The significance of higher vocational education in Australia

Shaun Rawolle, Steven Hodge, Lizzie Knight, Sue Webb

ARC Discovery Project – ‘Vocational Institutions, Undergraduate Degrees’

Paper presented at NCVER ‘No Frills’ Adelaide 12 July 2019
Introductions

• ARC Discovery Project – ‘Vocational Institutions, Undergraduate Degrees’
  Shaun Rawolle, Deakin University, Australia,
  Elizabeth Knight, Monash University, Australia,
  Sue Webb, Monash University, Australia,
  Steven Hodge, Griffith University, Australia,
  Alice Sinclair, Monash University
  Ann-Marie Bathmaker, University of Birmingham, UK,
  Trevor Gale, University of Glasgow, UK.
A problem and an argument

• What is the significance of higher vocational education, in Federal systems where there are existing settlements between the roles played by Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE)?

• The paper responds to this problem with data and findings from a research project about higher vocational education in Australia and the UK. The paper draws on a current Australian government funded empirical study of the growth of higher education in the vocational education sector.
What is higher vocational education?

• A new area of provision of education in which there is an extension of vocational knowledge and skills to reflect the complexity of workforce demands and emerging industries.

• In our study and in relation to Australia, higher vocational education points to higher educational qualifications offered by vocational institutions, such as Associate Degrees and Degrees.
What is higher vocational education?

• As it is a new term, its use is not standardised across countries.

• HiVE may refer to an area of provision:
  • in higher education institutions (UK),
  • in vocational education institutions (Australia) or
  • in high school (Netherlands).

• In England, HiVE has been used interchangeably with vocational higher education (Burnett & Thrift, 2015).
Why higher vocational education?

• To point to an area of provision that has appeared since the tertiary settlements of the 1980s, in which the connection between provision and provider type has blurred.

• One of the central purposes of this paper is to consider the significance of higher vocational education, and to draw on our research project to explore its significance in terms of:
The purpose of this paper

• The paper discusses the rightness of fit in structures and traditions and explores problems they may be creating in hindering the development of HiVE in Australia, effectively distracting policy makers and practitioners from the potential of HiVE to undertake equity work and contribute to Australian society and its economy.
Project overview

• ARC Discovery Project – ‘Vocational Institutions, Undergraduate Degrees’
• ARC Discovery Project 2017-2020
• Case study sites
• Draws on an investigation of the expansion of higher education into Bachelor’s degrees in TAFE institutes in Vocational Institutions (Vis) in Australia.
• Uses Bourdieu and Bernstein to consider messages about higher education located in different fields.
Project description

• Entry of new providers to Australian HE system, including those with a track record in vocational education and training (VET)
• Need for more research that aims to identify the effects of the expansion of vocational institutions as non-university providers of undergraduate degrees on the structure of higher education.
• Considers whether the system is becoming increasingly vertically stratified between providers or whether this increase in provider types is merely creating greater horizontal differentiation in higher education
Project Description

• Data streams
  • Public statistical data collection
  • Marketing messages of higher education
  • Institutional stakeholders of vocational institutions
  • Educators
  • Student focus groups
  • Career counsellors from local area
  • Employers in related areas
  • Line of sight institutions
  • National, state and international stakeholders
Case study data

- Total of 11 public VET institutions offering HE in Australia
- 4 Higher Education Institutions in geographic proximity to VIs in 2 states
- 460 students survey
- 56 students interviewed
- 17 Stakeholders interviewed
- 14 Employer / Industry interviews
Discipline areas focussed on in this study

• Early years
• Nursing
• Interior Design
• Fashion
• Financial planning
Bachelor students – who studies where

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Students Enrolments</th>
<th># all students</th>
<th>% of sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAFEs</td>
<td>3,676</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>706,337</td>
<td>94.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole sector</td>
<td>748,666</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AGDET HEIMS data 2016 enrolments, published 2017
Bachelor students – who studies where

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Students Enrolments</th>
<th># all students</th>
<th>% of sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAFEs</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>167,201</td>
<td>92.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole sector</td>
<td>180,277</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AGDET HEIMS data 2016 enrolments, published 2017
Access to what subjects differ by provider type
2016 enrolments, published 2017

HEIMS data 2017
Significance of HiVE in Australia

• We address significance for students first, noting that HiVE presents difficulties as well as opportunities to those entering higher education.

• Providers constitute a group for whom HiVE has other significances that often embed or built on significance for their students.

• As we step back from the sphere of learning and teaching, policy significances of HiVE come into focus.
Significance of HiVE for Students

• HiVE may offer familiar conditions that encourage HE study for students in VET
• HiVE may be easier to enter for students with lower prior credentials/easier access to HE.
• HiVE may be more cost-effective for international students
• HiVE may represent a more certain path to employment
HiVE may offer familiar conditions that encourage HE study for students in VET

• So I’m in my final year of a four year degree, and my key reasoning for choosing this setting in particular was to do with its location. I didn’t want to travel into the city every day so that was a big part of it.

• Bachelor’s degree student, Education, H case study 2018

• Initially when I came to the open day here I was interested in doing the diploma of early childhood teaching, so I guess that’s’ what got me physically acquainted with this campus, and then just through discussions with the course leader at the time, she encouraged me to go for the bachelor because my angle was to be a primary teacher rather than early childhood, but I was sort of just dipping my toe into it by coming to the open day here for the diploma.

• Bachelor’s degree student, Education, H case study 2018
HiVE may be easier to enter for students with lower prior credentials/easier access to HE

• Well I applied for university and didn’t get in, I’ll be completely honest. And I was looking at other options and this is the first place that stood out, and I heard it was a really good course from professionals in the industry. So I took the opportunity.

• Bachelor’s degree student, Interior Design, F case study 2018
HiVE may be more cost-effective for international students

• I’m an international student. I’m doing double major financial planning and accounting. The reason why I chose TAFE is one it’s affordable, two they offer internships and, yeah, it’s practical.

• Bachelor’s degree student, Financial Planning, G case study 2018
HiVE may represent a more certain path to employment

• ... the industry loves [TAFE degree] graduates because as opposed to a lot of the other degrees out there we actually get taught about industry standards. So for example when we’re putting together our patterns we’re not just left at the end of making a pattern, we’re also then taught how to put together a tech pack, so how you would send that offshore, or even if it’s an internal thing, all of the information that somebody else who just sees these pattern pieces would then be able to go, “Okay, that’s how that goes together.” That’s apparently something that not a lot of other places do –”

• Bachelor’s degree student, Fashion, G case study 2018
HiVE may represent a more certain path to employment

... I’ve been through three professional experience and all my supervisors at work all prefer TAFE students rather than university students.

Female Bachelor’s degree student, Education, F case study 2018
Significance of HiVE for Providers

• HiVE as way to serve industry that circumvents perceived limitations to training packages
• HiVE as an income stream
• HiVE as a way to improve market position in VET
• HiVE as an opportunity to correct credential misidentification/mislabelling
• HiVE as a way to continue serving industries that require higher AQF level credentials
HiVE for an institution

• *I think there will always be a small percentage of the TAFE sector. At the moment it’s around 5%. It may not even be that much, it might be around that much of student numbers. Certainly the financial incomes greater but becoming incredibly financially lucrative.* So I’ve been able to argue on the basis of financial returns and that keeps the place going for the meantime as we build our reputation, because you’re accountable. So I don’t see it necessarily being bigger than it is.

• *Institutional Interview, F case study 2018*
Conclusion

• Different offerings in TAFEs compared to universities;
• Different students take up HE in colleges, not particularly low participation groups (close but below university sector average); more international students in HiVE;
• Students emphasise distinctiveness in learning: approaches and connections to future work;
• TAFEs’ governance structures ‘dual’ facing towards VET and competency based training (with industry involvement) and higher education quality regulator;
• TAFE’s face an issue around the messaging HiVE
• HiVE is a growing area of provision overseas and for international students
Concluding comments

• HiVE in Australia is not a marginal or ephemeral development but rather is emblematic of the breakdown of a settlement that has characterised tertiary education in this country without necessarily serving the interests of students, providers and society more broadly.

• We argue HiVE has a legitimate place in the tertiary field but that conditions surrounding the current settlement militate against its emergence.