

# **Submission to the Review of Higher Education From ITC Education**

31 July 2008

## **Introduction**

ITC Education applauds the work carried out to date by Professor Denise Bradley and her team in the review of Australian Higher Education. Overall, we agree with the functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia, identified in the discussion paper and commend persistence with what may lead to be ground breaking changes to the sector.

## **Background**

ITC Education Ltd is part of the ITC Group, which is wholly owned by the University of Wollongong (UOW). ITC Education, trading as Wollongong College Australia, is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and Higher Education Provider (HEP).

In addition, ITC Education has a controlling interest in the International Film School Sydney, also an RTO.

The views in this submission are those of ITC Education, and are not necessarily those of UOW.

## **General comments**

### **1. Universal Education Entitlement**

ITC Education believes all appropriately qualified students have a right to be able to access further education at the institution of their choice, whether public or private, or in some combination, irrespective of their immediate financial circumstances. An income contingent loan scheme is one mechanism to achieve this, and one in which Australia is seen as a world leader.

ITC argues for the development of a single such scheme, without the present distinction between Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) which are eligible for HECS-HELP and Commonwealth Assisted Places (CAPs), which are eligible for FEE-HELP.

ITC notes the recent availability of FEE-HELP to part of the VET sector, and supports its further progressive extension more broadly across VET, as a mechanism to facilitate access to training and education to the benefit of individuals and society. We believe this will also encourage further articulation between the Vocational Education Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) sectors, where there have historically been artificial or perceived barriers.

If the relationship between higher and vocational education providers is to be closer and stronger, vocational providers must be able to better deal with issues already addressed by the university sector such as equity of access and inclusiveness. Such fundamental principles need to be addressed and become central to the vocational educational provider landscape if the move towards collaboration between the two sectors is to occur smoothly.

## **2. The Evolving Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education Training (VET) Global Relationship**

The distinctions between public and private, and VET and HE sectors are increasingly blurring both nationally and globally. While there will remain some difference between traditional HE and VET in the theoretical basis of a field of study, this is becoming more of emphasis rather than a sharp divide; practically oriented training ("VET") increasingly needs to produce a flexible workforce able to adjust to changing technologies and global circumstances, while HE professional courses need to train work-ready professionals without the luxury of protracted later "on the job" practical training.

A globally mobile workforce is emerging in many occupations and professions; this trend will continue with the integration of global and regional economies, and supported by formal transnational recognition and standardisation of qualifications.

### **Specific comments – discussion questions**

#### **1. Meeting Labour Market and Industry Needs**

In addressing the education, training and developmental needs of their workforces, industry would benefit from dealing with one sector rather than a range of providers existing in separate and distinctly different worlds.

Increased emphasis on continuous learning in the workforce may mean that courses that are shorter and more focussed would appeal more to those already in the workforce than degree-level courses. Partnership with a vocational education provider in offering such programs would ensure that a higher education institution retains direct involvement with their graduates' further and ongoing education.

#### **2. Connecting with Other Education and Training Sectors**

HE and VET missions should be viewed as a complementary continuum rather than distinctive silos. The emerging and significant contribution of the private education sector, whether at the higher or vocational level, needs to be caught by the higher education review. The relevance of this to the matter of collaboration between the two sectors cannot be lost.

Mobility between sectors needs to be more accessible. Individual aspirations and capabilities develop over a lifetime, and are not always, or even usually, mature at the end of high school. Workers are now more mobile, and move across traditional occupation boundaries as labour needs change and they develop their individual generic skills.

Recognition of dual sector institutions or relationships and nested qualifications needs to be encouraged, for example by reducing accreditation and compliance loads on non self-accrediting providers, and recognising appropriate VET qualifications as pathways to HE qualifications.

For a truly collaborative relationship to exist there needs to be a clearer match between core competencies and learning outcomes, where this is required for recognised prior learning, credit transfer and/or to underpin pathway arrangements.

We need the appropriate balance between planning and demand. Many in the university sector view previous mechanisms as too controlled, without the ability to respond quickly to changing demand and opportunity. In general, we support the continued provision of national priority and productivity places to address specific skills shortages, and also appropriate use of general skilled migration.

We believe however that current Graduate Skilled Migration (GSM) policy has led to a distortion of the international education sector, and that a review of the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) point schemes is due in view of the reported GSM outcomes. (We believe this will be captured in the current migration review).

In terms of funding, we have already commented on the desirability of universal entitlement.

In regard to regulation and governance, there are some inconsistencies between state based VET and HE accreditation processes; these need to recognise the valid place of VET diploma qualifications and facilitate credit transfer to Higher Education.

ITC Education provides several good practice examples between sectors with good learning outcomes.

Wollongong College Australia delivers, on behalf of UOW, several non-award enabling (pathway) programs into degree courses at UOW. While these programs do not receive credit transfer, the students have displayed exemplary outcomes in their university studies. The enabling programs receive a mix of Commonwealth supported and Commonwealth assisted places, which enable disadvantaged and equity students to access university.

The programs are:

- Foundation Studies Program, for students who have usually completed year 12, but lack the UAI for direct university entry
- STEP to UOW, for recent school leavers who demonstrate disadvantage against equity criteria
- University Access Program for mature age (over 21) students.

We urge the continued support for such programs.

### **3. Australia's Higher Education Sector in the International Arena**

On an international level the two sectors need to be liaising to ensure education and training obtained in Australia can be transferred to the global workforce arena. Transferability of skills and knowledge is crucial in a time where global based workforces are and will increasingly play a part.

### **4. Resourcing the system**

The current funding models need to be reviewed to secure the future of Australia's higher education sector. If vocational education providers are to contribute more to the higher education sector then the funding arrangements applying to them must be reviewed. Any higher education provider that engages productively with vocational partners should be able to attract funding to encourage and develop those models.

Any review of Australia's education sector, where this raises the question of partnerships between higher and vocational education providers, cannot avoid the need to review the relationship between the private and public vocational education environments. Government based funding / support for public providers as opposed to private entities is the most obvious and pressing issue in need of assessment and change. This would include a legitimisation of the role of the private vocational education provider in what is typically a public sector domain through TAFEs and the like.

## **5. Governance and Regulation**

ITC Education fully supports reshaping tertiary education in Australia including streamlining financing and regulatory arrangements. The involvement and role of the two relevant tiers of government, federal and state, in respect of the higher and vocational education sectors needs to be considered if closer relationships are to have any realistic chance of succeeding. It may in fact raise the serious question of whether these two sectors, in a very real and practical sense, need to fall under one system that is federally based.

One obstacle that needs to be addressed in enabling the two sectors to work more collaboratively is their very different levels of independence. Where universities with such attributes as self accreditation can in many ways direct their own activity, both public and private vocational education providers can find themselves entangled in state driven instrumentalities for policy, accreditation and regulatory matters.

We would recommend changes to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). From a community perspective this review may serve as an ideal opportunity to clearly delineate between secondary education and post secondary education (vocational and higher), their purpose and the framework in which they exist. The structure around qualifications with "end points" and qualifications leading to higher educational pursuits, may improve as a result.

This would include:

- a) Clarification, and possibly simplification, of the range of qualifications available under the AQF;
- b) A closer working relationship between the two sectors;
- c) More clearly aligned educational offerings where this is needed and a more responsive approach to business and economic need would without doubt be very welcomed by "business".

## **6. Final observation**

Much of the discussion paper emphasises the Australian economic and workforce needs. In a broader sense, training and education contribute also to the total national and global intellectual, cultural and social capital. This is underpinned by providing genuine individual student choice and access for both workforce and career benefits, but also personal development and enjoyment.

These viewpoints should be complementary rather than contradictory, and must also encompass global and regional relationships.

## **Summary of key points**

ITC Education fully supports the reshaping of Australia's higher education landscape. A key area for improvement would be the development of a single loan scheme for

both higher education and vocational students to encourage appropriately qualified students to access further education. HE and VET missions need to be a complementary continuum rather than distinctive silos with the recognition of the significant contribution of private education to Australia's education industry. The funding arrangements that apply to vocational providers need to be reviewed if this sector is to contribute more to higher education. Finally we advocate a streamlining of financing and regulatory arrangements and raise the concept of the need for these arrangements to fall under one system that is federally based.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. W. Langridge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr James Langridge**  
CEO & Managing Director, ITC Group of Companies

