential regulation, oligopolies and monopolies (i.e., multiple realities!) to simultaneously operate and optimise outcomes

Finally!

Thank you for your attendance
A detailed paper from which this
brief presentation is drawn is
available by email from
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