



RESEARCH OVERVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

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 some of the implications for teachers identified by this project.

Findings

Some students, especially younger students, enrol in higher education in TAFE because of TAFE's more supportive learning environment, while others, particularly older students, enrol because it directly supports their career progression.

Of the 28 students interviewed in the project, at least eight said that one reason they enrolled in their TAFE program was because university was too daunting and they could get more support in TAFE. Fourteen students explained that the smaller, more supportive learning environment was helpful, including the support of, and contact with, teachers. Even then, many said they found their studies difficult and challenging. Older students tended to enrol in higher education in TAFE because these programs directly supported their career progression. These students, particularly those with degrees, were more confident about

their studies but they also appreciated TAFE's supportive learning environment (*Main report*, p.32).

Students' concerns about higher education include their academic, social, and cultural transitions, which are often combined with work, family and economic demands.

The literature on 'transfer shock' in the United States shows that the transition from vocational to higher education is difficult for students because of the different learning environment, expectations and requirements. The research literature in Australia and the United Kingdom supports this claim, as did many of the students and teachers involved in this project (*Main report*, p.14). Teachers should take this into account in their teaching strategies, particularly in beginning subjects in higher education programs.

Many teachers who teach in both VET and higher education programs find difficulty in 'switching registers and levels' when moving between higher education and competency-based programs.

One TAFE teacher said, 'As long as higher education and VET are taught together, it is a challenge to switch from one to the

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other. Teachers sometimes carry the wrong mode with them into higher education—and this is because TAFE is asking everyone to have two styles and to be able to deploy each when appropriate. Teachers across the sectors in England reported similar experiences (*Main report*, pp. 14, 31).

Almost all higher education teachers in TAFE institutes said that their institute's teaching workload is not appropriate for higher education.

Some teachers reported that higher education teaching workloads were allocated on a similar basis as TAFE teaching workloads. But higher education teachers consistently reported needing more time to prepare for their classes, to undertake the scholarship that makes them competent higher education teachers, and for academic staff development. These requirements have implications for TAFE managers and are elaborated in a separate overview.

Many teachers highlighted the need for more staff development, but the project identified a wider need, that of developing TAFE's capacity for providing higher education.

Higher education teachers in TAFE do not have access to the higher education curriculum committees, discipline forums, staff development programs and the support from the Australian

Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), routinely available in universities. This is a public policy issue and is elaborated in the overview on the public policy implications of the research (*Main report*, pp. 14, 38).

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.