

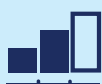
# Continuous improvement through regulatory experimentation

Increasing survey response rates to better assess education providers –  
NSW Department of Education



Level:

**Moderate**



Industry:

**Education**



Location:

**Australia**



## Overview

The NSW Department of Education (DoE) wanted to improve the volume of student survey responses so that it could better assess education providers. Through an iterative series of A/B tests, DoE experimented with the timing, frequency and medium of their survey to optimise response rates.

## Key finding

Increased survey response rates by approximately 100%.

## Outcome 1

Increased the number of providers with sufficient survey sample from approximately 100 to 250.

## Outcome 2

Online format significantly reduced yearly costs for survey administration.

## Evaluation method

A/B testing.

## Background



### The NSW Department of Education (DoE) wanted to improve the assessment of education providers by increasing student survey response rates.

DoE oversees and manages the state's educational policies and programs, including the allocation of funding to various training providers. These funding decisions are based on provider performance, which is assessed through the annual nationwide Student Outcomes Survey. Recently, DoE transitioned from traditional phone and paper-based surveys to an online format. This shift has enabled the department to access real-time data on student outcomes, improve response rates and achieve significant cost savings. As part of this transition, DoE's research team aimed to optimise and test multiple methods of administering survey reminders to further enhance response rates. While not a direct test of a regulatory approach, increased survey engagement is a universal benefit that can help DoE to more accurately evaluate provider performance, particularly for smaller providers.

## Intervention and outcome

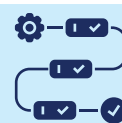


### DoE doubled survey response rates by changing the timing, frequency and medium of reminders.

DoE conducted a series of iterative A/B tests to determine the optimal timing, frequency and medium (email and text) for survey reminders to maximise response rates. They randomly allocated students to either a) the control group, receiving the standard reminder, or b) the treatment group, which varied across the different tests. For example, one experiment tested different lengths of time between the first and second reminders sent to the students.

Each experiment led to incremental improvements in response rates. By the end, the team had doubled the survey response rates through minor changes in the way in which the reminders were sent. As a result, DoE now has more accurate and reliable performance data of smaller providers. Moreover, this work inspired other teams within the department to conduct similar A/B tests of their own.

## Key steps for successful experiments



### ✓ Conduct experiments at opportune moments.

During the transition to the online survey format and before full automation was implemented, DoE's research team had to manually administer the survey. This provided a window of opportunity to conduct the A/B tests, where the research team had access to and could easily manipulate survey delivery variables.

**Consider timing experiments during moments that present unique opportunities for intervention and experimentation.**

### ✓ Iterate and improve the experiment design.

The DoE research team was able to achieve a significant increase in survey response rates by adopting an iterative approach to their experimental design, where they tested and implemented a variety of minor changes to the survey reminders.

**Consider adopting a similar iterative strategy to optimise experiment results.**

## Overcoming resistance to change

DoE had been using phone and paper surveys for decades. Transitioning to and experimenting with a new process can be challenging in a large organisation. DoE's culture of innovation and strong support from senior managers enabled the research team to build support for the experiments and access the required resources.