

Higher education in TAFE

Leesa Wheelahan
Gavin Moodie
Stephen Billet
Ann Kelly

Griffith University

NCVER MONOGRAPH SERIES 01/2009

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Mixed media

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Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

ph +61 8 8230 8400 fax +61 8 8212 3436
email ncver@ncver.edu.au
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>
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About the research



Higher education in TAFE

Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly, Griffith University

As at June 2009, ten technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia are able to offer degree qualifications. The presence of such 'mixed sector' institutions is relatively recent in Australia, the consequence being that we do not yet know a great deal about this type of higher education or about how it may be reshaping boundaries in the tertiary education sector. This project sought to capture different perspectives about the nature of this provision.

This report is the culmination of desktop research and interviews with staff from state offices of higher education, senior managers at dual-sector universities, TAFE institutes that offer higher education and some that do not, and teachers and students across six states. It also considers several implications arising from the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008).

Key messages

- While numbers of higher education students in TAFE are small, these may well increase as governments strive to both meet their equity objectives and boost the proportion of the Australian population with a degree.
- A distinctive, although not unique, feature of higher education courses in TAFE is their applied orientation.
- Some of the TAFE institutes offering higher education see themselves developing as polytechnics, while others view their offering of higher education qualifications as an extension of their role as vocational education and training (VET) providers.
- Mixed-sector TAFE institutes aim to help their students negotiate the boundaries between VET and higher education qualifications and adapt to learning in university, including through the provision of greater learning support.
- Institutional and industrial relations structures are impeding growth of higher education in TAFE institutes.
- Almost every person consulted in the project raised the issue of TAFE's profile and its perceived lower status compared with universities.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank those institutions that participated in this project. We have not identified institutions because all interviewees were very frank and open in their views. As a consequence, we wanted to ensure that we maintained their confidentiality and that they could not be identified, even indirectly. The community of higher education in TAFE is still very small and many of those involved are well known to each other. The openness that interviewees offered was crucial at this stage of the development of higher education in TAFE: we need to understand the controversies, issues and limitations, as well as the benefits and strengths, if we are to develop a policy and institutional framework that both supports the development of this provision and creates new opportunities for students.

In particular, we thank our liaison person in each institution who identified interviewees, asked them to participate, and organised times and places to enable the interviews to proceed. This is always an onerous undertaking and the project could not have proceeded without this help.

We also thank the 28 students who participated in this project. They are among the first higher education in TAFE students, and their views, experiences and advice are very important in helping us to understand how these programs can be improved. Similarly, teachers were a very important part of this project because they are the ones who actually deliver higher education programs, and their experiences and views will be fundamental in shaping this provision. Their frankness in the interviews provided important insights into the experience of delivering higher education and how they perceive its benefits, strengths and limitations; they also provided advice on how the quality, standards and outcomes of this provision can be ensured.

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Abstract

Degrees in technical and further education (TAFE) are relatively new, but are likely to grow as a consequence of government policies that both seek to increase the percentage of Australians holding a bachelor degree and create a more unified tertiary education sector. There are ten TAFE institutes authorised to offer higher education in five states, with fewer than 1600 higher education students in TAFE in 2006. Initially, TAFE institutes focused on niche programs not offered by universities; however, they now offer vocationally focused programs similar to those of many universities. This project sought to understand different perspectives on the nature of higher education in TAFE by interviewing staff from six state offices of higher education, senior managers at two dual-sector universities and nine TAFE institutes (in six states), along with teachers and students. Six of the nine TAFE institutes included in this project offer higher education, and the other three do not.

Most interviewees argued that the rationale for higher education provision in TAFE is to meet, through its applied orientation, specific industry needs and to provide a pathway for students who need support to access higher education. Others argued, by contrast, that industry and students benefit most if TAFE works in partnership with universities through complementary provision, rather than via its own higher education provision. Interviewees argued that the different reporting, funding, quality assurance, industrial and curriculum frameworks of the higher education and vocational education and training (VET) sectors constrain the growth of higher education in TAFE. The challenges identified as confronting TAFE in developing this provision include: the absence of a research culture; difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified staff; the need to invest in staff development; the existing industrial award covering TAFE teachers; costs of program development; the resources needed to sustain higher education provision; and, crucially, the absence of public funding for TAFE's higher education qualifications and the lack of community understanding about these programs.

Some TAFE institutes are seeking to become a new type of institution, similar to a polytechnic that offers a range of qualifications, from senior school and VET, through to higher education. Other TAFE institutes see their higher education programs as an extension of their role as VET providers. Teachers were, if anything, more in favour of higher education in TAFE than senior management, but most teachers argued that existing industrial and working conditions were obstacles to its development, as was management's lack of insight into the nature of their work. Students said that they valued the high levels of support they received, although younger students were more uncertain of their identity as higher education students and more troubled by the status of their qualification, even though almost all claimed they would recommend their program to friends. The status of TAFE's higher education qualifications was an issue that concerned all categories of interviewees.

This project concludes that higher education in TAFE should be established as a component of a coherent tertiary education policy framework to ensure the quality of provision and that it meets its intended outcomes. This includes consideration of the governance, policy, funding, quality assurance, curriculum and industrial frameworks required to realise academic standards and to support TAFE institutes to develop economies of scale and the expertise and culture needed to sustain higher education provision.

Introduction

Higher education programs in technical and further education (TAFE) institutes are relatively new in Australia. Ten TAFE institutes in five states have been registered by their state higher education registering bodies to offer associate degrees and degrees, with half in Victoria. Almost all of this provision is currently not publicly funded and is still in its very early stages, but it will almost certainly grow. It arises as a consequence of the increasingly fluid boundaries between the schools, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors, as institutions in each sector respond to three interrelated and interdependent drivers. First, they must respond to government policies and skills plans. Second, they are located within a more competitive market in which they are required to compete with each other for students and for funding. Third, they must also meet the changing expectations of society and the demands of the economy and labour market.

Little is known about higher education programs in TAFE even though they are contributing to the reshaping of sectoral boundaries. This includes the purposes they are designed to meet, how they have been designed and implemented, and their impact on partnerships between TAFE institutes and universities, and between TAFE institutes and industry partners. We also do not know whether they open opportunities for students for occupational progression or for progression to higher-level studies in universities, and how they are perceived by participants, particularly students and teachers. This lack of knowledge is understandable, given that higher education in TAFE is still new and has yet to establish a clearly defined place in Australian tertiary education. This novelty may also explain why this provision is still controversial.

As we found in our interviews, those who support higher education in TAFE argue that it has a distinctive role to play and they distinguish it both from higher education programs offered by universities and other VET programs offered by TAFE. These interviewees argue that TAFE's higher education programs are more responsive to industry and result in better outcomes for students. This is because of their more applied focus, which is based on a distinctive blend of practical application and theory, in contrast to the more abstract focus of degrees in universities on the one hand, and the narrower skills focus of much VET provision on the other. Moreover, they argue, these programs help to widen participation in higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds through smaller classes, higher levels of pastoral care, more student-focused pedagogy and seamless pathways between qualifications. Not everyone agrees. Others we interviewed argued that TAFE institutes cannot compete with universities because they would not win in the competition for students, as the community in general and parents in particular value a university education over a qualification from TAFE. They argue that competition between TAFE and universities will limit opportunities for students because such competition will damage TAFE–university partnerships, particularly in areas where there is weak demand for places in tertiary education. These interviewees argued that TAFE institutes and universities should work in partnership and leverage their complementary strengths to build a stronger position for both institutions while creating opportunities for students to gain a valuable, work-focused VET qualification and supported pathways to higher education.

The purpose of this project is not to resolve this debate because, as with many debates in tertiary education, it can never be resolved and it may be that these distinct positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both perspectives raise important issues and alert us to particular dangers while also offering suggestions about the best way to realise opportunities for students. Higher education in TAFE is likely to continue growing, and it is important that it does so in a way that creates

opportunities for students to gain the knowledge and skills they need for work and to access pathways to higher-level studies in universities.

This project maps provision of higher education qualifications offered by TAFE institutes and provides insights into participants' perspectives and experiences as a way of informing further policy discussion and institutional practices about the best way to support this provision. It focuses on TAFE's provision of associate degrees and degrees, even though TAFE institutes offer a small number of other accredited higher education qualifications.

The project was shaped by two key questions that were designed to provide insights into the nature of higher education provision in TAFE institutes:

- ✧ What higher education does TAFE offer? Why and how?
- ✧ What is the nature of VET and higher education identities in 'mixed sector' TAFE institutes and how is the sectoral divide constituted and navigated within TAFE by staff and students?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 97 people across the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. The number of interviews with different types of interviewees is outlined in table 1.

Table 1 Categories of interviewee and number interviewed in each category

| Category of interviewee | No. interviewed |
|---|-----------------|
| State offices of higher education in 6 states | 10 |
| Senior staff at 2 dual-sector universities | 6 |
| TAFE directors and senior staff in 6 TAFE institutes with HE in 5 states | 16 |
| TAFE directors and senior staff in 2 TAFE institutes in one state with no HE | 4 |
| TAFE director and senior staff in one TAFE with no HE in a state where TAFE does offer HE, and where the TAFE is planning higher-level qualifications | 2 |
| Program/curriculum developers in 3 TAFE institutes with HE | 5 |
| Teachers in 6 TAFE institutes with HE in 5 states and the TAFE division of one dual-sector university which delivers HE | 27 |
| HE students in 6 TAFE institutes in 5 states and the TAFE division of one dual-sector university | 28 |
| Total | 98 |

Note: 97 people were interviewed but one person was interviewed both as a student and teacher.

A fuller explanation of the project methods and limitations is available in appendix 2 and this includes more detail on interviewees. The interview schedules used are included in the support documents for this project (see <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>).

A tripartite classification of tertiary education institutions as single-sector, mixed-sector or dual-sector to reflect the changing nature of sectoral boundaries provides the analytical context for the project. How each of these is defined is given later in this chapter.

The findings from this project are that senior managers in TAFE institutes offering higher education, TAFE higher education teachers, and TAFE higher education students are deeply committed to this provision. From their various standpoints nearly all these interviewees articulate similar understandings about the role and purpose of higher education in TAFE. However, they also have distinct concerns. TAFE senior managers argue that the absence of public funding for these qualifications and the limitations arising from the industrial award covering TAFE teachers are of particular concern. They claim that the different sectoral funding, reporting, accreditation, quality assurance and curriculum frameworks limit the development of higher education in TAFE. TAFE teachers argue that existing working conditions are unsustainable because they do not provide time to engage in scholarship, which is fundamental for the quality of provision and the development of a higher education culture. They further note that management does not sufficiently understand higher education and, consequently, the nature of their work. Students value

the high levels of support they receive, but younger students tended to be more uncertain in their identity as higher education students and more troubled by the status of their qualification, even though almost all would, where appropriate, recommend their course to friends. The status of TAFE's higher education qualifications was an issue that concerned all categories of interviewees.

Senior managers from the three TAFE institutes included in the project that don't offer higher education were concerned that such provision would damage relationships with universities such that they would become competitors rather than partners. They also said that it would require TAFE to seriously engage with higher education's sectoral arrangements and all the baggage that this would bring with it, thus distracting them from what they were good at, which is serving industry's training needs. Views of senior staff at the dual-sector universities were more mixed, with some supporting higher education in TAFE and others not, reflecting the different views of TAFE managers who support it, and those who (to varying degrees) do not. One of these dual-sector universities offers degrees of the university through its TAFE division. Interviewees in offices of higher education believed that higher education in TAFE was an important component of a diverse higher education or tertiary education sector, but that it was still at an early stage, with the consequence that TAFE institutes need to work on developing their internal governance arrangements and a research culture.

The conclusion of this project is that higher education in TAFE needs to be part of coherent tertiary education policies to ensure the quality of provision and that it meets its intended outcomes. This includes consideration of the governance, policy, funding, quality assurance, curriculum and industrial frameworks required to support academic standards and to support TAFE institutes to develop economies of scale and the expertise and culture they need to sustain higher education provision. These findings are elaborated in the conclusion of this report. It also identifies issues associated with the provision of higher education in TAFE that need further discussion and makes some suggestions about measures that could be implemented to support this provision.

Context—the blurring of the sectoral divide

In the past, the structure of Australia's education system was relatively straightforward: secondary schools offered the senior school certificate; TAFE institutes offered competency-based VET qualifications; and universities offered higher education qualifications. The focus in Australian tertiary education policy has been on constructing institutional and administrative arrangements that maintain sectoral differentiation in qualifications and in institutions, while developing pathways between VET and higher education qualifications. Australia's five dual-sector universities are examples of this approach; they have large TAFE and higher education divisions and even though they integrate administration and student support, qualifications and teaching mostly remain sectorally differentiated, and qualification pathways are used as the main mechanism to transcend the sectoral divide within the institution. Other institutional arrangements that have emerged to manage partnerships between the sectors, while maintaining the distinction between them, include partnerships between single-sector TAFE institutes and universities, and co-locations. The latter mostly consist of co-located satellite campuses of a university and a TAFE institute (and sometimes a senior secondary school campus) in regional Australia or on the outskirts of big cities (Wheeler & Moodie 2005).

The picture is more complex now and the boundaries between the sectors are becoming blurred. The educational sectors are increasingly defined by the qualifications that are accredited in each sector and not by the type of institutions that comprise those sectors, even though most institutions are still defined by their primary sectoral location. Most secondary schools now offer VET in Schools and almost 34% of senior secondary school students are enrolled in VET in Schools as part of their senior school certificate (NCVER 2008, table 1, p.8). Many of Australia's 37 public universities are registered to offer VET qualifications or have established companies to do so (Karmel 2008), and now ten of the 59 TAFE institutes in Australia are registered to offer higher

education programs. To add to the complexity, the number of private providers in VET and higher education has grown considerably over recent years to constitute a small, if growing, component of both sectors, and many of these institutions offer both VET and higher education qualifications (Watson 2000).

The blurring of the sectoral divide is being driven by changes in society, the economy and the labour market and by government policies and funding mechanisms. Australia, along with other countries, is seeking to increase the percentage of its population with higher-level qualifications to ensure that it remains competitive within the global economy. Thus the Australian Government has recently set a target of 40% of those aged 25–34 years to attain a higher education qualification by 2025 (an increase from 32% in 2008) to meet future needs and to remain competitive with high-performing countries (or economies) (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p.2). Both the Victorian and Queensland governments have designated a role for TAFE to deliver higher education qualifications as part of their skills plans. In 2002, the Victorian Government granted TAFE institutes permission to offer full-fee degrees ‘that were strongly vocational in focus’ in ‘niche’ markets (Kosky 2002, p.10), while the Queensland Government rebadged Southbank Institute of TAFE as Southbank Institute of Technology with responsibility to develop ‘associate degrees, university pathways and articulation arrangements’ (Department of Employment and Training 2006, p.17).

Government policies and funding mechanisms designed to create competition between educational providers for students and funding also shape institutional behaviour. TAFE’s traditional student base is being eroded from all directions. TAFE is being eroded from below by schools offering VET in Schools and their growing monopolisation of lower-level VET certificates; from above by universities that are offering sub-degree programs to guarantee a pipeline of international and domestic students for their higher-level programs; and from within by private providers that are able to offer both VET and higher education programs to domestic and international students (Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2008). Moreover, the changing nature of the labour market places pressure on TAFE, particularly on its higher-level qualifications. Graduates from VET diplomas and advanced diplomas often compete with bachelor degree graduates for the same positions, and in many industries diplomas are being replaced by degrees as the entry-level qualification (Foster et al. 2007; Karmel 2009). TAFE institutes quickly moved beyond their niche higher education programs, sometimes designed to fill gaps left by universities, to offer programs in similar fields as those offered by universities such as business, hospitality, multimedia, engineering, performing and visual arts and nursing. Claims about distinctiveness now rest on the applied, vocational orientation of TAFE’s programs and more supportive learning environments, and the kind, level and quality of awards these institutions offer (Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2008; Box Hill Institute of TAFE 2008).

The growth of ‘mixed-sector’ tertiary provision may have been constrained until now because, in most cases, universities and TAFE institutes have received public funding only to offer qualifications normally associated with their sector, and they have been restricted to offering qualifications from the other sector for full fees. However, the Victorian Government is introducing a student voucher scheme for its VET programs (Government of Victoria 2008), and the Australian and state governments in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) have agreed to pursue the development of contestable funding arrangements for VET that do not distinguish between public and private providers (Gillard 2008). The Australian Government has announced that it will introduce a ‘student-driven’ funding system by 2012 in higher education to enable institutions to be funded according to the number of students they enrol (Gillard 2009a). These measures may, in time, give more institutions in both sectors greater access to publicly funded provision. The Australian Government has also decided to: establish a tertiary education ministerial council that will, among other things, encompass VET, higher education, and adult and community education; review the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) to make it more ‘robust’ and improve student articulation and credit transfer between sectors; establish a national tertiary education regulatory body for higher education that will eventually include VET; and expand the remit of Skills Australia beyond its advisory role on VET to advise government on how higher education can meet Australia’s

skill needs (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Australia 2009). These and other measures will contribute to the creation of a more coherent tertiary education system that brings TAFE and higher education into a more direct relationship.

For now, however, the blurring of the sectoral divide between the tertiary education sectors is resulting in the development of a new type of institution—mixed-sector institutions. This project distinguishes mixed-sector institutions from dual-sector institutions by the proportion of student load they have in both sectors (Moodie 2009), using the following three classifications:¹

- ✧ single-sector institutions: those with more than 97% of their student load enrolled in one sector
- ✧ mixed-sector institutions: those with at least 3% but no more than 20% of their student load enrolled in their minority sector
- ✧ dual-sector institutions: those with at least 20% but less than 80% of their student load enrolled in each sector.

This classification is different from a classification of institutions by their main sectoral identification. Just as there are single-sector VET institutions and single-sector higher education institutions, there can be both mixed-sector VET institutions and mixed-sector higher education institutions. It is useful to distinguish between dual-sector and mixed-sector institutions in Australia because it enables us to analyse the different kinds of demands they face and how they construct their institutional arrangements. The demands on each type of institution are different. Dual-sector institutions must report to two levels of government and construct their internal governance, administration and policies to meet each sector's different accreditation, funding, reporting, and quality assurance requirements. Mixed-sector institutions are not yet under the same pressure as dual-sector institutions to develop dual structures, and most arrangements for programs in the other sector can be handled as exceptions to their normal structures, systems and processes (Moodie 2009), even if, as reported in this research, they find these processes onerous and as obstacles to expanding their provision.

Higher education programs comprise less than 3% of total student load in most of the ten TAFE institutes that offer higher education programs nationally. Consequently, these institutes do not yet have sufficient higher education student load to be classified as a mixed-sector institution, even if this is the trajectory in which a number (if not all) of them are heading. Comparing and contrasting mixed-sector TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities in Australia is necessary for understanding how the mixed-sector TAFE institutions, staff and students construct their purposes, practices, and identities respectively. And, as was evidenced in submissions by mixed-sector TAFE institutes to the Review of Australian Higher Education, they do so in ways that are distinct from other TAFE institutes, single-sector universities, and dual-sector universities.

What the literature tells us

Mixed-sector institutions are a product of universal tertiary education systems in Anglophone countries such as Britain, the United States, Canada and New Zealand, and now, Australia.² The rationale for the development of mixed-sector institutions is twofold. First, they are seen as a key mechanism for increasing access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Foster 2005; Garrod & Macfarlane 2009). Second, their higher education provision is putatively more vocationally oriented than that of universities and they argue that their degrees are more responsive to industry's needs, as a consequence of 'a more evidence-based industry-focused

¹ The rationale for this tripartite classification is discussed in greater depth in *Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper* (see <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2139.html>>) and the TAFE in higher education literature review, which is part of the supporting document for this project (see <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>).

² The English use the term mixed-economy to describe further education colleges that deliver higher education, whereas we prefer to use the term mixed-sector.

applied learning methodology' (Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2008, p.13).³ The Mixed-Economy Group (2008), which is an organisation representing 29 large mixed-economy further education colleges in England, defines their higher education as 'vocational higher education'. They argue that their higher education programs are based on a more skills-oriented curriculum and they contrast this with the academic focus of similar programs accredited by universities, which 'continue to contain academic content which has little direct relevance to the work role of the student or the skills required by the employer' (Mixed-Economy Group 2008, p.2).⁴ This is, in effect, an argument that they produce more 'work-ready' graduates than does higher education.

As newcomers, mixed-sector institutions take their place in higher education systems, underpinned by educational policies designed to encourage a competitive market in which institutions compete for status, prestige and resource levels, and students compete for the limited supply of high-status places at high-status universities (Marginson 1997). Mixed-sector institutions come from 'second tier', lower status, vocationally oriented sectors of tertiary education, and they are consequently positioned as higher education institutions that are lower in status than 'new universities' (who were the previous newcomers) because they do not have the status of being a university. Their sectoral location contributes to shaping institutional, teacher and student identities within mixed-sector institutions so that pressures towards hierarchical differentiation emerge within these institutions (Bathmaker & Thomas 2007; Burns 2007).

There is reason to think that the designation of these institutions as non-university higher education providers is part of a transition to a more stable sectoral identity which results in at least some institutions becoming universities or university colleges. This process is often known as 'academic drift' and has been studied extensively (Riesman 1956; Burgess 1972; Pratt & Burgess 1974; Neave 1979; Berdahl 1985; Morphew & Huisman 2002). Several of Australia's universities were founded initially as vocational colleges or institutes of technology, in some instances, many years ago. During the course of this study we found several vocational institutions that had recently begun to offer baccalaureates and had even more recently been designated as a higher education institution or a university in New Zealand (Webster 2009, p.121), England (Smith 2008, p.29), and British Columbia in Canada (Flemming & Lee 2009, p.102). Of the ten TAFE institutes that offer higher education in Australia, two have formally changed their names so that they are now institutes of technology and not institutes of TAFE, four have removed TAFE from their name on their web homepages, while the remaining four have retained TAFE as part of their name on their webpage, although one does so in tiny text. Two TAFE institutes argued in their submissions to the Review of Australian Higher Education that a new type of institution be created that potentially encompasses senior secondary school, VET and higher education up to masters degree, and they gave these institutions the title 'polytechnic' or 'university college' (Box Hill Institute of TAFE 2008; Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2008). We have adopted their definition and understanding of both types of institutions in this report.

In England, as in Australia, the further education and higher education sectors have different funding, regulatory, quality assurance and reporting arrangements and this can inhibit the development of provision in mixed-sector institutions associated with the 'other' sector and in

³ See: Box Hill Institute of TAFE (2008), Canberra Institute of Technology (2008), Gordon Institute of TAFE (2008), Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (2008), Swan Institute of TAFE (2008), and, William Angliss Institute of TAFE (2008) for arguments in their submissions to the Review of Australian Higher Education about their capacity to support disadvantaged students and at the same time, provide more industry-focused higher education programs. See the Mixed Economy Group (2008, introduction, p.2) for similar arguments about England.

⁴ Until recently, further education colleges were limited to offering higher education qualifications that were accredited by a university. They have since won the right to apply for self-accreditation for foundation degrees, which are two-year, vocationally focused qualifications that lead to a degree. The Mixed-Economy Group (2008, introduction p.2) argues that many universities insist on 'overly academic approaches' to designing these programs, and this is why it is better if they can accredit their own programs.

aligning qualifications and credit between the sectors (Parry 2008, p.32).⁵ The quality of higher education in further education colleges in England has been criticised because: the colleges do not conduct research and thus lack a research culture; they have fewer staff with higher research degrees; their programs are too skills-focused; and their students are likely to be the most disadvantaged and underprepared in the higher education system in the United Kingdom, thereby raising questions about academic standards (Scott 2008). Government policy in England is trying to discourage small pockets of provision in further education colleges and encourage economies of scale to support quality and the development of a higher education culture (Parry 2008).

The findings from the literature are that teachers in mixed-sector institutions who teach in higher education programs value and support these programs. They construct their identities by differentiating themselves from those teaching in non-higher education provision because they have to teach higher-level, more complex and often discipline-focused knowledge and skills, while they differentiate themselves from academics in universities through their more supportive pedagogy and smaller classes (Harwood & Harwood 2004, p.161; Young 2002, p.278). They often found it difficult to 'switch registers and levels' in moving between higher education and other teaching (Young 2002, p.278; Harwood & Harwood 2004, p.161). Teachers feel under enormous pressure to provide high-quality provision, but it was difficult to do so. This is because they are on the same teaching conditions as other teachers, yet they have to spend more time preparing for classes and they need access to better library resources and technology to support their teaching. At the same time they were required to engage in research and scholarly activity and often undertake studies for higher research degrees (Harwood & Harwood 2004; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2003a; Hrabak 2009; Young 2002). There is debate in the literature about whether further education colleges in England need to undertake research to teach higher education, while there is general (and emphatic) agreement that higher education teachers must engage in scholarship (Young 2002; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2003b; Harwood & Harwood 2004; Minty 2007; Burkill, Rodway Dyer & Stone 2008). The literature points to the importance of building capacity at national and institutional levels so that teachers are properly resourced and qualified to best realise the quality of standards, provision and student outcomes. There are some helpful examples in England that include, among others, funding for the development of higher education learning partnerships and the 'HE in FE Enhancement Programme' delivered through the United Kingdom's Higher Education Academy, which is the equivalent of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.⁶

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have more uncertain identities as higher education students than those from more privileged backgrounds. They do not have the same preparation for university, and their transition to higher levels of study is not taken for granted (Crozier et al. 2008). In a 2005 study of student engagement at university, disadvantaged students scored lower on a scale that measured how they felt they were coping at university and how they felt they comprehended their studies (Krause 2005, p.11). The United States literature uses the term 'transfer shock' to describe students' experience of transition from community colleges to universities (Hills 1965; Laanan 2007). There is evidence in the international and Australian literature that students transferring to higher education find the process difficult and sometimes traumatic, even though they still manage to perform at similar levels as other new entrants to higher education (Abbott-Chapman 2006; Cameron 2004; Milne, Glaisher & Keating 2006; Laanan 2007; Falconetti 2009;

⁵ These are findings from the 'FurtherHigher' project in England that researched dual-sector institutions. See <<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/furtherhigher/>> for research papers from this project (viewed 6 February 2009).

⁶ For instance, the University of Plymouth works with over 20 further education colleges in its region to support the development of higher education in these institutions. See the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty network, which it is supported by the Higher Education Learning Partnerships and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning <<http://www.help-cetl.ac.uk/index.php?p=1>> (viewed 11 February 2009). One of the roles of the Higher Education Academy is to support the development of subject-specific disciplines within higher education as a whole, and the development of subject-specific support for higher education teachers in further education colleges is emphasised (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2003a, p.12). See 'FE in HE and Subject Centres' in the UK Higher Education Academy <<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/heinfe/scwork>> (viewed 11 February 2009).

Greenbank 2007). Students' concerns include their academic, social, and cultural transitions, which are often combined with work, family and economic demands.

Students' identities are built through an understanding of the requirements of studying higher education, a capacity to engage in learning at an appropriate level, confidence that these demands can be met, and by feelings of being in the right place. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009, p.5) argue that the type of higher education institutions that working-class students attend 'exerts a powerful influence on how they see themselves'. Strong and powerful processes of institutionalisation 'and the strong academic and social guidance and channelling that underpin them, both cut across and overshadow class differences' (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009, p.5). There is evidence that students' aspirations to transfer to higher education can either be 'warmed up' or 'cooled out' by the institution in which they are studying (Bathmaker 2008, p.9; Grubb 2006, p.33). Students' access to and experiences of transition in dual-sector and mixed-sector institutions depends on institutional policies and cultures and the nature of relationships between staff in both sectors (Bathmaker 2008; Milne, Keating & Holden 2006). Students transferring to higher education in England and Australia depend on their teachers for advice about what they can do, and their aspirations and sense of possibilities are also in part shaped through their engagement with their teachers (Wheelahan 2000, 2001; Bathmaker 2008; Milne, Glaisher & Keating 2006).

The Australian dual-sector universities are developing institutional policies (such as the creation of one academic board for both sectors) to transcend the sectors even while teaching and programs remain sectorally differentiated. In contrast, mixed-sector institutions studied in England are recreating sectoral boundaries within their institutions to support a higher education 'ethos', student learning experience and culture that are distinguished from the further education culture and practices (Bathmaker 2008; Bathmaker & Thomas 2007; Burns 2007). The need to do so was a feature of government reports (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2003a, 2003b). The findings from this project are that the mixed-sector TAFE institutes are (to varying degrees) following a similar trajectory, while mostly (at this stage) keeping teaching and programs organisationally integrated. Mechanisms to transcend the sectoral divide in the dual-sector universities and those which introduce a sectoral distinction within the mixed-sector TAFE institutes are each, in their own way, mechanisms that can support students to navigate the transition and process of becoming higher education students.

Boundaries can enable and constrain. They can entrench sectoral divisions or they can provide the basis for navigating the boundaries. Sectoral boundaries are likely to become mechanisms for creating hierarchies and barriers for students and staff if they are not explicitly constructed and underpinned by national and institutional policies that encourage transitions. Such policies would be helpful in considering the support students need in making the transition by acknowledging the academic, cultural and social challenges they will face. In mixed-sector TAFE institutes which are beginning to develop higher education provision it may be appropriate to distinguish higher education provision from VET provision as a way of providing students with opportunities to negotiate the boundaries between the two and to 'become' higher education students. This can be particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and can be one of the key contributions made by higher education provision in TAFE.

Scope of higher education in TAFE

Higher education programs in TAFE cover a range of disciplines, but their applied nature is emphasised, including in the way the qualification is named. While TAFE institutes offer some niche programs, they now also offer programs that are in fields similar to some vocationally focused provision in universities (for example, forensic science). The extent to which TAFE offers higher education differs among the states as a consequence of different state government policies. However, because all states implement the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)⁷ National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes, the state offices for higher education follow similar processes to register TAFE institutes and other private providers as higher education institutions and to accredit their programs. Almost all of the ten TAFE institutes have similar governance arrangements for their higher education provision, such as an academic board, but there are differences between them in the way they develop, monitor and manage this provision.

Where are higher education programs in TAFE?

Ten TAFE institutes are registered to offer higher education programs in five states, with most in Victoria. This provision is still in its early stages, with fewer than 1600 higher education students in TAFE in 2006 (Moodie et al. 2009). As of May 2009, this provision comprised 68 accredited higher education qualifications, mostly associate degrees and degrees. These programs are outlined in table 2. They cover creative, performing and visual arts; design/multi-media/IT; business (including commerce, accounting and various types of management); hospitality/recreation; engineering (including built environment); environmental sciences (including forensic science); and human services (including nursing, early childhood education and justice). As with vocationally specific programs offered in universities, many of these higher education programs in TAFE combine various disciplines to focus on a specific vocational area, such as water and land management, hospitality management, construction management and economics, and applied business in the music industry. Many have the word 'applied' as part of the award title, such as Bachelor of Applied Music. There are also programs in aviation, aquaculture, viticulture and equine studies, all of which would qualify as niche programs, yet are similar to niche programs offered by universities.

Table 8 in appendix 3 presents the full list of TAFE institutes registered as higher education institutions and the higher education qualifications they are accredited to offer.

⁷ Since completion of this research, MCEETYA has been replaced by two new councils: the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Education Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA), and the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE).

Table 2 TAFE institutes registered to offer higher education qualifications and their accredited higher education qualifications, at 25 May 2009

| Institution | HE diploma | Associate degree | Bachelor degree | HE graduate diploma | Total |
|---|------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------|
| Box Hill Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | - | 8 | 5 | - | 13 |
| Canberra Institute of Technology | - | - | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Challenger TAFE (WA) | - | 5 | - | - | 5 |
| Gordon Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | 1 | 3 | 9 | - | 13 |
| Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | - | 7 | 9 | - | 16 |
| Southbank Institute of Technology (Qld) | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| Swan TAFE (WA) | - | 5 | - | - | 5 |
| TAFE SA | - | 1 | 6 | - | 7 |
| William Angliss Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Total | 2 | 30 | 35 | 1 | |

Source: State and territory registers of the institutions approved to issue accredited higher education qualifications.

Some TAFE institutes are just beginning to develop their higher education programs, such as Southbank Institute of Technology in Queensland, while others such as Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE, all in Melbourne, have a range of associate degrees and degrees. Some of these associate degrees are early exit points from degrees. These include the Associate Degree of Applied Music and the Bachelor of Applied Music at Box Hill Institute of TAFE, and the Associate Degree of Music and the Bachelor of Australian Popular Music at Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE. Others, such as Swan TAFE's associate degrees in aviation, are stand-alone qualifications, although they articulate into the third year of a Bachelor of Commerce at Murdoch University. Institutions such as William Angliss in Victoria, which describes itself as a 'Specialist Centre for Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts', have developed two specialist degrees in their field, while others, such as Holmesglen, Box Hill and Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE have programs encompassing a wide range of disciplines reflecting the comprehensive nature of their VET programs.

While most of the TAFE institutes in table 2 offer the majority of their accredited programs, some institutes are not currently offering all programs. Challenger TAFE in Western Australia is of particular note here, because, although it has five accredited higher education qualifications, it does not currently offer any of them. Institutes may not offer an accredited program because there may be insufficient demand, or they are preparing to offer the qualification, or institutional priorities may have changed. Qualifications are normally accredited for five years and much can happen in that time.

Differences in the development of higher education in TAFE

Differences in how higher education in TAFE has developed reflect differences among the states across a range of factors. For example, TAFE does not offer higher education in New South Wales. In its submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, the NSW TAFE Commission Board (2008, p.9) argued that, 'The maintenance of distinctive functions between the higher education and VET sectors is imperative for the national development of workforce skills'. It said that it didn't envisage TAFE institutes offering higher education programs as 'a future organisational imperative', but the board reluctantly conceded it may need to do so in 'niche' areas

in future where there was demonstrated demand, but 'it is most likely such demand might be satisfied through TAFE NSW developing collaborative partnerships with universities' (NSW TAFE Commission Board 2008, p.15). Unlike other states, TAFE SA does not have separate TAFE institutes. Instead it has one TAFE institute divided into three regions and 11 different campuses. Consequently, any decisions about higher education in TAFE are made on behalf of TAFE SA rather than individual institutes which compete with each other. It is not clear if this will change as a consequence of the South Australian Government's decision to create 'three devolved yet connected institutes' with each having the status of a registered training organisation (Government of South Australia 2008a, p.5). The TAFE SA Executive (2008) and South Australian Government (Government of South Australia 2008b) submissions to the Review of Australian Higher Education did not flag a role for TAFE in delivering higher education and instead focused on how better pathways could be developed between the VET and higher education sectors. The TAFE SA Executive (2008, p.3) argued that, while it was easier to develop pathways if both qualifications were higher education qualifications, the problem is that 'pursuing such models may define VET business as a feeder to University rather than TAFE SA remaining true to its public VET sector mission'. This suggests that any extension of TAFE SA's role in delivering higher education will be limited to extending its role as a VET provider.

By contrast, TAFE institutes in Victoria have historically had more independence from government and they are constituted as independent entities, even though they are regarded as one entity for some purposes, such as for enterprise bargaining between the Victorian Government, TAFE institutes and the Australian Education Union. The Victorian Government granted permission for TAFE to offer full-fee degrees in niche areas in 2002 (Kosky 2002). Victorian TAFE institutes have also been encouraged to pursue full-fee programs because of Victorian Government funding policies and policies designed to create a competitive VET market. They have also had an advantage compared with TAFE institutes in other states because they and Swan TAFE in Western Australia were the only TAFE institutes eligible as of the end of 2008 to offer their full-fee higher education students access to Fee-help, which is an income-contingent loan students can use to defer payment of their fees.⁸ An institution must be registered as a corporation to be approved to offer Fee-help to its students. Australian Government approval of an institution to offer Fee-help not only confers a financial benefit on students and, hence, their institution, but is an important point of recognition of the institution's higher education status. As of 19 November 2008, only the following six TAFE institutes had been approved to offer Fee-help on behalf of their students, with five of these in Victoria (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008):

- ✧ Box Hill Institute of TAFE
- ✧ Gordon Institute of TAFE
- ✧ Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
- ✧ Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE
- ✧ Swan TAFE (WA)
- ✧ William Angliss Institute of TAFE.

The inability of the other TAFE institutes with higher education to offer their students Fee-help has inhibited the development of this provision because students in institutions without Fee-help must pay their fees on enrolment or in staged payments, if the institute makes this available. This has placed these TAFE institutes at a disadvantage compared with those private providers in their state which are eligible to offer students Fee-help. However, most remaining TAFE institutes have become, or are in the process of becoming, statutory bodies so they will be able to offer Fee-help to students for their higher education programs as well as for VET-accredited diplomas and

⁸ While Challenger TAFE in Western Australia meets the criteria as a statutory body and is therefore able to apply for Fee-help for students for its higher education programs, there is no point in doing so if they do not offer them.

advanced diplomas once they have achieved that status. Hence, registration and recognition as a higher education institution able to offer students Fee-help is an important factor in the provision of higher education within TAFE.

Registration and accreditation of higher education qualifications

As noted earlier, the processes for registering higher education institutions and accrediting qualifications are similar in all states because all states implement the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes. The purpose of the National Protocols is to:

... protect the standing of Australian higher education nationally and internationally by assuring students and the community that higher education institutions in Australia have met identified criteria and are subject to appropriate government regulation (2007b, p.1).

The protocols specify the criteria that must be met in approving all higher education institutions. This includes criteria for:

- ✧ registering non-self-accrediting higher education institutions (and this is the category that TAFE institutes fall under) and accrediting their qualifications
- ✧ awarding self-accrediting status to higher education institutions that are not universities
- ✧ establishing Australian universities
- ✧ approving international higher education institutions that seek to operate in Australia.

There are specific guidelines that must be used in registering higher education institutions and accrediting their courses. Institutions that are not universities that wish to offer higher education qualifications must be registered with their state higher education registering body, and each program they wish to offer must also be accredited. To be registered, an institution must demonstrate they have appropriate corporate, resourcing, governance and quality assurance arrangements and staffing to deliver higher education qualifications. In addition, accredited higher education qualifications must comply with the AQF higher education titles and qualifications descriptors. Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified (usually defined as a qualification level higher than that being taught) and they must be engaged in scholarship, while those who teach research students must also be engaged in research. Institutions are required to report annually and must include evidence to demonstrate compliance with these requirements; for example, that teaching staff have been engaged in scholarship. Independent expert panels are convened as needed to register institutions and accredit courses. Panels must include at least one senior academic with governance and management experience in an Australian university, a member with experience of higher education course approval processes, an academic with experience in the relevant disciplinary field, and a member with experience in an industry/profession or professional body where appropriate (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2007a, p.7). At least two states implement additional processes to ensure consistency among the panels and as an additional quality assurance mechanism; in these cases panel reports and recommendations for registration and accreditation are considered by a central panel. This may help to overcome complaints made by some TAFE institutes of inconsistent decisions by panels in some states.

Internal governance and professional development arrangements

All but one TAFE included in this project have established a separate higher education committee or academic board that reports to the institute's governing board or council. The remaining TAFE has an academic board that governs both its higher education and VET programs. This is the same for the dual-sector university included in this project that offers degrees through its TAFE division and in this it is similar to most (but not all) other dual-sector universities. With one exception, the TAFE higher education boards include external academic representatives, and they often include a representative from each university with whom the TAFE institute has a close partnership or memorandum of understanding. In the case of the exception, the TAFE has a separate higher education committee that reports to the institute's governing council and it invites external representatives from its partner university when required. Institutes vary in their internal arrangements. Most have course or program advisory committees for their higher education programs with external representatives, often from industry. One TAFE institute has faculty boards that are responsible for quality assurance, and these boards report to the academic board, which is responsible for governance and overall quality assurance.

Various arrangements exist internally to manage programs, and those institutes with the widest range of programs and with plans to expand provision have the most structured and extensive arrangements. Some institutes have established committees for day-to-day management that comprise heads of department or school with higher education programs, directors of those programs and other relevant staff. Institutes are also at different stages in developing institutionalised arrangements to support professional development for higher education teaching staff. One institute has a discussion group for higher education teachers that meets three times a year, and it invites external representatives with expertise to help address issues such as assessment. Another requires higher education teaching staff to meet early in semester to identify any issue that may need attention and this has been very helpful in identifying problems and improving provision. In general, those institutes in which provision is very small and in the early stages of development recruit staff with the appropriate qualifications. Those institutes in this project with more established and wide-ranging provision have established staff development programs, which include putting groups of teachers through masters programs and other relevant qualifications (such as graduate certificates of higher education). Most institutes are supporting staff who choose to undertake higher-level qualifications, including masters and PhDs (see table 5 in appendix 2). The number of staff independently undertaking higher studies is still small and the extent of support varies. Institutes with larger provision also have more structured continuing staff development programs, and in the case of one institute, this includes the establishment of a higher education and a research community of practice.

Why does TAFE offer higher education? Perspectives, debates, dilemmas and issues

Interviewees argued that the key rationale for TAFE's higher education programs is to meet specific industry needs through their applied orientation and to provide a more supported pathway for disadvantaged students in accessing higher education. An alternative view expressed by some is that students benefit most if TAFE works in partnership with universities through complementary provision, rather than through its own higher education provision. Interviewees claimed that TAFE's higher education provision was distinguished from that of universities through its applied focus, and it differed from competency-based training in VET because it had a more rigorous theoretical basis. It was also distinguished by its pedagogy and pastoral care. However, some interviewees argued that the differences between TAFE's higher education programs and vocationally oriented programs in universities were not so great. Nearly all informants agreed that TAFE required internal governance, quality assurance arrangements and appropriate staffing to support higher education in TAFE, and, while senior TAFE managers and interviewees from state offices of higher education held many views in common, there were contrasting perspectives about the nature of these arrangements. Many interviewees argued that the different reporting, funding, quality assurance, industrial and curriculum frameworks of the higher education and VET sectors respectively constrained the development of higher education in TAFE.

A consensus about why

There was a consistently high level of consensus among interviewees about *why* TAFE offers higher education programs, even if all interviewees did not agree that TAFE *should* offer higher education qualifications. All interviewees, other than students, were asked why they believed TAFE was offering higher education programs now. The main responses were related to the market; with meeting industry's needs in a more flexible way; and with meeting the needs of students who either did not have access to, or were not well supported in, universities.

Interviewees explained that competitive markets and the blurring of the sectoral divide provided TAFE with both threats and opportunities in achieving these purposes. A number of interviewees, particularly those in states where student demand for tertiary education has not been very strong as a consequence of strong labour markets, argued that TAFE institutes were being squeezed from below by schools offering VET in Schools, from above by universities offering VET programs, and by private providers which were able to offer both VET and higher education qualifications.

Another reason, according to these interviewees, is increasing state government expectations that TAFE increase its fee-for-service provision, with higher education programs as one way to do this, particularly in recruiting international students. Others, particularly senior managers in TAFE institutes with higher education, emphasised the opportunities that were available as a consequence of the blurring of the sectoral divide and the need to increase the skill level of the workforce. They also saw offering higher education as an opportunity to 'grow their business' through fee-paying programs for domestic students, but also with international students.

Most interviewees argued that degree programs in TAFE institutes were different from other VET programs and from higher education programs offered by universities. They perceived this as TAFE's point of differentiation in the 'market'. This is discussed in the next section in more depth, but is emphasised here because interviewees argued that a key rationale of higher education in

TAFE was its capacity to meet the needs of industry, enterprises, and students through its blend of the practical and theoretical. They argued that TAFE collaborated with industry more than their counterparts in universities, and that there were stronger partnerships between TAFE institutes and enterprises. Senior TAFE managers said that industry had told them that university graduates were not work-ready. This sentiment was also echoed by many TAFE teachers, who said that they were able to offer students a more applied program that was also theoretically grounded. As teachers, they claimed to be able to use their industry experience to demonstrate the relationship between theory and practice, and to leverage their industry contacts to provide students with opportunities for practicum and work placements.

In explaining why TAFE offered higher education several interviewees argued that higher education programs were more flexible than programs based on training packages. One senior TAFE manager argued that, even though training packages have been developed by industry skills councils, they did not meet the needs of small and medium enterprises. He said that, while it takes time to develop higher education qualifications, they provide a greater opportunity to tailor curriculum to meet the needs of clients.

TAFE senior managers, teachers and staff in offices of higher education argued that TAFE could provide access to higher education for disadvantaged students, higher levels of pastoral care, which was important in ensuring student success, as well as progression within the one institution.

One TAFE senior manager argued that a focus on credit transfer in discussions about student pathways between TAFE and universities missed the point because the prior issue was access, and that there was not enough access for TAFE students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds to universities. He used the analogy of the Melbourne Club to illustrate his argument: there was no point giving someone a voucher to spend in the Melbourne Club if they can't get in.

The emphasis on the tertiary entrance rank (TER) for entry to university excluded students who could be successful in higher education, if given the chance and support. This point was put very powerfully by two students—twin brothers—who had a particular disability which meant that their school experience had been an utter misery and, consequently, they had not done as well in the senior school certificate as they had hoped. They found that they were accepted and valued for who they were in TAFE. They were excelling in their higher education program and they had won international recognition for their work in their creative field. When we asked them for advice on how we should organise higher education in TAFE to support students in the future, they answered that:

Please, please don't do what universities do and make everything about the TER score. There are plenty of talented people out there. Focus on the strengths of the student and not what they can't do.

But no consensus on whether TAFE should offer higher education

Senior managers at the three TAFE institutes that do not offer higher education were ambivalent about whether TAFE should offer higher education and the worth of higher education in TAFE. These included senior managers at the two TAFE institutes with no plan to offer higher education programs, and senior managers at the one TAFE that was planning to increase its higher-level VET qualifications to include VET graduate certificates and diplomas but not higher education accredited qualifications. These managers conceded that higher education programs in TAFE might have value under some circumstances, but identified many disadvantages. One senior manager suggested that there may be value in offering programs in niche areas where a specialised skills base existed and in a geographic area with a concentration of industries that could use the qualifications, but there would need to be sufficient demand and this was unlikely. These senior managers argued that the market was too thin to sustain competition for students for the same qualifications. They

argued that TAFE and universities had different strengths and that it was best to develop complementary partnerships because these would create the best opportunities for students. The three TAFE institutes had developed a range of innovative pathways for students that combined VET and higher education qualifications in different ways. One argued that there was a danger that if TAFE offered degrees they will be seen as a fifth-rate university; she said it was better to be a leader in your own area than at the bottom of the pile in another sector. They thought that the community values a university education over TAFE, but they would value TAFE if it led to good work outcomes and also access to university. One explained that when they set up a university centre in a regional town in partnership with a university, the standing of TAFE with school guidance officers and parents was increased. She thought that if they did not have such good relationships with universities they may need to consider offering higher education, but only in this instance. Collectively, they expressed the fear that higher education programs in TAFE would damage partnerships between TAFE and universities because they would be competing with each other. One suggested that the emphasis on higher education would distort TAFE's mission, which was to offer vocationally specific qualifications. He argued that VET qualifications were already under pressure as a consequence of articulation and credit transfer arrangements because they had to be made to 'fit' the higher education model if credit transfer was to be granted.

In contrast, most of the TAFE directors with higher education programs argued that the growth of higher education in TAFE would not adversely affect partnerships with universities because the market was big enough for both and they weren't trying to compete with universities. They argued that they had very good partnerships at present and that there was potential for partnerships to improve because the development of their higher education programs had brought them into a closer relationship with their university partners, with the result that each was gaining a better understanding of the other. This view was also expressed by several interviewees in the offices of higher education. Other senior TAFE managers were more ambivalent, with some expressing the fear that partnerships may be damaged if they are seen as competitors when programs in similar areas were offered; others thought partnerships could be enhanced, depending on the willingness of both parties. One believed that relationships would remain strong if TAFE focused on offering associate degrees and not degrees because this would provide a steady supply of very good students to universities; however, he thought all this would change if they offered degrees in the same area. Teachers and program developers expressed the same ambivalence; they hoped that it would result in more cooperation but thought it may well result in increased competition and thus damage relationships, while others said that new opportunities may emerge. Only about five of the 27 teachers we interviewed thought that partnerships between TAFE institutes and universities would improve.

University partnerships were an important factor for the TAFE institute that was planning to offer higher-level VET qualifications. This institute was in a state where TAFE offers higher education qualifications. They had decided not to offer associate degrees or degrees but instead to focus on developing VET graduate certificates and VET graduate diplomas. These could be differentiated from higher education qualifications while still providing access to high-level knowledge and skills for experienced industry practitioners. They argued that TAFE is very good at industry engagement—it did this better than universities. An additional benefit of this approach was that they could use the existing VET framework for accrediting qualifications and for quality assurance in contrast to having to establish separate arrangements to meet the higher education registration and accreditation requirements. In their view, VET graduate certificates and diplomas were *higher education* qualifications because of their position on the AQF, which located them on the same 'level' as higher education graduate certificates and diplomas, even if they were not accredited in the higher education *sector*. This view was repeated by teachers we interviewed at a TAFE institute that offers higher education in that state, even though these teachers were not involved in teaching higher education accredited qualifications. They argued for the necessity of VET graduate certificates and diplomas while describing the difficulties of getting them established and known in the community. Many of the dilemmas, issues and difficulties they described were an exact echo of those identified by TAFE teachers who taught in higher education, demonstrating that there are common issues arising from the *level* of the qualification, and not just the *sector* in which it was accredited.

How do interviewees distinguish higher education in TAFE from other provision?

Interviewees differentiated higher education programs in TAFE from those offered by universities and from VET qualifications offered by TAFE by their curriculum, pedagogy and student cohort. The prevailing view was that TAFE's higher education qualifications were intellectually rigorous, while at the same time more focused on the workplace, offering students greater opportunities to blend theory and practice. This resulted in graduates who were work-ready, with the specific skills that industry needed. Industry partnerships and input into course development were fundamental to ensuring their success. This was a view expressed by many teachers, senior TAFE managers and staff in offices of higher education. Many interviewees argued that degrees in universities were too abstract and theory-driven and that university staff were more focused on research rather than on practical industry application. These are also the perceptions of many teachers, even though 18 of the 27 teachers we interviewed had experience in teaching university-accredited programs: 11 had taught in universities, mostly as sessional staff; five had taught in university programs being delivered through their TAFE institute; and two had had experience of both sessional teaching at university and teaching university programs in TAFE institutes. They varied, however, in the amount of teaching they had done and the length of time that had elapsed since they had taught in universities. One TAFE teacher who had taught as a sessional teacher at two universities expressed a common view on the distinction between higher education in TAFE and in universities in this way:

The teaching staff [in TAFE institutes] are new ... and they are more in touch with the world of work. They are more able to relate their teaching to practical outcomes. This is in contrast to professors who may be very smart and get published, but who are not in touch with the real world.

Many professors may contest this view of their lack of relevance to the real world of work, but this view is common and is helping to construct understandings of the way higher education in TAFE is different from that in universities.

However, this distinction between higher education offered by TAFE and universities was not universally made. Several interviewees argued that higher education programs in TAFE were seeking to position their programs in a similar way to the Australian Technology Network (ATN) universities that also promote the real-world relevance of their programs, as evidenced by ATN member Queensland University of Technology, which proclaims on its website that it is 'a university for the real world'.⁹ Others suggested that universities were moving closer to TAFE's approach, rather than the reverse, through offering work-integrated learning, work experience, cadetships and problem-based learning.

It is clear that the debate about the distinctiveness of TAFE's higher education programs will continue. The extent to which industry partnerships are a point of distinction is open to question and is part of this debate—universities have strong relationships with many professional bodies such as those associated with medicine, nursing, social work, engineering and accounting. Moreover, the way professional and vocationally oriented programs at universities were described by many interviewees seems at odds with the way many universities are trying to position their programs, so the extent to which there are substantive differences between curriculum and orientation is also part of this debate. In one case, a TAFE institute bought curriculum from a university for their program to smooth the passage of their qualification through the accreditation process and to maximise credit transfer for their students in articulating to that university. An international student argued that he was doing his program at TAFE because it was much cheaper, but he thought it was essentially the same program as at a well-regarded university located nearby. He said that 'we get almost everything that university students get'. He compared notes with a

⁹ See the QUT website: <<http://www.qut.edu.au/>> and the ATN website: <<http://www.atn.edu.au/>> (viewed 24 May 2009).

friend studying the same degree at this well-regarded university and found that they were studying the same content and using the same textbook. Another student said that both TAFE and university students study similar courses, use the same texts and, in some cases, have the same teachers because they teach in both universities and at TAFE.

In other cases, the difference between provision in universities and in TAFE was seen to lie in the pedagogy. One senior manager at the dual-sector university which offered degrees through the TAFE division drew a distinction between student cohorts and pedagogic approaches. Students undertaking this particular program were older and in work. Pedagogy was flexible, student-centred, based on adult learning principles and delivered in mixed mode where students were expected to be independent learners and self-motivated. He said that:

In higher education they explore the same theory, and teachers provide examples, but in TAFE students will draw examples from their own workplace—the difference is subtle but distinct. It really depends on the course.

The university was particularly careful in developing appropriate nomenclature for these programs. Their degrees are called applied degrees to convey their focus and philosophy to students, and they are degrees of the university, not degrees of the TAFE division. Because the university is a self-accrediting institution, these degrees are accredited through the appropriate processes in the same way as all other degrees of the university. This is different from degrees offered by stand-alone TAFE institutes, which must have their higher education qualifications accredited by their state government higher education registering body.

In contrast, other TAFE institutes emphasised their capacity to provide a more supported learning environment for both young and mature-aged students who needed support to become independent learners. Pedagogy in TAFE was seen to be more student-focused, based on smaller classes, closer relations between teachers and students, and higher levels of pastoral care. Students thought this was important and most claimed that they had very good access to their teachers and that their teachers knew them by name. A few were critical of their teachers, but most spoke highly about the learning environment and the highly individualised attention they received, even though they may have had other criticisms. Teachers explained that more was expected of higher education students, and sometimes students found it challenging to move to higher education when they had previously studied VET qualifications. One teacher explained that moving from VET to higher education was ‘an intellectual jump and so it should be’. Many teachers thought that higher education students were more motivated than VET students. However, teachers explained that students were challenged because they had to learn to use theory, develop arguments, integrate and synthesise knowledge and operate at a higher intellectual level than they were used to. They said that students sometimes found it difficult to change their mindset. Many teachers talked about the challenges students faced in learning to write essays and the importance of referencing. Students also talked about their angst about essay writing and referencing.

Interviewees distinguished higher education qualifications in TAFE from VET qualifications because they were not competency-based and because they required a higher level of theoretical content, thinking skills, written expression and capacity to develop a reasoned argument, and also because of the nature of assessments. Students needed to be able to undertake research and develop and defend an argument. One teacher explained that the demands on teachers were also different:

TAFE courses are geared around practical outcomes, and teachers can draw extensively on their own experience. But if a teacher has to go into a management class and teach organisational theory then the demands are a bit different.

Senior managers and many teachers argued that higher education freed them from the restrictions of training packages. Some were more moderate in their language than others. One senior TAFE manager argued that:

In VET the training mafia take the worker and train them to pull the lever on the job and teach small skill sets. There are others in VET who think that education needs to have a

conceptual basis that links everything. There is a conceptual overlay in higher education qualifications in TAFE that you don't see in training packages. Vocational higher education has a conceptual overview that puts the qualification in a total framework of knowledge and skills. They treat people holistically.

Two senior managers at another TAFE claimed they would just get rid of training packages if this were possible. Not all TAFE teachers and senior managers argued against the restrictions of training packages and competency-based training, although many did. Several TAFE institutes said that they were trying to enhance their diplomas and advanced diplomas so that students were more supported in making the transition to higher education.

Issues and dilemmas, strengths and limitations

Senior TAFE managers and staff in state offices of higher education said that qualifications in TAFE must be carefully balanced between being different from those offered in universities, but at the same time they should demonstrate that they are of the same standard. As part of the accreditation process, TAFE institutes are required to demonstrate that their programs are equivalent in quality, level and outcomes to those offered in universities. This is specified in the National Protocols and is an important quality assurance mechanism. One office of higher education interviewee explained that TAFE's higher education programs 'must look, feel and smell' like higher education programs compared with VET programs, and that 'higher education is not VET with a twist'.

Many office of higher education interviewees argued that the bar was set very high for the qualifications they accredit because they must comply with the AQF and they must demonstrate equivalence to universities. They said that in practice this meant that the bar was sometimes higher because standards in universities could vary. TAFE institutes agreed with this. One office of higher education interviewee noted that, 'It is difficult to maintain appropriate minimum standards when universities have lower minimum standards for entry or course duration'. A particular difficulty for offices of higher education is that universities offer qualifications, most notably masters degrees, which do not comply with AQF, even though this is a requirement of the National Protocols. The Australian Qualifications Framework (2007, p.70) specifies that masters degrees are normally of two years' duration, whereas all universities offer several masters of one to one-and-a-half years (Moodie 2008a). Consequently, interviewees in two states said that when providers come to the office of higher education to accredit a one-year masters and they can demonstrate equivalence with similar masters degrees in universities, they are still not able to proceed because a one-year masters does not comply with the AQF. Providers then argue that they are being put at a competitive disadvantage. However, the National Guidelines for non-self-accrediting higher education institutions state that a requirement for accrediting a higher education course is that 'The course duration and workload fulfil AQF requirements' (Ministerial Council on Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2007a, p.21).

Most TAFE institutes found working with their state higher education regulatory body challenging. Some were more positive than others, and there were mixed views within institutions. One TAFE director said that their regulatory body was supportive, but the processes still took too long. Others were more critical, arguing that the processes were onerous and that the result was that TAFE's qualifications could not stray too far from the university model. They argued that there was, in effect, pressure for homogeneity in higher education rather than diversity. TAFE institutes in some states argued that they were not able to maximise pathways from VET to higher education through nested models where advanced diplomas are the first two years of a degree because their regulatory body would not approve this model. This is the model used at the dual-sector university that offers university degrees through its TAFE division, and many TAFE interviewees in stand-alone TAFE institutes spoke enviously of this. The extent to which this was a problem for TAFE institutes depended on the state; however, even where TAFE institutes claimed that their regulatory body did

not favour such arrangements, these arrangements seemed to exist. It may be that TAFE institutes differed in what they were prepared to submit to the regulatory body. There were complaints in some states about lack of consistency in panel decisions. At least two TAFE directors argued that the composition of the panels was a problem because they were required to include academics from universities, and some academics on panels did not think that TAFE should offer degrees, or if they did, that it should look just like theirs. Moreover, they argued that they may compete with these universities and it seemed to be a conflict of interest. One senior TAFE manager argued that a problem for accreditation was that industry partners did not always understand policy, and they did not understand curriculum.

TAFE institutes would be surprised to learn about the extent to which all offices of higher education supported the development of higher education in TAFE and the extent of their insights into the challenges TAFE institutes confronted in developing programs for accreditation. They also said that degrees offered through TAFE were distinguished by their vocational focus, thus meeting the needs of industry and students. However, they emphasised that TAFE institutes had to meet appropriate standards, and that it takes time to develop the appropriate cultures, institutional governance, and policy frameworks to achieve this. One office of higher education interviewee explained that:

TAFE institutes are big institutions that have been built around VET. When they move into higher education it is often as a bolt-on and it isn't embedded in what the institution does. They have to add an academic board, processes and structures—they will do all this but it isn't embedded yet.

Different sectoral arrangements for VET and higher education were an impediment to the development of higher education in TAFE. Only one TAFE director in TAFE institutes offering higher education was reasonably relaxed about the different sectoral requirements; he explained that they arranged for some staff to work on VET while other staff worked on higher education. Most other senior managers thought that the different funding, reporting, quality assurance and governance arrangements were a major difficulty. A TAFE director said that they had to increase staffing substantially to cope with the different quality assurance requirements. Another TAFE director claimed that it costs more and everything is a mess. One senior manager said that the 'complexity of the funding, reporting, accountability, registration and accreditation requirements is confusing for everyone'. She said that they 'are having to think about organising higher education separately because of the complexity of this provision'. New issues arise all the time, such as the need to establish processes for higher education Fee-help and now for VET Fee-help. She said that 'you should be careful what you wish for'. One staff member explained that they had to do everything by hand in her institution to collect and submit all the information they needed for their last course accreditation process. She said they found reporting to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations a nightmare. The department's remoteness in Canberra was a further difficulty, compared with the accessibility and proximity of state government departmental staff. The words 'challengeable but manageable' were used a lot in many interviews. One senior manager in a TAFE institute with a limited range of higher education programs said that:

The only difficulty is finding people available to do the work. Bodies are a problem. To do this, the institute would need to double management staff. The obligations and roles aren't onerous but it is a very high risk. There is a lot of knowledge invested in one or two people. When they go, there is a serious problem.

In contrast, as expected, the dual-sector universities complained (quite a lot) about the different sectoral arrangements because they find these expensive and a brake on institutional development. However, they have all the necessary corporate, reporting and administrative arrangements required for both sectors, which means it is possible to develop degrees of the university which are offered through the TAFE division. TAFE can draw on corporate structures to manage these processes; however, it does require TAFE managers to develop new skills to administer both VET and higher education quality assurance processes and manage other sectoral requirements. Senior staff in both

dual-sector universities had similar views on this issue. One senior manager at a dual-sector university said that:

If we were a stand-alone TAFE we would have to import people who understood all the higher education reporting, funding and quality assurance arrangements, but as a dual-sector university the university already has got very good procedural understandings of the requirements in both sectors.

Interviewees identified a number of limitations of higher education in TAFE, which included: the absence of a research culture and the need to establish one; the costs of program development and the need for library and technical resources to support programs; recruiting appropriately qualified staff and supporting staff to become qualified; and industrial relations agreements. Staffing issues are dealt with in more depth in the next section. A key limitation was lack of public funding for higher education in TAFE so that TAFE institutes could offer their programs only as full-fee programs. Students who could not access Fee-help also complained and said this was the key issue that needed to be addressed.

An important issue raised by many interviewees in all categories, including some students, was the problem with TAFE's profile, its lower status compared with that of universities, and the difficulty in marketing their higher education qualifications and their vocational graduate certificates and diplomas so that the community understood them. Many interviewees said most people in the community thought that TAFE offered only the trades. This was identified as a key issue, particularly by teachers, who were anxious to ensure that their courses were able to attract students if all the benefits of higher education in TAFE were to be realised. The brevity of the discussion of this problem here does not reflect the emphasis that interviewees placed on marketing, community understanding, status and TAFE's profile.

There were a range of benefits and strengths that interviewees identified as associated with higher education in TAFE, quite apart from directly meeting industry and student needs. Many senior managers said that higher education in TAFE enriched the culture of the whole institution and built institutional capacity. It helped to orient the institution to what was going on outside. It also helped to sustain an innovative internal culture because it opened a new range of approaches to teaching and assessment that could extend and challenge teachers. In addition, it provided pathways for teachers to engage in staff development and to acquire the qualifications they needed to teach at higher education level, as well as giving them the opportunity to engage with knowledge and theory in their field. These views were also expressed by many teachers.

One TAFE director emphasised that such capacity-building also contributed to building a research culture in TAFE that was focused on working with enterprises to change them, not just to supply them with students who came pre-packaged according to a specific list of criteria. Senior staff at TAFE institutes and the dual-sector universities argued for the importance of developing a research role for TAFE that focused on knowledge transfer and application, which is a key component of a skilled workforce and an innovative economy. Interviewees argued that this research role for TAFE should be explicitly recognised by government and that they should have access to contestable research funding. There will continue to be debate over whether TAFE should, or needs to, engage in research if it is to deliver higher education. This is quite different from the argument that VET has an important role in innovation (see Moodie 2008b). The argument here is part of the broader debate about the extent to which there is a nexus between research and teaching in higher education, an issue which was widely canvassed in the debate over whether there can be teaching-only universities in submissions to, and in the report of, the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley 2008). It has not been resolved for universities—the government has referred the Bradley Review's recommendation that all universities must engage in research if they are to have title 'university' for the consideration of the new tertiary education quality and standards authority (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, p.61). The research-teaching nexus is likely to be a matter of continuing controversy for higher education in TAFE.

Identities in mixed-sector TAFE institutes

The changes accompanying the development of TAFE institutes as mixed-sector institutions is helping to shape institutional, teacher and student identities. Some TAFE institutes are seeking to become a new type of institution, which is best summed up in the notion of a polytechnic or university college that offers a range of qualifications, from senior school, VET and higher education qualifications, up to masters.¹⁰ Other TAFE institutes see their higher education programs as an extension of their role as VET providers and that they will thus essentially retain their TAFE identity. Teachers were, if anything, more in favour of higher education in TAFE than TAFE senior management, but they believed that existing industrial and working conditions and management's lack of insight into the nature of their work were obstacles to the further development of this provision. Students valued the high levels of support they received, but younger students tended to be more uncertain in their identity as higher education students and more troubled by the status of their qualification, even though almost all would recommend their course to friends, where appropriate. The status of TAFE's higher education qualifications was an issue that concerned all categories of interviewees.

Institutional identities

Three of the TAFE institutes included in this project were clearly positioning their institute to become a new type of institution, whereas the others still conceived of their institutional identity as a TAFE that meets industry needs through VET qualifications, with their offering of higher education qualifications an extension of that role. In the former, senior staff envisaged that in the future they would be a different type of institution that offered a range of programs so that the balance of their provision might not be in VET—or VET as it currently is. While the notion of a polytechnic or university college does not necessarily encapsulate the aspirations or imagined futures of all three institutions and of other TAFE institutes that may be considering this path, it is useful to use it as a model for distinguishing the institutional aspirations of these institutions from those that see themselves primarily as TAFE. A polytechnic or university college is a multi-sector institution that offers a range of programs that may include senior school certificates, but includes the full range of VET qualifications, associate degrees, degrees and perhaps higher education accredited graduate certificates and diplomas and masters degrees. Such institutions would, as one TAFE director put it, offer applied or vocational higher education programs and undertake applied research to transform workplaces and contribute to knowledge transfer and innovation. It would, ideally, win the right to self-accredit its qualifications after it had demonstrated that it had earned that status.

Senior TAFE managers we spoke to who wished to pursue this path emphasised that they did not want to become a university and that they were occupying a different sectoral position from universities. They differentiate polytechnics and university colleges from universities because universities offer programs up to doctorates across a range of disciplines and have a much larger research role, focused on knowledge creation rather than application, although some research is of the latter type. There is a lot to be done before these aspirations are realised, even though these

¹⁰ See the submissions of Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (2008) and Box Hill Institute of TAFE (2008) to the Review of Australian Higher Education.

institutions are trying to set the building blocks in place. At present, higher education in TAFE is integrated into departments that cover VET and higher education in most cases (even though it may be a separate component within that department), but some TAFE institutes are considering their internal organisational structures. One senior TAFE manager said this was a work in progress. In deciding on organisational structures, institutions have to consider the corporate, governance, quality assurance and administrative arrangements they need and the best way to support cultures of scholarship that can sustain higher education provision.

Teacher identities

Of the 27 teachers we interviewed, 11 taught in both VET and higher education (although the balance of their teaching load in each sector varied), nine taught only in higher education, five taught only in VET (which included two teaching in VET graduate certificate and diploma programs), and two were either program leaders or equivalent who were not directly involved in teaching, but had responsibility for both VET and higher education programs in their area. Teachers in this project were highly qualified, as is illustrated in table 3, which shows the qualifications that teachers currently have and the number undertaking further studies. It is clear that teachers included in this project have much higher qualifications than TAFE teachers overall (NCVER 2004, p.34). We did not ask teachers specifically about their qualifications as part of the interviews, yet virtually all volunteered this information or it arose in the course of the conversation. It was apparent in the interviews that the time, effort and money teachers had devoted to upgrading their qualifications were an important part of their understanding of themselves as teachers and their position relative to other TAFE teachers and to management.

Table 3 Profile of TAFE teachers interviewed

| Existing qualifications | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| PhD | 3 |
| Masters | 13 |
| Degree (at least) | 8 |
| Advanced diploma | 1 |
| Unknown | 2 |
| Total | 27 |
| Undertaking further studies | |
| PhD | 4 |
| Masters | 3 |
| Degree | 1 |
| Total | 8 |

Note: A more detailed profile of teachers is provided in appendix 2, table 5.

With only a few exceptions, teachers we interviewed for this project had claimed the higher education in TAFE vision for their own, and their chief criticisms were that management needed to be better at it and facilitate its development. Their view of the nature of vocational or applied degrees was the same as that held by management, and they also held the same views as management about the opportunities this provision could create for disadvantaged students. They were engaging with the curriculum and enjoyed engaging with theory and relating theory and practice. They enjoyed helping students become independent learners and they believed they were making a worthwhile contribution to students and to their own professions. Many saw higher education as a welcome escape from the constraints imposed by competency-based training.

However, they argued that current provision was not sustainable and that it would be difficult to expand provision because of the structure of their work, which is governed by the existing industrial agreement for TAFE teachers, and management's perceptions about their role. Many were trying to teach higher education programs while directly teaching more than 20 hours a week (and sometimes much more), and this left them very little time for preparation and for engaging in scholarship (let alone research), particularly if they were also upgrading their qualifications at the same time. Almost all teachers, with a few exceptions, complained about workloads and argued that they were unsustainable. They argued that the depth and complexity of the preparation required was at a qualitatively different level from that for competency-based VET programs. They believed that higher education teaching should be underpinned by scholarship and said that this could not be achieved under current arrangements. Many said that the extra work they did was not reflected in the pay scales, and it should be. In general, management in TAFE institutes that offered higher education agreed that existing industrial arrangements were an important constraint. They argued that a tertiary education award was needed to accommodate the different demands of different kinds of teaching.

It wasn't just workloads, although this was the major issue. Some teachers felt that management didn't understand the nature of their work. One said, 'There is a lack of understanding about the rigour of higher education'. Another said that:

We have heads of department with effective control of degrees who don't have degrees and who don't understand what is involved. This is very frustrating because they don't understand much about higher education.

While a couple of teachers said that there was no difference between teaching VET and higher education students because 'teaching is teaching', most said that it was quite different, and many thought that management didn't understand this. One teacher said:

As long as higher education and VET are taught together, it is a challenge to switch from one to the 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 argued that the differences needed to be recognised if higher education was to be developed. Some thought that higher education and VET needed to be organisationally separate so that the administration of the programs was handled by those who understand the requirements, while keeping those teaching higher education and VET within the one department to ensure silos didn't develop. Another said that he 'doesn't want to see higher education as an exclusive division, but there needs to be cultural recognition in the institute about academic input'. Others thought that there needed to be structural separation to benefit students. As an illustration, one notes that higher education should be organisationally separate and that students should have their own facilities and study area 'so they can feel a little bit proud and a little bit special'. She said this was important because:

It helps them to understand that studying higher education is different to studying TAFE. Some still have the TAFE mentality, and if they are mixing with TAFE students then they will continue to think that it is okay for assignments to be late and that things are a little bit easier.

Some teachers were more definite about this issue: higher education should be separate from VET organisationally and in teaching departments. Others thought that it was important to distinguish between VET and higher education to develop higher education communities of practice to support scholarship.

Teachers' perceptions of their identities were related to their work as *higher education* teachers. One teacher who teaches only in higher education said, 'I don't subscribe to the fact that I am a TAFE teacher. I am a higher education lecturer'. Others, particularly those coming from a creative and performing arts professional field of practice that had a strong identity, didn't call themselves teachers—either TAFE or higher education teachers; they were professionals from their field of

practice helping others to access the knowledge and skills needed to join this field of practice. One spoke for a few teachers when he said that, to help people understand higher education in TAFE, he explains to people that he is a TAFE teacher in a degree program. On the other hand, he found that:

Inside TAFE it is a little different, people sometimes jokingly refer to you as a professor, and it is sometimes like you have deserted the VET side. People just joke a bit occasionally. Most don't see too much difference because they think of it as just another department that teaches.

One teacher didn't make a distinction himself, but even though he needed his qualifications to teach higher education he thought that it was important that he didn't flaunt them. However, he 'can sense that people feel the differences'.

Eleven of the 27 teachers we interviewed claimed they were happy teaching higher education in TAFE and saw themselves staying in the TAFE institute (including one sessional teacher), although they too (for the most part) complained about unsustainable workloads. Five said they would leave unless they were given the chance to pursue scholarship and research. Four were focused on retirement, even though this was a number of years away in some cases. They said workloads were too difficult. Three were ambivalent, two were moving to new roles, and two did not address this issue.

Student identities

Students' identities as higher education students were also shaped by sectoral designation and the institution in which they were studying. There were 28 students interviewed in this project. Most were young, full-time and domestic, although there was a smaller number of older, part-time students and six of the 28 were international students. A profile of these students is outlined in table 7, appendix 2.

Students' reasons for studying higher education programs at TAFE were complex and in many cases reflect an uncertain student identity. This is evident in the way they had learned about their higher education program and the reasons for choosing it. Seven students learned about the program from their school or TAFE teacher, eight from friends or family, seven by word of mouth and their own research, three because they knew the institution (with two employed at their institution), and only two through their state's tertiary admissions centre. Younger students were relying on the knowledge of others to help them choose their post-school options and on the views of others about what they should do, while older students had a clearer understanding of why they were enrolling and how it was related to their career progression.

Of the 28, ten students explained that their school experiences were not positive (and in some cases utterly miserable); five were ambivalent—they enjoyed the social side of school and weren't particularly focused on the academic side and this was reflected in their results; and, eight had good experiences, but this included older students who already had degrees. Of the remaining five, four didn't say and one said it was too long ago to remember.

Multiple factors helped students decide to enrol in their program. For some students the program was 'just right', and, in the case of older students, was directly related to career progression. However, for some of the younger students, it was 'just right' not only because they were enrolled in the right vocational program, but also because TAFE was a more supportive learning environment, and they were accepted for entry. A number of students said they enrolled because their teachers recommended it. At least eight students explicitly said that one reason they enrolled in their TAFE program was because university was too daunting and they could get more support at TAFE. Fourteen students explained that the smaller, more supportive learning environment was a benefit, as was the support and contact they had with teachers, even though many said they found their studies difficult and challenging. On the other hand, there was a small group who thought their studies weren't sufficiently challenging and were considering transferring to a program in a university as a result—but it was their experience in TAFE that made them realise they could do

more. There was a smaller group who valued the learning environment, but thought that some teachers were more supportive than others. Older students, particularly those with degrees, were much more confident, but they said they liked the environment and they were also able to claim more support when needed (for example, with timely and more feedback on assessment). Only three seemed to really need extensive support. The fact that teachers knew students' names was important to many students—they weren't just a number. One young international student said, 'TAFE lecturers take care of overseas students' more than university lecturers. She said they wouldn't receive the same treatment in a university:

At uni lecturers keep going, keep going and won't stop because you are an overseas student and you don't understand.

A couple of the older students enrolled in TAFE institutes because they could be given more credit for prior studies and also more recognition of prior learning, but only in part. Among the younger students, there was a group who enrolled in their higher education program in TAFE because they did not attain the tertiary entrance rank they had needed to be accepted into their preferred program at university. In contrast, their TAFE program offered them access to university with credit, but also with the option of an early exit point (where available). There was a sense that students' enrolments were insurance against risk; if they didn't get into programs at university or if they didn't finish at least they would have the associate degree (where this was available). Most students enrolled in programs in the visual, creative and performing arts did so because it was the best program, and they were able to articulate the differences between their program and every other program in the state, and sometimes in the country. These were clearly examples of TAFE offering well-regarded programs in niche areas and fulfilling needs not met elsewhere. However, many of these students were among those who enrolled in TAFE because their experiences of school were not good and this was reflected in their results, and for whom the smaller, more supportive learning environment was important.

The notion of an uncertain identity as a *higher education* student was expressed by several students, and this was related to the question of status, which was addressed by almost all students (status is discussed in the next section). For example, one student explained that she tells people she is studying civil engineering. She then says she is studying an associate degree, but it 'is a half a degree'. She says that:

It is important to say that because when she says that she is studying civil engineering – they say 'whoy!' and she says 'it is only half a degree'.

Another said that 'I tell them the course name [he is enrolled in] and they are usually blinded by the big words'. Yet another student says when trying to explain what he does tells people he 'is studying drafting at TAFE'—he wouldn't like to call himself an engineer when he is not qualified as an engineer—even though he will eventually be an engineer. He explained he wouldn't have this problem if he were doing the same course at a university; in that case he would just say he was doing engineering. Other students proclaimed themselves as higher education students doing degree programs, but were less forthcoming about *where* they were studying, and it was clear that they found issues associated with status and credibility of their programs troubling. With the exception of two older students who found universities daunting, the other older students were much more confident about their identity as higher education students and it didn't matter to them where they were studying.

We asked students whether they mixed with students enrolled in other programs in TAFE, or whether they knew other TAFE students. This was a question that was mainly relevant to full-time students because of the time they spent on campus. A few knew some other students through school, but overwhelmingly higher education students did not mix with other students. Some students interpreted this question as referring to students doing other majors or streams in their degree (it was as if the rest of the institute did not exist), and there was not necessarily much contact with even these students, although there was some. They got to know other students in their class who then constituted a distinct group, and the support they received from the group was

very important. Those who had been to university contrasted this experience at TAFE with their experience at university. In some cases this sense of a community was reinforced because all their classes were in the one building, which was not used very much by other students. However, they were a distinct group, different from other students. While this mainly characterises the younger students, it also characterises the older students we interviewed at the dual-sector university who were nearing the end of their degree through TAFE. They did not necessarily see themselves as a distinct group different from other students, but they had established strong and very supportive networks and each in their separate interviews emphasised that this was one of the most important outcomes of their degree.

We asked students how higher education in TAFE could be improved. Those who were in states where they couldn't receive Fee-help insisted that this was needed. Some students thought their TAFE facilities were very good, but more complained about the lack of resources in the TAFE libraries and the lack of other resources such as computer laboratories. Some contrasted the available resources with what they perceived were available in universities. Teachers also discussed the lack of resources, particularly in the libraries, as a significant problem. There were a couple of issues related to the mixed-sector nature of the TAFE, such as the library and cafeteria being open for TAFE hours and not for higher education hours (one student complained that the library shut at 5.00 pm out of term), and some teachers talked about the difficulties of timetabling VET and higher education requirements and difficulties in making 'claims' on the resources, rooms and facilities that were needed to support higher education provision.

On the whole, however, the issues identified as concerning students are similar to those of other higher education students in universities. The assessments were too close together and too large—why can't teachers get together and pace the assessments? Writing essays was an agony and so was referencing. Book lists and course outlines weren't available at the beginning of semester. Others gave detailed explanations about those parts of the curriculum they thought irrelevant and what needed to be included instead. The timetable could be organised better so that students used their time more efficiently (this was a big issue). Sessional teachers weren't always available. Some found the pace demanding, others not demanding enough. However, while these students were raising the same sorts of issues that could be heard in any university, these issues are perhaps more pressing for TAFE in developing a higher education environment, but also in helping students, particularly younger students, who need support to become independent higher education students.

Status

The issue of the status of higher education in TAFE was raised in almost every interview. It was identified as an important limitation for the development of higher education in TAFE by interviewees in offices of higher education, by senior managers at the dual-sector universities included in this project, by TAFE senior management in all TAFE institutes in the project, and by teachers and students. Many TAFE managers and teachers explained that the community still identified TAFE as associated only with the trades, and that they didn't understand the extent of the programs TAFE was currently offering. Several interviewees thought that TAFE would earn higher status for its qualifications in the future as graduates demonstrated their worth to employers and demonstrated their capacities in further study in universities. One teacher said that '*students are breaking down the barriers*' and this is demonstrated by the fact that his institution now has a pathway from their associate degree into a related degree at a Group of Eight university.

The status of TAFE's qualifications mattered to all interviewees, even though most thought that the standards and quality of TAFE's higher education programs were at least equal to that offered in universities. This results in a paradox. On the one hand, interviewees distinguished higher education in TAFE from that offered in universities by its practical and applied focus, and, on the other, interviewees wanted recognition that TAFE's higher education qualifications were as good as those in universities. For many teachers this meant that their work wasn't recognised as equivalent

to those teaching in universities, even though it was in some ways more complex as a consequence of the higher levels of student support that were required and workloads that were much more onerous. One teacher explained:

One limitation is that higher education teachers in TAFE don't have the same recognition as teachers in universities. There are no additional benefits or duties as a TAFE teacher. They get paid at the same rate, they have to be here 30 hours, and teach 22 hours face-to-face.

Some teachers argued that it would be better if their TAFE institute were called an institute of technology rather than an institute of TAFE to escape, as one teacher put it, the 'stigma associated with TAFE, and the difference between TAFE and universities'. This view was echoed by other interviewees in senior management as an important part of a strategy to position the institution and its qualifications to help educate the community and the international market about the institution and its qualifications.

Virtually all students were well aware of the difference in status between TAFE institutes and universities. One international student explained that a drawback of studying higher education in TAFE was that, 'It's not a uni and the degree certificate doesn't show "uni" and that isn't as good', which is important for recognition of her qualification in her home country. We asked students how they described their studies to their family, friends and acquaintances. Most of the older students didn't have a problem with saying they were studying at TAFE, but most of the younger ones were not as direct about where they were studying when explaining what they did to others. A group said that they told people about their higher education program but didn't really volunteer that it was at TAFE unless pressed. A few were quite emphatic in explaining that they were at TAFE. One student explained that he told people he was studying at XXX TAFE, but this was after he first explained he was doing a degree in business, then what was in the degree, before getting to the point that he was studying at TAFE: 'Some people think it is a Mickey Mouse degree, but XXX dual-sector university was a TAFE once'; he was told this by family and friends. 'That's one reason why there isn't a problem doing a degree at TAFE. Yes—it is a TAFE and it caters to a wide range of people—that's why it is TAFE'. He said he didn't know how they managed to cater for such a wide range of people—'it is quite phenomenal'.

A number of students dropped the name TAFE off the end of their institution's name or, when push came to shove, said they were studying at university. One explained that if he needs to give more information about his degree he says he is studying at uni and that he is studying a bachelor degree. He says this because most people think that TAFE is about a certificate, and if they don't know him they think that studying his degree at TAFE is stuffing around. He says people would think that he couldn't make it to uni so he went to TAFE.

On the other hand, the great majority of students said that they would recommend their course to others or to friends. Some were enthusiastic about why they would do so and argued that it was a better way of doing things compared with going to university, even though there were status issues. One student explained that he would recommend his program and that it was the best way to go even if the person had a tertiary entrance rank of around 90. This was a student who started his program because his tertiary entrance rank wasn't high enough to get him into the university program he wanted. Others said that they would if it met their friend's interests and if they were motivated, and others thought that, on balance, yes because, among other things, it was flexible, prior studies and informal learning were given more substantial recognition, and there were pathways to universities and work. There were only a few students who were ambivalent about recommending their TAFE program to friends. For younger students, the disjuncture between their willingness to recommend their course to others and awareness of, and concerns about, status, could not be more stark.

Discussion and conclusion

This conclusion brings together the findings and analysis of preceding sections to consider the challenges that confront the Australian and state governments, other institutional and sectoral stakeholders, and TAFE institutes in developing higher education in TAFE that is high-quality, provides opportunities for students, advances governments' equity and social inclusion objectives, and contributes to developing the knowledge and skills Australia needs for work and for building and sustaining inclusive, tolerant communities.

Sectoral boundaries and the place of mixed-sector TAFE institutes

The evidence from the literature and from this project is that sectoral boundaries will inevitably be constructed, as mixed-sector TAFE institutes develop their higher education provision. In part, this is as a consequence of having two tertiary education sectors that report to different levels of government and education policies that distinguish between the sectors and insist on different curriculum, funding, reporting, quality assurance and administrative arrangements. As with the dual-sector universities, this will make it more difficult than necessary for the mixed-sector TAFE institutes to develop their 'dual-sector' provision, because these arrangements will always pull VET and higher education in different directions. The discussion in earlier sections of the report demonstrates that accreditation requirements, the need to sustain a higher education culture underpinned by scholarship, and the requirement for separate higher education governance, quality assurance and reporting all promote differentiation between sectors in Australia, just as in England.

Boundaries will also arise as a consequence of the sectoral location of mixed-sector TAFE institutes, and we risk constructing large mixed-sector TAFE institutes that are lower in status than the 'new' universities and non-university higher education providers, thus reinforcing the stratification of tertiary education in Australia and perceptions about varying standards between high-status universities, lower-status universities and higher education colleges; and between higher education in universities, colleges and TAFE. As with the dual-sector universities, sectoral hierarchies may also develop within mixed-sector TAFE institutes as their provision of higher education grows. Mixed-sector TAFE institutes may also be questioned about the quality of their provision because of their sectoral location, the fact that they do not conduct research and as a consequence of their more vocationally focused provision that is more explicitly designed to be industry 'relevant'. Questions will be asked about the extent to which it is possible for students to have a higher education experience in TAFE and also about the academic independence of programs that have tight ties to industry. They will also be subjected to more scrutiny because their students are more likely to need more academic support, particularly if they come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, their staff are not likely to have the same level of research higher degree qualifications, and they will tend to have heavier teaching loads, which will also lead to questions about the quality of provision.

All of this means that TAFE institutes need support in developing their higher education provision to ensure their students have the same opportunities as those at universities. This becomes a broader issue for government because higher education provision in TAFE will grow as a consequence of recent government policies. In particular, the Australian Government's

announcement that 40% of all 25 to 34-year-olds will have completed a bachelor degree or above by 2025 (Gillard 2009a) will be a key driver of this expansion. While there are various ways that government could meet these targets by, for example, expanding existing universities, it is hard to see how government can achieve this in a cost-effective way without the involvement of TAFE in either directly delivering higher education in its own right, or through networked and franchised arrangements with universities. TAFE's role as a public provider enables it to be used by the government to meet both its equity objectives and its objectives for skilling the population. Much depends on government policy following the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley 2008). It may well be that in the longer term this model of institution is endorsed by government for managing the projected expansion of participation in higher education of disadvantaged students, just as in England. It would certainly be cheaper than establishing new universities.

How can policy support high-quality higher education in TAFE?

The conclusion we draw from this research is that policy development is required to support the growth of higher education in TAFE. Recent government decisions arising from the Review of Australian Higher Education will help to create a national framework to support consistent and publicly verifiable academic standards, particularly through the establishment of a national tertiary education quality and standards agency. Other decisions that will contribute to greater consistency between the sectors include VET's eventual inclusion within the tertiary education quality and standards agency, the review of AQF, the creation of one ministerial council for all tertiary education¹¹, and the introduction of VET Fee-help for full-fee, and later, publicly funded VET diplomas and advanced diplomas (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009). However, the government has not yet clarified whether it will expand TAFE's access to public higher education funding beyond the 40 bachelor of nursing places it allocated to Holmesglen Institute of TAFE or whether it will create a consistent funding model for both sectors (Ross 2009). Arrangements between the sectors need to be as consistent as possible to help to reduce inexorable pressures for administrative and organisational separation of higher education and VET provision within mixed-sector TAFE institutes, but also more broadly to support collaboration between institutions in the higher education and VET sectors.

Higher education in TAFE can be an important part of government equity strategies, but it will need to be publicly funded if it is to play this role and it will also need an equity 'enrolment loading' for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their higher education programs, similar to that which has recently been made available to public universities (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, p.14). This is important because, once higher education in TAFE becomes established, it is more likely to have to support students who are even more disadvantaged than those at the 'new' and regional universities, which already with a high percentage of disadvantaged students. Moreover, access to publicly funded places and Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) income-contingent loans is an equity issue for disadvantaged students. It is not equitable if their only access to higher education in TAFE is by paying full fees, even if they are able to access income-contingent loans for these fees. Higher education students in TAFE have access to Fee-help for their full fees in most TAFE institutes that offer higher education, and as the remaining TAFE institutes meet government requirements to become incorporated, Fee-help will be available across the board. Nevertheless, this is not as favourable as access to HECS-funded places, which would result in their accruing a much lower debt for their higher education studies.

¹¹ Known as the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment, which has been established since completion of this research.

As with English further education colleges (Parry 2008), similar consideration will need to be given to developing economies of scale of higher education in TAFE to support high-quality provision. Its quality will be questioned (with some justification) if the level of provision remains marginal. It may be worth considering an optimal sectoral mix of provision within mixed-sector TAFE institutes. TAFE institutes that offer close to the 20% threshold of higher education provision and thus qualify as a dual-sector will be more able to develop and invest the resources that are needed to ensure the quality of that provision.

There also needs to be a single tertiary education award for staff working within mixed-sector institutions to enable more realistic teaching loads to be negotiated that take account of the additional work required to teach higher education programs, and to establish career pathways for TAFE teachers to facilitate their becoming higher education teachers should they wish to do so. This possibility is not currently open to TAFE teaching staff in the dual-sector universities and, if it were, it would arguably do much to reduce sectoral tensions. The possibility of more flexible career pathways in mixed-sector TAFE institutes may help mitigate pressures towards entrenching sectoral distinctions among teaching staff, and may assist in TAFE institutes recruiting and retaining staff. This is an issue for governments, institutions and the two unions with coverage of universities and TAFE teachers respectively.

Support for staff and curriculum development is an issue for government and not just for TAFE institutes with higher education. Each sector has national policies and frameworks to support the development of curriculum and pedagogic practices. However, there is no framework at the moment for supporting the development of higher education provision outside universities, even though such provision is likely to grow. Individual TAFE institutes are developing scholarly cultures to support their higher education provision, which includes supporting their staff to gain higher degree qualifications. While this is so, it is difficult for TAFE institutes to offer this level of staff development: they are just beginning to develop the institutional capacity needed to sustain a vibrant higher education culture. As suggested earlier, it may be useful to consider what role the Australian Learning and Teaching Council can play in supporting the development of higher education in TAFE—adopting a role similar to the ‘HE in FE Enhancement Programme’ delivered through the United Kingdom’s Higher Education Academy. It may also be useful to consider funding other partnerships to encourage the development of communities of practice to support TAFE’s provision of higher education, as exemplified earlier by the University of Plymouth partnership with its regional further education colleges (see footnote 6).

An issue related to the question of staff development is how TAFE higher education teachers can be supported to engage in scholarship and to consider what this means in relation to research, and TAFE’s role in research. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage in the debate about the research–teaching nexus and whether this applies to some universities, all universities, or all higher education. It is also beyond the scope of this project to consider what applied research in TAFE might look like and TAFE’s role in innovation, although this was an issue raised consistently by TAFE senior managers as an important part of their emerging institutional role and identity. However, regardless of the outcome of this debate, it is crucial that TAFE teachers who teach higher education also engage in scholarship and they need support to do so, otherwise students will be short-changed. This is an issue for government, tertiary education quality assurance and staff development agencies, mixed-sector TAFE institutes, and also teachers who, as explained below, have very strong feelings about this issue.

How can mixed-sector TAFE institutes support high-quality higher education?

In addition to the points raised above which concern senior managers in mixed-sector TAFE institutes, senior managers themselves need a realistic understanding of the challenges teaching staff confront in teaching higher education programs while employed on TAFE teaching conditions.

High-quality provision of higher education in TAFE is premised on staff having the *time* to engage in scholarship (and not just the capacity to do so). This is one of the strongest themes in the literature and one of the strongest themes to emerge from our interviews with TAFE teaching staff. There also needs to be institutional discussion and debate about what it means to construct a higher education culture and how higher education provision is, and whether it should be, distinguished from other VET provision. Without such discussion and debate, TAFE teachers will continue to feel that their institutional culture is not conducive to higher education, and that management does not have insights into their work. It may also help establish better understandings between TAFE higher education teachers and their managers who may not in some instances have had much experience of higher education beyond their own experiences as a student, even though they may have a wealth of experience to draw on in developing VET provision.

There also needs to be consideration given to developing transition programs within TAFE institutes to support students moving from VET to higher education programs (within mixed-sector TAFEs, and between all TAFEs and universities), and transition programs to support students moving from associate degrees in TAFE institutes to degrees in universities. The extensive literature on transfer shock in the United States shows that this transition is difficult for students, even if they are moving from a lower-level higher education program to a higher-level program because of the different learning environment, expectations and requirements. The research literature in Australia and the United Kingdom confirms this. So did many of the students and teachers involved in this project.

We conclude on what is most important, which is how students' opportunities can be broadened. Pathways from associate degrees in TAFE to degrees in universities or from degrees in TAFE to postgraduate degrees in universities are essential components in the development of higher education programs in TAFE. Many TAFE institutes already have these pathways, but this issue needs to be emphasised and placed at the forefront of issues that require consideration. Pathways help to raise the status of TAFE's programs, ensure TAFE and universities develop strong partnerships and open new opportunities for students.

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Appendix 1: Methods

This section outlines the methods used in this project.

This research project was shaped by two key questions that were designed to provide insights into the nature of higher education provision in TAFE institutes. The two key questions were:

- ✧ What higher education does TAFE offer? Why and how?
- ✧ What is the nature of VET and higher education identities in ‘mixed-sector’ TAFE institutes and how is the sectoral divide constituted and navigated within TAFE by staff and students?

The purpose of the first question was to map the provision of higher education qualifications offered by TAFE institutes in Australia. It was designed to provide insights into: why TAFE institutes are increasingly offering higher education programs; the ways in which they are doing so; the policy, institutional, and governance arrangements they have in place to develop and support this provision; and the impact of higher education accreditation and quality assurance processes on the development of their higher education awards.

The purpose of the second question was to understand the perceptions of participants concerning the provision of higher education in TAFE and, in particular, to provide insights into the impact of this provision on the nature of VET and higher education identities in ‘mixed-sector’ TAFE institutes and the way the sectoral divide is constituted and navigated within TAFE by staff and students.

Each of the two key research questions was analysed to develop sub-questions that could be used to structure the research. This analysis was informed by a preliminary review of the international and Australian literature on dual-sector and mixed-sector institutions and the broader literature on tertiary education policy. The sub-questions emerged from this literature and our understanding of issues and controversies in tertiary education in Australia and the available sources of data. These questions were used as broad guides to structure the research rather than as a prescriptive framework.

The first question, ‘What higher education does TAFE offer? Why and How?’, was informed by the following sub-questions:

- ✧ What is the international experience of mixed-sector institutions in comparable systems in expanding opportunities for students to participate in higher education and what impact is this having on the structure of tertiary education in those countries? What lessons can we learn for Australia?
- ✧ What is the international experience concerning quality assurance issues associated with mixed-sector provision and what lessons can we learn for Australia?
- ✧ What are the broad social, economic and policy drivers and the specific national and state policies that are encouraging TAFE institutes to offer higher education and what are the perceived needs TAFE is seeking to address by offering higher education qualifications?
- ✧ What are the sources of differences among TAFE institutes offering higher education qualifications in different state jurisdictions?
- ✧ How are TAFE institutes determining industry ‘needs’ in developing higher education qualifications, and what collaborative arrangements do they have with industry partners in developing these qualifications?

- ✧ How are TAFE institutes positioning themselves by offering higher education qualifications and how do they differentiate their provision from that offered by public universities and private educational providers?
- ✧ Does offering higher education qualifications affect TAFE's partnerships with universities and what pathways do TAFE institutes have in place for their higher education graduates to degrees and post-graduate qualifications in public universities?
- ✧ What is the impact of state higher education accreditation processes on the way TAFE institutes construct higher education qualifications and create appropriate institutional settings?
- ✧ What are the internal governance, institutional and pathways arrangements in mixed-sector TAFE institutes, and how is the boundary between VET and higher education programs navigated?

The second question, 'What is the nature of VET and higher education identities in "mixed-sector" TAFE institutes and how is the sectoral divide constituted and navigated within TAFE by staff and students?', was informed by the following sub-questions:

- ✧ What is the international experience of the way in which student and staff identities are shaped in mixed-sector institutions and the way in which they navigate the sectoral divide? What lessons can we learn for Australia?
- ✧ What is the international experience concerning professional development issues associated with mixed-sector provision and what kinds of professional development programs have been implemented to support this provision? What lessons can we learn for Australia?
- ✧ How do teaching staff understand their role within mixed-sector institutions? Do staff who are teaching mixed-sector programs differentiate between VET and higher education programs, learning outcomes, and pedagogies, and if they do, how? What issues and concerns do they have about mixed-sector provision? How do they see the future development of higher education programs, and their role in its development and delivery? What recommendations do they have for the way in which such provision should be developed and supported? How do they see their own career trajectory? How do they understand the nature of the sectoral divide?
- ✧ What is the nature of student identities and student experiences for those undertaking higher education programs in TAFE? Do they differentiate between VET and higher education students in TAFE? Why did they enrol in these programs? What led them to this point? What are their aspirations and how do they see their own career trajectory? What is the nature of their experiences in their programs? What recommendations do they have for the way in which such provision should be developed and supported?

The project used a range of methods under the broad categories of desktop research and interviews to address these research questions. The desktop research included a review of Australian and international literature on dual-sector and mixed-sector tertiary education institutions. It also included research of: Commonwealth and state government regulatory bodies' websites, qualifications registers and registration and accreditation policies; TAFE institutes' websites; state and Commonwealth Government policy documents; higher education and VET student statistics; and, submissions to the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education as well as the final report of the review (Bradley 2008). Interviews were conducted with staff in state government offices of higher education, and with senior managers, staff and students in TAFE institutes and in dual-sector universities. The scope and nature of the interviews is discussed in the next section, as are the methods used to analyse the results from the interviews.

The sub-questions were addressed to differing degrees in the three publications from this project. The issues paper¹² focused on Australian tertiary education policy, the impact this was having on the development of mixed-sector institutions, research on mixed-sector institutions in comparable countries, and the impact of the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education on the development of mixed-sector TAFE institutes and on the sectoral boundary between VET and higher education.

¹² See <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2139.html>>

It raised questions based on this analysis for Australian tertiary education policy and tertiary education institutions. The literature review (in the support document accompanying this report) focused on an analysis of the international literature and, in particular, the findings from the FurtherHigher project in England¹³ because of the similarities between the English and Australian systems. The literature review analysed the impact of policy on the development of mixed-sector institutions in comparable countries and the way in which the structure of tertiary education was changing as a consequence, the way staff and student identities are shaped in mixed-sector institutions and international experiences concerning quality assurance and professional development associated with mixed-sector provision. It concluded by identifying issues that need to be considered in the development of higher education in TAFE to ensure the quality of provision and to ensure that students' opportunities are enhanced. The *Higher Education in TAFE* report (this report) focused on the provision of higher education in TAFE in Australia, the purposes it is designed to meet, the impact of policy on the way it is developed, how it is structured within TAFE institutes, governance and quality assurance arrangements within TAFE institutes, and the perspectives of differently placed stakeholders about this provision, including the experiences and perspectives of staff and students.

Interviews

In designing this project we sought understand contrasting perspectives on the development of higher education in TAFE with different stakeholders within institutions, across institutions and across state jurisdictions. A multiple case study design was used which included 11 institutions and state government offices of higher education in six states (Hall 2008, p.110). The offices of higher education were included because of their role in accrediting higher education programs in non-university higher education institutions. They were therefore able to provide insights into the nature of the accreditation process and issues they identified as important to the development of higher education in TAFE. A range of institutions were included in the project, including TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities. There are ten TAFE institutes that are registered to offer higher education programs in Australia, and six of these were included in the project. In identifying which TAFE institutes to include, we wanted to ensure that we included all states in which TAFE institutes offer higher education programs, as well as TAFE institutes at different stages of development in their higher education provision. Interviews were held in:

- ✧ six TAFE institutes that offer higher education in five states
- ✧ three TAFE institutes that do not offer higher education. This included one TAFE in a state where TAFE does offer higher education, and two TAFE institutes in a state where TAFE does not offer higher education
- ✧ two dual-sector universities, which included one where degrees of the university are offered through the TAFE division
- ✧ six state offices of higher education. This included offices of higher education in five states where TAFE does offer higher education, and one office of higher education in a state where TAFE does not offer higher education
- ✧ six states and territories which included: the Australian Capital Territory; New South Wales; Queensland; South Australia; Victoria; and, Western Australia.

Table 1 in the report lists the category of interviewee and the number who were interviewed in each category.

We used purposeful sampling in selecting institutional sites, but also in selecting interviewees within sites (Creswell 2008, p.214). 'Maximal variation sampling techniques' were used to identify

¹³ The website for the FurtherHigher project is: <<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/furtherhigher/>>. This project was funded by the UK Teaching and Learning Research Programme within the Economic & Social Research Council.

interviewees within the limits that were imposed by the number of TAFE institutes that offer higher education, to fulfil the need to encompass all states in which TAFE institutes offer higher education, and to accommodate the constraints arising from the scope and scale of the project (Creswell 2008, p.214). It was not possible to include a representative sample of TAFE institutes that do not offer higher education and consequently two TAFE institutes were identified in one state where alternative approaches were implemented to provide students with access to higher education. This enabled us to contrast the perspectives of senior staff in these TAFE institutes with senior staff in TAFE institutes with higher education. We also selected one TAFE that does not yet offer higher education but was planning to expand its provision of higher-level VET qualifications to understand how they were embarking on this process. This was in a state in which TAFE does offer higher education, although it is still in the early stages.

Staff with different types of responsibilities for developing higher education in TAFE were designated as potential interviewees to gain insights into the way these programs are developed and implemented as well as the views and perceptions of interviewees. In those TAFE institutes that offer higher education we originally we sought to include the TAFE director (or nominee), the director of higher education programs within that TAFE, and program (or curriculum) developers, as well as teaching staff and students. We found that TAFE institutes implemented their higher education programs in different ways and the designations we originally planned were not always appropriate. Consequently, in developing the list of interviewees we sought staff who played roles that were broadly equivalent to these designations. Of the six offices of higher education we visited, four had direct responsibility for the registration of higher education institutions and accreditation of higher education programs, while responsibilities in the remaining two were divided between the office of higher education and the state government registration and accreditation authority. In these cases, the offices of higher education had a legislative and policy development role and advised government on the development of higher education within that state. They also had insights into, and were sometimes involved with, registration and accreditation processes.

Ethical clearance for the project and its interview protocols was obtained from Griffith University's human research ethics committee (GU Ref No: EBL/27/08/HREC). We sought permission from each institution to conduct the research and worked with a person nominated by the institution to identify potential interviewees according to criteria we supplied. Interviewees were contacted in each institution by that institution and they were asked if they were willing to participate. Interviewees were provided with information about the project and they were advised that they could withdraw at any time and that there would be no consequences if they did so.

Interviews were held with 97 people and this included one person who was interviewed both as a member of teaching staff and a higher education student within that institution, so that two interview schedules were used. We had originally planned to interview 80 people. More were interviewed because one institution asked to be included in the project, and additional senior staff in the state offices of higher education and in TAFE institutes that offered higher education were included because of their role in higher education and/or because of their interest. Consequently, the 'maximal variation sampling' technique for identifying interviewees was supplemented by a 'snowballing sampling' technique because of the additional insights these interviewees could offer (Creswell 2008, p.217). This allowed us to identify those who were directly involved in higher education in TAFE within institutions.

The end result of our purposeful sampling approach is that we had included a representative sample of TAFE institutes that offer higher education because six of the ten TAFE institutes that do so were included. We achieved variation within institutions to a degree by interviewing people within these institutions who were in different positions. However, we were more successful in including interviewees from different *categories* of stakeholders, so that we included senior management, teachers and students, but we were less successful in including different types of interviewees within the teaching and student categories. In selecting teaching staff we originally sought to include four teachers from each institution to include teachers who taught across both VET and higher education, those who taught exclusively in one or other sector, and program or

departmental heads with responsibility for VET and higher education programs. We interviewed 27 teachers in total. In two of the seven TAFE institutes (this includes the TAFE division of a dual-sector university) we interviewed three teachers and we interviewed five in one other. The end result was that we included 11 teachers who teach in both VET and higher education, although the balance of their teaching load in each sector varies; nine who teach only in higher education; and five who teach only in VET. In addition, we interviewed two members of staff who held positions of program leader or equivalent; they were not directly involved in teaching but had responsibility for both VET and higher education programs in their area. We also included one TAFE teacher who taught exclusively in VET programs but who was also a student in a higher education program at that institution and we used both the teacher and student interview schedules in this case.

Some 28 students were interviewed for this project. We originally sought to include four students from each institution who were studying from a range of discipline areas and who also varied in their background by sex, age and whether they were part-time or full-time. In practice, students were included because they were available, and this meant that many tended to be young full-time students, although some older students were also included. Moreover, we were able to interview students from programs in different disciplinary areas in only two institutions. In most cases this was because the institute mainly offered higher education programs in the one discipline, and in one case it was because of the preference of the TAFE institution. In two institutions we interviewed three students, and we interviewed five students in another two, while we interviewed four students in the remaining three TAFE institutes.

A summary of the different categories of interviewees is included in table 1, and further information on the characteristics of interviewees is provided in appendix 2. We had originally planned to list the institutional affiliations and names of all participants to acknowledge their contribution to the project, but upon reflection we decided not to do so. We had guaranteed confidentiality to all participants and we had guaranteed institutional leaders that their institutions would not be able to be identified, even indirectly, without their express permission. Interviewees were very frank in sharing their views and in some cases these views were quite controversial. It was important that we were able to represent the views of participants as accurately as possible, while at the same time ensuring that we did not identify them, even indirectly. Consequently, we reluctantly decided to omit identifying information from this report.

Semi-structured interviews were used to ensure consistency in the interviews and thus allow comparison across sites and categories of interviewees, while at the same time allowing the interviewee the ability to develop their ideas and address issues they considered important (Hillier & Jameson 2003, p.103). Nine interview schedules were developed for this project for different types of participants. The interview questions were developed as a consequence of our review of the literature on tertiary education policy and on dual-sector and mixed-sector educational institutions and through our understanding of issues and controversies in tertiary education in Australia. The interview schedules were piloted and revised. In those cases where we had developed an interview schedule for a particular role within the TAFE institute to find that there wasn't a direct match between this role and the organisational structure of that TAFE, we consulted with the person who was our liaison in organising the interviews, and often with the interviewee as well, to identify the most appropriate interview schedule. We developed the following interview schedules (see the support documents for a copy of each interview schedule):

- ✧ offices of higher education
- ✧ TAFE directors (or nominees) in TAFE institutes that offer higher education programs
- ✧ directors of higher education within TAFE institutes that offer higher education programs
- ✧ senior staff in dual-sector universities
- ✧ senior staff in TAFE institutes in which there are plans to offer higher education programs
- ✧ senior staff in which there are no plans to offer higher education programs

- ✧ program (or curriculum) developers in TAFE institutes that offer higher education
- ✧ TAFE teachers
- ✧ students.

Most interviews were with individuals, although there were instances in which interviews were held with two or more people. This was particularly the case with the offices of higher education; in two cases staff involved with the registration and accreditation of higher education institutions and programs participated in the interview with the director. There were also instances in which interviews were held with two people when interviewing senior TAFE staff, TAFE teachers and students, but most interviews were with individuals. Most interviews were held in person, with a small number held by phone. Interviews with students were between 30–45 minutes, while most interviews with remaining interviewees lasted from between 45 minutes to one hour. Interviews were written up, based on notes taken during the interview, and the interview notes were then sent to the interviewee who was asked to make any amendments they wished as a validation measure and to ensure that the interviewee's 'voice' came through the interview notes.

Analysis

An interpretative approach was used to analyse the interviews as the aim was to represent and understand meanings of participants (Hall 2008, p.258). As indicated above, this included sending the interview notes back to each interviewee and inviting them to make any changes they thought appropriate. While not all interviewees availed themselves of this opportunity, many did so. The data were analysed holistically to identify emergent themes (Hall 2008, p.258; Creswell 2008, p.257). All interviews were read through several times before being ordered within a case-ordered matrix (Hall 2008, p.266). Themes were analysed and grouped into major and minor themes (Creswell 2008, pp.258–9).

Limitations

Higher education in TAFE is in very early stages and this research project provides a snapshot of the extent of provision and how it is organised. There are limitations with the statistical data because the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations statistics have, until the end of 2008, included only those non-university higher education providers that are eligible to offer their higher education students Fee-help for full-fee higher education qualifications. To be approved to offer Fee-help, an institution must be registered as a corporation. As of 9 November 2008 only the six of the ten TAFE institutes that offer higher had been approved to offer Fee-help on behalf of their students, five of which are in Victoria (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008). This will change in the future because the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is requiring all institutions to report on their higher education student enrolments, regardless of whether the institution is Fee-help eligible. Moreover, most of the remaining TAFE institutes have become or are in the process of becoming statutory bodies; they will therefore be able to offer Fee-help to students for their higher education programs as well as for VET-accredited diplomas and advanced diplomas. NCVER produces some data on higher education enrolments and this was used in the discussion paper and in the report. The data on student numbers are thus limited, but more accurate data will be available in future. However, we were able to provide an accurate account of the higher education qualifications that are offered within TAFE by researching the states' various qualifications registers and by researching the websites of those TAFE institutes that offer higher education.

Interviews with the state offices of higher education are comprehensive because six of the eight jurisdictions were included in the project. Similarly, six of the ten TAFE institutes that offer higher education were included and this is good coverage of those institutions. We also had good access to

senior staff in those institutions and in the two dual-sector universities included in the project. Most of the interviews with teachers reflect the views of those directly involved in delivering higher education, with the exception of five of the 27 teachers who teach exclusively VET programs in TAFE. Consequently, the interviews provide insights into the views of teachers engaged in higher education, but they do not provide the same level of insight into the views of teachers who teach only VET programs and have little to do with higher education provision. While it would have been desirable to have more VET-only teachers, it is perhaps appropriate to have interviewed a greater number of teachers involved in higher education. This is because higher education in TAFE is an emerging area and the way in which these teachers understand the nature of higher education in TAFE and negotiate their own teaching roles within institutional cultures will be an important factor in understanding how it develops. Similarly, interviews with students included more younger, full-time students, even though some older students were included. We did not seek to obtain a statistically representative sample of students, given the early stages of the development of higher education in TAFE; rather, through qualitative research methods, we sought to identify problems and issues as well as the benefits experienced by students. It was more important to identify the types of issues, problems and benefits students experience because we are in new territory; we are not working with well-established categories. Our purpose was to interpret students' (and other interviewees) understandings as the basis for charting the issues that will arise with the provision of higher education in TAFE and the relationship between students' (and other interviewees') understandings and the policy and institutional context in which they are located.

It was not possible to obtain a representative sample of TAFE institutes that do not offer higher education and so contrastive examples were identified (Pawson 2004; Sayer 1992). The aim was not to obtain a representative sample of senior staff in TAFE institutes that do not offer higher education; rather, our aim was to identify different perspectives and alternative ways of providing students with access to higher education as a way of understanding the complexities of issues around TAFE in higher education.

Appendix 2: Profile of interviewees

Table 4 Senior staff interviews

| Senior staff | No. interviewed |
|---|-----------------|
| Directors of TAFE with HE (or nominee) | 5 |
| Directors of TAFE within HE or equivalent | 11 |
| Senior staff in TAFE not planning HE (two TAFE directors and two directors education programs) | 4 |
| Senior staff in TAFE that doesn't offer HE but planning higher-level qualifications (one TAFE director and one director education programs) | 2 |
| Senior staff in two dual-sector universities | 6 |
| Total | 28 |

Table 5 Profile of TAFE teachers

| Attribute | No. interviewed |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Sex</i> | |
| Female | 15 |
| Male | 12 |
| Total | 27 |
| <i>Programs they teach in</i> | |
| HE only | 9 |
| VET only | 5 |
| Both HE and VET | 11 |
| Centre/department heads with VET/HE | 2 |
| Total | 27 |
| <i>Qualifications</i> | |
| PhD | 3 |
| Masters | 13 |
| Degree (at least)* | 8 |
| Advanced diploma | 1 |
| Unknown | 2 |
| Total | 27 |
| <i>Undertaking further studies</i> | |
| PhD | 4 |
| Masters | 3 |
| Degree | 1 |
| Total | 8 |
| <i>Employment mode</i> | |
| Full-time | 24 |
| Part-time | 1 |
| Sessional | 2 |
| Total | 27 |

| Attribute | No. interviewed |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Field of education</i> | |
| Business** | 5 |
| Multimedia/IT | 2 |
| Engineering/built environment | 2 |
| Creative, performing and visual arts^ | 9 |
| Human services | 1 |
| Literacy/ESL/TESOL | 2 |
| Hospitality/recreation | 5 |
| Science | 1 |
| Total | 27 |

Notes: * Five teachers said they had a degree, but a further three were included because two were studying for a PhD or an EdD and one was previously a practising lawyer.

** Includes management/accounting etc.

^ Includes dance, music, fashion design, design & screen production.

Table 6 Range of qualifications teachers interviewed teach in

| Qualification type |
|---|
| Higher education graduate certificate |
| VET graduate diploma/VET graduate certificate |
| Degree |
| Associate degree |
| Advanced diploma |
| Diploma |
| Certificate IV |
| Certificate II |
| Certificate I |
| Certificate – not stated |
| Year 12 |

Table 7 Profile of students interviewed for project

| Attribute | No. interviewed |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Sex</i> | |
| Female | 14 |
| Male | 14 |
| Total | 28 |
| <i>Age range</i> | |
| Under 25 | 20 |
| 25–29 | 1 |
| 30–34 | 2 |
| 35–39 | 1 |
| 40 & over | 4 |
| Total | 28 |
| <i>Level of schooling</i> | |
| Finished school | 23 |
| Didn't finish | 4 |
| Didn't apply (too long ago) | 1 |
| Total | 27 |

| Attribute | No. interviewed |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Prior studies</i> | |
| School leaver | 8 |
| Certificate overseas | 1 |
| Started degree but didn't finish | 5 |
| Degree | 3 |
| Graduate qualifications | 2 |
| VET certificates (all) | 8 |
| VET diploma | 8 |
| VET advanced diploma | 8 |
| Total* | 43 |
| <i>Domestic/international</i> | |
| Domestic | 22 |
| International | 6 |
| Total | 28 |
| <i>Study mode</i> | |
| Full-time | 23 |
| Part-time | 2 |
| Other** | 3 |
| Total | 28 |

Notes: * Doesn't equal 27 because students had multiple qualifications.

** These students were in full-time work undertaking the final year of their degree in 'intensive' mode, which meant that they completed 3rd year in one year.

Appendix 3: Profile of higher education programs in TAFE institutes

Table 8 TAFE institutes registered to offer higher education qualifications and their accredited higher education qualifications, at 25 May 2009

| Institution | Accredited higher education qualification |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Box Hill Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | Associate Degree in Applied Business in Music Industry Associate Degree in Applied Music Associate Degree in Biotechnology Associate Degree in Commerce Associate Degree in Computer Systems (Networking) Associate Degree in Fashion Technology Associate Degree in Hospitality Management Associate Degree in Software Development Bachelor of Applied Business in Music Industry Bachelor of Applied Music Bachelor of Biotechnology and Innovation Bachelor of Computer Systems (Networking) Bachelor of Hospitality Management |
| Canberra Institution of Technology | Bachelor of Design (Fashion Design) Bachelor of Design (Photography) Bachelor of Forensic Science (Crime Scene Examination) Graduate Diploma of Forensic Investigation |
| Challenger TAFE (WA) | Associate Degree of Engineering (Instrumentation and Control) Associate Degree of Engineering (Process Engineering) Associate Degree of Environmental Science Associate Degree of Horticulture and Soil Science Associate Degree of Water and Land Management |
| Gordon Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) |
| Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | Associate Degree in Business (Accounting) Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education Associate Degree in Social Science (Justice) Bachelor of Applied Science (Built Environment) Bachelor of Built Environment Bachelor of Business (Accounting) Bachelor of Business (Executive Administration) Bachelor of Construction Management and Economics Bachelor of Facilities Management Bachelor of Nursing Bachelor of Property Valuation Bachelor of Screen Production with Associate Degree in Screen Production exit point Diploma of Commerce |

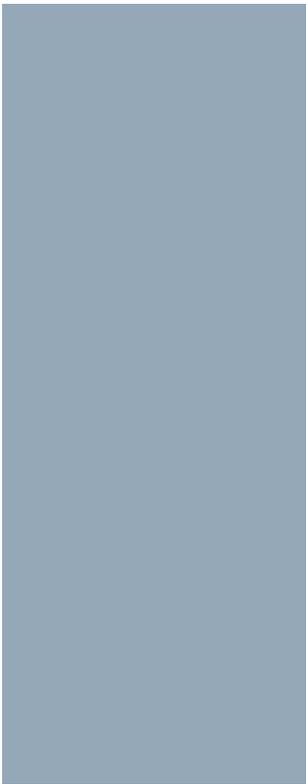
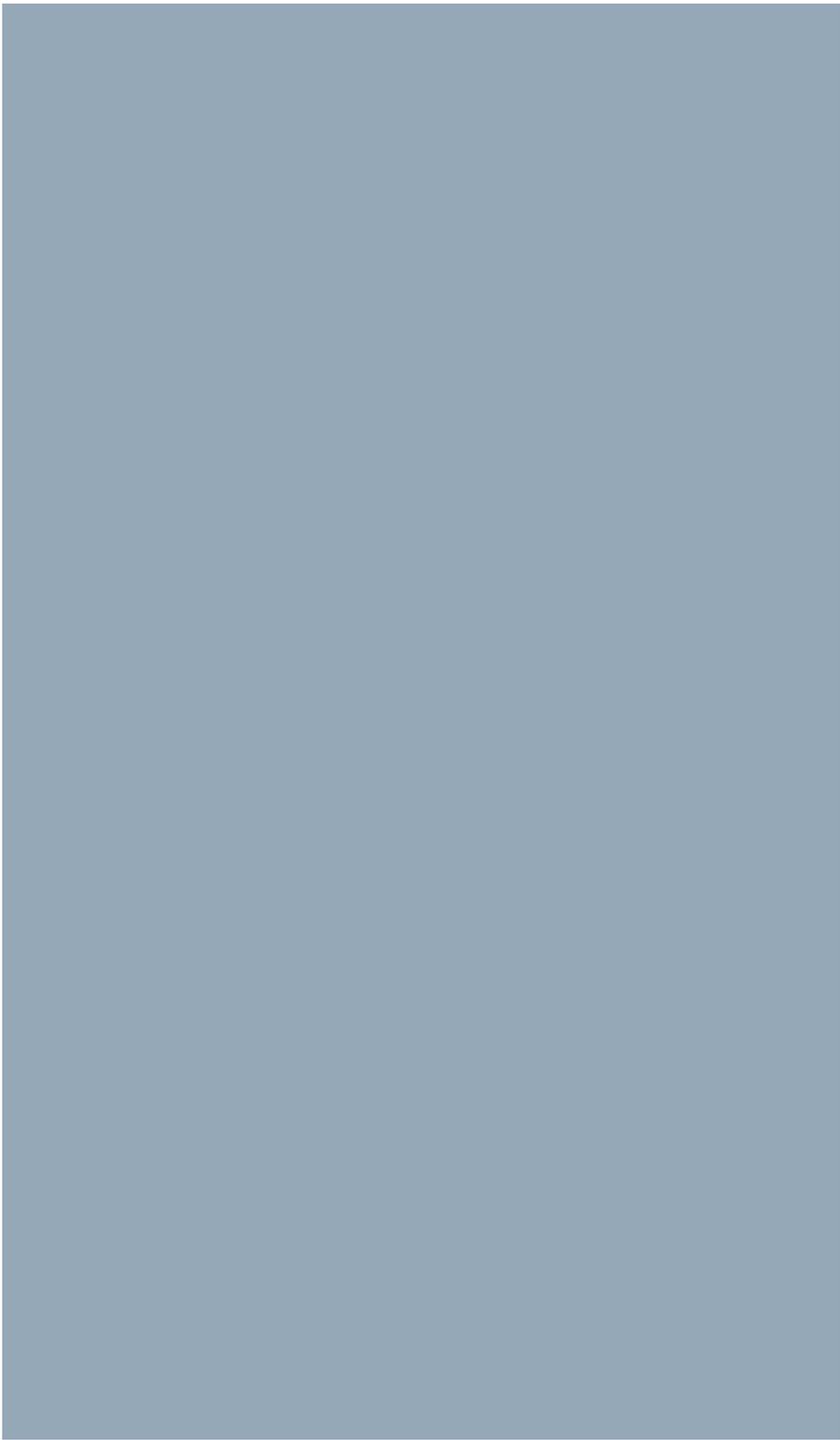
| Institution | Accredited higher education qualification |
|---|--|
| Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | Associate Degree in Accounting Associate Degree in Agriculture and Land Management Associate Degree in Illustration Associate Degree in International Business Associate Degree in International Business Management Associate Degree in Music Associate Degree in Writing and Publishing Bachelor of Applied Aquaculture Bachelor of Agriculture and Land Management Bachelor of Australian Popular Music Bachelor of Equine Studies Bachelor of Hospitality Management Bachelor of Illustration Bachelor of Psychology and Business Bachelor of Viticulture and Winemaking Bachelor of Writing and Publishing |
| Southbank Institute of Technology (Qld) | Associate Degree in Civil Engineering Diploma of Computer Aided Drafting |
| Swan TAFE (WA) | Associate Degree in Hospitality Management Associate Degree in Business Associate Degree in Aviation (Aeronautics) Associate Degree in Aviation (Aviation Management) Associate Degree in Aviation (Maintenance Engineering) |
| TAFE SA | Associate Degree in Electronic Engineering Bachelor of Business (Hospitality Management) Bachelor of Business (Tourism Management) Bachelor of Business (Recreation Management) Bachelor of Dance Performance Bachelor of International Hotel Management (ICHM) Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design |
| William Angliss Institute of TAFE (Vic.) | Bachelor of Culinary Management Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality |

Note: Since we produced *Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper*, Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE has increased the number of its higher education accredited programs from 13 to 16. The new programs are: Associate Degree in Agriculture and Land Management; Bachelor of Agriculture and Land Management; Bachelor of Psychology and Business.

Source: State and territory registers of the institutions approved to issue accredited higher education qualifications.

Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Higher education in TAFE: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVET's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2167.html>>. It contains a literature review and the interview schedules.



National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd
Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide, South Australia
PO Box 8288, Station Arcade, SA 5000 Australia
Phone +61 8 8230 8400 Fax +61 8 8212 3436
Website www.ncver.edu.au Email ncver@ncver.edu.au