



RESEARCH OVERVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR TAFE MANAGERS

Higher education in TAFE

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A project funded through the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation program investigated higher education programs—mostly bachelor's and associate degrees—offered by TAFE institutes. This overview highlights the implications for TAFE management identified through this project.

Findings

Some TAFE institutes are developing higher education programs as an extension of their provision of upper-level vocational education, while others are seeking to evolve as a new type of tertiary institution; however, status is an issue for all TAFE institutes.

Multiple goals and approaches to offering higher education in TAFE increase the diversity and responsiveness of higher education provision. Evidence from Canada and England suggests that the aspirations of some institutions to evolve into a particular type of tertiary education institution such as a polytechnic is a transition to a longer-term development as a university. In this, TAFE institutes would be pursuing a path previously followed by at least eight of Australia's current

universities and several universities overseas (*Main report*, p. 13; *Literature review*, p. 15). Yet status is an issue for all TAFE institutes and is the subject of a separate overview.

TAFE institutes should emphasise their role as an alternative public provider of higher education.

TAFE as a public provider of higher education has an important potential role in meeting the Australian Government's qualifications and equity targets. The allocation of more Commonwealth-supported places will enable TAFE to contribute to these targets. In time, TAFE's participation in the government's student-demand-driven funding system will also facilitate this role (*Main report*, pp. 11, 28, 37).

Staff of state offices of higher education support higher education in TAFE as an important part of a diverse higher education or tertiary education sector.

State offices of higher education also acknowledge the obstacles TAFE institutes face in providing higher education. However, they emphasise that these institutes have to meet standards, and that it takes time to develop the appropriate

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cultures, institutional governance, and policy to achieve this (*Main report*, p.26).

Mixed-sector institutions tend to replicate divisions between sectors within their institutions; this can be reduced by student transition programs.

Mixed-sector institutions in England—those with more than 3% but less than 20% of their load in their smaller sector—tend to replicate internally the divisions between sectors, a consequence of different government policy and governance arrangements. A similar trend is evident in TAFE institutions in Australia. Sectoral boundaries are likely to create hierarchies and barriers for students and staff if they are not explicitly constructed and underpinned by national and institutional policies to encourage transitions (*Main report*, p.15). The creation of transition programs to support students moving from VET to higher education programs within TAFE and to universities is critical (*Main report*, p.39).

Higher education teachers in TAFE report inadequate recognition of time and other demands of their work.

Almost all higher education teachers in TAFE interviewed for this project complained about workloads and claimed they were unsustainable. They argued that preparing for higher education

teaching is more demanding and complex than preparing for competency-based VET programs. Higher education teachers need more time to prepare for their classes, for the scholarship that makes them competent higher education teachers and for academic staff development, all issues that should be recognised in working conditions and in the allocation of teaching and other workloads (*Main report*, p.31, *Literature review*, p.17).

About the project

The project examined the growth and the implications of higher education offered by TAFE institutes. It sought to understand the purposes of such programs, how they have been developed and implemented, the impact they are having on institutional partnerships, how they are perceived by participants, and whether they create opportunities for students.

The project involved a survey of bachelor degrees offered by TAFE's equivalents in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also reviewed the literature on higher education in TAFE's equivalents in those countries. In addition, the project team conducted 98 interviews in six states and territories.

Further information

More information is available from the various publications associated with the project:

- the **research overviews**, which discuss the implications of the research for TAFE teachers, TAFE managers, staff development and public policy, as well as the issues raised about the status of TAFE degrees, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2189.html>>
- the **discussion paper**, *Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper* by Gavin Moodie, Leesa Wheelahan, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2139.html>>
- the **main report**, *Higher education in TAFE* by Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly, NCVER, Adelaide, 2009, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>
- the **literature review**, by Leesa Wheelahan, *Higher education in TAFE: Support document*, NCVER, Adelaide, <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>

Additional information is available from:

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This overview is based on the research report, *Higher education in TAFE* by Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly. Visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html> for more information.