

Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper

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ISSUES PAPER

Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper

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About the research



Higher education in TAFE: An issues paper

Gavin Moodie, Leesa Wheelahan, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly

Although the development of ‘mixed-sector’ institutions is relatively recent in Australia, this provision is expected to increase as the boundaries between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education become increasingly blurred. This has prompted the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to commission Gavin Moodie and his colleagues to investigate the provision of higher education awards within technical and further education (TAFE) institutes.

As part of this investigation, this paper has been released with the intention of provoking discussion—readers are invited to respond directly to the authors by 1 June 2009.

The paper reviews how comparable vocational institutions in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand provide short-cycle higher education as part of their designated roles. It also considers several implications arising from the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education.

The research raises several issues about the emerging character of the interface between higher education and VET:

- ✧ Will new types of TAFE institutes emerge?
- ✧ Will there be new networked arrangements between VET and higher education providers?
- ✧ Will the strengths of the current systems be preserved?

It also argues that, to be consistent with international classifications, Australian diplomas and advanced diplomas should be considered higher education in level, although almost all are offered according to nationally prescribed VET requirements. Furthermore, the provision of diplomas and advanced diplomas in VET is under pressure at the same time as the boundaries between the sectors are becoming more fluid. It may be that the degree qualification increasingly replaces diplomas as the point of negotiation between the sectors.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Introduction

This issues paper is intended to stimulate discussion about higher education in technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia. The authors invite responses to the paper, including comments that particular issues have been given too much prominence or have been overlooked.

TAFE institutes now offer full-fee associate and bachelor degrees in five states. This provision is likely to increase as a consequence of policies of the Australian and state governments, which encourage diversity and competition among educational providers in both the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors. This project seeks to fill gaps in knowledge about the nature of these programs: how they have been designed and implemented, the purposes they are designed to meet, the impact they are having on partnerships with universities and with industry partners, and whether they open opportunities for students. This issues paper will be followed by a report of the project which outlines the findings of the research.

This paper has two purposes:

- ✧ to put TAFE institutes' offering of higher education programs in an analytic, historical, geographic and policy context
- ✧ to raise for discussion issues about higher education in TAFE in Australia.

The focus in this paper is on higher education in TAFE institutes. While it notes the provision of higher education and vocational education and training by private educational institutions and the provision of VET programs by universities, this is to the extent that is needed to understand the growth of higher education in TAFE institutes. Further research is required to understand the way in which 'mixed-sector' provision is occurring in private providers and in universities in Australia.

The first section proposes a tripartite classification of tertiary education institutions as single-sector, mixed-sector or dual-sector institutions to reflect the more fluid nature of sectoral boundaries and to provide the analytical context for the remainder of the paper. The next section discusses the changes to the sectors of post-compulsory education and training that are contributing to the blurring of the sectoral divide and the decoupling of educational programs and educational institutions from sectors. It also discusses policies that are likely to increase this diversification. The following section looks at the way in which government policies and funding have shaped the sectors and the relationship between them. It proposes that, historically, the diploma has been a point of negotiation between the tertiary education sectors in Australia, but this has now lost any standing as a higher education qualification. In its place, the bachelor degree is now becoming the point of that negotiation.

Following this is a section that outlines the scope of higher education in TAFE. The paper then uses international instances of these qualifications to indicate that negotiations between educational sectors are occurring in particular ways across a range of comparable countries. It considers the implications for higher education in TAFE of the recommendations in the final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008). It concludes by raising a number of issues for discussion.

The emergence of mixed-sector institutions

The sectors of tertiary education in Australia have, until recently, been differentiated by the nature of provision offered in each, with vocational education and training institutions offering competency-based qualifications and universities offering curriculum-based qualifications. The blurring of the sectoral divide between the tertiary education sectors is resulting in the development of a new type of institution—the mixed-sector institution. These are institutions that are located primarily in either the VET or higher education sector, while offering a small amount of educational provision normally associated with the other sector. The development of mixed-sector institutions is relatively recent in Australia compared with countries with broadly similar systems.

The focus in Australian tertiary education policy has been on constructing institutional and administrative arrangements that maintain the sectoral differentiation in qualifications and in institutions, but at the same time develop pathways between VET and higher education qualifications. The dual-sector universities are one example of this approach, because, even though they integrate administration and student support, qualifications and teaching remain sectorally differentiated and pathways are used as the main mechanism to transcend the sectoral divide. Other institutional arrangements that have emerged to manage partnerships between the sectors, while maintaining the distinction between them, include partnerships between single-sector TAFE institutes and universities, and co-locations. The latter mostly consist of co-located satellite campuses of a university and a TAFE institute (and sometimes a senior secondary school campus) in regional Australia.

In this paper we distinguish between single-sector institutions, dual-sector institutions and mixed-sector institutions. Single-sector institutions have almost their entire student load in one sector—VET or higher education. Dual-sector institutions offer a substantial proportion of their load in each sector and they must report to two levels of government and construct their internal governance, administration and policies to meet each sector's different accreditation, funding, reporting, and quality assurance requirements (Moodie 2009). Mixed-sector institutions describe VET or higher education institutions with some offerings in the other sector, with these offerings being a small (if growing) part of their provision. They are not yet under the same pressure as dual-sector institutions to develop dual structures, and most arrangements for programs in the other sector can be handled as exceptions to their normal structures, systems and processes. While this is so, our preliminary findings are that TAFE institutions that offer a number of higher education qualifications are finding the different reporting, quality assurance and accreditation requirements quite onerous, but most have not yet set up distinct organisational structures to manage these processes, even though some are in the process of doing so.

Dual-sector universities have never specified the proportion of load needed in each sector to be considered 'substantial' and classified as a dual-sector university. The issue can be put rigorously by asking: how high a proportion of total student load must vocational education be before it is no longer considered an exception and is generally accepted as a normal part of the institution? Trow (1974, p.63) argued that the transition from elite to mass higher education occurs when the participation of the relevant age group reaches 15%. Moodie (2009) related this to the concept of a 'tipping point' (Grodzins 1958) and referred to a number of empirical studies of different tipping points to posit that an institution is dual-sector when the student load in each sector ranges from a

minimum of 20% to a maximum of 80%. We, therefore, propose a tripartite classification of institutions by their mix of sectoral student load (Moodie 2008a):

- ✧ *single-sector institutions*: those with more than 97% of their student load enrolled in one sector
- ✧ *mixed-sector institutions*: those with at least 3% but no more than 20% of their student load enrolled in their minority sector (Wheelahan & Moodie 2008, p.2)
- ✧ *dual-sector institutions*: those with at least 20% but less than 80% of their student load enrolled in each sector.

Such a classification scheme is important because of the changing character and current blurring of sectoral divides in Australia.

Recent sectoral breaches

Educational sectors are largely artefacts of history and government policy, and of government funding in particular, rather than being aligned to universally understood and practised conventions. The distinction between vocational and general or academic education is contested, and, while the emphasis in each sector may differ, both VET and higher education offer vocational and general or academic qualifications. Differences remain: VET has responsibility for apprenticeships and traineeships and for many technical and para-professional occupations, as well as 'second chance' education, while higher education has responsibility for research and research training, as well as training for many professions. Arguably, these differences at 'either end' of each sector's provision will continue because they meet different needs in society and in the labour market. However, despite these differences, there is an increasing overlap in what the sectors do 'in the middle' and this has been the basis for the blurring of the sectoral divide.

Before Australian VET institutions started expanding higher education enrolments, critics claimed that Australian universities were becoming too vocational (Symes 1999). While that claim may be contested, by 2002 the Commonwealth (Department for Education, Science and Training 2002a, p.2) was able to write in its second discussion paper for its 'Crossroads' review of higher education that: 'Questions have been raised about the appropriateness of the apparent convergence of purpose and role of the higher education and vocational and education sectors.' In its responses to the Commonwealth's discussion papers, the Australian National Training Authority (2002, p.4) agreed that 'the boundaries between all sectors of education have become increasingly blurred.' Similarly, TAFE Directors Australia (2002, p.5) proposed that 'there is an increasing overlap in what each of the educational sectors does'; and, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (2002, p.21) stated that: 'The line between which occupations require university-based teaching and which do not will continue to shift.' Six years later, submissions to the recently completed Review of Australian Higher Education (2008, p.180) broadly agree that the boundaries between the sectors have further blurred, with some applauding and others deprecating this development.

The result of the blurring of the sectoral divide is that TAFE institutes now offer higher education programs in five states and territories. The only jurisdictions not to do so are Tasmania, the Northern Territory and New South Wales; however, NSW TAFE is reluctantly considering following the trend (NSW TAFE Commission Board 2008, p.15). TAFE institutes have both broadened and expanded their earlier local and isolated development of higher education programs. Nonetheless, participation in higher education programs in TAFE is still very small. While enrolment figures are not consistent, TAFE institutes' enrolments in associate and bachelor degree programs are certainly fewer than 2000 students (see table 3) or 0.12% of total vocational education enrolments of 1.6 million students.

TAFE institutes have been offering private higher education programs in recent years to achieve policy objectives specified in state government skills plans; to compete with private VET providers which are also offering higher education programs; and in response to other Australian education institutions breaching sectoral boundaries. Private providers have long sought access to higher education awards because they are more prestigious, particularly amongst international students. Furthermore, the availability of Fee-help for full-fee paying domestic higher education students provides them with a new source of revenue. Fee-help is the Australian Government's scheme of subsidised and guaranteed income-contingent loans to the students who access them and thus to

their institutions. TAFE institutes and private VET providers are now also able to offer VET graduate certificates and diplomas, which, while they are differentiated from higher education graduate certificates and diplomas, nonetheless mean that VET institutions are offering qualifications at levels normally associated with higher education.

Universities are also returning to offering sub-bachelor programs after a steady withdrawal since 1988. Several Australian universities offer publicly funded VET programs. Some offerings are vestiges of history. For example, the University of Adelaide offers three VET diplomas and four certificates in music through the Elder Conservatorium of Music, which was established by a bequest in 1898. The University of Queensland amalgamated with the Queensland Agricultural College in 1990 and thereby offers the Queensland Certificate of Agriculture at its Gatton campus. Other examples include Curtin University with 320 equivalent full-time students or 1% of its total student load enrolled in VET programs at its Kalgoorlie and Esperance campuses and Edith Cowan University with 400 equivalent full-time students or 3% of its student load enrolled in VET programs in music and theatre.

More recently, some Australian universities have introduced fee-paying VET programs to broaden their activities or to vertically integrate programs or services that had previously been offered by other organisations. The Australian Catholic University, for instance, is a registered training organisation that offers VET certificates and diplomas in education, exercise science, frontline management and nursing. The Australian National University has established ANU College as a registered training organisation that offers a range of preparatory, foundation and bridging studies, as well as English programs for overseas students. Charles Sturt University has established CSU Training as a registered training organisation to offer programs for its staff, industry and professionals in niche areas and to embed vocational qualifications within higher education programs. While these provide instances of universities crossing the sectoral boundaries to secure particular goals, the provision is still limited. Most Australian universities' VET programs are offered for full tuition fees, are small in size, are confined to one campus (Australian universities have an average of 3.4 campuses), are in one or two disciplines, and many are offered through separate organisational units rather than through the faculties and schools that offer higher education programs. They, therefore, have little if any impact on the university outside their immediate area, being convenience or niche offerings.

The growth of mixed-sector institutions may have been constrained until now because, in most cases, universities and TAFE institutes have received public funding only to offer qualifications normally associated with their sector and they have been restricted to offering qualifications from the other sector for full fees. The Victorian Government is introducing a student voucher for its VET programs, and the Australian and state governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) have agreed to pursue the development of a student voucher for VET programs in Australia. In higher education, the recently completed Review of Australian Higher Education has recommended vouchers for higher education. This will give more institutions in both sectors greater access to publicly funded provision. This, along with other policy changes, is likely to result in the growth of mixed-sector institutions. We return to this at the end of the paper when we consider the recommendations of the Review of Australian Higher Education on the growth of higher education in TAFE.

While universities have been encroaching on TAFE institutes' position from above, TAFE institutes' position was and continues to be eroded from below by the very considerable expansion of VET in Schools, most of which is offered by schools rather than TAFE institutes. TAFE institutes are therefore seeking other areas of provision to maintain and possibly expand their provision overall. As we shall see later in the paper, a similar trend is emerging in England (but not Scotland) and had begun somewhat earlier in some states in the United States such as Florida and in the Canadian provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. The New Zealand Government is also encouraging selected undergraduate enrolments in some institutes of technology and polytechnics. This raises the question: in what ways are Australian developments part of a more general trend? All of this invites a more fundamental question of the continuing significance of sectoral distinctions.

The increasingly contingent construction of tertiary education sectors

Vocational education was not wholly consolidated as a sector separate from schooling and higher education until 1975, when the Australian Government accepted the recommendations of the Kangan Committee on Technical and Further Education to designate technical and further education as a distinct sector of education (Kangan 1974; Chappell 1999, p.6). Following a pattern that had been established with colleges of advanced education, the Australian Government required TAFE to be designated and organised separately from other forms of education, so that the government's earmarked partial funding of TAFE could be identified and accounted separately.

The diploma has been central to Australia's construction of tertiary education sectors and of VET's role in short-cycle higher education. In 1939, subgraduate diplomas and certificates were 15% of all university enrolments (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1993, p.5). In 1964, the Martin committee on the future of tertiary education in Australia recommended the establishment of the advanced education sector of higher education, whose highest, distinctive and preferably exclusive qualification was to be the diploma. Universities were enjoined to relinquish their diplomas and concentrate on higher-level study and research training, which was to be their distinctive role (Martin 1964). The Australian Government decided it would fully fund diplomas only if they were offered in colleges of advanced education, while the states retained responsibility for funding TAFE (Moodie 2003). Consequently, advanced education took responsibility for diplomas not only from universities, but also from technical colleges (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1975, para 5.69; Goozee 2001, p.21). By 1977, diplomas were only 0.7% of VET institutes' enrolments and 3% of university enrolments, but they were 44.6% of advanced education enrolments (Williams 1979, p.20, table 1.7).¹

In 1988, the then Australian Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, dismantled the divide between the advanced education and university sectors to establish the unified national system of higher education (Dawkins 1988). Higher education quickly became unified around international university norms, withdrawing from sub-baccalaureate qualifications such as diplomas and advanced diplomas to redirect energy to postgraduate programs, the area with the highest growth rate at least since 1992 (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002b, para 1.1). Following a familiar pattern not only in Australia (Goozee 2001) but also at least in Britain (Hyland 1999), VET institutes responded by filling the gap being vacated by universities by offering more associate diplomas, diplomas and, in time, advanced diplomas (Moodie 2003).

By the time qualifications were systematised in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 1995, responsibility for diplomas and advanced diplomas was shared between higher education and VET. The framework therefore accurately reflected shared sectoral responsibility for diplomas and advanced diplomas at the time it was adopted, but since then higher education has continued to withdraw from the qualifications (Moodie 2003). Nationally, by 2006, approximately 96% of diploma and advanced diploma equivalent full-time students were enrolled in VET institutions, not higher education institutions. However, because the AQF steadfastly eschews any notion of education level—as if the highest qualifications in the schools, VET and higher education sectors

¹ However, the Commonwealth continued to fund some diplomas offered by VET institutes, and in 1986 the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (1986, para 6.113) noted that a number of institutes in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria were offering diplomas (Moodie 2003).

were all of the same educational level—the notion of the diploma as a qualification of higher education level has all but been lost.

The migration of diplomas from higher to vocational education is important because Australia’s VET diplomas and advanced diplomas are classified at the same level as higher education diplomas and associate degrees by the most widely accepted classification of education: the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (OECD 2008, p.24). The Review of Australian Higher Education has recommended different treatment of vocational education programs according to their ISCED level, so it is useful to present them here. The table below was taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) review of vocational education and training for Australia (Hoeckel et al. 2008, p.11).

Table 1 Australian qualifications by sector of accreditation and ISCED level

Schools	Vocational education and training	Higher education	ISCED level
		Doctorate	Level 6 – second stage of tertiary education
		Masters	
	Vocational graduate diploma	Graduate diploma	Level 5A – first stage of tertiary education
	Vocational graduate certificate	Graduate certificate	
		Bachelors degree	
	Advanced diploma	Associate degree/ Advanced diploma	Level 5B –first stage of tertiary education
	Diploma	Diploma	
	Certificate IV		Level 4B – post-secondary non-tertiary education
	Certificate III		Level 3C – (upper) secondary education
Senior secondary certificate	Certificate II		Level 2C – lower secondary or second stage of basic education
	Certificate I		

Source: Adapted from Hoeckel et al. (2008, p.11, table 1.1); AQF categories by sector, and ISCED equivalents.

To be consistent with the international classification, Australian diplomas and advanced diplomas should be considered higher education in level, although almost all are offered according to nationally prescribed VET competence-based curriculum and quality assurance and accreditation requirements. If this premise is accepted, it could be held that VET institutions currently offer 15% of higher education in Australia. As discussed later in this paper, this is about the same as the 15% offered by analogous institutions in England, but rather less than the 35–45% offered by analogous institutions in Canada and the United States.

The place of diplomas in VET is under pressure at the same time as the boundaries between the sectors have become more fluid. Provision of diplomas and advanced diplomas has declined over recent years, despite government policy proclamations that more diploma and advanced diploma graduates are needed in the labour force (Karmel 2008). Karmel (2008) explains that diploma and advanced diploma graduates are better placed in the labour market compared with those with lower-level VET qualifications, but they face strong competition from people with degrees. However, diplomas and advanced diplomas continue to play an important role in providing access to degree level or higher studies: 32% of diploma and advanced diploma graduates aged under 25 go on to study at this level, while 14% of graduates aged 25 or over do so. In some fields of

education such as banking and accountancy, the percentage of those aged under 25 years who go on to study at degree level is over 50% (Karmel 2008, p.7). One factor that may militate against increasing the provision of diplomas and advanced diplomas is the capacity for TAFE institutes and private providers to offer associate degrees and degrees so that these qualifications become an important access route to attaining a higher education qualification and to universities, even if it is too soon to see if they can establish a place in the labour market. While it is still very early, if this occurs, the degree qualification may increasingly replace diplomas as the point of negotiation between the sectors.

Decoupling the sectors: Higher education in TAFE in Australia

The place of higher education awards being offered through Australian VET institutes is emergent and fluid. Institutions that are not universities but wish to offer higher education qualifications must be registered with their state higher education registering body, most often as a non-self-accrediting higher education institution, and each program they offer must be accredited as well. Currently, ten TAFE institutes have been registered by their state higher education registering bodies to offer higher education qualifications, most in Victoria. These and their accredited higher education qualifications at February 2009 are set out in table 2 (full details can be found in appendix 1). While most of the TAFE institutes shown in table 2 offer most of the programs they have accredited, some institutes are not currently offering all the programs they have accredited. Challenger TAFE in Western Australia is of particular note because, although it has five accredited higher education qualifications, it does not offer any of these at present. Institutes may not currently offer an accredited program because there is insufficient demand, because the institute is gearing up to offer the qualification, or as a consequence of a change of institutional priorities. Qualifications are normally accredited for five years and much can happen in that time.

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

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

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

Australian Government approval for an institution to offer Fee-help to its students not only confers a financial benefit on students and hence their institution, but is also important as recognition of the institution's higher education status. As of 9 November 2008 only the following

six TAFE institutes have been approved to offer Fee-help on behalf of their students, five of which are in Victoria (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008d):

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

To be approved to offer Fee-help, an institution must be registered as a corporation, and most remaining TAFE institutes have become or are in the process of becoming statutory bodies to enable them to offer Fee-help to students for their higher education programs as well as for VET-accredited diplomas and advanced diplomas.

Tables 3 and 4 show that VET institutes' enrolments in bachelor and associate degrees are still rather modest, at around 1600 enrolments, as are the number of annual hours in these programs.

Table 3 Australian VET institutions' enrolments in diploma-level programs and above, 2006

Qualification level	Domestic	Overseas	Total
Graduate diploma	64	1	65
Graduate certificate	926	55	981
Bachelor degree (Honours)	23		23
Bachelor degree (Pass)	911	452	1363
Associate degree	236	9	245
Advanced diploma	37 309	3519	40 828
Diploma	134 805	9880	144 685
Total	174 274	13 916	188 190

Source: NCVET VET Provider Collection (2008).

Table 4 Australian VET institutions' annual hours in diploma-level programs and above, 2006

Qualification level	Domestic	Overseas	Total
Graduate diploma	19 148	786	19 934
Graduate certificate	169 060	17 314	186 374
Bachelor degree (Honours)	11 960	0	11 960
Bachelor degree (Pass)	607 697	141 997	749 694
Associate degree	75 000	6100	81 100
Advanced diploma	14 995 110	1 912 473	16 907 583
Diploma	49 187 301	4 979 380	54 166 681
Total	65 065 276	7 058 050	72 123 326

Source: NCVET VET Provider Collection (2008).

The higher education statistics published by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008b) indicate that six TAFE institutes (Box Hill, Gordon, Holmesglen, Northern Metropolitan, Swan and William Angliss) reported a total student load of 515 equivalent full-time student units enrolled in higher education programs in 2007. Until recently, only those institutions that were eligible to offer students Fee-help were required to report to the Commonwealth on their higher education student numbers; however, in the future, all institutions offering higher education qualifications will be required to report on their student numbers and we will begin to see statistics on higher education in TAFE that are more reliable.

In summary, Australia is in the process of decoupling its institutional and programmatic designations of the sectors (Moodie 2002b, 2003); that is, while Australia maintains the distinction between VET and higher education programs, it does not maintain as sharp a distinction between VET and higher education institutions. In their analysis of enrolments in each sector, Karmel and Nguyen (2003, p.2) draw a similar conclusion when they argue that:

... there is no clear distinction between the sectors in terms of providers. Numerous (22 according to the Australian Quality Framework), including seven out of the GO8 research universities, run VET programs while a small number of TAFEs currently offer degrees. Thus the level of the award defines the sectors rather than the provider.² As an aside, they are certainly not defined by vocational content—medicine is as vocational as plumbing and the VET sector provides considerable general education. (Karmel & Nguyen 2003, p.2)

While mixed-sector provision is still small in both the VET and higher education sectors, the trajectory is for this to grow, and this has certainly been the case overseas in countries with education systems that are often compared with Australia's. It is to these international comparisons we now turn.

² Karmel and Nguyen offer this caveat in their footnote: 'But even here things are not straightforward because of the dual-sector diploma and advanced diploma awards. A dual-sector award is one with the same title but different descriptors and accreditation arrangements within each sector.'

Overseas experience and analysis

This section reviews the extent to which degrees are offered by TAFE institutes' analogues in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom provides the closest analogues to Australian TAFE institutes through its colleges of further education. England's further education colleges provide post-compulsory education; that is, education beyond the age of 16 years. Further education colleges in England therefore differ considerably in scope as well as size. They are usually classified as general further education colleges, tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges, and colleges that specialise in agriculture and horticulture or the creative arts.

English further education colleges have offered higher education programs since the 1950s and 1960s. By 1994, further education colleges enrolled approximately 13% of all higher education students (Parry & Thompson 2002, p.78). By 2005, they enrolled 15% of students commencing higher education in England, 11% in programs offered in their own right and 4% in programs franchised from higher education institutions (Rashid & Brooks 2008, p.4). The percentages are similar, but the numbers enrolled in higher education courses in further education institutions grew substantially because the higher education system expanded between 1994 and 2005. Higher education is offered by some 288 further education colleges, about 80% of all colleges, but is concentrated in 29 so-called 'mixed economy' colleges, which account for about half of all higher education award enrolments in further education colleges.

Most degrees offered by English further education colleges are foundation degrees franchised from a partner higher education college or university. These programs are like Australia's associate degrees, being of two years' duration, and while vocational in orientation, must be accepted for substantial credit towards bachelor degrees. Some 54% of foundation degree students study in further education colleges, about 70% full-time. Some 88% of further education colleges, other than sixth form colleges, offer foundation degrees (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2007, pp.4, 14), although many have only small enrolments. The further education colleges with at least 500 full-time equivalent higher education students in the United Kingdom are known as 'mixed economy' colleges (Mixed Economy Group 2008). However, in this paper, they are referred to as 'mixed-sector' institutions.

Until recently, foundation degrees could be awarded only by higher education institutions. Section 19 of the *Further Education and Training Act 2007* makes further education colleges eligible to apply for the power to award foundation degrees, but none has been granted that capacity yet (Parry 2008, p.17). No further education college has yet been awarded 'taught degree-awarding powers', which would authorise them to award bachelor degrees. Institutions have to meet several criteria to be granted degree-awarding powers, one of which is to have 40% of their students enrolled in higher education programs.

Parry and Thompson (2002, p.3) describe the period from 1987 to 1997 as one of 'low policy'. This is because the great expansion of higher education in further education colleges was eclipsed until the late 1990s by the rise of polytechnics and higher education colleges and disguised by further

education colleges being funded and coordinated by local education authorities rather than by the Higher Education Funding Council. This they contrast with the period of 'high policy' from 1997 to 2001, following the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997), chaired by Ron Dearing, which gave special prominence to the role of further education colleges in the expansion of higher education (Parry & Thompson 2002, p.34). This may have parallels with Australia, where the period from the end of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training in 1999 until the publication of the final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008 may be considered a period of low or no policy about vocational education institutions' role in providing higher education.

Parry and Thompson (2002, p.68) head their discussion of issues still remaining following the Dearing report 'Continuing duality and prevailing uncertainty' and this may anticipate the position following the final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education. Likewise, the following issues raised by Parry and Thompson (2002, pp.68–9) appear to be relevant to Australia:

- ✧ The heightened attention on the role of further education colleges providing higher education increased the need for both coordination of further and higher education, but also for a clearer division between the sectors.
- ✧ While the dispersion of higher education amongst approximately 300 further education colleges broadened access, most of these colleges offered small and sometimes isolated pockets of higher education. There is therefore an argument that higher education should be concentrated in the approximately 29 'mixed economy' (mixed-sector) colleges, which have greater experience and depth of higher education expertise.
- ✧ There is also the suggestion that further education colleges with little experience and depth of provision of higher education should be subject to more rigorous processes for maintaining standards than higher education institutions.
- ✧ Regional collaboration between further education colleges and higher education institutions and the provision of foundation degrees should be encouraged. However, this is contrasted with competition for students, particularly in disciplines (and regions) with modest student demand.
- ✧ Ambiguity exists in English policy post-Dearing between the aims, in Australian terms, of increasing participation overall and increasing the participation of members of under-represented groups.

In more recent work Bathmaker et al. (2008) conducted policy interviews and case studies of four colleges and universities that offer both further and higher education. They concluded that these mixed or dual-sector institutions provide important opportunities for access and progression to higher education. While this is so, related research found that the development of higher education in further education was accompanied by tendencies to recreate the sectoral divide *within* the institution. The emphasis is on how to engender a higher education 'ethos', a student learning experience and culture that is distinguished from further education culture and practices (Bathmaker & Thomas 2007; Burns 2007). In part this is as a consequence of national policies that require 'appropriate' higher education governance, quality assurance, curriculum and learning environment, with 'appropriately' qualified staff (Parry, Thompson & Blackie 2006). However, it seems in part to be about replicating hierarchies within institutions that reflect the broader sectoral hierarchies, so that higher education provision in further education colleges bestows greater status on teachers and staff and provides the basis for constructing higher education identities that are differentiated from further education identities. Thus Bathmaker (2008, p 32) observes:

Structural separation of FE and HE into separate sectors in national policy manifests itself in funding arrangements, different audit and inspection regimes, conditions of service, and qualification systems. Where institutions work across these two sectors, this study found a tendency to maintain divisions rather than break down boundaries. Divisions between FE and HE at national policy level became reinforced in institutions in organisational arrangements for FE and HE provision. This meant that boundaries between FE and HE continued to exist, though boundaries were not necessarily barriers.

Separating vocational and higher education even within one institution is not necessarily negative: it can be important for students, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, to develop an identity as a higher education student (Burns 2007), and we cannot underestimate the importance of such 'identity work' (Young 2006). However, the key lesson from this is that the development of mixed-sector institutions will not automatically remove sectoral boundaries; they may also deepen and entrench these boundaries in ways that reproduce the status hierarchies within tertiary education. In a similar vein, Bathmaker and Thomas (2007, p.8) argue:

The processes that we have found may change the current higher education system, but they do not appear to fundamentally challenge the power relations that are embodied in it. The work that transition currently appears to do is to create a more detailed nuancing of existing stratifications and inequalities within the system. Whether this might eventually allow opportunities for greater access to the more powerful parts of the higher education field is unclear.

Bathmaker (2008, p 34) adds in summary that her data suggest that 'patterns of differentiation, stratification and diversification ... are extended further through the work of "dual-sector" institutions.'

In Scotland 46% of higher education students are enrolled in further education colleges (Morgan-Klein 2003, p.340). However, Scotland has not seen the need to introduce foundation degrees and Scottish further education colleges do not offer degrees. Their higher education qualifications are higher national certificates and higher national diplomas which are often offered parallel to years one and two of Scottish four-year bachelor degrees (Morgan-Klein 2003, p.338). Gallacher (2008, p.35) notes that, while higher national certificates and diplomas were initially developed as vocational qualifications, they have also increasingly been used as transitional qualifications for students wishing to progress to degrees.

Further education colleges are well recognised as widening access to higher education in Scotland (Raab & Small 2003). Recent Scottish analysis has considered the extent and differential rate of student transfer to universities. McLaurin and Osborne (2002) and Osborne and McLaurin (2006) found that the most selective ancient and old universities enrolled about half the proportion of students transferring from further education as the new, least exclusive universities. Field (2004, p.12) concluded that: 'The differential distribution of articulation arrangements, and of less formal arrangements for progression, has created a multi-track system' and further that 'articulation in Scotland may be producing a new binary divide' (Field 2004, p.10). Gallacher (2006, p.363) expressed the same concern, specifically about the prospects of further education graduates being able to transfer to elite institutions.

Accordingly, there has been increasing interest in encouraging greater collaboration between further and higher education in Scotland to create a more integrated tertiary system, which is expected to increase flexibility and opportunities for progression (Gallacher 2008, p.41). The first significant development of a more integrated system was the establishment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in 2001, which merged the pre-existing Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer System for higher education and the Scottish Qualifications Authority's national qualifications in other sectors (Gallacher 2008, p.41). A second major development was the establishment of the joint Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education in 2005. In 2008 the Scottish Funding Council launched a program to improve articulation from higher national qualifications to degrees; the program establishes five regional hubs led by universities to encourage collaboration between further education colleges and higher education institutions in their region.

Australia seems to be following England in allowing some overlap in the programs offered by predominantly vocational and higher education institutions, rather than retaining the separation of the sectors maintained by Scotland. Is Australia likely to further follow England in replicating the sectoral boundaries within institutions, and if so, is this necessarily undesirable? While further education colleges have offered higher education programs from the 1960s, most colleges offer

only a few higher education programs to a few students. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has asked whether the higher education student experience is as rich in these colleges as in further and higher education colleges, which offer a broader range of higher education programs to more students. Might similar concerns be relevant to Australia? Finally, we referred above to Bathmaker and Thomas's (2007, p.8) observation that further education colleges' offerings of higher education programs 'may change the current higher education system, but they do not appear to fundamentally challenge the power relations that are embodied in it. The work that transition currently appears to do, is to create a more detailed nuancing of existing stratifications and inequalities within the system.' Is this a risk for Australia, and if so, how might it be addressed?

Given the historical alignments between the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, it is helpful to look beyond these instances, to appraise how these courses are positioned internationally.

United States of America

In the United States, higher education is regulated by state governments. The Federal Government has much less involvement in higher education policy and regulation than in Australia and is essentially confined to providing the US analogue of Fee-help and national competitive research grants. There is, therefore, considerable variation in higher education arrangements between states in the United States. Nonetheless, all community or two-year colleges offer associate degrees and this is considered part of mainstream higher education. In most states, the associate degree is the highest qualification awarded by two-year colleges.

However, ten states have authorised their two-year colleges to offer bachelor degrees. Florida first authorised its community colleges to seek approval to offer bachelor degrees from the State Board of Education in 2001, and nine two-year colleges have received approval, the most of any state. Washington has four two-year colleges offering bachelor degrees and Texas has three such colleges. In all, 23 two-year colleges in the United States offer bachelor degrees (Community College Baccalaureate Association 2008), 2% of the 1157 two-year colleges in that country.

Most bachelor's degrees in two-year colleges are in education, with fewer degrees in nursing, information technology and business specialisations. This reflects the priorities of the relevant state governments. Public colleges (and universities) in the United States do not offer full fee-paying places to domestic students and most enrol only a few international students. Bachelor degrees in community colleges, as with most degrees in most public colleges, are, therefore, funded by the state government, and state governments have been most concerned to ensure the supply of teachers to their schools.

Unlike Australia and the United Kingdom, there is no distinction between self-accrediting and non-self-accrediting public higher education institutions in most states. The relevant state board, commission or department authorises public colleges (and universities) to offer associate and bachelor degrees in specified fields at specified sites, according to the state's higher education policy and priorities and the state body's assessment of the colleges' capacity. Separately, all public and private higher education institutions must meet quality assurance requirements to be accepted as a credible institution and for their students to be eligible for federal government loans and grants. Higher education quality assurance in the United States is somewhat similar to the processes of the Australian Universities Quality Agency, except that there are about 60 recognised accrediting organisations. There are also six major regional accrediting organisations, some of which accredit both two-year and four-year institutions, others of which accredit just 'community and junior colleges' or 'senior colleges and universities'.³ So tertiary education institutions in the United States are aligned quite differently from those in Australia and England.

³ There is a Community College Baccalaureate Association (2008) which publishes useful information on its website.

Dougherty (2008, p.10) claims that: 'To American eyes a notable feature of the English postsecondary education system is the continued strength of a definition of "higher education" that excludes the bulk of sub-baccalaureate education. It is surprising to find that only a portion of the further education colleges and their offerings are considered higher education.' An observer in the US would make a similar observation of Australia, of course. Dougherty discusses what he calls 'the dilemmas of comprehensiveness' and the conflicting pressures of 'mission specialisation'. He notes the strong evidence that more comprehensive institutions are superior in providing broader access to higher education in the United States (Dougherty 2008, p.7). However, Dougherty (2008, p.6) explains that:

One of the principal ways in which community colleges encourage greater access is by providing a wide panoply of educational programs, ranging from academic education to vocational education and basic literacy education. However, this breadth of curriculum poses a great dilemma. Postsecondary institutions pursuing very different programs may find that they cannot do all of them well, because those programs compete for a limited stock of organizational attention, energy, and material resources and may in fact undermine the effective functioning of other programs.

The resulting calls for US colleges and universities to become more specialised and reduce overlap in their functions have rarely been heeded (Dougherty 2008, p.8). This is because of the clear hierarchy in higher education reinforced by higher funding for elite programs and research. Dougherty (2008, p.9) also draws on resource dependence theory to explain that institutions try to compensate for uncertainties in funding from any one source by gaining their revenue from a variety of sources. Hence, community colleges offer academic and vocational programs in pursuit of multiple sources of funding (Dougherty 2008, p.9). This echoes Parry et al.'s (2008, p.2) observations of England that:

Decisions to combine further and higher education are only partially informed by widening participation strategies, or by the scope for student progression. At the corporate level, market-related considerations are often the most powerful drivers, with institutions searching for competitive edge and survival in a complex market.

We can now observe a continuum from Scotland, where vocational and higher education remain distinct, to England, which maintains distinctions between the sectors but with fuzzy boundaries and overlap of provision, to the United States, where community colleges are much more closely integrated within higher education. Where along the continuum should Australia aim? Even if the United States is too far along the continuum of integration for Australia, can Australia nonetheless learn from the US how to strengthen student transfer from vocational to higher education?

Canada

Education is even more thoroughly the responsibility of the government of the ten provinces and three territories in Canada, it having no federal department of education or federal education policy. It follows that Canada has even less national consistency than the United States in the role and name of their analogue to TAFE institutes and the qualifications they offer. Nonetheless, community colleges in most provinces offer associate degrees. Jones (2008, p.19) notes that, as in the United States, in Canada both degree programs and shorter programs such as those leading to a diploma 'are associated with institutions that we would classify as part of a more broadly defined higher education (or postsecondary education) sector'. Jones (2008, p.24) adds that the English further and higher education sectors seem to be structured as separate games (with mixed-sector institutions playing cards at two tables), 'while in the Canadian provinces one has a sense of multiple sectors playing the same game, though with different roles assigned to different players, and sometimes there are great differences of opinion over the rules.'

Three provinces have approved two-year colleges to offer bachelor degrees. British Columbia, whose higher education arrangements are perhaps most similar to the US, adopted a policy in 1989

and passed legislation in 1995 to enable community colleges to award bachelor degrees. Alberta followed British Columbia's lead by introducing applied bachelor degrees that combine formal instruction with accredited work experience, although its degrees were introduced a year earlier, in 1994. Ontario permitted its community colleges to offer applied degrees in 2000 (Walker 2001; Levin 2004). In all, some 23 community colleges in Canada now offer bachelor degrees.

In British Columbia the three community colleges that were granted the right to award degrees in 1989 were designated university colleges, and two more community colleges were designated university colleges from 1990 and 1995. Flemming and Lee (2009, p.102) report that, while the three university colleges they studied expanded their degree offerings from 1997 to 2007, they also expanded their diplomas and maintained their number of trades, apprenticeship and adult basic education programs. Moreover, enrolments in trades, adult basic education, vocational, and career programs have remained stable or increased (Flemming & Lee 2009, p.102).

Flemming and Lee (2009, p.98) argue that 'the creation of the university colleges without engaging in thorough deliberation on their role within the post-secondary system resulted in a certain ambiguity of purpose and identity within the institutions and their communities.' Levin (2003) observed that British Columbia's university colleges changed their structures and practices to emulate research-intensive universities. For whatever reason, British Columbia's institution of university colleges has been unstable. By September 2008 all five university colleges had become universities, one by restructure, one by amalgamation and the others by redesignation. Does Canada offer a model or warning for likely developments in Australia should higher education become a modest or substantial part of TAFE's offerings?

New Zealand

New Zealand offers a different set of institutional arrangements that are based on models in the United Kingdom but taken at an earlier moment in time—the era of polytechnics and institutes of technology which are the New Zealand analogues of Australia's TAFE institutions. Institutes of technology and polytechnics 'are mainly focused on vocational training at certificate and diploma level, especially in trades and other applied areas' (Ministry of Education 2007, p.16). Some 16 of New Zealand's 20 polytechnics or institutes of technology offer bachelor degrees, mostly in computer science, business and teacher education (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] no date). Polytechnics enrol approximately 20% of degree students in New Zealand.

From 1989 to 2006, New Zealand National and Labour governments operated a fairly deregulated and marketised tertiary education sector. All public and private institutions can, in principle, offer any program on the National Qualifications Framework, from trades and technical certificates, to doctorates. However, this is limited by the *Education Act 1989*, which requires all programs at bachelor level and above to be taught mainly by lecturers active in research.

The government funded institutions for their equivalent full-time students. Initially the Ministry of Education set a student load cap for each institution, but this was progressively relaxed by a government keen to expand higher education participation. In time the government operated a virtual higher education voucher. Fees were not capped initially and government loans charged a real rate of interest. Institutions greatly expanded their number of campuses, programs and enrolments, many well beyond their initial scope. Webster (2009, p.124) reports that institutions' competition for students became intense:

For the most part, the experiment was quite successful in increasing participation rates, especially in Auckland, the only really large urban center in the country. Where population density was sufficient to allow providers to identify and pursue discrete market niches, and to allow students to exercise some genuine choice, the market model operated quite effectively, and the overhead costs in terms of marketing and program duplication remained modest. Furthermore, compliance costs were notably low.

However, Webster (2009, p.113) reports that the outcomes were different elsewhere:

The impact was particularly acute in small regional centers, where private providers delivering only profitable programs undercut local polytechnics, which had to subsidize expensive, but socially important, services while suffering from decreasing levels of funding for the training and assessment commissioned by industry training organizations. Regional polytechnics began to experience serious financial difficulties, with several being restructured or merged with larger institutions.

From 2003 the government has sought to plan, coordinate and consolidate provision by institutions. The government has negotiated a charter for each institution through its newly established Tertiary Education Commission, stating the institution's overall role and an investment plan or educational profile for the following triennium. The government has also controlled the explosion in student debt by no longer charging a real rate of interest on student loans and by capping student fees. Webster (2009, p.116) notes that the government clearly wishes to encourage differentiation between and within the various categories of institution to reduce competition and encourage collaboration throughout the tertiary education sector. The government has encouraged polytechnics to strengthen their regional focus and reduce their emphasis on adult and continuing education programs in favour of a broader range of diplomas and applied degrees (Webster 2009, p.116).

Thus, while the Government of British Columbia successively redesignated its vocational education institutes which offered moderate amounts of higher education as university colleges and then universities, the New Zealand Government has sought to maintain the position of polytechnics as a separate type of institution, notwithstanding that some offer moderate amounts of higher education. New Zealand redesignated the Auckland Institute of Technology as the Auckland University of Technology in 2000, yet the government has blocked Unitec Institute of Technology's proposal for redesignation as a university, notwithstanding that it was submitted at the same time as the Auckland Institute of Technology's proposal in 1996 (Webster 2009, p.121). Does New Zealand therefore offer an alternative to British Columbia's policy for vocational education institutions that offer a moderate amount of higher education? Would it be a better example for Australia to follow?

It follows that the institutions' alignments across these countries, while being similar in many ways to Australia, offer variations and even differences from what has emerged as the conventions in Australia. In each country considered, the distinctions between vocational and higher education are far less sharp than those in Australia. In all the countries discussed, vocational education institutions have a formal but not exclusive role in offering diplomas and associate degrees, what ISCED classifies as tertiary type 5B programs and what are elsewhere called 'short cycle' higher education.

Review of Australian Higher Education

The final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) was published on 17 December 2008. The implications of its several recommendations for vocational education and training may be considered by grouping relevant recommendations into phases. Some of these phases may be progressed concurrently.

Phase 1: Public universities

In the first phase the government would introduce student entitlements or vouchers, which would be available at all public universities (recommendation 29, p.158). The government would retain the current limits on Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) contributions for all programs that receive a public subsidy (recommendation 34, p.165), but there is Fee-help and no fee cap for any program that does not receive a public subsidy (recommendation 35, p.166).

Phase 2: New higher education regulatory arrangements

In phase 2 the government would establish a national regulatory body to:

- ✧ accredit and re-accredit all providers of higher education and accredit programs of providers not authorised to do so
- ✧ conduct regular quality audits of higher education providers
- ✧ advise on quality, effectiveness and efficiency
- ✧ register and audit providers for the purposes of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (recommendation 19, p.116; recommendation 20, p.121).

Phase 3: Other higher education institutions

In phase 3 the government would make student entitlements available at all approved higher education providers (recommendation 29, p.158). If an institution enrolls a student with a public subsidy in a program, all students in that program must be charged the same fee, which may be from \$0 up to a maximum determined by the government (recommendation 34, p.165). If an institution does not enrol a student with a public subsidy in a program, Fee-help is available and no fee cap is imposed for the program (recommendation 35, p.166).

Phase 4: An independent national tertiary education regulatory body

In phase 4 the government would establish an independent national regulatory body responsible for regulating all types of tertiary education to:

- ✧ accredit new providers including new universities
- ✧ periodically re-accredit all providers including the existing universities on a cycle of up to ten years, depending on an assessment of risk
- ✧ carry out quality audits of all providers focused on the institution's academic standards and the processes for setting, monitoring and maintaining them. This would include auditing the adoption of outcomes and standards-based arrangements for assuring the quality of higher education

- ✧ register and audit providers for the purpose of legislation protecting overseas students studying in Australia and assuring the quality of their education
- ✧ advise government on higher education issues referred to it or identified by the government itself
- ✧ supervise price-capping arrangements in courses offered only for full fees where there is no public subsidy (recommendation 19, p.116; recommendation 43, p.184).

Phase 5: Vocational diplomas and above

In phase 5 student entitlements would be made available at all approved VET institutions for the upper levels of VET (diplomas and advanced diplomas) (recommendation 44, p.186). Income-contingent loans would be available at all approved VET institutions for the upper levels of VET (diplomas and advanced diplomas) (recommendation 45, p.186). If an institution enrolls a student with a public subsidy in a program, all students in that program must be charged the same fee, which may be from \$0 up to a maximum determined by the government (recommendation 34, p.165). If an institution does not enrol a student with a public subsidy in a program, Fee-help is available and no fee cap is imposed for the program (recommendation 35, p.166).

Phase 6: All vocational education and training

In the final phase 6, student entitlements would be available at all approved VET institutions for all VET programs (recommendation 44, p.186). If an institution enrolls a student with a public subsidy in a program, all students in that program must be charged the same fee, which may be from \$0 up to a maximum determined by the government (recommendation 34, p.165). If an institution does not enrol a student with a public subsidy in a program, Fee-help is available and no fee cap is imposed for the program (recommendation 35, p.166).

Higher education in TAFE is mostly concerned with what are described here as phases 2 and 3. Phase 2 is the establishment of new higher education regulatory arrangements. These would require TAFE institutes to have their higher education programs accredited by a national higher education accrediting body which would be concerned more with educational standards than the current higher education accreditation and quality assurance arrangements, which are more concerned with processes. This would not affect TAFE institutes much, except for the prospect of a harmonisation of higher education and vocational education accreditation procedures (but not necessarily content or orientation), with the establishment of an independent national tertiary education regulatory body in phase 4.

Of far greater potential significance for higher education in TAFE would be the extension of student entitlements to all higher education providers, described here as phase 3. This would require TAFE institutes to decide whether each of their higher education programs:

- ✧ continues to charge an uncapped tuition fee with an income-contingent loan, Fee-help, or
- ✧ receives a government subsidy, currently known as the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) amount, and charges up to a maximum HECS.

Table 5 shows the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) amounts and maximum HECS that may be charged and therefore total funding for each discipline for 2009, but it includes the increased HECS recommended by the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008, p.167) for education and nursing.

Table 5 Commonwealth Grant Scheme amounts, maximum HECS and total funding by discipline, 2009, including the increased HECS recommended for education and nursing

Discipline	CGS	Max. HECS	Total
Humanities	\$4 743	\$5 201	\$9 944
Accounting, administration, economics, commerce, law	\$1 709	\$8 677	\$10 386
Behavioural science, social studies	\$8 389	\$5 201	\$13 590
Education	\$8 389	\$5 201	\$13 590
Clinical psychology, foreign languages, visual and performing arts	\$10 317	\$5 201	\$15 518
Computing, built environment, other health	\$8 389	\$7 412	\$15 801
Mathematics, statistics	\$11 639	\$4 162	\$15 801
Nursing	\$11 517	\$5 201	\$16 718
Allied health	\$10 317	\$7 412	\$17 729
Science	\$14 664	\$4 162	\$18 826
Engineering, surveying	\$14 664	\$7 412	\$22 076
Agriculture	\$18 610	\$7 412	\$26 022
Dentistry, medicine, veterinary science	\$18 610	\$8 677	\$27 287

Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2008); Review of Australian Higher Education (2008, p.167).

Funding levels per student are considerably higher in higher education than VET (Burke & Long 2005) and this may be an incentive for TAFE institutes to offer publicly funded associate degrees instead of VET diplomas and advanced diplomas. Moreover, while the total amount for some disciplines may be comparable with full fees for higher education programs in TAFE, in other disciplines (such as engineering) the Commonwealth Grant Scheme combined with HECS is considerably higher. Even where full fees are comparable with the Commonwealth Grant Scheme and HECS, students accessing public subsidies will pay only the maximum HECS, thereby making these programs more attractive. Consequently, there are considerable financial incentives for TAFE institutes to expand their higher education programs and offer them only with public subsidies.

This discussion paper closes by raising some issues about higher education in TAFE. Readers are invited to respond to the authors on these or any other issue.

- 1 Are higher education programs likely to continue to be a small and unusual part of TAFE institutes, are they likely to grow moderately to be a modest part of about half of TAFE institutes, or are higher education programs likely in time to become a substantial part of most TAFE institutes? What should happen?
- 2 If higher education programs become a modest or substantial part of many TAFE institutes, would this increase or decrease the diversity of tertiary education institutional types, and should this be an important factor shaping government policy?
- 3 In its submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (2008, p.2) argued for ‘a new form of institution or university to extend and diversify the options and teaching and learning methods available to Australians while at the same time clarifying the purpose and audience of the range of players within the sector’. The institute argued further that ‘the creation of this new form of institution will need to have included in its nomenclature the title “University” to attract candidates, for parity of esteem and to reflect a new and higher level form of educational offering’ (Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2008, p.2). Does this suggest that a substantial expansion of higher education in (some) TAFE institutes will lead them to seek to change their name and sectoral designation? Would this be undesirable or would it introduce a flexibility and dynamism to sectoral designations which have been stable/static in Australia for the last 15 years?
- 4 Is there a risk that higher education programs may divert TAFE institutes from their core role, and if there is such a risk, how may it be averted? If this risk exists, what can be done to ensure that existing VET provision, including apprenticeships and traineeships, does not become residual?
- 5 Should TAFE institutes offer their higher education programs by staff and departments with resources and in facilities that are separate from their vocational programs, or should vocational and higher education programs, staff, students, resources and facilities be integrated?
- 6 If higher education programs are offered in separate divisions from VET programs in TAFE institutes (as they are in most dual-sector universities), what benefits are there to students, employers, governments or the public in having vocational and higher education programs offered in the same institution?
- 7 What impact will the provision of publicly funded higher education places in TAFE have on TAFE institutes’ relationships with universities, and will this close or open opportunities for students?
- 8 Is there any other issue that should be considered about higher education in TAFE institutes?

Responses are invited by 1 June 2009 to:

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Responses will inform a series of 'message briefs' for target audiences that will be prepared for posting on the NCVER website.

We should end as we started, by acknowledging that the development of higher education within TAFE will inform and should be informed by other changes in sectoral relations: higher education institutions becoming more vertically integrated in offering vocational education and training programs and private institutions developing as what we have called mixed-sector institutions, despite whether they initially offered mainly vocational or higher education programs.

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Appendix 1: TAFE institutes registered to offer higher education qualifications and their accredited higher education qualifications, at February 2009

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

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

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