

Lessons from VET providers delivering degrees: case studies

Victor J Callan
Callan Consulting Group

Kaye Bowman
Kaye Bowman Consulting

This document was produced by the authors based on their research for the report, *Lessons from VET providers delivering degrees*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's Portal: <www.ncver.edu.au>.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER. Any errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

© Commonwealth of Australia, 2015



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the Department's logo, any material protected by a trade mark and where otherwise noted all material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au>> licence.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the CC BY 3.0 AU licence <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/legalcode>>.

The Creative Commons licence conditions do not apply to all logos, graphic design, artwork and photographs. Requests and enquiries concerning other reproduction and rights should be directed to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

This document should be attributed as Callan, V & Bowman, K 2015, *Lessons from VET providers delivering degrees: case studies – support document*, NCVER, Adelaide.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER.

Any interpretation of data is the responsibility of the author/project team.

Published by NCVER, ABN 87 007 967 311
Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

Phone +61 8 8230 8400 Fax +61 8 8212 3436

Email ncver@ncver.edu.au Web <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>> <<http://www.lsay.edu.au>>

Follow us:  <<http://twitter.com/ncver>>  <<http://www.linkedin.com/company/ncver>>

Contents

Introduction to case studies	5
Canberra Institute of Technology	8
Introduction	8
Factors influencing the development of HE qualifications	8
Factors influencing the cessation of HE qualifications	11
Summary	12
Sources	13
Holmesglen Institute	14
Introduction	14
Strategic drivers	14
Strategic positioning	14
Operational arrangements	15
Key challenges	17
Summary	19
Sources	20
Polytechnic West	21
Introduction	21
Strategic drivers	21
Strategic steps taken	22
The associate degree strategy	23
Operational arrangements	23
Summary	26
Sources	26
Tabor Adelaide	27
Introduction	27
Strategic positioning	28
Tabor Adelaide Dual Sector	29
Current and future challenges	30
Summary	31
Sources	31
TAFE SA	32
Introduction	32
Strategic drivers	32
Strategic rationale for maintaining HE registration	33
Summary	36
Sources	37
Think: Education Group	38
Introduction	38
VET and HE accreditation	39

VET, HE programs and partnerships	39
FEE-HELP	40
Quality	40
Student experience	41
Staff support	41
Challenges	42
Sources	43
Appendix A: Interview guide for the case studies	45

Introduction to case studies

This support document contains six case studies of registered vocational education and training (VET) providers who have taken up the delivery of associate degrees and bachelor degrees in their own right by becoming registered higher education (HE) providers as well. The case studies explore the issues that the VET institutions have faced in making the transition to deliver these HE degrees. The issues investigated include the:

- Strategic thinking and positioning behind why the VET provider is delivering associate and bachelor degrees;
- Operational issues that have been encountered, such as curriculum development and accreditation, funding and reporting, and how they have been managed; and
- Capability building required for teachers to deliver successfully the HE programs and for students to successfully complete their HE qualifications.

The general nature of these various issues was identified in an earlier literature review, published by the NCVET as an *Occasional Paper* in 2013. The Occasional Paper (i.e. *VET providers delivering associate and bachelor degrees: issues and impacts*) is Support Document No. 1 to the wider research project. This Support Document No.2 presents in detail the identified strategic, operational, and capability issues identified using a qualitative case study approach for the six VET provider organisations investigated in this project.

In selecting these six VET providers for case study, two key factors were taken into account: that they were in scope; and the length of time the VET provider has delivered associate and bachelor degrees. Other factors taken into account included: the field of study in which the associate and bachelor degrees are being delivered; and the jurisdictions (states and territories) in which the VET provider operates.

Of note is that the providers potentially in scope include dual sector tertiary institutions which provide HE within their VET division. However, we decided not to pursue these organisations, as they have the advantage of having in place the required HE arrangements. We were looking for organisations that have a long history of being VET providers, and are having to deal with the range of funding, reporting, curriculum, and other operational factors that need to be managed as they continue to make the transition into delivering HE qualifications.

We were interested in the length of time that the VET providers had been delivering associate and bachelor degree programs because we wanted to select those that had been doing so for the longest times and would have demonstrated outcomes for staff and learners. This rationale was linked to the project's overall aim: to compare across the six case studies to identify the key features which contribute to the successful introduction of associate and degree qualifications.

To enhance the generalisability of our findings, the sample of six VET providers is from a mix of jurisdictions, and the associate degrees and bachelor degree programs are in a mix of fields of study. This diversity in the cases allows us to determine what effect, if any, these two variables have on the success of providers in the transition into HE and to becoming tertiary education providers.

Also, we have included in the six case studies a mix of 4 public and 2 private VET providers to reflect the fact that some of both of these types of VET providers have made this transition.

Each case study has involved the completion of interviews with various staff, together with an examination of organisational data, reports, web materials, and other archival data. The interviews have included senior leaders responsible for strategy and direction, managers of the HE curriculum development and accreditation processes, and teachers who are delivering the various associate and bachelor degree qualifications. The interviews have been face to face or by telephone and of 45 to 60 minutes in length and semi-structured in format. The developed interview guide questions are contained in this document in Appendix 1. The providers involved have validated the case studies, as presented in the following chapters.

To determine the final sample of six we took the following steps:

- 1 Identified which institutions are registered to offer both vocational and HE qualifications, by interrogating the national HE provider data base and the national VET provider database to find those institutions that are in both data bases. Our list included 67;
- 2 Reduced the list generated in Step 1 to those providers in scope by consulting colleagues and data already generated by other researchers, specifically on VET providers with some associate degrees and/or bachelor degree program offerings;
- 3 Sourced publicly available data on the list of providers in scope generated in Step 2 to ascertain the length of time the VET provider had delivered associate and bachelor degrees and in what fields of study and jurisdictions;
- 4 Identified a short list of in scope providers with the most time and experience in delivering associate and bachelor degrees. They included a mix of public and private providers collectively delivering in a broad range of fields of study and jurisdictions. This list included about 20 providers;
- 5 Contacted the VET providers on our short list to confirm our understanding of their HE delivery and to ascertain their interest in being a case study. We moved down the list deleting those where our understanding of their VET and HE offerings proved to be inaccurate or there was no interest; and
- 6 Finalised the list of six providers for approval by NCVET.

The six providers who agreed to participate in the development of a case study on their organisation are:

- Canberra Institute of Technology
- Holmesglen Institute
- Polytechnic West
- Tabor College Adelaide
- TAFESA
- Think Education Group.

The Final Report for this research project will draw from the literature review (Support Document No. 1) and the six case studies (Support Document No. 2) to examine the three research issues outlined above: the strategic, operational and capability factors at work in shaping their engagement with HE qualifications. Also the Final Report will identify the best practices of both public and private VET organisations that are transitioning to the delivery of HE qualifications in their own right. This set of practices can serve as a guide for other providers that may decide to make similar transitions in the future.

As these six cases highlight, there are a number of factors shaping decisions to move into HE in their own right including: to build upon existing capabilities of the VET institutions and their staff; to produce work ready graduates to fill the projected and growing number of paraprofessional and professional jobs required to keep Australia internationally competitive; and to help achieve the clear achievement targets at the diploma to bachelor degree levels set by the Council of Australian Governments. There is capability building required for their staff and their students to achieve success in HE, that is subject to ongoing continuous improvement and being in-built. There are challenging operational issues. These include the costs of accreditation of their HE degree courses and for HE provider registration, and the viability of these HE courses where the vast majority of students pay full fees. This is because VET providers of HE in their own right do not currently receive Commonwealth funding for their HE students, although the students often do receive FEE-HELP. The other key challenge is around receiving recognition for the applied and more practical nature of their HE provision. This is a key point of difference for these HE providers and also influences their approaches to scholarly practice.

Canberra Institute of Technology

Introduction

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is the premier provider of vocational education in the ACT. It is a statutory authority of the ACT Government with almost 1000 staff and almost 23 000 students from over 86 countries. Some 85% of students study with CIT part-time and about one third of CIT students work full-time and study. Recently CIT students won the 2012 Australian Apprentice of the Year, 2012 Australian Vocational Student of the Year, and CIT has been awarded the ACT Large Training Organisation of the Year every year since 2007. CIT has six locations across Canberra and delivers nationally-accredited training packages via the workplace, online and on-campus.

CIT offers almost 400 industry courses ranging from certificates, traineeships and apprenticeships through to diplomas and degrees. Qualifications include certificates I to IV, diploma and advanced diploma, and all qualifications in these categories are managed by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). In addition, CIT is accredited to deliver graduate certificates, graduate diplomas and bachelor degrees, while students in these courses are eligible to receive FEE HELP.

Photography was the initial degree offered by CIT, followed by forensic science, games and virtual worlds and fashion. In 2013, CIT offers four degree programs:

- Bachelor of Games and Virtual Worlds (Programming)
- Bachelor of Forensic Science (Crime Scene Examination)
- Bachelor of Design (Fashion Design)
- Bachelor of Photography.

The two degree programs in games and virtual worlds, and forensic science, are accredited until the end of 2013, and visits by TEQSA occurred during October-November 2013. CIT is very confident of positive outcomes around the re-accreditation of both degree programs. However, the two degrees in design and photography will not be re-accredited. Both are being discontinued due to small enrolment numbers and the considerable number of competing institutions offering similar qualifications that have emerged in more recent years.

Also CIT has not sought re-accreditation of its associate degrees. Associate degrees have proved challenging due to issues around guaranteed articulation into other programs and institutions.

What follows is an examination of some of the key factors that initially encouraged CIT to design, accredit and to deliver these four HE programs, and now the factors at work behind recent decisions to cease two of CIT's four degree qualifications.

Factors influencing the development of HE qualifications

TAFE HE engagement strategies need to be seen as connected. For CIT, moving into HE qualifications built upon existing capabilities in the organisation, including its ability to develop practical and applied programs that meet industry needs around wanting more advanced qualifications. In particular, these opportunities arose in niche markets in fashion, forensic science, games and virtual worlds and photography.

Positioning CIT as a HE provider

When deciding to offer HE qualifications from about 1998, CIT targeted niche markets aligned to its core capabilities around offering practical industry-relevant qualifications that could build upon existing industry partnerships. There was strong support from the senior management who also saw little value in replicating degrees offered by local universities. Programs were designed to offer “field-based” degrees that involved a strong exposure to industry practitioners as teachers alongside CIT staff.

For each HE qualification, a business case was made that included gaining industry support, and the process of consultation and review included input often from expertise from ANU and the University of Canberra. In addition, at the time of seeking approval for these degree qualifications, the then ACT accreditation agency (ACT Registration Council) only permitted CIT to provide qualifications in areas not already dominated by competing institutions, especially ACT based universities.

Compared to a university that enrolls hundreds of students in first year classes, each of the two continuing CIT degrees have small first year enrolments, typically between twenty and thirty students annually. A major attraction of each degree is the applied orientation, small cohorts of students, flexible delivery formats, industry projects and links with industry that are not typically provided by universities.

Degree programs initially positioned CIT at the prestige end of the VET market. Today, CIT continues to offer the highest level of VET qualifications, and it is believed by senior management that this positioning has had ripple effects for other qualifications. For example, degrees have attracted more Masters and PhD qualified staff as teachers to CIT, and raised the institution’s profile around scholarship and research, including studies in forensics.

Degrees with hands-on experience

The two continuing degrees offer features that still separate them from their competitors. For students completing the Bachelor of Forensics Science (Crime Scene Examination), there is use of an on-campus forensic house where students interpret blood-spatter in recreated crime scenes, excavate buried remains, interpret questioned documents and use the latest technology to analyse evidence. CIT students also have access to facilities at the National Centre for Forensic Studies laboratory that is equipped with instrumentation for the scientific analysis of DNA, illicit drugs, explosives and fingerprints.

The Bachelor of Games and Virtual Worlds (Programming), also accredited to 31 December 2013 with re-accreditation in progress, offers similar features. This degree program is delivered using a mix of face-to-face and online activities through CIT and the private provider the Academy of Interactive Entertainment campus in Canberra and in Melbourne, and in Sydney from 2014. It provides practical skills in computer game/simulation design and programming and opens up employment opportunities in 3D games programming, simulation software engineering, project management, software engineering, as well as more general roles in programming and computing. Students learn general business skills around market research, development of a business plan and the management of computer game/simulation development projects. The final year is completed on-line, involving applied industry projects, while many students move to part-time status as they have gained jobs with employers in the games programming or related industries. The degree has also attracted international students from Iraq and other countries.

Complementing existing VET qualifications

Advanced Diploma qualifications remain as a major focus of CIT's strategy. As noted above, degrees have been structured whereby Advanced Diploma qualifications are nested in the first two years of most degree qualifications, except for Games and Virtual Worlds. This strategy has worked well, accessing students to lower fee structures, and allowing these smaller cohorts of degree students to be combined with larger cohorts of students in diploma courses. For example, for the Forensics degree, students who are working in forensic policing already may combine in classes with non-police students. In addition, this design means that students for personal (e.g. fee costs) or employment reasons (e.g. offered a full time job in their chosen industry) can choose to exit a degree early with an Advanced Diploma qualification.

Throughout their existence, CIT's degrees have had no subsidised places from the federal government. Until recently, Bachelor of Forensic Science (Crime Scene Examination) students initially enrolled in the Advanced Diploma of Forensic Science (Crime Scene Examination) paying VET fees, and moved in their final year to the Bachelor of Forensic Science (Crime Scene Examination). The final year in the degree program was subject to higher tuition fees outside of the VET fee schedule, but FEE HELP was offered for the final year in the degree. Fees were set to achieve cost-recovery. Under the new guidance provided by Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), this program structure around the use of the Advanced Diploma will discontinue. From 2014 FEE HELP will apply to all three years of the degree.

Building on the CIT partnerships model

Partnering with industry, private providers and universities is a key feature of many CIT qualifications, including its degree programs. The Bachelor of Forensics Science (Crime Scene Examination) accesses staff, resources and projects through partnerships with the Australian Federal Police and the University of Canberra. Industry partners include the Australian Federal Police, National Centre for Forensic Studies, NSW Police Forensic Services Group and Australian and New Zealand Forensic Science Society. CIT will look to partner more formally with a university around delivery of this qualification into the future.

In another partnership, CIT and the private provider the Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) jointly deliver the other degree program of the Bachelor of Games and Virtual Worlds (Programming). Other successful CIT partnerships include:

- Bachelor of Business and Graduate Certificate in Management degrees in partnership with Charles Sturt University. These programs are delivered wholly at CIT, while CIT and CSU have a number of formalised credit transfer agreements around CIT's Diploma and Advanced Diploma programs
- CIT and the University of Canberra collaborate on pathways and transfers between the two institutions
- Partnerships with ANU have included the associate degrees in science and an associate degree in engineering, where many of CIT's subjects articulated directly into the ANU degree programs. However, both of these associate degrees due to decisions by ANU are currently in teach-out mode. The new positioning will focus upon the vocational Graduate Certificates as they are judged to be easier for accreditation within CIT and by other providers.

Staff capability

Prior to introducing the degree programs especially in forensic science and computer (games) programming, CIT had few Masters and PhD qualified staff. Today there are numerous Masters and PhD qualified teaching staff, and all teachers must have at least the Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualification. CIT also provides as part of the professional development of its teachers access to its own Advanced Diploma of Adult Vocational Education and Training.

Degree programs have been staffed by a combination of permanent, casual or part-time teachers, including police who have joined the forensics program since leaving the police. In this degree there are some difficulties in recruiting from the various police jurisdictions due to the higher salaries in policing, but over time CIT has grown a strong cohort of teaching staff in its degree programs. Staff are encouraged to do consulting to build upon their skills and expertise.

Under the Enterprise Agreement, there is an additional clause for professional development of teachers delivering HE programs. This clause includes that full or part time staff undertaking direct teaching of HE accredited bachelor degree programs are provided with a reduction in teaching of 15% per annum, where the teacher has agreed to undertake appropriate scholarly activities and/or to participate with university partners in scholarship programs. Outcomes are measured through scholarly outputs that can include published papers, academic presentations and creative outputs.

The scholarly activity required to support the HE provision of these teachers is still unfolding at CIT. Interestingly, a number of researchers have recently highlighted the challenges around introducing expectations about scholarly practice that are rooted in HE traditions in institutions that have a long tradition of VET practice and culture (Williams, Goulding & Seddon, 2013). Outputs framed around HE traditions in universities often do not capture the applied orientation of HE courses at TAFE, and the distinctive features of quality scholarly practice in both contexts.

Student support

CIT emphasises to potential and current students that HE programs are challenging. In the forensic science degree, there is a high level of science, while the games and virtual worlds degree at its core is an advanced computing and programming qualification.

CIT provides small classes, on-going technical support, learner support through the library, extra tutorial support in chemistry, mathematics and related areas, and provides literacy and numeracy programs across all of its programs. Also CIT teachers have re-designed some of the HE qualifications, embedding research skills and communication skills in most subjects and allowing students to conduct their industry related research projects earlier in their academic journey.

Factors influencing the cessation of HE qualifications

Increased competition

As noted earlier, CIT has been a leader in developing degrees that met industry needs around wanting more qualified employees as those industries matured. Today, many other public and private providers have developed similar qualifications, and there are high levels of competition in what are still niche markets. CIT has used partnerships well in building student markets in Sydney and Melbourne, while online courses in CIT degrees overcome some of the disadvantages of its Canberra

location. However, declining class sizes, costs of marketing and the overall costs of accreditation have led to the decision to discontinue two of their four degree programs.

Changes in accreditation

Until recently, CIT was subjected to the ACT Registration Council, and under the regulatory guidance of this authority, its four degree programs were designed and accredited. Recent changes in the HE regulatory environment have moved the responsibility for the accreditation of courses to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). As with other VET institutions that offer HE courses, CIT has reviewed the structures and processes put in place to meet the National Protocols and Guidelines in 2008 in order to ensure they meet the new HE standards and regulation of TEQSA.

CIT perceives some key differences under the new HE standards and regulation of TEQSA. Such changes include:

- Increased workloads in preparing for and completing the five year review cycle
- Shorter timelines for submission
- Increased data collection and submission requirements
- Increased fees for renewal of both HE registration and HE course accreditation.
- Slower accreditation and re-accreditation processes.

Costs of resourcing, staffing, delivering, marketing and now re-accreditation have led to the decision to discontinue the two degrees in photography and fashion. More specifically, the costs of re-accreditation of one degree are estimated at about \$100,000 that is equivalent to nine months commitment by a senior manager.

Summary

CIT's aim is to provide industries with the professionally qualified staff needed to develop the capacity of each industry. The HE qualifications continue to meet the needs of Australian industries in forensics and games technology in particular. CIT continues to pursue multiple strategies to deliver its degree qualifications, including cross-sectoral linkages with ACT universities and private providers, strong industry relationships that provide access to highly credible and hands-on instructors and degrees that produce graduates with sound theory but also the practical skills required of their industries. While aiming to place students in these niche industries, qualifications are broad enough to allow students to access jobs in other industries.

However, CIT has clearly turned a corner in recent times. It is questioning the future of its engagement in the HE sector and a mix of factors is in play. As the HE sector becomes even more competitive with the removal of Government restrictions on enrolment numbers, CIT still has its strong diploma and advanced diploma enrolments that position the institution at the higher end of VET qualifications. Degree programs will continue, but it is likely that the partnership model that is central to many CIT qualifications will be used to grow the competitiveness of the two remaining degree programs.

Sources

Interviewees

Anita Wesley, Manager - Quality Services, Education Services, Student and Academic Services, CIT.

Dr Kym Turnbull, Head of Department, Forensic Science Health, Community and Science, CIT.

Elizabeth Tomaras, Manager, Student and Academic Services, CIT.

Don Munro, Teacher ICT, IT degree Coordinator, CIT.

Diana Kirby, Research and Policy, CIT Student and Academic Services, CIT.

William Nauenburg, Director, Technology and Design, CIT.

Geoff Bell, Centre Director, Health, Community and Science, CIT.

Validation and sign off

Anita Wesley, Manager - Quality Services, Education Services, Student and Academic Services, CIT.

References

Williams, M, Goulding, F & Seddon, T 2013, Towards a culture of scholarly practice in mixed sector institutions, NCVET, Adelaide.

Holmesglen Institute

Introduction

Holmesglen Institute is located in the eastern region of Melbourne, Victoria. It has a long history as an innovative public provider of vocational education and training (VET). It was founded on VET apprenticeships and courses for the building industry in 1982. Over time the Institute expanded to offer VET courses over a broad range of subject areas and today is Victoria's largest VET provider. From 2005 the Institute began to offer HE bachelor and post-graduate degree programs in its own right, positioning these degrees as distinctive in their use of high quality and applied approaches to learning. Holmesglen Institute is seeking to position itself further in this competitive marketplace as a new type of provider, an applied tertiary education provider, as will be outlined in this case study.

Strategic drivers

Holmesglen Institute's move into HE provision primarily has been for the benefit of its students. The Institute development into HE programs has given access to HE for students who may not otherwise have entered a university degree program. In addition, the HE programs have strongly adopted an applied teaching and learning model, with student centred approaches that are most aligned with the learning styles and backgrounds of these students. The Institute began as a contracted deliverer of components of HE courses for Charles Sturt University and Deakin University about two decades ago. The trigger for Holmesglen becoming a HE provider in its own right (i.e. non self-accrediting) was a change in Victorian legislation in 2003 that enabled TAFE institutes to develop and deliver HE programs. Holmesglen took this opportunity.

Strategic positioning

Since 2005 Holmesglen has worked with industry partners to create innovative HE bachelor and post-graduate degrees, as well as VET diplomas and certificates that combine theory with industry experience and practical skills. The Institute has broadened its mission to focus on accessible and applied vocational and HE programs, supported by excellent resources and staff to maximise student success and benefit society. In 2008 the Institute rebranded with the new logo of 'Vocational and Higher Education'.

Characteristics of a Holmesglen HE course

Holmesglen's HE degrees have a defining set of characteristics embedded within them (see Table 1 for a list of these defining features). Degree graduates have demonstrated professional theory knowledge and professional practice skills.

Table 1 Characteristics of a Holmesglen HE course

- Designed and delivered using applied learning and student centred principles including project-based learning, case-based learning or problem-based learning approaches
- Identifies clear professional outcomes and delivers career alignment
- Develops work-ready graduates
- Includes industry-focused content to a breadth and depth appropriate for a HE qualification
- Benchmarked against similar courses in HE
- Exposes students to current discipline, relevant scholarship and theoretical underpinning
- Embeds scholarly activity
- Encourages learner autonomy
- Demonstrates progression of learning towards Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) outcomes by the completion of the course
- Provides articulation and credit for VET qualifications into HE programs
- Provides articulation pathways to higher level qualifications
- Open to a rigorous review and maintenance process incorporating both internal and external moderation and review.

Areas and scale of HE provision

Holmesglen's bachelor degrees are in its areas of strengths in its VET programs. The Institute has made significant investment in building first class facilities for applied learning in both HE and VET. The facilities include a simulation hospital centre used extensively in the Bachelor of Nursing program; audio and production facilities and equipment used in the Bachelor of Screen Production program; purpose built Early Childhood Practicum/Observation facilities; and innovative Learning Commons (libraries). The Institute's HE offerings currently include a range of bachelor programs (over 25 in all) in the following discipline areas: Art and Design; Building and Construction; Business and Finance; Education and Languages; Fitness and Wellbeing; Information Technology; Health and Social Science; and Hospitality and Tourism. The scale of bachelor degree provision by Holmesglen reached 4 per cent of its total 50,000 course enrolments in 2011.

Holmesglen has not entered into HE associate degrees to this point, 2013, preferring to focus on VET advanced diplomas at the same level and provide pathways from them to the next level of education, HE bachelor degrees.

Operational arrangements

Holmesglen's previous experience as a contracted deliverer of components of HE courses for universities meant that staff had a clear idea of what was involved in establishing a HE portfolio in its own right. Holmesglen HE staff are integrated with VET staff in the operations of the faculties, and supported by staff located in the Higher Education Support Unit (HESU) that, in turn, reports to two HE committees, and those Committees to the Board.

Governance arrangements

As of 2012, Holmesglen's HE governance arrangements involved the:

- *Holmesglen Board* - that provides the strategic direction and resources for the development of and delivery of HE programs at Holmesglen.

- *Higher Education Academic Committee (HEAC)* - that provides guidance on governance and quality assurance and monitors the provision of HE programs. It has external expertise in HE on the Committee.
- *Higher Education Executive Committee (HEEC)* - that manages the operations of HE programs by developing and monitoring key performance indicators and quality assurance to promote high quality program development and delivery.
- *The Higher Education Support Unit (HESU)* - that provides the staff and skills to guide the faculties and their teams through the various stages of HE course development and course accreditation.
- *The Faculties* - that each develops an annual HE action plan based on the Institute's strategic plan that encompasses both VET and HE, which is forwarded from HEEC to HEAC for consideration.

The HESU has been instrumental in educating staff across the Institute about HE at Holmesglen especially around issues of quality assurance and expectations around scholarship. It has progressively led the education of Holmesglen's workforce and has been responsible for the dissemination of good practice. Staff of the unit have led positive communication strategies and discussions on HE policy, including meeting regularly with course leaders and heads of Departments and the establishment of a range of communities of practice. The unit aims to ensure the integrity and correct application of Holmesglen policies and procedures, as well as those of external bodies, impacting upon the registration of Holmesglen as a HE provider and the delivery of its HE courses. The unit has been responsible for helping the academic staff deal with understanding the many interpretations of scholarship and with enhancing the student experience, two of the ongoing key challenges identified by some of those interviewed.

HE program development

All Holmesglen HE programs are appropriately researched to ensure congruence with the Institute's strategic direction. Initially a feasibility study is undertaken to determine course outcomes, including pedagogical framework to achieve the outcomes, professional and/or industry recognition and rationale against the Australian Qualifications Framework. To further maximise the opportunities for students, graduate pathways and articulation arrangements are incorporated into the design process.

Following approval of the program proposal, a Course Development Reference Panel (CDRP) is convened. The CDRP has as members, external academics and industry representatives who are selected on the basis of their expertise in the discipline area. Institute representatives provide strategic and operational focus to ensure programs are developed in line with Holmesglen's HE academic values (of access, excellence, scholarship, integrity and enterprise), course characteristics (see Table 1) and desired graduate attributes that enable them to participate effectively in the workforce and make constructive contributions to the community. The CDRP makes recommendations on course structure, content, academic standard and adherence to professional and regulatory requirements. Upon completion of the development of the program the application for accreditation is submitted to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia's independent national regulator of the HE sector since January 2012.

Also Holmesglen delivers programs which require accreditation by professional organisations. This is a separate submission process. Following accreditation of the program by TEQSA, an application for approval is prepared and submitted to the professional organisation. As with TEQSA, the professional organisation must be satisfied that the program meets their accreditation standards.

This rigorous development and accreditation process takes up to eighteen months to complete and ensures that the requirements of the accrediting bodies are fulfilled, and Holmesglen is delivering high quality programs. Holmesglen has a comprehensive review process in place which incorporates feedback from all stakeholders ensuring that continuous improvement of programs is achieved. Programs are reviewed biennially by external academics and to inform the Institute's course re-accreditations, that all have been successful.

Teaching and learning

As already mentioned, Holmesglen is committed to the development of applied approaches to teaching and learning. Examples of good practice to date include: the simulated learning approaches in the Nursing and Early Childhood Education degrees that are leading edge; and the problem based learning approaches and use of industry connections to provide authentic learning in the Faculty of Building Construction and Architectural Design. Good practice in applied approaches to teaching and learning are developed within the Institute's scholarship activity (see below) and by qualified industry practitioners and Institute staff being closely connected in educating students. The Holmesglen Higher Education Support Unit also maintains a community of practice project in work based learning.

Staff development

Staff involved in the Institute's HE activities have wide access to professional development opportunities, including conference attendance and access to financial support and study leave for higher degree studies, including master and doctoral degree study. This access to professional development extends to sessional staff.

Key challenges

In 2011 Holmesglen undertook significant work in developing its HE expertise and capacity and prepared for a HE portfolio audit. The audit provided an opportunity for the Institute to showcase its capacity and expertise and maturity as a HE provider. The Audit was completed by TEQSA in 2012, with an overall positive outcome.

Governance

Holmesglen has continued to strengthen its academic governance capacity and in particular with additional external expertise in HE quality assurance. Holmesglen is in the process of restructuring its HE governance arrangements to support the overall restructure that has occurred under the stewardship of the new Chief Executive. This new structure includes the establishment of a Dean of Higher Education and Strategic partnership, who among their duties will be responsible for identifying new opportunities for Holmesglen within the HE sector.

Scholarship development

Holmesglen does not aspire to conduct traditional 'discovery' research. Rather, it is focussed on scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching. Holmesglen is seeking to develop a scholarly culture that both values the critical role research activity plays in the formation of knowledge that is itself characterised by an approach to teaching and learning that involves systematic analysis and critical inquiry. While HE scholarship practices are heavily discipline-focused within traditional HE

organisations (i.e. universities), in Holmesglen they are related more to teaching and learning, as they are in VET.

The Institute has adopted the Boyer framework of scholarship, defined as discovery, integration, application and teaching, with an institutional emphasis on scholarly teaching. The Boyer framework of scholarship is accepted as a good fit with the strategic direction of the Institute.

A member of Holmesglen staff together with two external researchers have since completed a project on scholarly practice based on the Boyer framework and to identify criteria that could be used to define “quality scholarly practice and practical strategies for enhancing and supporting scholarly practice in mixed sector tertiary education providers (Williams, Goulding and Seddon , 2013). A practitioner-scholar project has also been undertaken recently by Holmesglen with external leadership.

Promoting a positive student experience

Holmesglen Institute’s goal is to provide access to HE for non-traditional or under-represented students. It is to widen participation in HE for those who may not otherwise have the opportunity for bachelor degree study. Data to 2010 show that many of the Institute’s HE domestic students have completed a VET diploma and many are mature age students with no stated or no prior qualifications. Fifteen per cent were from home postcodes in the lowest socio-economic status category. Overseas students also included many who have articulated from partner courses, in and from China for example.

Holmesglen supports students transitioning to HE through the following programs:

- HE orientation events, that each Faculty conducts for each of their HE courses
- HE transition support programs including
 - The Academic Skills Unit that assists vocational and HE students with academic and study skills
 - The Social Inclusion Program that aims to assist international and local students to integrate effectively into the Holmesglen and local Melbourne community
 - Student Support Services that provide various kinds of services to maintain the general health and wellbeing of the Holmesglen community, and aid reduction of student attrition rates and staff absenteeism, and that include; Careers & Vocational Counselling, Counselling & Welfare, Student Employment, Student Accommodation, Health Services and Scholarships and Fee Assistance Advice.

All HE programs use multiple mechanisms to test readiness for HE degree level study among non-traditional HE students. When admitted to the HE programs, the students have access to most lecturing staff and smaller class sizes. The Institute’s HE students are generally positive about their experience.

With 2010 student attrition rates from some of Holmesglen’s HE programs that were not acceptable to the organisation, (e.g. business degree programs), Holmesglen has reviewed its admission policies for those HE programs that had high attrition rates. The aims of the review were to ensure the Institute was admitting students who had a reasonable chance of success; to develop stronger approaches to student support to cater for the needs of a diverse student body; and to review and reframe approaches to students at risk, including more effective early intervention to reduce attrition based on the good practice that is emerging in some faculties. Among the outcomes are that student support

is now better embedded in HE programs but attrition still occurs primarily due to students moving between HE courses. In response to this, there are also a wide range of transition and bridging programs now developed in conjunction with both HE and VET staff.

Finally, some of the attrition issue is seen to be funding related. The majority of Holmesglen's HE programs are Full Fee for Service (FFS), with two also having some Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP). For example, domestic business degree students pay a full fee of \$7800 a year, compared with up to \$11,286 that universities receive in student and government contributions combined. Students attrite to go to another provider, generally a university, because they receive a CSP and hence pay much less generally than the FFS tuition. Holmesglen has been active in advocating access for its students to Commonwealth Supported Places through the introduction of new category in the Higher Education Provider Standards of TAFEs who deliver HE.

Cost of accreditation

A further financial issue in the short term has been the cost impost experienced around how HE regulation has unfolded since TEQSA has commenced its operations. Holmesglen has detailed the impost and these costs were included in the final report of the Independent Review of Higher Education Regulation of 2013.

Gaining support for applied HE delivery

Holmesglen Institute has been strategic and pro-active in developing appropriate actions and support for HE delivery within a traditional VET environment. One example is its instrumental role in the establishment of a collegial support group that consists of five Victorian TAFEs that all moved into HE provision in their own right after 2003. Group members share ideas and experiences about HE and benchmark against each other. Also the group has held an annual conference on the topic of HE in TAFE since 2011, with the inaugural Mixed Sector Symposium attracting over 120 participants from across the sector. Holmesglen staff are also involved in developing this dialogue about HE issues. For example, they held a half day workshop on HE at the TAFE Directors Association (TDA) Conference in Perth in 2011, and Holmesglen conducts an annual higher HE conference specifically for TAFEs involved in the mixed sector.

Holmesglen Institute is working with and assisting other public VET providers in the HE space based on the attitude "their success ensures our success". These interactions have been facilitated to the national level recently with the assistance of the TAFE Directors Association (TDA) to promote a consolidated effort across all jurisdictions, and including for the extension by the Commonwealth of its HE-supported places for domestic students to Australia's TAFEs.

Summary

Holmesglen has established strong foundations for its further development as a new type of tertiary provider. The Institute looks forward to the day that the Commonwealth decides to extend its HE supported places to all domestic students in the Institute's HE programs, and thereby give full recognition to Holmesglen Institute as a new type of provider, an applied tertiary education provider.

Sources

Interviewees

Ili Pelliter, Manager, Higher Education Support Unit, Holmesglen Institute.

Validation and sign off

Mary Faraone, Chief Executive, Holmesglen Institute.

References

Dow AO, K,L & Braithwaite, V 2013, *Review of higher education report*, Commonwealth of Australia.

Holmesglen website -www.holmesglen.edu.au/programs/higher_education.

Holmesglen Institute, 2012 & 2011, *Annual Reports*, Holmesglen Institute.

Williams, M, Goulding, F & Seddon, T 2013, *Towards a culture of scholarly practice in mixed sector institutions*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Polytechnic West

Introduction

Polytechnic West is a major provider of vocational education and training (VET) courses in Western Australia (WA) delivering to over 30,000 students annually. Furthermore, it has been a registered HE provider (non-self-accrediting) since 2007, with a focus on applied associate degree courses in its areas of specialisation. These are full-fee paying courses and do not receive any government subsidies. The Institute has achieved rapid expansion of its associate degrees, to total annual enrolments of 326 in 2013, mainly made up of international students but also a substantial cohort of domestic students, many of whom may not otherwise have entered into HE. This case study outlines the strategic drivers and steps taken by Polytechnic West to enter the HE sector and the operational approach taken to achieve good outcomes for its HE students, and the key challenges that have been encountered.

Strategic drivers

Several factors emerged in the 2000s that led Polytechnic West, at the time Swan TAFE, to investigate opportunities afforded in the HE sector. The factors included:

- Swan TAFE, along with other VET Registered Training Organisations, was under pressure in the training sector. Funding arrangements were becoming increasingly competitive. Universities were increasingly focussed on VET diploma and advanced diploma products and schools were increasingly delivering lower level VET qualifications (their available product offerings were being 'squeezed' from both directions)
- The WA Government was encouraging TAFE Colleges to increase the percentage of their revenues gained from commercial, fee for service activities
- Feedback from the marketplace was that TAFE'S higher level VET courses at diploma level were not meeting the mark in some areas. They were not producing graduates with the mix of knowledge and skills required by industry for the destination of para-professional occupations
- A new qualification, the associate degree, was added to the suite of recognised Australian qualifications with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), as a HE equivalent and alternative to the VET advanced diploma
- The then Managing Director of Swan TAFE had been watching developments in the TAFEs in eastern states. Several institutions had started to look at a move into HE as an activity to broaden products
- Swan TAFE's domestic student base included many who were unlikely to take up a university qualification directly but may be encouraged to do so through effective VET to university pathways
- The review of HE by Bradley et al (2008) reinforced the desirability of improved pathways between the VET and HE sectors to achieve higher levels of occupational progression among VET students to meet market demand and achieve HE attainment targets set by the Council of Australian Governments.

Strategic steps taken

Responding to the above set of drivers Swan TAFE, led strongly in this direction by the then Managing Director, investigated the opportunities afforded in the HE sector as a means of broadening its product and market base. The Institute:

- 1 Analysed the HE market across Australia
- 2 Discussed options with the State Department of Education Services (DES), which at the time was the HE and VET regulatory body for WA, and was supportive of their business case
- 3 Developed a business case to focus on associate degree level qualifications that were within certain parameters as outlined below
- 4 Developed a HE unit to manage the shift into HE
- 5 Sourced the relevant curriculum or developed the curriculum through a process involving industry advisory groups and university representatives
- 6 Negotiated articulation arrangements between its planned associate degrees and bachelor degrees of universities, and from its VET diplomas
- 7 Submitted accreditation documentation as a non- self-accrediting HE provider for its first associate degrees to DES as the HE accreditation agency for WA
- 8 Provided professional development to its staff prior to entering the HE market and ongoing, especially in regard to academic scholarship
- 9 Put in place revised commercial delivery arrangements and targets to ensure Polytechnic West's ongoing viability. The aim was to provide the ability to better identify business needs, cultivate commercial opportunities and develop strategic partnerships to capitalise on commercial training opportunities across the state
- 10 Marketed courses (to current students at first) through a shift from print format to online marketing
- 11 Instigated a name change to Polytechnic West in 2009. There was a shared vision that the adoption of the term 'polytechnic', that broadly means 'many skills', promotes a status consistent with the Institute's position as the only publicly funded training provider of applied HE qualifications in the state of WA. The rebranding would convey a meaningful and contemporary image to students, staff and the wider community, and position the organisation to take advantage of the opportunities within both domestic and international markets (Polytechnic West Annual Report, 2009)
- 12 Established the next HE Plan, for 2010-2013 to strengthen the governance arrangements around academic integrity and the quality of course delivery and student administration. The plan provided for expansion of HE delivery through the introduction of additional associate degree courses, as well as increasing participation in the existing courses
- 13 Shifted to a consolidation strategy in the short term from 2012-3 in the light of the impact of changes in HE regulatory arrangements and the possible impact of changes in VET funding arrangements in WA to come into effect from 2014, as explained later.

The associate degree strategy

Associate degrees are the identified HE business priority for Polytechnic West. The associate degrees offered by the Institute are restricted to those that:

- are applied, with a mix of practical skills and knowledge components that are developed with and valued by employers for the available paraprofessional jobs
- are in areas of specialisation within the Institute that promote a competitive advantage
- complement rather than compete with existing VET offerings
- have strong articulation arrangements from VET diploma products and into HE bachelor degrees in particular universities.

Additionally, Polytechnic West associate degrees are aimed at students who require and/or prefer to further their education through a stepping stone or advanced standing approach to the HE level. Polytechnic West has complemented the associate degree strategy through the introduction of a number of targeted HE diploma programs.

Current HE provision

In 2013, Polytechnic West was offering 10 associate degrees and two HE diplomas, based around institutional strengths (Centres of Excellence). Polytechnic West's HE offerings are in the areas of Aviation, Hospitality Management, Fashion Business Management, Business Management and Information Technology. All of its current HE courses are accredited until 2016 or later.

Data indicate current total annual enrolments of 326 students across Polytechnic West's HE courses. International students accounted for 71.3 per cent of these enrolments in 2012, from 46 different source countries. Polytechnic West has competed strongly to achieve this market share. The Institute is proud of the pastoral care it provides to these mostly "first to university" domestic and international students.

Partnership agreements and participation in national student surveys provide appropriate benchmarking activities to ensure quality outcomes. Student satisfaction with the Polytechnic West HE experience is high and continuing to improve. Overall student satisfaction in 2011 was 87% compared to 75% in 2010. The high student satisfaction rating is underpinned by 78% of graduates in employment after the completion of their course in 2011. The end of 2012 total student satisfaction rate was 89% and the unit pass rates remained high with 81% of students passing their HE units (Polytechnic West Annual Reports 2011, 2012). Further, the associate degree graduates who go on to university bachelor degrees are quite successful according to informal feedback received by Polytechnic West.

Operational arrangements

General

Polytechnic West has incorporated HE into its portfolio of products by establishing a HE Unit in 2007. The Unit is responsible for the coordination and development of all matters in relation to HE. This includes documents such as associate degree accreditation and authorisation submissions, HE policies and procedures, HE registration and student FEE-HELP compliance. The Unit, together with the relevant delivery areas, coordinates information between the institute and outside organisations,

including the relevant national and state government departments and the local universities. The Unit provides guidelines and information to HE lecturers via HE specialist staff induction sessions and regular HE familiarisation meetings. It provides a centralised admissions and enrolment centre, is responsible for all appeals processes, orientation and graduation, and co-ordination of examinations and Board of Examiners' meetings. Professional development has been a key response to overcome various challenges, on which some details are provided in the capability building section below.

In general, the different operational arrangements required for HE are handled as exceptions to the normal VET structures, systems and processes by Polytechnic West. For example, HE staff are employed under the same industrial award as VET staff with accommodations made for their different patterns of time usage. VET student enrolment and achievement systems have been modified to accommodate HE requirements to an extent, with some manual work-around still required. The academic governance of HE rests with the Polytechnic West Governing Council, on recommendation through the Academic Board. Matters of corporate governance are referred to the Corporate Executive. There is student membership on the Academic Board.

Course development

All HE courses developed at Polytechnic West have incorporated significant input and feedback from industry and other HE providers. Each delivery area has led its own course development, in consultation with industry and HE providers; with support provided primarily by Polytechnic West's HE Unit staff. All Polytechnic West HE courses have negotiated articulation arrangements into bachelor degrees of particular universities as well as from their associated VET courses.

Staff capability development

Polytechnic West sources its HE staff from among its VET staff and from outside by enlisting casual, sessional lecturers. There has been a positive response among VET lecturers to delivering HE. Many VET lecturers already had the requisite HE qualifications in their field of study to teach in HE. Other VET lecturers have undertaken self-improvement courses and gained the required tertiary education qualifications to enable them to deliver in the associate degree programs. Additional HE staff have also been recruited on a casual basis as content experts in their field. Most of the casual lecturers are employed at Universities or have their own businesses and work in HE in the same field of study. Employing staff with a university background also has positive benefits with respect to scholarship and overall HE acculturation, as not all of the VET lecturers have HE experience.

Polytechnic West requires all new HE lecturers to undergo a HE Lecturer Induction Program which comprehensively covers all essential information and support systems within the Polytechnic. HE lecturers are supported by the HE Support Unit and HE Coordinators in each delivery area. Regular team meetings are made available to all HE lecturers and are designed to provide ongoing support and professional development. The content of meetings and support is different to VET, in that it is specifically focussed on scholarship within their academic discipline.

Professional development for staff who work in HE has been undertaken and continues. A particular early focus has been the HE regulatory environment and framework, and ensuring staff delivering HE are aware of the AQF level 6 requirements, and do not take a competency based approach to their HE provision. Meeting academic scholarship requirements on an ongoing basis has been the other main focus. Polytechnic West's approach to scholarship in light of its mixed sector experience is to build a culture of scholarship, rather than research, across all its areas of HE teaching.

Polytechnic West is also currently advertising for more staff with substantial experience in universities. Their appointment will further ensure academic leadership and scholarship is embedded throughout the course development to delivery process.

HE student support

Polytechnic West is proud of the support and pastoral care to its HE students that include many first timers to HE. Existing VET student support services, such as Customer Service, Disability Services, International Services Centre and Library Services, have been tailored to contribute to the ongoing care of the HE students. The HE Unit facilitates activities and support services that are particular to supporting students within the HE learning environment. Current improvements, as part of Polytechnic West's robust continual improvement strategy, are focussed on ensuring Individual Learning Plans for at risk students and that the plans are closely monitored.

Key challenges

When Polytechnic West entered into HE in 2007, the regulator was the WA State Department of Education Services (DES). Five years later the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) was established and took over as an independent statutory authority, regulating all HE from the end of January 2012 against new Threshold Standards. With the move to TEQSA a prolonged accreditation period arose for Polytechnic West (up to 18 months). TEQSA inherited some 65 outstanding registration and accreditation matters to finalise in accord with new HE Threshold Standards set out in the TEQSA Act (Lee Dow and Brathwaite, 2013). By the time TEQSA came to consider Polytechnic West's outstanding course renewal accreditation documents some of them were out of date and consequently required renewal activity. Also, some information was not presented in the way TEQSA required, involving revision activity. Consequently, the costs of HE course development and accreditation have been higher in recent times for Polytechnic West. In some cases no delivery activity eventuated as alternate VET courses had become available in the meantime. Furthermore, these alternate VET programs provided similar graduate outcomes as those identified in some associate degree courses and Polytechnic West therefore decided to withdraw from the reaccreditation process for some HE courses.

This has led Polytechnic West to focus on review and consolidation of the business case for all of its existing associate degrees. As Polytechnic West's HE courses are all run as "fee for service" courses, with domestic students eligible for loans to cover the costs through the FEE-HELP scheme, all costs incurred in developing, accrediting, marketing, delivering and reporting on the courses, as well as in maintaining HE registration, have to be recouped through the fees charged and by factoring in several years of delivery to achieve estimated critical mass of student enrolments to remain financially viable. While the current tuition fees for its associate degree courses are reasonably competitive, an increase in these may impact negatively on future entrant numbers to Polytechnic West associate degree courses.

Additionally, from next year, associate degree enrolment behaviour may be impacted by changes in VET funding arrangements in WA. WA is introducing a new VET Entitlement Model in 2014. Many diploma level courses are not categorised as priority programs within the WA Entitlement Model and consequently their associated student fees are to be increased significantly; however students enrolling in such programs will have access to income contingent loans through VET FEE HELP. A number of VET diploma courses have been feeder courses into Polytechnic West's associate degree courses. Students gain credit for their VET diplomas and consequently spent shorter time periods, and

so pay less fees, to complete an associate degree. It is hard to predict what impact higher VET diploma fees will have on student's articulating to associate degrees.

Following TEQSA's feedback, Polytechnic West is focussed on further building its HE academic leadership and support to students. Currently HE discipline leaders, with extensive teaching experience within a university setting, are being appointed to strengthen academic leadership at a discipline level. The Institute has recently completed a review of their HE Strategic plan for 2014-2016, including the development of new frameworks and policies to strengthen the culture of scholarship in the provision of HE programs.

Summary

Polytechnic West has responded to the challenge of working in an environment of increasing competition by implementing a range of applied associate degrees and HE diplomas in its areas of specialisation. These areas have industry demand and aid students to progress to HE who may not otherwise have done so. Student satisfaction with the Polytechnic West HE experience is high, with them achieving high HE unit pass rates and graduate employment outcomes overall. The changes in HE regulatory arrangements and reporting linked to the introduction of TEQSA has caused a slowing of Polytechnic West's rate of growth in associate degrees in recent times, and changes in VET funding arrangements in WA to come into effect from 2014 may also impact. The foundations have been established though for further growth in associate degrees in future, where there is a sound business case.

Sources

Interviewees and written comments

Bill Swetman, General Manager Organisational Services, Polytechnic West.

Kath Finn, Director Teaching and Learning, Polytechnic West.

Brenda Micale, Executive Director Commerce and Hospitality, Polytechnic West.

Written comments

Blair Marsh, General Manager Training and Industry Services.

Validation and sign off

Jill Jamieson, Chief Executive, Polytechnic West.

Tabor Adelaide

Introduction

Tabor College (trading as Tabor Adelaide) is a small institution with a community of approximately 1000 students. Based in Adelaide, the College is committed to academic excellence, and to creating a genuine learning community for its students and staff. The College commenced operations in 1979 as a small Pentecostal Bible and ministry training centre, and over time broadened its profile so that the College now describes itself as a multi-denominational, dual sector Christian tertiary institution offering Government accredited qualifications from Vocational Certificates to a Research Doctorate. While there are Tabor colleges in other states with historic connections to Tabor Adelaide, they are all independent entities.

Tabor Adelaide (Tabor College Inc. [SA]) is a registered private provider of government-accredited courses and also a Commonwealth Government approved Higher Education Provider (HEP). Tabor Adelaide is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and operates according to the requirements of the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012. Tabor Adelaide's Vocational and Employment Training (VET) courses are accredited by the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Tabor Adelaide's HE courses are accredited by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

The Tabor Adelaide vision is to provide "Tertiary education with a Christian perspective". Internally it is often compared by staff to a US liberal arts institution and seminary. Its four Schools located at the Millswood campus offer a range of disciplines in theology, ministry, intercultural studies, education, counselling, youth work and VET.

A Coursework Quality Assurance Committee and Research Quality Assurance Committee provide internal oversight and monitor academic standards, and reports to academic staff and to the Academic Board on such matters. The Academic Board includes independent members from various South Australian universities and other bodies, and the Board among other functions oversees the internal review and approval process for all academic programs of study. The College is moving to adopt a more formal framework of processes and quality assurance as it moves into the next phase of its development.

Interestingly, there is some debate about the actual history of the College, in particular with a view that the College was registered as a vocational education and training (VET) provider before its registration as a HE institution. Thus, some see Tabor as a VET organisation that has transitioned into HE courses, while others in the organisation perceive Tabor as a HE organisation that moved into VET programs. Today, the College offers both VET and HE programs, while the HE programs are the dominant source of College revenue. However, the VET side of the College has recently been given more focus towards growing and diversifying College revenue. In 2014, new courses on offer include the Certificate IV in Community Services, Certificate IV in Mental Health, Certificate IV in Disability and the Certificate IV in Pastoral Care.

Strategic positioning

Size and niche focus

Tabor Adelaide has an established reputation in the theological sector that historically has involved smaller private colleges delivering religious tertiary education in Australia. As a relatively small institution, as a point of difference Tabor allows study of a range of VET and HE programs that can be studied on campus or online. Students are seen to be mostly focused upon competing qualifications that allow them access to positions in church-based schools, church agencies and youth work. Its largest HE enrolments with 200 HECS places are in the Bachelor of Education that is also approved by the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia. Graduates of these courses are eligible for positions in both government and non-government schools in Australia and overseas, while as part of the degree, trainee teachers rotate across public, private and Christian primary and secondary schools.

Values

Another point of difference promoted by Tabor Adelaide is that teaching is underpinned by a Christian tradition of beliefs, while the explicit multi-denominational focus of Tabor Adelaide promotes a strong focus upon community, faith and its implications for practice in one's chosen profession. Underpinning its learning community are core values that include partnerships in learning, excellence, freedom of academic inquiry and expression, the promotion of social justice and equity, and service to the local and global communities.

Classroom based sessions are held mostly during the day time with some evening classes and a VET program as a Saturday morning workshop. In addition, there is access to online resources. Online study uses the Moodle learning system to access online student workbooks, recorded lectures, discussion forums and upload of assignment work. Mixed mode delivery is also a feature. In mixed mode, many students study successfully only on-line, while others combine on-line and on campus study. Schools offering units or courses externally include Ministry, Theology and Culture, TESOL, Humanities, Counselling, Youth Work and VET. In addition, intensive classes are conducted over several consecutive days, combined with access to online resources.

Tabor Adelaide has a positive and proactive approach to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Many of the VET programs provide credit into various VET and degree programs, both at Tabor Adelaide, other RTOs, universities or other HE providers.

Student experience

The flexibility around study arrangements, the small sizes of its classes and the ability of teaching staff to take a more personal interest in students are attributed as the key factors behind the high levels of overall student satisfaction. The College is understandably proud of its point of difference around consistently high levels of student satisfaction. National surveys (e.g. Australian Graduate Survey, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement) rate Tabor Adelaide amongst the highest performing institutions in terms of overall student satisfaction. The College has a strong culture of community and student support. Its Life Design Counselling and Education centre provides professional counselling services for students, as well as professional training and supervision for graduate student interns in a wide range of areas (e.g. premarital counselling, personal growth and development, anxiety/depression/low self-esteem, and family and relationship breakdown).

Tabor Adelaide Dual Sector

The focus of its VET programs

There is no Christian content in these VET courses and individuals from all backgrounds are welcome to study with Tabor Adelaide. Tabor operates in an environment where a high percentage of VET graduates in South Australia gain employment upon completion. Targeted jobs for Tabor Adelaide include VET teacher/trainer, case/support worker for community organisations or rehabilitation services, youth and family services coordinators/managers/senior youth workers, youth alcohol and drugs workers, Indigenous youth and Christian pastoral support workers.

VET programs include Certificate III in Community Services Work, Certificate III in Christian Life and Ministry, Certificate IV in Business, Certificate III in Business, Certificate IV in Christian Life and Ministry, Certificate III in Christian Life and Ministry, Certificate IV in Youth Work, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, Diploma of Christian Life and Ministry, Certificate IV in Christian Life and Ministry, Diploma of Management, Certificate IV in Front Line Management, Diploma of Youth Work, Certificate IV in Youth Work and Youth Work experience.

The focus of its HE programs

In HE, undergraduate courses are offered in Bachelor of Arts (Creative Writing), Bachelor of Arts (English), Bachelor of Arts (History), Bachelor of Arts (Music), Bachelor of Arts (Philosophy), Bachelor of Arts (TESOL), Bachelor of Arts / Education (Secondary), Bachelor of Education (Middle School), Bachelor of Education (Primary), Bachelor of Education (Secondary), Bachelor of Intercultural Studies, Bachelor of Ministry, Bachelor of Social Science (Counselling), Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work), Bachelor of Theology, and various Diplomas (Intercultural Studies, Ministry, Theology).

Postgraduate courses include various Graduate Certificates (Christian Studies, Counselling and Theology) and a number of Graduate Diplomas (Education, Ministry and Counselling). There are a wide range of HE Masters qualifications in Master of Arts (Humanities), Master of Arts (Creative Writing), Master of Arts (Humanities) - History, Master of Arts (Humanities) - Philosophy, Master of Counselling, Master of Divinity, Master of Education, Master of Ministry Studies, Master of Theology, Master of Arts (Humanities) - TESOL/ESL, and a Doctor of Ministry.

Staff capability and partnerships

Tabor Adelaide supports teaching and research development for its HE staff. For HE staff, there are seminars and awards in learning and teaching. The majority of full time HE teaching staff are in the education school and ministry and theology, and are PhD qualified or enrolled in PhD programs. The major focus of teaching is into the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs. There is also a strong use of part-time faculty and adjuncts to deliver the HE courses.

Teaching is the core focus of HE staff, not research. However, in many cases this HE teaching is supported by scholarship, with the research interests of full-time HE staff listed around topics in religion, theology, and history. There is a workload model for HE staff for research active staff that allocates hours annually for research, and hours for scholarship. A number of staff publish in scholarly publications including monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles and occasional papers. Some are engaged in national and international collaborative research programs, while there is a good level of support for attendance at short courses and conferences.

A new initiative at Tabor Adelaide is The Graeme Clark Research Institute established to conduct and promote research and development within Tabor Adelaide in the broad context of Christian service to the community. Its mission is to build a community of research scholars working together to promote greater understanding of issues that include the role of spirituality in family, society, education, culture and politics. The Institute has begun to establish strategic partnerships with key institutions in Australia and overseas, including in the United Kingdom the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at Cambridge University and St John's College, Durham University.

The picture for VET staff is less clear. Tabor Adelaide has set up an organisational structure that puts VET programs into a separate Department and VET staff are under the same award as HE lecturers. No teachers in VET courses teach into HE programs, while no HE teachers deliver VET qualifications. The vast majority of VET teachers are part-time and casual appointments, and are qualified as VET trainers and teachers in delivering various Certificate III and IV qualifications, and Diplomas. These numbers are expected to grow with new courses introduced in 2014.

Current and future challenges

Seeking more diversity in the revenue base

Like many organisations, Tabor Adelaide suffered financially during the Global Financial Crisis, and the period of recovery has resulted in some key strategic decisions. While over time the VET income has dropped as courses fell off the funded training list (e.g. "Year in the Sun" initiative that offered funded VET places in a Certificates III and IV in youth work), the senior leadership want to grow the VET revenue as part of a strategy of income and student diversification. VET qualifications provide an opportunity to move into new markets, and in addition, to offer qualifications that are aligned with its values around social justice and diversity. The College identifies strong forces at work around educational and training organisations providing better outcomes for more disadvantaged learners.

Funding

Like its competitors, eligible students can access Austudy, Abstudy and Youth Allowance, and tuition costs can be deferred through FEE-HELP. All VET courses are approved for Austudy/Youth Allowance/Abstudy, with students required to maintain a three-quarters work-load to be eligible, but there is no FEE-HELP available for Tabor VET programs as the organisation is yet to apply to be registered for FEE-HELP. The SA Government, however, does offer a "Skills for All" initiative and Tabor Adelaide is a "Skills for All" provider. If students are South Australians, they are eligible for at least one "Skills for All" course that can reduce the cost of a VET qualification. Regarding HE Tabor Adelaide has some Commonwealth supported places with a HECS-HELP option but they are for teacher education students only. As VET and most HE Students need to fund their study, part-time work is encouraged to assist funding their programs. The flexibility of the College's program using on-campus, on-line, evening and intensive deliveries support this feature of the students.

Based on student survey outcomes, clearly Tabor has done well, and needs to continue to perform well, in offering quality training and education experiences for those higher fees. The College believes that currently it is disadvantaged by what it sees as a lack of equity by the Commonwealth around the allocation of HECS places. The organisation is not a University and so does not gain the funding benefits given to the University of South Australia, the University of Adelaide or Flinders University. However, Tabor does plan to respond to this situation by aiming to apply for University College status by 2018, and by building a number of partnerships with well-known Australian and

overseas universities. Its success to date in building research linkages through The Graeme Clark Research Institute might be seen as a small step towards this goal.

Costs of accreditation

Tabor faces the challenges of meeting the requirements of two different forms of compliance and accreditation with its dual sector standing. As a small institution that is not self-accrediting, the costs are high around HE accreditation. Tabor report an internal estimate of some 12-18 months of staff time working on the recent TEQSA submission, and a cash amount estimated at about \$250,000. Past experiences with AUQA was that it provided a quality improvement approach where the institute being accredited was seen to be an ally in the process. However, in the recent TEQSA experience Tabor Adelaide found that many questions were unclear, TEQSA was not very helpful in trying to understand the contextual and operational demands on Tabor, and at the centre of these issues were a set of reporting requirements written for a large public university rather than a small HE provider. In the last three years, the College moved away from a prior focus in some VET and HE courses on international students with the administrative, financial and other costs of gaining and maintaining CRICOS registration.

Summary

Tabor Adelaide is responding to the challenges of working in a highly competitive and changing VET and HE environment. Its core point of difference is its Christian perspective which has a definite appeal to a specific target group of students. In addition, Tabor Adelaide has other competitive advantages linked to its smaller size, the intimacy of the student experience, and the flexibility that allows its predominantly part-time students to complete qualifications while working locally, or in some cases in other States. Tabor Adelaide has established its reputation in both VET and HE in niche markets around delivering jobs in education, counselling, youth services, and ministry. A major aim is to set the foundations for creating more diversity in its student body, and more diversity in revenue and in doing so, VET programs are gaining renewed attention. In the longer term, gaining FEE-HELP status for its VET programs, and more HECS funded places, seem obvious strategic priorities for Tabor Adelaide to pursue.

Sources

Interviewees

Dr Don Owers, Principal, Tabor Adelaide.

Rev Dr Stephen Spence, Deputy Principal (Academic), Tabor Adelaide.

Meg Rowlands, Manager, VET Programs, Tabor Adelaide.

Validation and sign off

Meg Rowlands, Manager, VET Programs, Tabor Adelaide.

TAFE SA

Introduction

TAFE SA has a 16 year history of HE provision in its own right. The provision is highly targeted and remains small overall, at less than one per cent of total student load. In recent times TAFE SA has had to consider whether maintaining HE provider status is viable. In particular, recent changes in HE regulatory arrangements have added to the effort required while the funding of its HE provision no longer is subsidised by the state government. TAFE SA has arrived at the decision to continue its HE provision, but for several interrelated reasons documented in this case study, not with the same degree of commitment or the same delivery models as in the past.

Strategic drivers

The idea of TAFE SA delivering HE qualifications was first brought up in relation to performing arts where a bachelor degree met industry needs. There was no one delivering this qualification in South Australia. TAFE SA had the expertise and state-of-the-art facilities and so decided to fill the gap. Its first HE qualification, the Bachelor of Dance Performance was accredited in 1997. A few other qualifications have since been added to the scope of its HE registration. All of the accredited HE qualifications TAFE SA has offered in its own right are in niche markets, where its VET sector has expertise and infrastructure strengths and there is industry support for applied HE qualifications. HE qualifications are delivered by TAFE SA for the purpose of fulfilling its mission; to foster student progression to higher level qualifications in line with national and state strategic priorities and future workforce needs, and especially to support students who may not otherwise gain HE qualifications through a university.

TAFE SA's accredited HE qualifications history is outlined in Table 1. As can be seen, this is reducing with some courses either taught out or entering teach-out mode. A major reason is due to funding changes, explained shortly. TAFE SA is entering new contracted delivery arrangements and new dual VET and HE study pathways with universities. Only one HE qualification will be offered by TAFE SA in its own right in Semester 1 2014; the Associate Degree in Electronic Engineering, and this will convert to full fee for service funding from 2015. Whether this change in funding arrangements will be embraced by engineering students is uncertain.

At least one HE course accreditation is required for TAFE SA to maintain its registration as a HE provider. TAFE SA plans to meet this minimum requirement for several reasons:

- Registration as a HE provider aids TAFE SA's other HE engagement initiatives
- It would be extremely time-consuming, arduous and difficult to re-instate HE registration if it were to lapse
- Students achieve good results from HE delivered by TAFE SA due to the support provided
- The applied nature of the qualifications continues to meet industry needs
- New opportunities to deliver HE options in its' own right are expected to arise in future.

Table 1 History of TAFE SA's HE provision in its own right

Qualification	Start date	Current status	Future arrangements
Bachelor of Dance Performance	1997	Accredited until 30 June 2014. Preparing a renewal of accreditation application to TEQSA for teach out purposes only.	From 2014, TAFE SA Adelaide College of the Arts will move to collaborative contracted delivery of the bachelor degree with Flinders University under its HE accreditation, and will introduce VET level qualifications that articulate into the bachelor degree. Students will enrol in TAFESA and Flinders University at the same time and complete a dual qualification in 3 years.
Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design	2001	Accredited until 31 December 2013. A full renewal of accreditation application has been submitted to TEQSA.	TAFE SA will introduce VET level qualifications from 2014 and is exploring collaborative models of delivery for this degree.
Bachelor of Business Hospitality Management Tourism Management Recreation Management	2000	All 3 bachelors taught out by 31 December 2012.	Contracted delivery and collaborative arrangements with universities are being explored to replace this delivery. Currently being explored is one option for Hospitality, another for Tourism and yet another for Recreation.
Associate Degree, Electronic Engineering	2010	Accredited until 31 December 2013. A full renewal of accreditation application has been submitted to TEQSA.	The associate degree was developed in collaboration with The University of Adelaide as a TAFE SA owned course. It aimed to meet industry demand for graduates with applied <i>and</i> theoretical knowledge and skills to fill para-professional level jobs and encourage a new cohort of students to enter engineering. It offers a 2 + 2 pathway into the B Engineering (Electrical and Electronic) at The University of Adelaide. From 2015 TAFE SA will deliver the associate degree under a full fee for service arrangement. VET diplomas in Electronic Engineering that do not have the academic aspects will remain on scope until the value and longevity of the new associate degree has been fully determined.

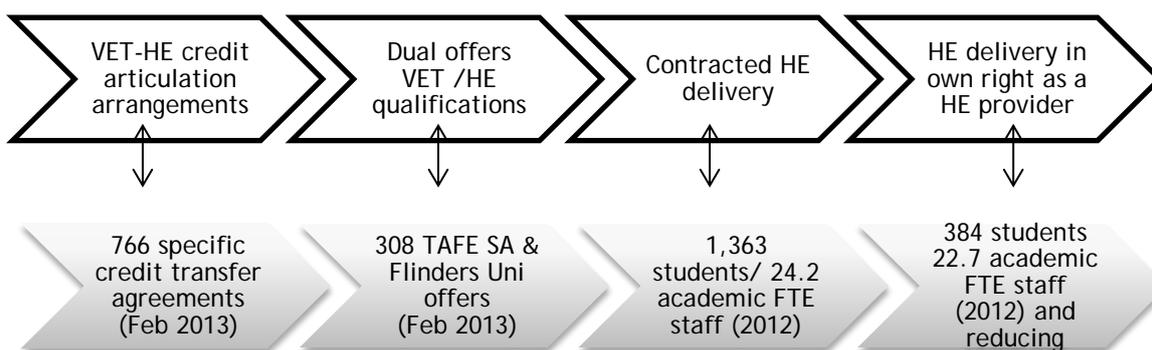
Source: compiled by the authors

Strategic rationale for maintaining HE registration

HE provider registration aids all of TAFE SA's HE engagement initiatives

Although TAFE SA has been in the HE area for many years, it is only recently that a consistent view and approach to HE has been developed across the organisation. TAFE SA has adopted a comprehensive approach to HE engagement for the purposes of creating a more connected tertiary education sector for South Australians to aid student progression to higher level qualifications and sustainable job outcomes. The continuum of HE engagement strategies adopted by TAFE SA are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 TAFE SA's HE Engagement Approach and Scale of Activity 2012/13



Source: Adapted from Guscott 2013, p5.

As Guscott (2013) explains, all TAFE SA's HE engagement strategies are inter-connected, with one strategy enabling the expansion/enhancement of another:

- Connections made through articulation and credit transfer negotiations lead to increased numbers of TAFE SA diploma graduates receiving university offers and to discussion about, and in some cases development of, integrated or dual VET and HE qualifications
- Integrated delivery arrangements lead to contracted delivery discussions
- Contracted delivery agreements with universities are easier to negotiate if they provide evidence of understanding HE delivery and compliance with HE standards through their own registration
- Contracted delivery for a university grows the HE knowledge and expertise of staff to increase capability to be able to deliver in their own right
- Delivery in own right is a strategy not only to fill niche markets where TAFE SA has a competitive edge, but also to reduce risks to universities/institutions with whom TAFE SA partners and does contracted delivery with, and to alleviate impacts of decisions made by partners on TAFE SA business.

While TAFE SA's HE provision in its own right remains small overall, when combined with its contracted delivery, there are over 1500 students currently receiving HE through TAFE SA. This is in the vicinity of the estimated benchmark of 1000 effective full time student load required to justify the effort to maintain a HE provider registration (Moodie 2012).

To re-instate HE registration if it were to lapse would be most costly

TAFE SA has a HE engagement framework and a consolidated and comprehensive HE governance structure implemented from 2008. Until 2008 there were separate governance arrangements for each HE qualification at the faculty level. The governance structure established in 2008:

- Brought all TAFE SA degrees under the one Academic Board, this Board has a reporting /recommending line from the faculty HE committees and to the TAFE SA Board
- Gave one committee, the HE Reference Group, oversight of collaboration with universities and HE delivery under TAFE SA's registration
- Introduced a TAFE SA wide Higher Education Support Service from 2009.

Changes in the detail of this structure have been made over time by TAFE SA to ensure the Threshold Higher Education Standards are met, and through benchmarking and reviewing its HE governance structure against those of other TAFE HE providers and some universities (Guscott, 2012).

The development and embedding of a collective HE governance structure and approach was in part undertaken in order for TAFE SA to prepare for the implementation of the National Protocols and National Guidelines for Higher Education Approval Processes (as approved by MCEETYA in October 2007) in South Australia. Then, further changes in the HE regulatory environment were announced, and that responsibility for the regulation of HE providers and the accreditation of courses would transfer to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) at the end of January 2012. This development required TAFE SA to reassess its structures and processes put in place to meet the National Protocols and Guidelines in 2008. Although TEQSA's new Higher Education Threshold Standards (consisting of Provider Standards and Qualification Standards) are based on the National Protocols and Guidelines, variations to emphasis and implementation are evident.

TAFE SA has determined that the key differences under the new HE Standards and regulation of TEQSA include:

- A greater reliance on submitted policy documentation and evidence for approval assessment:
“Even though TEQSA provides good customer service and has a case manager approach that TAFE SA likes, work to provide the kind of evidence required is more time consuming” (Ruth Shubert)
- Increased data collection/submission requirements
- Increased fees for renewal of both HE registration and HE course accreditation.

Overall, TAFE SA has concluded that increased resources - both human and financial - are required for TAFE SA to maintain a HE registration under TEQSA. It will be extremely time-consuming, arduous and difficult to re-instate its HE registration if it were to lapse, and therefore TAFE SA at the moment has decided it is best to maintain a HE registration, given the investment made to date.

TAFE SA has recruited teachers with the required credentials to work in the HE area and has made required modifications to the TAFE oriented conditions under which they work. For example, HE teachers are acknowledged to require more time for assessment than VET teachers and to keep records that include graded assessments that are done through established separate databases to those used for VET. HE teachers are also required to maintain their scholarship or engagement with the latest discipline knowledge and practices in order to maintain the quality of their teaching.

The issue of scholarship has been an ongoing operational capacity issue for TAFE SA that is now resolving after a major effort. TAFE SA has positioned itself to have strong enough relationships with the three local universities to be admitted to the Higher Education Research Group of Adelaide (HERGA), made up of the three SA universities and now also TAFE SA. This provides TAFE SA staff free attendance at seminars, the ability to publish and to complete other ongoing academic learning opportunities. Further, the concept of formalised scholarship is filtering through to some VET staff. This development is considered to be good outcome and a capacity building exercise for when the opportunity next arises to extend its HE offerings in its own right.

Students achieve good results from HE delivered by TAFE SA

TAFE SA reported no capacity issues regarding supporting its HE students. Indeed, quite the opposite. It believes that its focus on preparing students for and assisting their progression to higher level qualifications is a feature that differentiates TAFE SA from other VET sector providers. TAFE SA has a

reputation for its ability to inspire students to transition them up through the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels to the HE level. HE students in TAFE SA receive the “general standardised TAFE model of support” that includes small class sizes and good access to teachers. Additional learning services allow the students to feel more connected and to be better supported than in a university setting. In 2012, the overall satisfaction rates for TAFE SA HE graduates was better than the result for all Australian HE providers participating in the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (Guscott, 2013 p8). TAFE SA also points to its delivery of university foundation studies programs as evidence of its ability to produce high quality learning outcomes for students at the HE level. Its retention rates are higher than those of the universities in foundation studies, and this helps students to move on to HE.

New opportunities to deliver HE in its own right are expected in future

A change in funding arrangements is the major reason why TAFE SA's HE provision will reduce, at least in the short term. TAFE SA has historically utilised state government funding to subsidise its HE qualifications. This funding regime is not continuing with the introduction of the SA VET policy *Skills for All*. A transition period has been negotiated to cover the continuing study commitments of commencing students in bachelor degrees up to 2013 and associate degrees up to 2014. Thereafter, alternative funding arrangements will be required (Guscott, 2013, p8).

The only other funding option currently available is a full fee for service arrangement. This arrangement applies for TAFEs interstate that deliver HE in their own right, with the exceptions of the Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at Holmesglen which are subsidised through Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP). Fees can be deferred using FEE HELP income contingent loans for students. TAFE SA has been approved to offer FEE HELP from 2013.

Notwithstanding, it is considered that the price to TAFE SA students of a full fee cost recovery HE qualification might be too high to attract students in the arts areas, when compared to the student contribution rate that universities can offer students through receiving Commonwealth supported places. Due to this situation, TAFE SA is moving to deliver these qualifications or parts thereof through contracted delivery arrangements with universities in the future.

TAFE SA believes that new opportunities to deliver HE options in its own right will arise in future. TAFE SA will continue to move towards centres of excellence offering a concentration of cutting edge facilities, resources and expertise (such as the new Mining, Engineering and Transport centre to be opened in 2014), that can be capitalised on through to the HE level, and especially if Commonwealth supported places for HE is extended to TAFE HE providers. Although it is not clear at this stage if this will eventuate, it is the view of some that it is only a matter of time before the Commonwealth Government will expand availability of such places to TAFE HE education providers. TAFE Directors Australia is advocating for this development. TAFE SAs plans therefore to continue to work towards building a critical mass of HE delivery and expertise and for the moment maintaining its' registration as a HE Provider.

Summary

TAFE SA's overall aim is to foster progression among its students to higher level qualifications to meet the needs of the future Australian workforce. It aims to ensure good job outcomes for its students and through to the HE level in instances where significant specialised expertise and infrastructure in the State exists solely or mainly within TAFE SA. At the HE level, TAFE SA pursues a comprehensive

approach: from the development of cross-sectoral linkages with universities, through to contracted delivery arrangements for other accredited HE providers and onto HE accreditation and registration to deliver a limited number of HE sector qualifications in its own right in niche education fields. It has a proven capacity to deliver quality HE outcomes for students and industry. HE delivery in own right is plateauing at the moment due to a change in funding arrangements. TAFE SA remains poised, however, to expand its HE provisions whenever the opportunity arises. Its next steps are dependent in large part upon whether HE funding arrangements are extended to TAFEs who are HE providers or the new full fee for service funding arrangements for HE are embraced by students.

Sources

Interviewees

Ruth Schubert, Director Strategy and Business Regional, TAFE SA.

Christie Anthony, Creative Director of the Arts, TAFE SA.

Madeline Frost, Director Tourism, Hospitality and Creative Arts, TAFE SA.

Greg Bassani , Educational Manager Electronics and Computer Systems Engineering, TAFE SA.

Sharon Guscott, Principal Consultant Higher Education, TAFE SA.

Validation and sign off

Jen Rodger, Executive Director, Education, TAFE SA.

References

Guscott, S. 2012, TAFE SA Higher Education: Governance and positioning project final report/recommendations. Government of SA: Adelaide.

Guscott, S. 2013, Higher Education: Positioning 2013. Government of SA: Adelaide.

Moodie, G, 2012, Mixed-sector tertiary education research overview, NCVER, Adelaide.

Think: Education Group

Introduction

Think: Education Group is an amalgamation of colleges that covers a diverse range of specialist courses. Think has grown rapidly through acquisition, with established businesses successfully brought together that have different histories, cultures and systems. Think has over 180 years of combined history, and at the origins of many of its colleges is a common heritage in the vocational education and training (VET) sector that has assisted industries to create higher levels of skills and qualifications as the world of work has changed. Historically many of these industries were in hospitality, tourism management, design and health, and they remain major partners for Think's colleges today. Think's Higher Education (HE) focus emerged from about 2005-6 with HE seen as a further opportunity to improve student employability, increase the qualification level within traditionally vocationally qualified industries and grow new student markets.

Today, Think: Colleges Pty Ltd trades as Australasian College of Natural Therapies, Australian National College of Beauty, APM College of Business and Communication, Billy Blue College of Design, William Blue College of Hospitality Management, Jansen Newman Institute, CATC Design School and Southern School of Natural Therapies. Think offers Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree, Bachelor and Master level qualifications across its colleges, with an almost even split between VET and HE programs on offer. Both VET and HE programs have adopted a point of difference around small flexible classes, with on-campus (mostly through Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane campuses) and on-line delivery, and the use of a three trimester system to accelerate program completion. For example, 100% of the newly TEQSA accredited Bachelor of Business can be completed now on line, accelerated over 2 years. Many VET students are on campus, completing the typical hands-on applied learning with practical assessment, quizzes, cases, observations, demonstrations and with on-line simulations.

The leadership team of Think promote a mandate to be "agitators for an education revolution". Think owners and its senior leadership assert that they will continue to take up new opportunities as they arise, responding to changes in industries and in education markets (e.g. the growing number of "working adults"), greater calls for more flexible forms of study, the breakdown of geographical boundaries, and changes to government policy and visa requirements. As evidence of the success of Think's strategic planning and execution to date, Think was awarded HE Provider of the Year 2012 from the ACPET in its Awards for Excellence. Think has achieved this accolade after navigating a challenging period of re-investment, change management and turn-around after the Global Financial Crisis, with a return to profit in 2013.

Currently, Think: Education Group provides over 45 industry-leading qualifications to more than 10,000 students across campuses in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland and many students all over Australia studying online. International students currently represent about 10% of enrolments, and come from over 40 countries to study both HE and VET qualifications. Think has campuses located in Sydney (North Sydney, Pyrmont, The Rocks); Melbourne (CBD, Fitzroy); Gold Coast, Brisbane and Perth. Think's student body is diverse in age and prior experience, with young people direct from high school through to older students across all qualifications. In general, it is reported that younger students are more likely to be seen in the design/hospitality qualifications, with older students completing marketing/public relations and health-related programs.

VET and HE accreditation

Think: Colleges is a Registered Training Organisation and is registered by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). As part of this registration, Think: Colleges maintains compliance with and improves the quality of its courses following the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations. Think: Colleges is authorised to issue nationally recognised vocational education and training qualifications in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Think: Colleges is also an accredited Higher Education Provider (HEP) and is accredited by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA). As part of this accreditation, Think: Colleges maintains compliance with and improves the quality of its courses following the Higher Education Standards Framework. Think: Colleges is authorised to issue HE qualifications in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

The delivery of VET diploma and advanced diploma qualifications at its various colleges offers major opportunities for pathways for students to progress from VET courses to HE qualifications in the same field. There is a nesting of qualifications where appropriate, including across various HE diplomas and associate degrees. Think supports the associate degree qualification as part of strategy around providing clearly defined pathways for students. There was little support among those interviewed that the development of HE qualifications was part of a strategy to grow the status of Think's colleges or brands ("There is no point in growing status if you do not have students" was one comment). Rather the growth in both VET and HE programs is aligned with the increasing demand from industry and students for higher level qualifications with strong employability skills and capabilities, and an opportunity to grow revenue in highly competitive training and education markets.

New qualifications and opportunities are identified through strategic information and market intelligence gathered through its partnerships with SEEK learning, Government statistics (e.g. NCVER) and research reports (e.g. Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency) alongside information from each campus. In-house course development capability has been established, with access to expertise from across campuses and industry to determine the nature, structure, content and delivery of any new VET or HE qualification.

VET, HE programs and partnerships

There are three faculties: Business and Hospitality, Design and Health, with an additional English Language Training facility. In the fields of business and hospitality, the APM College of Business and Communication provides business management, public relations, marketing, and event management. APM was established over 25 years ago by a group of industry professionals who wanted Australian school leavers to be work-ready professionals. Courses are offered in Brisbane and Sydney on campus or online. William Blue College of Hospitality Management offers programs in business management, hotel management, event management and tourism management.

In design, Think operates the Billy Blue College of Design with programs in communication design, digital media design, commercial interior design, residential interior design, branded fashion design and design fundamentals. For over 25 years, Billy Blue College of Design has produced creative and successful HE design graduates. Campuses are at Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. In addition the CATC Design School offers programs in graphic design, interior design and decoration, and photography. Since 1982, CATC has been a recognised vocational education provider and students can study online or on campus or both, with campuses at Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and the Gold Coast.

In the Faculty of Health, Think runs the Australasian College of Natural Therapies with programs in naturopathy, nutritional medicine, western herbal medicine, massage and sports and fitness.

Campuses are in Sydney and Brisbane, with study on campus or online. The Southern School of Natural Therapies delivers qualifications in naturopathy, nutritional medicine, western herbal medicine, health science, Chinese medicine, clinical myotherapy and massage. Established in 1961, the School based at Fitzroy is the longest established school of natural therapies in Australia, and many of its courses were the first of their kind to be accredited in Australia.

Also under health and wellness, the Jansen Newman Institute offers courses in counselling and psychotherapy and community services. The Institute provides practical training for counsellors and psychotherapists, and has operated for over 30 years. Qualifications range from diplomas and associate degrees to bachelor degrees, graduate diplomas and Think's only Masters with study full-time, part-time or online through its Sydney campus. The Australian National College of Beauty provides on-campus and online study options through its Sydney and Brisbane campuses with an internationally recognised Diploma program in beauty and spa therapy.

Various colleges in the Think group have international agreements. Examples include Rajamangala University of Technology and International Hotel and Tourism Industry Management School (I-TIM), Thailand; Berghs School of Communication, Sweden; Korean Tourism College, South Korea; Ouhua College, Shanghai and Shanghai Jianqiao College, China; and YIC, Japan. Within Australia, students enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Tourism and Hospitality) have this degree awarded by La Trobe University. SEEK Learning successfully markets Think's programs as a significant recruitment partner.

In November 2013 the Australian Securities Exchange announced that the US based Laureate International Universities (LIU) acquired SEEK's remaining shareholding in THINK (having already purchased 20% of Think in 2012). LIU is a global leader in providing access to high quality, innovative HE institutions, with a network that includes more than 75 institutions and 800,000 students in 30 countries throughout North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Its network of institutions offers undergraduate, masters and doctoral degree programs in fields including architecture, art, business, culinary arts, design, education, engineering, health sciences, hospitality management, information technology, law and medicine.

FEE-HELP

THINK is approved by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to offer VET FEE-HELP loans to students enrolled in eligible Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses. In addition, as a recognised HE Provider, eligible HE students have the opportunity to apply for the Australian Government FEE-HELP loan scheme. FEE-HELP is seen to be a major enabler to assist students to attend a private provider like Think where the proportion of fees paid by the student (100%) is significantly higher than at TAFE or public universities where students are part funded through Commonwealth supported places or subsidised delivery. In turn, at Think: Colleges there must be a strong business case that leverages existing organisational capabilities to support the costs of developing and maintaining any new VET or HE qualification prior to realising the revenue from earned market share.

Quality

Quality assurance through continuous improvement of courses, valued student interaction and sound education management are 'top of the mind' at Think. There is a continuous improvement approach to all work, and Think ensures quality and consistency through a single Quality Management Framework. Due to rapid growth through various amalgamations, Think is still developing consistency

and alignment across all colleges, including adopting the most appropriate enabling technologies around IT platforms. The organisation continues to embed quality in all areas of the business, and from about five years ago, began to implement a number of evaluation tools to measure student satisfaction, including the Student Satisfaction Survey, the Australian Graduate Survey, the Student Evaluation of Subject and Lecturer Survey, an Employer Survey, and a Staff Engagement Survey.

Think has an independent Academic Board with five external members who are current or adjunct academics with backgrounds in teaching and learning in Australia, UK and elsewhere, many with both VET and HE experience. There are structures and policies that define the role and responsibility of the Academic Board in monitoring quality, and the responsibilities of sub committees that report to the Board.

Student experience

Think makes strong use of internships, industry placements, on campus clinics and incubator pods to develop graduates who are technically skilled in their discipline area, socially aware and in turn highly employable. The high levels of employability of its graduates and higher salaries are attributed to its very strong links with industry. By 2015, a further goal is for Think graduates to earn 5 per cent higher than average starting salary compared to other graduates in their field. In addition, Think has set a goal that by 2015, 80 per cent of students will gain employment through industry placements or internships, and with all students gaining work through industry placements and internships by 2020.

Another point of difference is around small class size and flexibility. Students have a choice to study online, on campus or blended. New campuses in Sydney and Brisbane opening in mid-July 2014 will provide 24 hour access for students. By 2015, all courses in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane will be delivered flexibly through a combination of 24 hour online and on campus experiences. Student support is provided through the Centre for Learning and Academic Skills Support (CLASS). Additional student support includes dedicated tutors for face-to-face support and a student intervention strategy that applies to all students (directing students towards additional literacy, numeracy and computer skills/online computer skills, English classes, academic writing for HE assessments). Those students who choose a more accelerated path of study are closely monitored to ensure success.

Staff support

The Think workforce across its various colleges consists of appropriate numbers of full-time, part-time and sessional teachers and support staff. There is a significant proportion of industry professionals employed as part-time teachers and sessionals in both the VET and HE programs. Many staff have Master level qualifications, and some hold PhDs. In the past, the Think workforce has been managed in separate VET and HE streams. From 2014, Think has adopted a dual-sector management approach, with Heads of Academic Studies responsible for VET and HE in their field, supported by development initiatives for all staff in their understanding of both sectors (VET/HE) through working parties, workshops, professional development opportunities and on-line materials.

As reported in other case studies, there are some differences in the award agreement for VET and HE professionals, with differences through the Modern Award agreement around pay rates, preparation time and delivery. Think might possibly have to re-visit these issues as it builds stronger links between VET and HE involvement by its staff, especially if teachers are more likely to deliver courses to both VET and HE students. Think encourages all staff to focus upon scholarship, with a broader definition of scholarship than is adopted by universities. While there is not a great deal of pure or theoretical

research currently being undertaken, staff are encouraged to engage in applied research and industry consultancy, delivering workshops and conference papers in their field of specialisation.

Challenges

Further closing the gap between VET and HE across Think colleges

Think reports that creating stronger links between VET and HE may require a shift in the mind sets of some staff. Only a few staff at present teach in both VET and HE programs. While there are similarities across VET and HE in many areas (e.g. delivery methodologies), there are notable and understandable differences across the sectors in policies, procedures, quality frameworks, assessment, accreditation, timetabling, preparation time, and concepts such as scholarship.

Accreditation

As reported in other case studies, maintaining accreditation across both the VET and HE sectors is a cost to the Think Group. Think is not a self-accrediting organisation like the public universities. Some 35 qualifications have been successfully accredited or renewed in the past eighteen months by TEQSA. When developing a new qualification, Think undertakes a detailed six to twelve month process that involves writing curricula in house, together with all the necessary requirements required to develop higher education courses. It is believed that Think's applications made up to a third of all TEQSA applications processed in 2013.

Based on their early experiences, the TEQSA process is seen to be more paper-based than ASQA, with a strong focus upon quality, processes, academic integrity, and the role and functions of the academic management structure. For example, the initial TEQSA submission for the accreditation of five degrees was a document of over 5,000 pages. For some courses Think has decided not to renew some HE qualifications and those qualifications have been approved for teach-out. TEQSA have established a regulatory risk framework whilst ASQA focuses on continuous improvement aligned to similar standards. Think undertakes internal audits enabling identification of areas of good practice with supporting evidence and areas for further improvement based on review findings, performance data and consultation with various stakeholders. It is reported that ASQA and TEQSA are exploring ways around working together to assist dual accredited institutions. This development is viewed very positively by Think managers and teachers as it provides a platform for a broader understanding of both sectors within the company, together with opportunities for improved quality and reduced overlap and costs.

Staff qualifications and scholarship

Think colleges advertise and fill staff vacancies. As noted, many positions are filled by part-time appointments, and overall in the current market positions are being readily filled. Think has actively-managed plans in place to support existing staff to progress in to postgraduate qualifications and to hire staff with postgraduate or doctoral qualifications as appropriate to the role. Think have recently reviewed their scholarship framework and are currently working with the colleges to identify opportunities for completing applied research that would improve teaching practice and further industry collaboration.

Bad press and scare mongering about private providers

A number of interview respondents reflected upon the difficult period around Australia with the very public failure and closure of some private providers especially in VET. Many feel that the attention of the media is still focused upon the private providers, rather than TAFEs and the universities. TEQSA in particular is seen as responding to this public and government pressure to remove non-performing and low quality institutions. While highly supportive for these actions, Think staff feel that quality providers have been “tarred with the same brush”. It is reported by some Think colleges that much of their focus over the last three years has been upon preparing for and responding to the questions of accreditation agencies, with staff attention taken away from significant day to day matters.

Funding

It is clear to Think colleges that government policy aims to drive up enrolments to meet HE targets set by COAG and various government reviews. Think does not receive government funding for either VET or HE. However, Think is well positioned as a predominantly dual sector provider, and it has a private sector mindset that has conditioned its various colleges to see opportunities where others might see threats.

Conclusions

Think is another example of the growing diversity among Australia’s HE and training providers. Through a strategy of growth through acquisition, Think now has a portfolio of VET and HE qualifications that are positioned to provide practical applied qualifications that will help many of our industries to develop workforces to meet current and future needs. Think is well positioned on a number of fronts. It offers HE qualifications at a time when Government policy is pursuing an increased pool of tertiary qualifications by some 3 per cent per annum to 2025, with higher qualifications needing to grow faster. In addition, the flexibility of its programs, their strong use of internships and placements, and their strong applied nature appeal to industries that want graduates who are highly employable from day one.

Finally, Think is a for-profit organisation operating in an education and training market that many believe is uneven with publically-funded organisations receiving significant subsidies from the government for places in HE. What is impressive is how Think is responding to this situation, through the use of strategic planning and quality management to drive change, innovation and improvements. The Think case demonstrates how its various colleges are seeking to establish and sustain unique sources of competitive advantage that are providing points of differences and attractiveness to students and industry in a crowded and highly competitive education and training market.

Sources

Interviewees

Helen Batey, Director of Higher Education & Head of Academic Services Division, Think.

Anne Murray, Manager, VET, Think.

Trish Fairburn, Head of Academic Studies Higher Education, APM College of Business and Communication, Think.

Stuart Wiggins, Quality and Risk Manager, Faculty of Business and Hospitality, Think.

Sue Buckle, Head of Academic Studies Naturopathy, Southern School of Natural Therapies, Think.

Validation and sign off

Helen Batey, Director of Higher Education & Head of Academic Services Division, Think.

Appendix A: Interview guide for the case studies

Project: VET providers delivering associate and bachelor degrees: Issues & impacts.

Duration: July 2013-April 2014.

Interview questions

This project is investigating the strategic, capability and operational issues that need to be considered in planning the uptake and successful delivery of HE qualifications within VET providers.

Interviewees will have the opportunity to address all or some of the interview guide questions, according to their knowledge and experience base.

Section 1: Strategic Issues

1. Why has your VET organisation become involved in delivering associate degree and bachelor degree qualifications that traditionally are HE qualifications - Briefly tell us the history, the business case and time commenced and steps taken?
2. What are your views on recorded drivers of VET provider strategy around these qualifications including to:
 - 2.1. Maintain/expand provision overall and given greater competition in lower level VET?
 - 2.2. Compete with private providers that are offering associate and bachelor degrees?
 - 2.3. Encourage more people from equity groups to take up HE?
 - 2.4. Gain status, to bring more attention to the organisation?
 - 2.5. Provide an alternative to university style HE?
 - 2.6. Build on special strengths of the institution?
 - 2.7. Cash in on government loan support (FEE Help)?
3. Tell us about what associate and bachelor degree qualifications have been and currently are being delivered; for what target markets and why (re learner groups and industries) and with what take up rates? (Can we get data on this and from whom?)
4. What marketing/communication/related strategies are you using to grow enrolments in these qualifications? Is the identity of your organisation shifting as a result?
5. Tell us about your strategic thinking around your organisation's future purpose and directions in this area -
 - 5.1. Is your organisation planning to deliver additional associate and bachelor degrees in future and why?
 - 5.2. Does your organisation expect to continue to deliver the traditional VET diplomas that are around the same level educationally and why?
6. For us to learn more about your organisation's strategic thinking and motivations for deciding to deliver associate degree and degree qualifications,
 - 6.1. What organisational reports and data do you have that we can review?
 - 6.2. Who else should we interview?

Section 2: Operational issues

There are different curriculum frameworks, quality assurance and other regulations and funding, reporting arrangements required to move into HE degree qualifications to those in place for VET provision.

7. What have been the major operational challenges for your VET organisation in making the shift to delivering associate degree and bachelor degree qualifications?
 - 7.1. What has your organisation done to overcome the challenges?
8. How has the organisation gone about developing curriculum for associate and bachelor degree qualifications and seeking its accreditation in the HE sector?
 - 8.1. Who has undertaken this task?
 - 8.2. Have there been any issues?
 - 8.3. What have been the costs and how have these been covered?
9. How easy or hard has it been for the organisation to meet the standards or criteria required to achieve HE provider status?
 - 9.1. What are the main differences to the standards or criteria for becoming a registered training organisation?
10. How do you fund the cost of preparation for and delivery of HE degree qualifications?
 - 10.1. Do your students have access to government loan support Fee help?
 - 10.2. Is the cost of delivering HE degree qualifications an issue for your organisation?
11. What impact, if any, has the different operational arrangements in HE had on your organisation? What institutional processes are in place (or should be in place) to produce quality outcomes for learners, and for industry?
12. For us to learn more about your organisation's operational arrangements and any associated issues regarding delivering associate degree and degree qualifications-
 - 1.1. What reports and data do you have that we can review?
 - 1.2. Who else should we interview?

Section 3: Capability building issues

13. Where do you source your staff from to deliver your HE degrees?
 - 13.1. Are your HE qualifications delivered in isolation to your VET qualifications or do the same people deliver both?
 - 13.2. Are there any barriers to VET staff delivering HE degrees- attitudinal, industrial relations, credentials-wise and so on? How are you overcoming these barriers?
14. Are there any barriers to learners taking up HE degrees in your organisation - attitudinal, preparedness and so on?
15. What types and levels of support do you provide to learners entering into your HE degrees?
 - 15.1. Is it different to that offered to learners in VET qualification programs?
 - 15.2. Going forward, what other support might be considered to assist learners in HE degrees to successfully complete them?
16. For us to learn more about your organisation's teacher and student capability building approach regarding delivering associate degree and degree qualifications-
 - 16.1. What reports and data do you have that we can review?
 - 16.2. Who else should we interview?

Section 4: Concluding Remarks

17. Are there any final comments you would like to make about factors that aid success/act as barriers to VET providers moving to delivering associate and bachelor degrees successfully?

Thank you for your contribution to this study.