The ACPET Journal for Private Higher Education is published biannually (June and December), and is currently freely available on the ACPET website (http://www.acpet.edu.au/about/activity/higher-education-journal/).

The Journal publishes scholarly articles on the theory and practice of higher education in the context of the private sector. It provides up-to-date perspectives of benefit to educators, scholars, students, practitioners, policy-makers and consultants, and covers:

- higher education policy and practice
- teaching, learning and curriculum design
- quality assurance
- postgraduate education
- academic leadership and management
- academic work.

Readers are also invited to submit original commentaries on current issues relevant to private higher education. Commentaries in the form of responses to articles published in prior issues of the journal are welcome and may be considered for publication.

Commentaries should be a maximum of 3,000 words and will be reviewed by a member of the Editorial Board. The commentary may be edited to ensure it fulfils the mission of the journal.

Prospective authors should refer to the guidelines for authors (available on ACPET website at http://www.acpet.edu.au/about/activity/higher-education-journal/). Further information is available from the Journal Editor, Email: HE.journaleditor@acpet.edu.au

The views and opinions expressed in any article/commentary, unless otherwise stated, are those of the respective authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or ACPET.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary. Growing Australian Higher Education: Achieving Targets and Rethinking Provision</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Edwards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Culture of Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for the Non-University Higher Education Sector</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Robinson, Laura Hougaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahsood Shah, Sue-Ann Stanford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olalekan Arikewuyo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary on “Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience”</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Ryan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Do You Think You Are? Profile of International Students in a Private HE Provider Pathway Program: Implications for International Education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Kaktiņš</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

Editor

Many thanks to our Journal Editor, Dr Laura Hougaz

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University of Technology Sydney

Thanks to Dr Robert Trevethan for helping to prepare this issue’s material for publication.

Welcome to issue 1, 2013 of The ACPET Journal for Private Higher Education. This issue features a broad range of topics, issues, and opinions of interest to the wide cross section of our readers.

The opening commentary by Daniel Edwards is an enlightening viewpoint on the substantial expansion of the higher education sector in Australia over a very short period of time. In his article, Edwards argues that without the private higher education sector, this growth will not achieve the ambitious government attainment targets, including the wider participation from people of low SES origin. Edwards therefore calls for recognition of the significant role that private higher education providers can play in maintaining the growth trajectory, and for a review of the policies set in place to achieve this agenda of expansion. This opinion is shared and supported by ACPET.

This issue introduces a new international perspective to the journal, with our very first article from abroad. In it, Olalekan Arikewuyo presents an informative overview of the rapidly expanding private higher education sector in Nigeria. This is a very positive sign that The ACPET Journal for Private Higher Education is being read, and well received internationally as well as at a local and national level. On behalf of the Editorial Board, and the Editor, I welcome and encourage our international readers and authors who have an interest in the private higher education sector to consider publishing in the journal in the future.

With this issue I would also like to inform our readers that due to a recent change in her professional role, Professor Hilary Winchester has decided to step down from her position as Chair and member of the journal’s Editorial Board. On behalf of the ACPET Board of Directors and members of the journal Editorial Board, I would like to thank Hilary for her leadership and guidance over the last two years as the founding chair, and we look forward to her continuing relationship as a reviewer for the journal. The ACPET Board of Directors will be considering the nomination of a new chair in the near future.

This issue would not be possible without the combined efforts of the Editorial Board, the Editor, and all the reviewers who kindly donate their valuable time. In particular, I would like to thank the authors for choosing to submit their articles to the journal and their dedication to the quality of the journal, and to our readers for their continued interest.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) is Australia’s national industry association for independent providers of tertiary education and training. ACPET’s members offer a diverse range of higher education, vocational education, English language and foundation studies courses to Australian and overseas students across all states and territories, and increasingly across the globe.

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Claire Field
Chief Executive Officer
Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to write a brief introduction to the five articles included in this issue of the journal, hoping that they will provide some thought-provoking insights and inspire contributors to submit articles for future publication.

This issue features an invited commentary by Daniel Edwards. He considers recent changes in higher education that are driven by the federal government’s key policies such as the introduction of demand-driven funding, the 40% attainment target by 2025, and the increase in SES participation target. Edwards presents some interesting statistics in support of his suggestion that the role of private higher education providers in increasing attainment and widening participation needs to be reconsidered and further explored, and that government policies should reflect the vital contribution that can be made by the private higher education sector.

Robinson and Hougaz tackle the important issue of the requirement by non-university higher education providers to create and demonstrate a “culture of scholarship” within their institutions as a result of the new regulatory framework. The authors aim to stimulate discussion on this topic, provide an overview of the meaning of scholarship, explore the relationship between scholarship and teaching, and provide an approach for addressing the question of scholarship through a defined plan.

Shah and Stanford encourage debate about the necessity for private tertiary education providers to develop internal capacity for quality assurance, and draw attention to the need for a single sustainable quality assurance framework that will help to meet both internal and external requirements in such a highly regulated environment.

The global trend toward private higher education is highlighted in Arikewuyo’s article, which contains illuminating data about the rapid growth of private universities in Nigeria as well as thought-provoking information about the main issues that those universities face. Accompanying this article, Ryan provides a useful commentary for our readers by outlining the similarities and differences of the Nigerian and the Australian private higher education systems.

The final article by Kaktiņš is a case study that examines the current profile of international students, predominantly Chinese, enrolled in a private higher education pathway program. The issues explored, such as stereotyping, and the students’ perception of their English language skills, are factors that impact on the student-teacher relationship, with important and interesting pedagogical implications.

The range of articles published in this issue is timely and highly relevant to the private higher education sector.

This journal provides teachers and academics, policy makers and administrators working in/with private higher education institutions with an exclusive forum to showcase their work and achievements to their peers, and to readers across the globe. I encourage you to spread the word, and support the journal with your valuable contributions.

Dr Laura Hougaz
Editor
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Commentary. Growing Australian Higher Education: Achieving Targets and Rethinking Provision

Daniel Edwards
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University

Abstract
Higher education in Australia has been following a growth trajectory unmatched for the past 20 years. This paper shows that while the recent growth in university enrolments over the past few years has been facilitated by the federal government’s demand-driven funding policy, private providers have also been expanding and contributing to the overall national aims of increasing attainment. With the 2013 initial university offer figures showing a slowing of growth in universities for the first time since demand-driven funding was announced, the role of non-universities in maintaining the growth trajectory for higher education, as well as helping to achieve key attainment and participation targets, is heightened. This paper suggests that now is the time for considering the role that private providers and TAFEs will play in the Australian higher education sector in the coming decades.

Keywords
attainment rates, models of provision, education enrolments, education provision, graduation targets

Introduction
The landscape of Australian higher education is currently being reshaped. Policies relating to expanding participation are one of the key drivers of this change. However, more than four years after the Bradley Review (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) was completed, we still have very few ideas about what shape our higher education system will assume once these policies are fully implemented. For example, will a reshaping of the sector result in a larger role for non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs)? Some of the data presented here suggests that the role of these providers could be crucial for achieving government goals in higher education.

Recent changes in higher education are encapsulated in an “expansion agenda”, in which three key policies are paramount: the introduction of demand-driven funding for students in public universities, the 40% attainment target (i.e., 40% of 25-34 year olds will have a bachelor degree or above by 2025), and the SES participation target (i.e., 20% of undergraduate enrolments will be from low socioeconomic backgrounds by 2020).

To date this government-auspiced expansion agenda has been very much focussed on the public university providers in the higher education sector, with private providers and TAFEs not featuring greatly in government policy relating to the implementation of these policies and the achievement of the targets.

The targets suggested in the Bradley Review, and subsequently adopted in government policy, have been the topic of wide debate in the sector in the past few years. While legitimate questions may be asked about the merit of setting targets, particularly given the attention and focus that it has generated around the future of higher education in Australia, Bradley’s message about these targets appears to ring true:

Setting targets for the achievement of any goal does not of itself ensure that the goal is achieved. However, it can help. Setting targets that are clear and transparent can focus the mind of policy makers on what needs to be done to achieve the target and can help the community to hold policymakers accountable (2008, p. 19).

This paper explores the changes in enrolments in Australia in response to the policies stemming from the Bradley Review. It investigates what the 40% attainment target really means for the sector and the impact that moving to a student demand-driven funding system has had on achieving the target. The analysis indicates that while growth is being achieved in the current university-focussed expansion, the capacity of universities may be reached before the targets are achieved. It concludes that it is now time to rethink the models for provision of higher education, increasing the role played by private providers and TAFEs in higher education enrolments.
Translating the Target to Numbers

In 2010, the year after the attainment target was announced, according to figures collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 34.2% of people aged 25 to 34 in Australia held a bachelor degree or higher qualification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Based on population estimates for 2010, 1.05 million people aged 25 to 34 in Australia have attained at least a bachelor degree.

By 2025, it is estimated that there will be about 3.68 million people aged 25 to 34 in Australia. If the attainment target of 40% is to be reached, 1.47 million people from this group will need to have at least a bachelor-level qualification.

For the target to be achieved, in 2025 there will need to be 422,000 more people in this age cohort with a bachelor degree than there were in 2010. This equates to a 40% increase over this 15-year period.

Given that the overall number of 25 to 34 year olds is forecast to increase by a more modest 20%, the scope and context for this growth is substantial. Essentially, numbers of this group with a bachelor degree will need to grow at twice the rate of anticipated population increase. These figures are summarised in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Change (required) 2010 to 2025</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 25 to 34 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,067,139 (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with bachelor degree or above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,048,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attainment rate (bachelor +)</td>
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<tr>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Base population data for 2010 and 2025 from ABS, Population Projections Australia, Series B, cat. 3222.0.

Recent Trends in Attainment

Presented in terms of percentage point gain and over a 12-year period, the achievement of the 40% attainment target appears to be relatively straightforward. When the recent trajectory of growth in the attainment rate is considered, it is possible to conclude that these targets will be easily reached, if not outstripped by 2025. A conclusion along these lines was made in a paper by the Group of Eight that states “a continuation of the recent trend growth in degree attainment would see the Government’s 40 per cent target for the 25-34 year group exceeded by 2015” (2010, p. 2).

Figure 1 charts the attainment rates of the 25 to 34 year-old population in Australia over the past 12 years. The attainment rate is calculated based on all those within the age range who have completed a bachelor degree or above. Those qualifications could have been gained from a university or a NUHEP. The figure details a remarkable rise of more than 12 percentage points, from 24.0% in 2001 to 36.8% in 2012. At each point in the series from the Survey of Education and Work (ABS, 2012) there has been an increase in attainment apart from that in 2010, which was down on the large figure recorded in 2009. A trend line has been included in this figure to provide an indication of the average trajectory during this time.

As argued in the Group of Eight paper, if this trend were to continue Australia would reach the 40% attainment figure by the middle of the current decade (Group of Eight, 2010). While this conclusion is appealing, an examination of national attainment level trends over recent years does not provide the full picture of likely future attainment rates.

Figure 2 provides a reality check and a context for understanding the drivers of attainment in Australia over the past decade. The figure tracks both the 25 to 34 year-old attainment rate from 2001 to 2012 alongside the participation rate of 20 to 24 year-olds in courses for a bachelor degree or above (these include those at a university, or other NUHEP). While the attainment rate has experienced steady growth over the past decade, the same cannot be said for levels of participation in bachelor degrees by the next group of people entering the 25 to 34 year age bracket. Between 2004 and 2009, attainment rates grew steadily in Australia, while the participation rates of persons aged 20 to 24 remained relatively steady. The final three years in this time series show some uniformity in direction, with participation rates finally rising in 2011 and 2012 (this change is discussed in the next section).

While the late rise is a positive sign of the potential role of domestic students in boosting attainment rates, overall the majority of the years in this time series indicate that the growing attainment rates in Australia over the past decade...
Commentary. Growing Australian Higher Education: Achieving Targets and Rethinking Provision

Daniel Edwards
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University

Figure 1:

Attainment rates of 25 to 34 year-olds in Australia, 2001 to 2012.

Source: ABS Survey of Education and Work 2001 to 2012

Figure 2:

Participation rates in bachelor degree or above (20 to 24 year-olds) and bachelor degree attainment rates (25 to 34 year-olds), 2001 to 2012.

have not necessarily been achieved through output from domestic higher education. So what is contributing to this noticeable and well-publicised growth in attainment?

The most plausible explanation is that the change in higher education attainment levels has been the result of a strong skilled migration program, focused on young migrants in professional occupations, alongside large increases in the number of international students studying in Australia. Between 2001 and 2009, skilled migration numbers increased 87%, with more than 35,000 settler arrivals of 25 to 34 year old professionals in 2009 (Edwards, 2011b, p. 7). In parallel, international student completions in Australian universities more than doubled over the decade, with nearly 43,000 completions in 2009. Data compiled by the ABS suggest at least one-third of international students are successful in applying for a permanent residency visa and remaining in Australia on completion (ABS, 2007), although their ability to do so is contingent upon fluctuating visa regimes.

So, while Australia appears to be on track to achieve the attainment figures, the reality of the situation appears to be less certain and heavily reliant on continued growth in migration and international student numbers. Given the volatility of these sources of growth, illustrated recently through changes to the skilled migration program and nervousness surrounding the sustainability of the international student market, the role of domestic student expansion in Australia in achieving and sustaining the government’s target of 40% attainment over the long term is of paramount importance.

It is also clear that the Bradley Review panel’s intent in including this target in their recommendations was to encourage expansion of higher education domestically, irrespective of changes to migration policy.

An Expanding Sector

Universities

To facilitate growth in the domestic market for university, a demand-driven funding system was introduced by the federal government in 2012. The Bradley Review panel recommended this, noting that student demand-driven funding was “necessary if Australia is to achieve better attainment of higher education qualifications” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 155).

The official federal government response to the Bradley Review was outlined in the document Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System. This policy document stated:

From 2012, Australian public universities... will be funded for student places on the basis of student demand. The government will fund a Commonwealth supported place for all undergraduate domestic students accepted into an eligible, accredited higher education course at a recognised public higher education provider (Australian Government, 2009, p. 17).

As noted in the quote, this policy related only to public providers of higher education. While the Bradley panel recommended expanding the demand-driven system to all accredited higher education providers once regulatory measures were in place, to date there has been little commitment publicly towards this happening.

Figure 2 demonstrates that from 2010 onwards there has been a spike in student numbers at universities. Data on new enrolments suggest that this has largely been a result of the move toward demand-driven funding in public universities. This comes despite the fact that the demand-driven funding policy was only officially in place from the beginning of 2012. In the years prior to that funding system being introduced, universities were able to enrol above their government quota (up to 10% over) and still receive funds. Some universities took student numbers well above the government quota with the strategy of beginning their expansion early in order to have a solid growth foundation for when the new funding system began (Edwards, 2011c).

The national picture, compiled from a range of tertiary admissions centres (TACs) and from the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) (Edwards & van der Brugge, 2012c; Ross & Trounson, 2013), shows a notable reaction from institutions in the years following the announcement of the introduction of student demand-driven funding and the removal of enrolment quotas for universities. As demonstrated in Figure 3, consistent and noteworthy growth in the sector occurred in the first three years following the announcement of the demand-driven funding policy. Many universities reacted at the first opportunity to begin the expansion. Figure 3 shows a 6.4% growth in offers made across Australia in 2010; in the second year (2011), the increase was 3.5%; and in 2012 when full funding for students was introduced and the caps were removed, university offer grew by an additional 5.3%. As Figure 3 also shows, in the years prior to the policy being announced (2006 to 2009), no discernible pattern in offer numbers was apparent.

Importantly, the large growth in the first three years has so far not been matched in 2013, with the current numbers suggesting a much more modest 1% increase in university offers (Ross & Trounson, 2013).

These figures highlight the success of the introduction of demand-driven funding to public providers in Australia in terms of increasing attainment. The policy implementation...
and the response from universities to this policy have been more substantial than that predicted by the Bradley Review panel or by the Australian Government when these policies were announced (Edwards & van der Brugge, 2012c).

However, the slowing of this trend into 2013 also indicates that the levels of growth achieved in the first few years following the policy announcement might not be sustained in the long term by university providers in the higher education sector.

Private and other providers

The recent growth in higher education provision has not been occurring in public universities alone. Private universities and NUHEPs have also been growing significantly in recent times, despite being largely separate from the current “expansion agenda” policies described above. Recent growth in this part of the sector was assisted by changes to the Higher Education Support Act in 2005, as Ryan (2012) notes, with 41% of the current HEPs having been approved between 2005 and 2011.

Data compiled from DIISRTE for the 2008 to 2011 period (2012 figures were not available at the time of writing) help to chart the changing enrolment patterns for private universities and NUHEPs. Figure 4 shows that between 2008 and 2010, growth in commencing students in bachelor degrees was notable in this part of the sector, with a rise from just under 8,000 effective full-time students in 2008 to more than 12,000 in 2010. However, in 2011 a decline in commencing student numbers in bachelor degrees is recorded. Whether this decline is a direct result of the introduction of demand-driven funding in public universities is not certain. Another explanation may be the decline of international student numbers during this period (Edwards & van der Brugge, 2012b). In order to explore this issue more comprehensively, additional years’ data tracking beyond 2011, are required. Such future analyses will provide an opportunity to explore the changes in enrolment for NUHEPs in particular, and examine possible patterns in enrolments between the public and private higher education providers in Australia.

While the data presented in Figure 4 show growth in both universities and in the private provider sections of the higher education sector in recent years, the data from DIISRTE based on bachelor student commencements and total bachelor enrolments show that, in this period of growth, private

Figure 3:

Offers for university study; annual percentage growth, 2006 to 2012; and number of offers, 2009 to 2012.

Source: Data compiled by ACER from TACs and DIISRTE
*2013 data based on January estimates from TACs compiled by Ross and Trounson 2013.
Commentary. Growing Australian Higher Education: Achieving Targets and Rethinking Provision

Daniel Edwards
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University

Figure 4:
Commencing student bachelor degree load in private universities and NUHEPs, 2008 to 2011.


Figure 5:
Share of bachelor degree student load for private universities and NUHEPs, 2008 to 2011 (%).

universities and NUHEPs have been experiencing an overall increase in the share of provision at this level of education. The share of bachelor degree commencements for those providers that are not public universities increased from 4.3% in 2008 to 5.4% in 2011 and, despite a small decline in commencements for 2011, the overall share of all bachelor degree students among this group of providers increased steadily each year in the time series presented here. Refer to Figure 5.

Impact on Attainment

In this context of overall growth it is appropriate to consider whether it is likely that Australia will meet the attainment target of 40% of 25 to 34 year olds with a bachelor level qualification or above by 2025. As suggested through previous analyses (Birrell, Rapson, & Smith, 2010; Edwards, 2011a), achieving these targets will require consistent increases in student enrolments over a number of years. So while current figures suggest that Australia is on track to achieve these targets, its likelihood of achieving the attainment target depends on its ability to continue to expand for a number of years to come.

A model developed by the Centre for Population and Urban Research (Birrell et al., 2010) provides an opportunity to track the “required” trajectory for expansion alongside the actual expansion in higher education that has been experienced over the past few years. In Figure 6, the “required” trajectory of bachelor-level completions is shown in the dotted line, while the actual numbers and the numbers officially forecast in the national budget papers are plotted in the solid line. This figure shows that for the period of the estimates (2010 to 2015), domestic enrolment numbers appear to be on track to reach the attainment target. However, the numbers in the estimates flatten out by 2015. This is problematic because, according to the “required growth” scenario, consistent increases of about 5% growth maintained for a seven year period would be needed to reach the 40% attainment goal. So, while initial growth may be on track, the challenge for the sector is sustaining these increases until the beginning of the next decade. If, as shown earlier, the provision of new places by the university sector continues to decrease, the role of other providers in keeping Australia on track in achieving this target becomes important.

The Role of Private Providers

The role of private providers in facilitating the expansion of higher education qualifications beyond the traditional market for students that universities focus on was discussed by the

Figure 6:
Forecasts of enrolments (public and private providers) and CPUR growth scenario comparison, 2010 to 2025.

Bradley Review. Recommendation 29 of the review stated that the suggested demand-driven funding system should “apply initially only to public universities, but would be extended to other approved providers when new regulatory arrangements are in place” (Bradley et al., 2008). With the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) through an Act of Parliament in 2011, the foundation for these regulatory arrangements is well in place. It is now an appropriate time for government and stakeholders to revisit this recommendation of the Bradley Review and explore in more detail the role that private providers and TAFEs can play in the higher education sector — and in contributing to the government’s targets.

The data provided here suggest that while large increases in enrolments in universities were achieved almost immediately after the government response to the Bradley Review, the capacity of these providers to continue to increase enrolments may be at its limit. Alongside the growth shown in the public universities, data for private universities and NUHEPs indicated that the large growth they experienced in the period pre-2010 began to slow once the universities began expanding in preparation for the introduction of demand-driven funding. However, given that the figures for 2013 suggest a slowing of growth in the public universities, it is likely that the short downturn in private provision will turn around. Therefore, the role of other higher education providers in facilitating ongoing growth is important.

An example of the potential additional growth that private providers may be able to foster in an open demand system can be seen in the demand-driven system in vocational education and training (VET) in Victoria. In 2008, a demand-driven funding system was introduced in the Victorian VET sector known as the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG), essentially providing students with a “voucher” to take to their preferred accredited training provider regardless of whether that provider was public or private. According to the department responsible for these changes, this system “released pent up, latent demand for skills training” (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2013b, p. 9).

Overall, between 2008 and 2012 the number of government-subsidised VET enrolments grew by 75%, from 381,300 to 670,400 (a growth of 289,100 enrolments). Private providers were a significant contributor to this growth, accounting for more than 250,000 of this 289,100 student growth (DEECD, 2013b, p. 40).

One aspect of this growth that is less well publicised is the fact that private VET providers substantially expanded the number of disadvantaged and vulnerable persons completing tertiary qualifications. For example, the number of students with a disability who completed a VET qualification with a Certificate III or above grew from 2,618 to 7,844 between 2008 and 2012. One in every five people generating this increase in completions over this time was from a private VET provider. A growth in indigenous students completing a VET qualification of Certificate III or above was also recorded, with 699 more indigenous student completers in 2012 compared with 2008. Private providers contributed 572 of these completions (DEECD, 2013a).

It is important to note that this is a different educational sector and applies only to a single state, so may not be generalisable. Nonetheless, the Victorian VET changes provide an indication of the flexibility of private tertiary education providers in responding to changes in the policy environment and their ability to attract students who may not have otherwise been in education and training.

Although the Victorian example is only indicative and relates to a different area of tertiary education that has a different role, the outcomes are worth noting. The potential role of private providers and TAFEs in higher education provision, and their contribution to achieving the attainment target over the coming decade is substantial. However, until further policy analysis and implementation of models of provision that include these providers as a genuine part of the higher education sector is instigated, this potential may be lost. The VET example above, and changes highlighted by Ryan (2012) in the higher education sector, demonstrate that private providers are equipped to respond quickly to change. Therefore, it might be expected that any change to the extension of demand-driven funding beyond public universities would likely have an immediate impact on student numbers. With the improved regulatory procedures now in place through TEQSA, the potential for continued and considered expansion through non-university providers is significant.

Both public and private providers have contributed to the recent expansion of the higher education sector.

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Conclusion

Australian higher education enrolments have grown substantially in a short period of time. For universities, this growth can be attributed to the introduction of a student demand-driven funding system. For NUHEPs, this growth has generally been self-driven. Both public and private providers have contributed to the recent expansion of the higher education sector as it attempts to reach ambitious attainment targets and enable wider participation from people of low SES origin. This is despite the fact that the initial focus of the government’s expansion policies was solely on assisting public universities to grow.
Since the announcement of the demand-driven funding system, higher education enrolment figures have followed a consistent upward trajectory that is unprecedented in the past 20 years (Edwards & van der Brugge, 2012a). The initial growth in the sector is a positive sign for the health of higher education in Australia into the future and continued growth of this magnitude would see Australia reaching its attainment targets. However, the most recent figures show that enrolment growth in universities for 2013 has slowed. It appears that a continuation of the trajectory charted between 2010 and 2012 may not be realistic for universities.

If the growth required to achieve the attainment target cannot be facilitated through universities, perhaps the role of NUHEPs in increasing attainment and widening participation needs to be further explored. Given the new regulatory arrangements now in place through TEQSA, and the prior recommendations of the Bradley Review for consideration of expanding the demand driven funding system beyond the university sector, it appears that it is now time for considering what Australia’s re-shaped higher education sector will look like in 2025.

References


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A Culture of Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for the Non-University Higher Education Sector

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Abstract
The objective of this article is to explore the nature of scholarship in the context of non-university higher education providers that see themselves as teaching-intensive or teaching-only institutions.

While the development of a culture of scholarship within any institution is on first principles desirable, it is the impact of state, and latterly federal, regulation that provides the impetus for change across the sector.

In this article we provide a better understanding of the meaning of scholarship in a regulatory sense, the distinction between the scholarship of teaching and learning versus the scholarship of research, and of the teaching-scholarship-research nexus, all of which support appropriate initial and continuing professional development for academics in the non-university higher education sphere. A model that describes the “culture of scholarship” is provided, and approaches are offered for demonstrating unequivocally that providers have not only addressed the question of scholarship but have also effectively implemented their approach and can provide evidence of acceptable outcomes.

Keywords
scholarship, research, teaching, non-university higher education providers

Introduction
Over the last twenty years, the non-university higher education sector in Australia has experienced substantial change and growth alongside a steady general increase in the number of students in higher education (Ryan, 2012), leading to changing views on the nature and functions of the sector. In this rapidly changing context and climate, new national regulations have been developed to monitor performance across all institutions, both public and private, aimed at establishing a quality foundation for all higher education providers.

The Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs’ (MCEETYA) National Protocols for Australian Higher Education (MCEETYA, 2007), one of the first approaches to a national consensus on the desirable characteristics of higher education, have embedded within them reference to a “culture of scholarship” and a detailed definition of scholarship (p. 19). While there may have been debate about the scope and thrust of the definition of the term “scholarship”, the protocols stated clearly what was required to demonstrate a culture of scholarship in the regulatory sense. The National Protocols have now been replaced by the Higher Education Standards Framework [Threshold Standards] 2011, contained in the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act (Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency [TEQSA], 2011).

In Chapter 2, Section 1.4 of the Threshold Standards it is stated that: “The higher education provider’s academic staff are active in scholarship that inform their teaching and are active in research when engaged in research student supervision.” The word “scholarship” is not defined, and it is separated from “research”, which only comes into play when an academic is “engaged in research student supervision”.

Within this new regulatory framework, non-university higher education providers (NUHEPs) that have been considered, and have considered themselves, until now as “teaching-only institutions”, are encountering a shift in the way their performance and accountability will be viewed and measured. There is a requirement for them to move from a culture of teaching towards a culture where teaching is overtly informed by scholarship, and is documented.

But what precisely is meant by the concept of scholarship? How does it relate to teaching? How can NUHEPs be part of, and contribute to, this shifting culture? Does a culture
A Culture of Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for the Non-University Higher Education Sector

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The Meaning of Scholarship

The international perspective of scholarship

For some time there has been a long-standing debate about “teaching versus research” in higher education. Some researchers (Boyer, 1990; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997), however, argue that academic work should be seen in a wider context, where teaching is elevated through the notion of scholarship to an equal status with research. This notion continues to be discussed and examined today (Andresen, 2000; Brew, 2006; Kreber, 2002; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000; Vardi & Quin, 2010). The term “scholarship” is, however, often confused with, and/or used interchangeably with the term “research”; although there may be similarities and some overlap, the two concepts are different activities.

Boyer’s (1990) perspective of scholarship, which began in the United States and later spread to Canada and Australia (Taylor, 1993), tackled the debate of teaching versus research by offering an innovative viewpoint that challenged the traditional way in which teachers/academics work and thought about their work.

The time has come to... give the familiar and honorable term ‘scholarship’ a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of a scholar also means stepping back from one’s investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one’s knowledge effectively to students (Boyer, 1990, p. 16).

Boyer argued that teaching is a process that should convey intellectual and educational integrity, closely linking teaching and scholarship into a “scholarship of teaching”:

Scholarship is not an esoteric appendage; it is at the heart of what the profession is all about... and to weaken faculty commitment for scholarship... is to undermine the undergraduate experience, regardless of the academic setting (Boyer, 1987, p. 131).

Boyer’s scholarship framework is based on the concept of knowledge and how it is perceived, advanced, and applied in society. His framework stratifies the work of an academic into four separate, but overlapping, dimensions. These are the:

- scholarship of discovery
- scholarship of integration
- scholarship of application
- scholarship of teaching.

The scholarship of discovery is closely connected to the notion of research, which incorporates the institutional climate that accompanies it:

Not just the outcomes, but the process, and especially the passion, give meaning to the effort. The advancement of knowledge can generate an almost palpable excitement in the life of an educational institution (Boyer, 1990, p. 17).

The scholarship of integration relates to academics drawing meaning from isolated facts and bringing facts together, forming them into patterns within and across disciplines. This is achieved by undertaking “serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research” (Boyer, 1990, p. 19), focusing on “making connections across disciplines” (p. 18).

The scholarship of application refers to how knowledge is applied toward the solution of problems. Applied knowledge connects scholarship with practice, contributing to the welfare of individuals, the community, and educational institutions.

Boyer’s scholarship of teaching incorporates three aspects: well informed and knowledgeable teachers, teaching that...
promotes active and critical learning in students, and the recognition that teachers are also learners (Boyer, 1990, p. 24).

Boyer’s four dimensions intersect and overlap, and can combine in varying ways at different times and in different contexts.

Rice (1992) expanded Boyer’s framework by incorporating the additional perspective of “learning”. The “scholarship of teaching and learning” (SoTL) focuses on the impact of teaching on the students’ learning experience. It is “scholarly inquiry into how students ‘make meaning’ out of what the teacher says and does” (Rice, 1992, p. 125).

Scholarship, according to Clement and Grant (2010, p. 101), “is the beating heart of academic work”. It contributes to “intellectual curiosity, rigorous argument, judicious use of evidence, a depth of understanding gained through serious engagement with the work of others, erudition, learnedness” for academics and students alike.

Boyer’s work was further expanded and strengthened by Glassick et al. (1997) who developed a new paradigm of scholarship by identifying six areas for evaluating different forms of scholarship. For them, teaching scholarship must focus on teaching as an intellectual activity, and ensure that teaching comprises the following:

- Clear goals – goals must state clearly the basic purpose of the work, clearly define the objectives, and identify the important questions.
- Adequate preparation – scholars should demonstrate knowledge of existing scholarship in the field, possess the necessary skills, and bring together the necessary resources.
- Appropriate methods – scholars should use appropriate methods effectively for the desired learning outcomes, and modify them as the circumstances develop.
- Significant results – scholarship must achieve significant outcomes, add to the field of knowledge, and explore ways to further enhance learning.
- Effective presentation – suitable style and effective communication must be used to enhance students learning.
- Reflective critique – self-evaluation and peer-critiques can improve the quality of future work (Glassick et al., 1997, p. 36).

A culture of inquiry is fundamental to the scholarship of teaching, and involves being well-informed about the pedagogy of one’s discipline as well as being critically reflective (Andresen & Webb, 2000; Schön, 1995).

Although there appears to be an enormous variation in the definition of scholarship, it is generally agreed that the concept of SoT (and SoTL) has made, and continues to make, a major contribution to the changing role of teachers in the educational context of the non-university higher education sector. In a quickly evolving new knowledge society, the role of the teacher is being reconfigured into a new type of professional teacher and academic whose multifaceted roles blend, and where the teaching-research divide is no longer so clearly defined, as De Weert (2009) explains:

The teaching-research nexus is no longer a simple dichotomy but is linked to various aspects of academic work in a continuous way. Both components encompass an increasingly heterogeneous range of activities. This may lead to more complex configurations and particular tasks, and also to creative solutions as to how to increase the students’ exposure to research. The latter would constitute a genuine reinterpretation of what academic professionalism is all about (p. 151).

Over the past two decades, a new educational context around the world, and in Australia in particular, has emerged in which the role of teachers and academics in higher education, including the non-university higher education sector, has diversified and become more complex. The debate about effective teaching continues, with institutional and government policies and plans focusing on evaluating and improving the quality of the educational experience.

The advancement of knowledge can generate an almost palpable excitement in the life of an educational institution.

The Australian perspective of scholarship and its relation to regulation

For some time, successive Australian governments have been pursuing improved quality and a higher degree of accountability and transparency in higher education. The recent change in the Australian regulatory framework, through the establishment of TEQSA as a new national regulator, exemplifies this direction.

A new agenda, however, is apparent — that of minimum, or more appropriately, threshold, standards that must be satisfied for an institution to be permitted (registered) to offer higher education awards. It is also clear that because of the lack of an accompanying definition of scholarship in the TEQSA Threshold Standards, each higher education institution is...
expected to understand and apply its own meaning to the term “scholarship” in the context of higher education.

If the 2007 MCEETYA National Protocols are re-visited, a deeper and clearer meaning of scholarship, and especially a culture of scholarship, emerges. According to the protocols, scholarship in relation to learning and teaching involves:

- demonstrating current subject knowledge and an ongoing intellectual engagement in primary and allied disciplines, and their theoretical underpinnings;
- keeping abreast of the literature and new research, including by interaction with peers, and using that knowledge to inform learning and teaching;
- encouraging students to be critical, creative thinkers and enhancing teaching understanding through interaction with students;
- engaging in relevant professional practice where appropriate to the discipline;
- being informed about the literature of learning and teaching in relevant disciplines and being committed to ongoing development of teaching practice; and
- focusing on the learning outcomes of students (p. 19).

In other words, ideal scholars encourage, coax, engage, and interact with students in their quest for knowledge and understanding of a discipline. Scholars achieve this by having a clear grasp of the theory and practice in their discipline that they continually refine through reference to the emerging literature and through interaction with peers. They also use their understanding of the theory and practice of teaching and learning at a higher education level to fulfill these aims. Above all, they provide their students with clear expectations of what is required and how students might achieve their desired level of achievement.

The comprehensive definition of scholarship provided in the protocols is condensed in the Threshold Standards in the TEQSA Act, and represented as a general expectation. Chapter 2, Section 1.4 of the Standards states that it is expected that “The higher education provider’s academic staff are active in scholarship that inform their teaching and are active in research when engaged in research student supervision.” The underlying assumption is that each institution will have a clear understanding of the meaning of the word “scholarship” and to a lesser extent the word “research”.

This requirement is replicated in Part C of TEQSA’s Application Guide for the Renewal of Registration, where applicants must attach to their application “evidence of initiatives taken to support sustaining a culture of scholarship and professional practice, including (as appropriate) evidence that staff involved in research supervision are active in research relevant to the discipline area or areas in which they are supervising.”

It may be useful at this stage to draw a distinction between scholarship and research. Research is a widely used term with a variety of definitions. According to the National Protocols (MCEETYA, 2007):

Research² comprises creative work and artistic endeavours undertaken systematically in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humans, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. Research is characterised by originality and includes creative activity and performance. It has investigation as a primary objective, the outcome of which is new knowledge, with or without a specific practical application, or new or improved materials, products, devices, processes or services (p. 18).

The National Protocols identify three broad types of research activity:

- Basic research is experimental and theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge without a specific application in view. It consists of pure basic research which is work undertaken to acquire new knowledge without looking for long-term benefits other than advancement of knowledge and strategic basic research which is work directed into specific broad areas in the expectation of useful discoveries thus providing the broad base of knowledge necessary for the solution of recognised practical problems.
- Applied research is original work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge with a specific application in view. It is undertaken either to determine possible uses for the findings of basic research or to determine new ways of achieving some specific and predetermined objectives.
- Experimental development is systematic work, using existing knowledge gained from research or practical experience that is directed to producing new materials, products or devices, to installing new processes, systems and services, or to improving substantially those already produced or installed (pp. 18, 19).

² Based on the ABS definition of Research and Development, with minor amendment to provide for more explicit recognition of performance and creative arts.
A Culture of Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for the Non-University Higher Education Sector

Wayne Robinson
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the “Australian university” category. It is therefore of central importance for NUHEPs not to confuse scholarship in the Australian context, with research, where research is broadly defined as the acquisition of new knowledge. Scholarship in the Australian context does not have this latter requirement.

The preceding analysis of the international view of scholarship encompasses a broad approach including teaching, research, integration, and application, and the more restricted regulatory view of scholarship that focuses on scholarship as it relates to teaching and learning. This leads to the conclusion that for NUHEPs, scholarship should be considered as the “scholarship of teaching and learning”. The national regulatory framework aligns well with this view, and is sustained by a number of prominent authors.

It is suggested that the NUHEPs, by adopting this perspective, will have a clear view of what is expected in the national context, which at the same time removes the confounding factor of the need for them to address the scholarship of research.

Scholarship in the Context of Non-University Higher Education

“Scholarship” and “research” are concepts generally perceived as closely bound to the nature of higher education, in particular the university sector, while NUHEPs have traditionally focused on teaching. Although the mission and values of higher education institutions may vary, the changing context and the new regulatory framework governing higher education in Australia have increasingly challenged NUHEPs to reconsider their role and culture.

Boyer’s concept of “scholarship of teaching” is directly relevant and applicable as the non-university higher education sector moves into this new phase: “When defined as scholarship... teaching both educates and entices future scholars” (1990, p. 23, original emphasis). His concept is linked to transforming knowledge, encouraging and stimulating “students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning... Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subjects taught” (1990, pp. 23-24). The act of teaching, which encapsulates what is known, how knowledge is acquired, and how knowledge is disseminated, therefore aims to facilitate student learning and development as well as the achievement of significant educational goals (Kreber, 2003; Trigwell, 2000).

Through the introduction and application of Boyer’s concept of scholarship of learning and teaching, the process of teaching in NUHEPs is being transformed into a scholarly activity that understands educational theory, and, through skills and knowledge, puts theory into practice. This objective is a central part of the National Protocols and is essential to good practice in learning and teaching in the non-university higher educational context.

The fundamental issue that might now be addressed is how NUHEPs can lay the foundations for putting scholarship into practice. It is also important to consider the approaches that NUHEPs might use to demonstrate that they have initiated and embraced a culture of scholarship if each of the criteria contained in the National Protocols is taken as the foundation for a culture of scholarship about teaching and learning. Each criterion for scholarship stated in the National Protocols will be taken in turn, with suggestions about how they might be satisfied.

- **Demonstrate current subject knowledge and an ongoing intellectual engagement in primary and allied disciplines, and their theoretical underpinnings.** This may be achieved by academic staff participating in ongoing professional development activities through attendance/presenting at discipline-specific seminars and conferences at national and international level; enrolment as postgraduate research students; or engaging in research on discipline-specific issues.

  For NUHEPs, scholarship should be considered as the “scholarship of teaching and learning.”

- **Keep abreast of the literature and new research, including by interaction with peers, and use that knowledge to inform learning and teaching.** Academic staff may attend in-house seminars and conferences; regularly access electronic databases and relevant library holdings through subject descriptions/source reference material, in particular monographs and journals; interact with peers by discussing teaching with colleagues, asking a peer to review one’s teaching practice, and participating in a “community of practice” that focuses on teaching and learning. Most importantly, staff must demonstrate that the current literature and new research findings are integrated into material they teach.

- **Encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers and enhance teaching understanding through interaction with student.** Academic staff must engage with students in lectures/tutorials through the use of challenging and relevant questions and scenarios; demonstrate an emphasis on embedding graduate attributes; seek formal feedback from students on all aspects of their teaching; provide regular, appropriate and supportive feedback to students; and incorporate this feedback into their teaching.
The challenges for teachers working in NUHEPs lie in building the experience and skills required to develop a culture of scholarship. It also supports the creation of a positive teaching and learning environment. The following section outlines the professional approach for fostering scholarship in NUHEPs by drawing on the Melbourne Institute of Technology's (MIT) Scholarship and Research Plan for 2012-20163. In the Plan, scholarship specifically refers to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and research refers to the acquisition of new knowledge in either a specific discipline or in the broad area of learning and teaching.

MIT focuses primarily on teaching, and employs staff who are particularly committed to scholarship and to research, both in learning and teaching, although some staff conduct research in their particular areas of expertise.

The Scholarship and Research Plan is buttressed by MIT’s commitment to fund continuing professional education for academic staff4. Using a points system, each academic staff member must accumulate a minimum number of continuing professional education points per annum. One significant aspect of this is the funding made available for casual staff to participate, so that they are paid for the professional development sessions that they attend.

Planning an Approach to Scholarship: One NUHEP’s Experience

NUHEPs acknowledge that teaching, scholarly activity, and research are all complementary, and hence have mutually supportive roles. It is generally also acknowledged that scholarly activity accompanies quality in teaching. This activity supports staff development as well as institutional image and reputation, and it influences student recruitment.

· Engage in relevant professional practice where appropriate to the discipline. Staff should contribute to professional associations and be provided with opportunities to do so.

· Be informed about the literature of learning and teaching in relevant disciplines and be committed to ongoing development of teaching practice. Teachers must demonstrate an understanding of pedagogical principles relevant to the student group being taught. Teaching and learning expertise might be gained by undertaking professional development, attending conferences related to pedagogical developments in teaching, or enrolling in postgraduate courses such as Graduate Certificates in Higher Education.

· Focus on the teaching outcomes of students. This reflects a student-centred approach to teaching involving the process of reflecting on and improving teaching practice, so that learning outcomes of students improve (Prosser, 2008). This may be achieved through teaching to the learning outcomes of a subject, which may be measured through assessment and feedback from students, and by evaluating the feedback, which is then incorporated into the teaching process. The ideal place to demonstrate reflection on the process is through the staff member’s portfolio of activities.

It is further suggested that each institution’s approach to scholarship be annually assessed through the sum of each academic staff member’s portfolio. Anecdotally, a number of institutions, and more commonly the universities, insist on developing and maintaining a portfolio that records their academics’ activities and achievements.

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The MIT Plan rests on four major pillars:

- entrenching a culture of scholarship
- developing a research culture in learning and teaching
- fostering research in the institute’s academic disciplines
- research-based honours degrees.

For the purposes of this paper we will concentrate on the first two pillars.

Staff at MIT are encouraged to:

- demonstrate current subject knowledge by reflecting and reporting in their portfolio on their personal reading and investigations, highlighting their understanding and grasp of current concepts in their discipline
- keep abreast of the literature and new research by participating in seminars/workshops at MIT; attending local seminars/workshops; attending/presenting at local, national, and international conferences; and reporting evidence that current literature and new research is integrated as a continuous cycle of improvement into the academic program taught
- encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers by mapping, embedding, teaching, and assessing generic graduate attributes through each unit in the respective courses, and by providing evidence that staff reinforce to students the importance of acquiring generic graduate attributes
- engage in relevant professional practice
- be informed about the literature of learning and teaching in relevant disciplines, and to be committed to ongoing development of teaching practice by participating in workshops on learning and teaching at institute, state, national, and international levels and where appropriate, complete a Graduate Certificate in Education [Higher Education]
- focus on the teaching outcomes of students through analysis of student performance and student feedback.

In order to achieve a culture of scholarship in learning and teaching, MIT will initiate a collaborative research program in the broad field of teaching and learning in higher education with other non self-accrediting institutions and universities, aiming to identify and develop a specific research proposal that will be supported by start-up funds from the institute. Recognising and rewarding scholarship in teaching supports the status of teaching. This will be achieved by awarding annual prizes for good teaching, offering grants and professional development aimed at improving teaching and learning, and improving the status of teaching so that teachers, and teaching, is more appreciated and understood.

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The Importance of Initial and Continuing Professional Development

Given the widespread, and possibly universal, acceptance by the professions of the centrality of continuing education to the health of the professions, continuing professional education is at the core of the future success of NUHEPs. This is a manifestation of segments of the culture of scholarship at work. As there is little question that the expectation of students, graduates, and regulators will rise over time, NUHEPs will need to embrace working models of continuing professional education both individually and nationally.

Good practice in this area demands both initial and continuing development. All academic staff should undergo a comprehensive induction program with, at its centre, the theory and practice of teaching and learning being part of the institution’s culture of scholarship. At this time, new staff members should be left with no illusions about the expectations of their employer in this regard. The induction program should have at least three major components: briefing on the strategic direction of the institution centred on its approach to scholarship, a handbook for reference, and a series of induction seminars led by both senior and experienced staff.

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Continuing professional education builds on the induction program, but can be tailored to meet individuals’ specific needs in the context of their discipline and cementing a desire to become more familiar with the theory and practice of learning and teaching in higher education. In many ways it will be up to individual staff members to choose the best approach for themselves, on the understanding that they can show through, for example, their portfolio, that they are achieving the dual expectations of their institute and their own profession.

It would be of value for NUHEPs to construct a nationally accepted guide to good practice in continuing professional education. This could be achieved through an industry organisation such as the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) or through the newly formed Chairs of Academic Boards of Non-University Higher Education Providers.

One approach would be to formalise expectations by instituting a points system in which there is a threshold for...
A Culture of Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for the Non-University Higher Education Sector

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continuing education relevant to learning and teaching in higher education, and a similar threshold for continuing education in discipline-related fields. For example, every academic staff member might be required to accumulate a minimum of ten points per annum, where each point equated to one hour of formal professional development. There may be higher expectations for senior staff who act as mentors to a number of staff. Points could be accumulated through attendance at, or participation in, in-house seminars and workshops, or state, national, and international conferences.

The Issue of Scholarship and Sessional/Casual Academic Staff

Very few members of academic staff employed by NUHEPs are on long-term contracts, and therefore the health of NUHEPs is dependent on the employment of casual labour. If NUHEPs are to successfully fulfil their role as educational institutions, and through that demonstrate that they foster a culture of scholarship, the importance of continuing professional education for sessional/casual staff cannot be overstated.

Continuing professional development should be a central plank of any organisation. Specifically, organisations that rely on the employment of sessional/casual labour should be explicit in their expectation that staff will take part in continuing professional education. Further, the working environment should be such that staff come to regard taking part as furthering their career prospects, and will not be financially penalised by doing so.

As outlined above, the organisation’s expectation can be quantified by the construction of a system that measures participation in continuing education with each staff member expected to achieve the stated threshold for it. A given is that the continuing education will focus on the principles of the enhancement of the staff member’s scholarly activities.

Sessional/casual staff members can be recompensed for their involvement through payment of conference/seminar registration fees, travel, and for hours spent participating in continuing education. As a rough guide the organisation might allocate a minimum of $400 per staff member per year in its annual budget to achieve these aims. It is not intended, nor is it expected, that organisations will meet all costs for all occasions, as continuing education has a dual benefit to both the organisation and the individual member of staff.

Evaluating Scholarship

Most NUHEPs are at the beginning of entrenching a culture of scholarship within their organisations. This, combined with the comparative difficulty of setting key performance indicators, presents both opportunities and challenges for what might be termed a rather nebulous aspiration. Nevertheless, the following may be useful in at least stimulating discussion about evaluating the scholarship of learning and teaching:

• academic staff, on induction, prepare a portfolio that contains a section about learning and teaching, including emphasis on their aspirations and achievements in the area of the scholarship of learning and teaching
• academic staff regularly attend relevant conferences/workshops/seminars related to the scholarship of teaching and learning
• feedback questionnaires intended for students contain questions specifically directed to relevant aspects of the scholarship of learning and teaching
• staff member provides the students with feedback on the results of the questionnaire
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The sector’s primary purpose, and in most senses its reason for existence, is to support the learning and teaching of higher education, and a similar threshold for continuing education in discipline-related fields. For example, every academic staff member might be required to accumulate a minimum of ten points per annum, where each point equated to one hour of formal professional development. There may be higher expectations for senior staff who act as mentors to a number of staff. Points could be accumulated through attendance at, or participation in, in-house seminars and workshops, or state, national, and international conferences.

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Evaluating Scholarship

Most NUHEPs are at the beginning of entrenching a culture of scholarship within their organisations. This, combined with the comparative difficulty of setting key performance indicators, presents both opportunities and challenges for what might be termed a rather nebulous aspiration. Nevertheless, the following may be useful in at least stimulating discussion about evaluating the scholarship of learning and teaching:

• academic staff, on induction, prepare a portfolio that contains a section about learning and teaching, including emphasis on their aspirations and achievements in the area of the scholarship of learning and teaching
• academic staff regularly attend relevant conferences/workshops/seminars related to the scholarship of teaching and learning
• feedback questionnaires intended for students contain questions specifically directed to relevant aspects of the scholarship of learning and teaching
• staff member provides the students with feedback on the results of the questionnaire

Continuing professional development should be a central plank of any organisation.

The sector’s primary purpose, and in most senses its reason for
existence, is as a provider of higher education, and a significant component of that purpose is to exhibit unequivocally that each provider has not only embraced, but has embedded in its very fibre, a culture of scholarship of learning and teaching.

The sector has before it, in the international literature and in national standards, clear definitions and guidelines about what scholarship in teaching and learning encompasses. However, until now there is little evidence of the sector demonstrating that it has a consensus view about the meaning of, formulation of plans for, and actual implementation of scholarly approaches.

In this paper we have suggested for pragmatic reasons that the definition of scholarship contained in the National Protocols and in the TEQSA Threshold Standards form the basis of any institution’s approach to planning its strategic approach to the scholarship of learning and teaching.

We have further suggested that there should be no doubt that scholarship in the broad national sense does not include research as it is presently defined. That does not mean that NUHEPs should not encourage research activity, but that is another story.

References


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Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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Abstract
The private tertiary education sector has experienced ongoing growth in Australia. Based on current trends, this sector is predicted to grow, contributing to the social and economic development of Australia and many other countries. While the private tertiary education sector is experiencing growth and tough competition from other providers, it is important and timely to revisit the quality assurance framework used in all tertiary education providers to assure internal quality and meeting external requirements. This paper is aimed to encourage debate on the need for private tertiary education institutions to develop internal capacity for quality assurance with the view to using a single framework to meet both internal and external requirements in a highly regulated tertiary education environment. The paper outlines the current dilemmas in some institutions that use a range of different quality frameworks, including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the Vocational Education and Training (VET) quality framework monitored by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the Higher Education quality framework monitored by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS). We argue that there is a need for institutions to develop a single framework to meet internal and external needs that are economical, sustainable, and morally responsible in order to improve academic quality and to monitor standards.

Keywords
private tertiary education, quality assurance, regulation, sustainable framework

Introduction
The Australian tertiary education sector consists of public and private universities, self-accrediting institutions, private for-profit vocational and higher education providers, not-for-profit vocational education and training (VET) and higher education providers, and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes. Government policy has enabled approved private tertiary education providers to offer VET and higher education courses supported by publicly funded income contingent student loans, contributing to the growth of education provision in this sector. Despite fierce competition with other education providers and changes in government policy related to international student visa requirements, the private tertiary education sector is proving to be sustainable with ongoing growth (Bennett et al., 2012). While the government lacks an overall strategy for private tertiary education in terms of size, scale, and diversity, it is clear that market choice and demand for this sector’s offerings is continuing to grow (Coaldlake, 2009).

Despite the growth of private tertiary education (Bennett et al., 2012; Ryan, 2012), research is limited in the Australian context (Wheelahan et al., 2012). Limited studies in the Australian context by Shah and Brown (2009), Shah and Lewis (2010), Shah and Nair (2011a, 2011b), and Shah and Nair (2012) outline the growth of the sector, factors contributing to its growth, challenges related to quality assurance, student experience, and the uptake of flexible modes of delivery. The most recent studies in Australia by Shah and Nair (in press) argue the need for public and private collaboration and the need for government policies to encourage private providers to increase access and participation for disadvantaged students. Shah and Nair argue that the private tertiary education sector has provided a second chance for many domestic students who did not have access to tertiary education in the first instance through university.

A report by Edwards, Coates, and Radloff (2009), provides an interesting insight into how private tertiary education providers perceive their place in the sector. The authors found that the
Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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Private tertiary education “is confident in their ability to deliver quality education qualifications, aware of their student body and the industries to which they are linked, and ambitious to improve, grow and prove that their degrees are of higher quality than of those in other parts of the sector” (p. iv).

Despite their growing presence in education provision, doubts remain about the sustainability of the private tertiary education sector, given shifts in government policy, changing dynamics of international education, increased competition for students between and within the different types of providers, and externally monitored regulation and accreditation requirements using externally set and monitored standards, compliance with external reference points, and risk-based quality assurance reviews.

The future growth of the private tertiary education in terms of student growth and number of providers is uncertain as the government encourages the growth of universities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Plans to increase student enrolments in universities have seen the expansion of university pathway colleges to attract and recruit students who have been traditionally targeted by private tertiary education providers. According to Shah and Nair (in press), the government’s social inclusion agenda and the rewards linked to it have resulted in the formation of new pathway colleges in universities, or the growth of existing university colleges as a mean of providing pathways for students and attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some Australian universities have also formed partnerships with private tertiary education providers to offer purpose-built pathway programs articulating into specific university courses.

The paper outlines the current complexity for some private tertiary education providers who use different quality management frameworks to assure the quality of education provision for English language teaching and VET and higher education delivery. We argue that there is a need for institutions to use a single quality management framework to meet VET and higher education internal and external requirements in a highly regulated environment. Importantly, there is a need to shift the quality assurance focus away from compliance to an improvement-led approach.

Current Dilemma

The tertiary education sector in Australia includes providers offering higher education and VET courses. Historically, the quality assurance arrangements in the two sectors of tertiary education have been different. While English language providers are not part of tertiary education, complexity exists with different registration and accreditation requirements.

Some institutions offering English language courses are required to register with NEAS, with the attendant cyclical accreditation requirements. Until 2011, colleges offering VET qualifications were regulated by States/Territory governments and monitored against the 12 standards of the (then) Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). With the exception of Victoria and Western Australia, this has now been replaced by the VET Quality Framework and includes the NVR Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTO) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Until 2012, all non-university higher education providers (then also called non-self-accrediting institutions, or NSAIs) offering higher education diplomas, associate degrees, and higher qualifications were also registered and accredited by States/Territory governments that used the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes to monitor quality assurance. All higher education providers are now registered and accredited by Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

The provider accreditation and compliance requirements in each of these three quality assurance frameworks are different. The complexity in demonstrating the management of quality assurance across the three frameworks is considerable for those providers offering the three types of education. The system is more complex in those TAFE institutes that also use the ISO 9000 quality management framework with different criteria used in accreditations and external auditing methodology. Figure 1 below outlines the number of tertiary education institutes that use the ISO 9001-2008 quality management framework. Twenty eight TAFE institutes have ISO accreditation compared to 18 private institutes and 10 universities. The 10 university accreditations with ISO are mostly in non-academic areas such as libraries, facilities, and maintenance.

Figure 1:
Number of tertiary education providers using ISO standards.
The complexity of managing and assuring the quality of Australian tertiary education was highlighted in the Commonwealth Government sponsored 2008 Review of Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The report identified a number of weaknesses in the system, with a particular focus on higher education. In the main, the authors concluded that the system hampered rather than encouraged a focus on student choice or student outcomes and the inconsistent application of the different frameworks across state borders meant that inefficiency and inconsistency was built in, both for the providers and the regulators (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 115). The review also found that the previous regulatory arrangements were complex for providers, especially for those operating across sectoral or state and territory boundaries (p. 182). Research by Wheelahan et al. (2012) outlined the current problem in both universities and TAFE institutes. They argued that universities have well-established processes to ensure the quality of their higher education provision; however, they are less well equipped to ensure the quality of their VET provision, particularly if they only offer a small number of vocational courses. Similarly, TAFE institutes can demonstrate compliance with quality requirements for VET provision, but find the registration, accreditation, and quality assurance requirements of higher education onerous.

The possible merger of TEQSA and ASQA post 2013 may result in the implementation of a single quality assurance framework for all types of tertiary education providers. However, it may continue to place challenges on TAFE institutes and other providers that use ISO standards in addition to the quality assurance framework imposed by TEQSA. The use of different quality assurance frameworks for different purposes raises questions about the effectiveness of the framework for enhancing the core business of education institutions. It also raises important questions about the extent to which teaching staff are required to focus excessively on documentation and paperwork related to policies and processes to meet compliance requirements rather than focussing on pedagogical innovation, academic rigour, and outcomes. The increased focus on compliance requirements may limit innovation in learning and teaching and it may also have a risk-averse effect on academics with different notions of quality.

Despite the use of ISO in TAFEs for more than a decade, there is limited research on its effectiveness in improving educational standards and outcomes. It is timely and worthwhile to undertake research on the effectiveness of compliance-driven quality assurance such as the ISO and VET quality frameworks for improving educational standards and outcomes. The study is important as TEQSA is also using a compliance-driven framework with its full impact on providers yet to be seen. The lack of research on whether a compliance-driven quality framework improves educational standards and outcomes contradicts TEQSA’s new regulatory framework which is also based on compliance driven assessment with increased focus on documentation review.

**National and International Issues around Quality in Private Tertiary Education**

The rise of private tertiary education in Australia, coupled with a lack of government planning for tertiary education provision (Coaldrake, 2009), has brought about significant issues related to quality assurance and standards. Concerns about quality assurance have been raised in the outcomes of external quality audits of 32 private providers by the (former) Australian Universities Quality Agency (now subsumed by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) and by a number of researchers (Shah & Brown, 2009; Shah & Lewis, 2010; Shah & Nair, 2011a; Shah & Stanford, 2009). Some of the recurring concerns are also part of AUQA’s own analysis of 20 private higher education providers (Winchester, 2010). The recurring areas needing improvement across the private higher education sector include institutional governance; a compliance-led quality culture; poor academic leadership; huge reliance on sessional teachers to teach and coordinate courses; a lack of research culture; lower admissions criteria; student equity and access issues; poor investment in staff professional development; a lack of academic support structures to help students in learning; poor alignment between growth, resourcing, and infrastructure; and a huge reliance on international student income in selected fields of education based on skilled migration policies. Due to the nature of some of the concerns related to provision, AUQA decided in 2010 to undertake post-audit visits two years after the release of an audit report to monitor progress on the affirmations and recommendation from the audits (AUQA, 2010).

Concerns about quality in private tertiary education are also found in other countries by various scholars (Jalowiecki, 2001; Lim, 2010; Mok, 2009; Universities UK, 2010). According to Mok (2009), quality issues surrounding private higher education have resulted in student protests in China about the quality of teaching, the status of the degree being offered, and a mismatch between promises and reality after graduation. Similar observations have also been made with regard to the private sector in Malaysia and Singapore with its focus on profit and limited investment in resources and facilities.

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Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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The Polish experience shows that private higher education may have negative impacts including low standards of teaching and institutions focusing on maximising profits, with many institutions experiencing serious staff shortages and a narrow focus on institutional governance (Jalowiecki, 2001). In the United States, high dropout rates and the low quality of education offered by some American private providers is fast becoming a public scandal. At the University of Phoenix, the largest for-profit provider of higher education in the United States, nearly 17 out of every 20 students fail to complete an undergraduate degree within six years (Davis, 2010). According to Davis (2010) some institutions are so desperate for students that they are offering substantial academic credit based on “life experience”, enabling people to receive part, or the whole, of a degree without entering a lecture theatre, taking an exam, or writing an essay. A study by Middlehurst and Woodfield (2004) found that employers have complained about the quality of graduates from local private colleges in Jamaica and Bangladesh in terms of their lack of key skills (communication, problem-solving, and teamwork), poor quality training, and the market relevance of their courses.

The Effectiveness of Various QA Models in Australian Tertiary Education

The core business of tertiary education institutions that offer both higher and vocational education is learning and teaching — and in some cases, research, within institutions offering postgraduate programs. Non-academic areas such as library, facilities, student support, IT, and other areas are also important; however, these services are aligned to serve the core functions of the institution. Quality assurance frameworks implemented in tertiary education have to focus on setting and monitoring standards and measuring and enhancing academic outcomes. For example, in the core business of learning and teaching, the quality assurance framework needs to set and monitor standards related to course design, course reviews, course delivery, teaching quality, assessments, academic outcomes, and the student experience. The use of any quality assurance framework needs to engage academics who are in the forefront of assuring the quality of education and research.

Analysis of the Former AUQA Audits

Few studies have been undertaken in the Australian context on the effectiveness of AUQA audits, despite ten years of external review. The review of higher education in Australia in 2008 highlighted the weaknesses with a focus on the quality assurance frameworks used in universities and non-university higher education providers. Shah et al. (2010) outlined the success and deficiencies of the quality assurance framework used in Australian higher education. Shah (2011) suggested that the AUQA audit processes have been effective in a number of areas, for example quality assurance of offshore international education, implementation of quality assurance framework, using data to track and improve institutional performance, and cyclical review of academic and non-academic areas. However his findings suggest that a decade of external audits has failed to monitor standards, ensure compliance with external reference points, or enhance student experience.

Analysis of VET Audits and the AQTF Framework

Various studies in Australia highlight the limitations of the (former) AQTF framework used in the VET sector. The limitations range from lack of consistent implementation by States/Territory governments, to lack of compliance to the AQTF standards by providers in the VET sector (Abola & Lambert, 2010; Meyers & Blom, 2004). Gallagher and Anderson (2005) were highly critical of the adherence to the standards by a number of private RTOs under the AQTF, arguing that:

Low levels of compliance were found among a majority of RTOs with respect to the AQTF standards for the development of appropriate learning and assessment strategies, and the provision of accurate and ethical marketing and advertising, and of access and equity and client services. Training plans and resources were ‘generally inadequate’, and misinterpretation of a number of units of competency was ‘a serious problem’. A large proportion of RTO assessments neither complied with the AQTF guidelines or training package requirements for validity and reliability, nor focused on the application of knowledge and skills to all aspects or standards of workplace performance (Gallagher & Anderson, 2005, p. 4).

In 2007, two key instruments as part of AQTF were implemented to gather feedback from students and employers. The two instruments (learner engagement and employer satisfaction) were used to assess the quality of RTOs. Six years of implementation and monitoring by State and Territory governments has not produced any national report on the findings of the two quality indicators used in RTOs and the areas needing improvement. The issues around ethical conduct of the surveys with respondents are unclear, with fears that the data could be manipulated to avoid identification of high-risk providers. The experience of some RTOs suggest that an AQTF compliance audit is a “short term or quick fix tick box” buried with excessive paperwork and documentation rather than a sustainable improvement-led approach that engages teachers and practitioners to prove and improve educational quality. The lack of rigour and risk-based assessment (financial and academic) in relation to AQTF audits has resulted in the
Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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collapse of 16 private vocational colleges in the last three years (Healy, 2010) due to poor quality monitoring and lack of risk based AQTF audits.

Analysis of the Effectiveness of ISO Standards

Studies of the effectiveness or impact of the ISO framework in tertiary education indicate mixed views. For example, according to Houston (2007), the literature is largely silent on the use of recognised quality improvement tools such as ISO in relation to academic functions. He argues that ISO offers much to those in universities who subscribe to the image of the university as business. Research conducted by Vazzana, Elfrink, and Bachman (2000) from a large-scale longitudinal study of ISO processes in US business colleges noted that less than 25% of institutions used the “scientific tools” in relation to teaching and learning. Among the benefits that educational institutions saw from the ISO 9000 quality management system were improvements in organisational structure and day-to-day operations (Bevans-Gonzales & Nair, 2004). According to Waks and Moti (1999) “...it checks how the system is being run based on the assumption that proper functioning coupled with the development of internal control will yield better educational and scholastic results” (p. 254).

Authors such as John Peters (1999) support ISO 9000 as being a global quality system for educational institutions to ensure that educational providers are keeping their promises to the student-customer, not necessarily to have the education content standardised. According to Alderman (1999), “quality in tertiary education is not about satisfying the customer (i.e. the student), but is rather about transforming learners, which is not the same thing at all ... an ISO 9000 approach will not and cannot lead, by itself, to the achievement of quality: the most it can lead to is short- to medium-, to mid-term bureaucratic procedural compliance” (p. 262).

Studies by Bevans-Gonzales and Nair (2004) have shown confusion among staff about how an ISO 9000 quality management framework, requiring significant documentation of every process, is applied in tertiary education. Their study showed that teachers were frustrated at the time required to be spent on administration, away from the classroom, concerned about “more paperwork, less class time”, as they felt they already had full workloads. Vanguard Consulting Ltd (1994) surveyed 647 ISO 9000-certified corporate firms in the UK and revealed that only 15% of the organisations believed that they benefited from the ISO 9000. Brown and Wiele (1995) conducted another survey study on 160 ISO certified organisations in Australia and found that the respondents reported no significant improvements in market share, productivity, costs, staff motivation, or wastage rates. These findings are consistent with the results of another survey (Lee, 1995) conducted on 61 companies in Hong Kong.

Studies by Nair and Prajogo (2009) suggest several motives for ISO certification. They include enhanced reputation and fulfilling customer requirements, improving organisational processes, and procedure documentation. The literature on the relationship between ISO 9000 certification and organisational performance has reported mixed results. For example, Terziovski, Samson, and Dow (1997) found no link between ISO 9000 and organisational performance among Australian firms. Similarly, Singels, Ruel, and van de Water (2001) failed to find a link between ISO 9000 and organisational performance among Dutch firms. Briscoe et al. (2005) examined the relationship between ISO 9000 internalisation and quality and financial performance among small US and Canadian companies. The authors found that greater internalisation of ISO 9000 standards led to higher performance. Studies by Lima de Oliveira (1999) and Martinez-Costa and Martinez-Lorente (2003) found that ISO 9000 certification had no effect on financial performance in Brazilian and Spanish companies.

The literature on the relationship between ISO 9000 certification and organisational performance has reported mixed results.

The rigour of ISO 9000 standards and the extent to which such standards are based on research findings has also emerged in the literature. Corbett and Kirsch (2001) noted that, “surprisingly, the ISO 9000 standard has not been the subject of sustained scholarly analysis” (p. 328).

The brief review of literature on the effectiveness of ISO in tertiary education provides no evidence about how the framework could enhance course design standards, course delivery or teaching standards; academic and non-academic support standards; or strategies that could be used to track and improve academic outcomes such as student retention, student progression, and student attainment of employability skills.

Does Quality Assurance Matter? A Moral Perspective

Quality assurance has emerged in tertiary education as a result of many external pressures. These pressures include the growth of tertiary education, both in terms of the number and types of providers and the student population; increased internationalisation of tertiary education (onshore and offshore); flexible modes of delivery; competition between providers in Australia and overseas; and increased stakeholder demand for quality education. The external pressures have...
played a key role in the renewal of quality in many countries, with governments developing policy instruments to improve the quality and productivity of tertiary education. An example includes setting targets for under-represented students to access higher education in Australia, with concurrent policies aiming to increase the quality and regulation of institutions.

From a moral perspective, quality assurance in tertiary education should contribute to social development such as creation of a civil society and tackling contemporary issues facing society. The moral perspective also includes the extent to which quality assurance in tertiary education contributes to economic development and productivity. Various scholars have emphasised the moral purpose of tertiary education. Schwartz (2011) argues that tertiary education institutions are losing sight of their ethical function in their desire to turn a profit. According to Yorke (2000), there is a moral imperative on a tertiary education institution to do the most it can to facilitate the learning of its students (and, of course, to serve its external clients through consultancy and other services). Beck (1992) argued that organisations must be alert to potential danger or risk of not performing in ways that are morally and politically acceptable, as well as economically viable. McWilliams (2004) suggested that for tertiary education institutions, risk of not performing means guarding against the danger of waste (of resources), of failure (of students), and of declined standards (intellectual, ethical, and moral).

Shah and Nair (in press) highlight the low access and participation of disadvantaged students in private tertiary education in Australia and they raised questions about the extent to which tertiary education institutions are fulfilling their moral purpose of providing equal access to education for all groups of people. They suggest that the paradigm has shifted from meeting the needs of society and fulfilling the ethical function of tertiary education to doing the most it can to facilitate the learning of its students (and, of course, to serve its external clients through consultancy and other services). Leadership also requires the management of effective corporate and academic governance with accountabilities at all levels. The second element relates to teaching and research as the core business of the institution. The third element involves the alignment of various academic and non-academic support services with the core business of the institution. The fourth element of the framework includes improvement-led approach that enables schools and faculties to take ownership of their process and outcomes rather than compliance or an inspectorate regime imposed on institutions or individuals. The increased focus on compliance and risk-based quality assurance frameworks requires institutions to develop a framework that:

1. meets the external requirements of national regulators that are driven by a compliance and risk framework
2. is an improvement-led approach to genuinely track and improve academic quality and monitor standards with a view to improving quality and engaging staff and students in the process
3. is economically sustainable regardless of the size of the institutions, and fulfils the moral purpose of an educational institution.

Figure 2 represents a framework of quality assurance that could be used in both VET and higher education. The framework is based on current developments in Australian tertiary education and it takes account of the externally set and monitored compliance requirements (to meet external requirements) and an improvement-led approach (for internal enhancements and innovation). The increased focus on an improvement-led approach is to develop internal capacity that complements external needs. The framework consists of six key elements that are informed by the internal and external operating environment of tertiary education.

First, the framework requires leadership and direction. This requires the development of a long term strategy that is aligned with institutional resourcing and strategies to manage academic and financial risk. Leadership also requires the management of effective corporate and academic governance with accountabilities at all levels. The second element relates to teaching and research as the core business of the institution. The fifth element includes systematic improvement-led quality framework focusses on the extent to which various plans, policies, and processes are implemented consistently and have a positive impact on organisations.

Various studies suggest that academics and other staff have the tendency to accept an improvement-led approach that enables schools and faculties to take ownership of their process and outcomes rather than compliance or an inspectorate regime imposed on institutions or individuals. The increased focus on compliance and risk-based quality assurance frameworks requires institutions to develop a framework that:

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An Ideal Framework

The formation of TEQSA and ASQA, and the use of different quality management frameworks to meet VET, higher education, ISO, and NEAS requires the development of a single, sustainable, and cost effective framework to reduce the current regulatory burden on institutions. The development of a single framework also requires institutions to rethink the economic benefit of using different kinds of frameworks and the possible effectiveness of a single framework for improving their core business. Historically, VET and ISO quality assurance frameworks have been driven by a compliance culture with increased focus on improving systems and processes that placed excessive reliance on documentation. In contrast, an improvement-led quality framework focusses on the extent to which various plans, policies, and processes are implemented consistently and have a positive impact on organisations.

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Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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Figure 2:
Quality and improvement framework.

External operating environment

Leadership and directions
Institutional strategy and resourcing
Risk management
Academic and corporate governance
Setting accountability

Enhancements
Innovation in core business, rewarding excellence and improvements, engaging staff and students, setting new priorities, and targets

Enabling Support
Facilities and infrastructure
Academic and non-academic support
Workforce development

Core Business
Engaged Learning
Engaged research

Performance Evaluation
Performance measures, student, staff and employer feedback, cyclical internal reviews, risk assessment, professional accreditation, ERA, internal compliance audits, benchmarking, and stakeholder complaints

Compliance with Externally Set and Monitored Standards
Provider registration, AQF, Learning and Teaching, research, Information, and ESOS, VET quality framework

Internal operating environment
performance evaluations. This includes the use of quantitative and qualitative measures to track academic quality and outcomes, stakeholder feedback, cyclical internal self-reviews, assessment of risk in academic and non-academic areas, professional accreditation of courses, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment, internal compliance reviews, and tracking stakeholder complaints. The final element comprises reflection on achievement, celebrating areas of good practice, and prioritising areas where further improvement is needed. It requires reflection of institutional performance and developing innovative strategies to improve learning and teaching, and research. Enhancement also requires rewarding excellent performing areas/individuals and commending areas where improvements have been made. It requires communicating the achievement with staff and students and setting new priorities and targets.

Conclusion

The renewal of quality in Australian tertiary education with the government’s proposal to merge TEQSA and ASQA as a single national regulator requires tertiary education institutions to revisit their quality assurance framework. The merger of TEQSA and ASQA may require the use of a single framework for quality assurance and ongoing accreditation. Registration and accreditation are based on externally set and monitored standards (e.g., provider standards), compliance with external reference points (e.g., AQF; Education Services for Overseas Students Act), risk based reviews, and assessment of institutional performance using a range of performance data. The challenge for some tertiary education providers like TAFE, private providers, and dual sector universities is to develop a quality framework that meets the requirements for both internal and external needs.

The challenge... is to develop a quality framework that meets the requirements for both internal and external needs.

Failure to engage in strategic discussion may have implications in the near future with the use of different quality frameworks that may disengage staff in the quality and improvement agenda. The new risk and regulatory framework may impact on private tertiary education in a number of areas including academic and corporate governance, data quality and reliability, AQF compliance, compliance with externally set standards, ongoing scrutiny of high risk providers, resourcing and its alignment with student growth, infrastructure to support learning and teaching, nexus between learning and teaching, and research (for higher education providers), institutional financial sustainability, and academic outcomes.

A focus on quality assurance as a moral purpose of tertiary education is critical in any debate and discussion on quality.

References


Quality and Regulation of Australian Tertiary Education: Searching for a Sustainable Quality Assurance Framework

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Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract
In this paper I examine the development of university education in Nigeria from 1948 to the present, in particular the development of private universities from 1999. In 2012, the country had 50 private universities, as well as 75 government-owned universities. I discuss some pertinent issues that concern private universities in Nigeria. The issues are justification for the establishment of private universities, courses offered by private universities, the carrying capacity of the universities, funding, and quality assurance. Finally, I recommend that proprietors of private universities should ensure that the institutions are properly managed, receive adequate funding, and should focus on the overall development of education in Nigeria.

Keywords
proliferation, private universities, private education, higher education, Nigeria

Introduction
The role of university education in the development of any country cannot be over-emphasised. A high level workforce, which is needed in the political, social, and economic spheres of the country, is mostly trained at the university level. In addition, high level research is developed at universities. Universities are expected to carry out their various functions through teaching, research, and services to the community. The role of universities has been summarised by Boulton and Lucas (2008) in the following way:

Universities operate on a complex set of mutually sustaining fronts - they research into the most theoretical and intractable uncertainties of knowledge and yet also seek the practical application of discovery; they test, reinvigorate and carry forward the inherited knowledge of earlier generations; they seek to establish sound principles of reasoning and action which they teach to generation of students. Thus universities operate on both the short and the long horizon. On the other hand ... they work contemporary problems and they render appropriate the discoveries and understanding that they generate. On the other hand, they forage in realms of abstraction and domains of enquiry that may not appear immediately relevant to others, but have the proven potential to yield great future benefit (p. 3).

In Nigeria, higher education (which includes university education) is expected to:

• contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training
• develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society
• develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments
• equip people with both physical and intellectual skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and useful members of the society
• promote and encourage scholarship and community service
• forge and cement national unity
• promote national and international understanding and interaction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

History of University Education in Nigeria
The history of university education in Nigeria dates back to 1948, when the colonial government established the University College, Ibadan, as an affiliate of the University of London. Fafunwa (2010) observed that the curriculum of the College was closely patterned after that of London University. He further remarked that:

the University of London awards the degrees and therefore reserves full rights finally to determine the examination schemes, the setting of papers and the assessment of candidates. The standard of performance
required of candidates from the College is equal to that demanded from all other students of the University (of London) (p.11).

The University College remained the only one in the country until 1959, when the federal government appointed the Ashby Commission “to conduct an investigation into Nigeria’s needs in the field of post school certificate and higher education over the next twenty years”.

Following the wide recommendations of the Commission, both federal and regional governments established more universities in the country. Fafunwa (2010) reports that the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which was established by the Eastern regional government, became the first university in Nigeria when it opened its gates to its pioneer students in October 1960. The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, established by the Northern regional government, was formally opened in October 1962. Following a series of proposals and legal backing, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) was opened in October 1962. The federal government established the University of Lagos, following the recommendations of the Ashby Commission that a university be established in Lagos, which was then the capital of Nigeria. Thus, in October 1962, the University of Lagos was formally opened. Fafunwa concluded that the University College, Ibadan, became a fully fledged university in December 1962. According to him, before that time the universities at Nsukka, Zaria, Ife, and Lagos, in that order, had already been made fully fledged universities with all rights and privileges. These five universities are known as first generation of universities in Nigeria.

Nigerian universities began to grow in size during the first military era (1966 to 1979). During this period, the military government, as a matter of deliberate policy, established eight additional universities. The 1970s also witnessed the establishment of more universities by the government. The University of Benin was established in 1970; this was followed by the establishment of seven additional universities in Kano, Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt, and Sokoto in 1975. The development of universities in Nigeria further continued during the Second Republic (1979 to 1983). Many state governments, such as Ogun, Ondo, Lagos, Anambra, Rivers, and Bendel (now Edo and Delta), established their own universities. Arikewuyo (2011) reported that the federal government introduced specialised universities in the country by establishing Universities of Technology in some parts of the country.

Because the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria entrenched the establishment of educational institutions, including tertiary institutions, under the concurrent legislative list, both federal and state governments have continued to take advantage of this constitutional provision by establishing more universities. Consequently, as at December, 2012, there were 37 federal and 38 state universities in Nigeria (National Universities Commission, Monday Memo, December 17, 2012).

In this paper I take a cursory look at the development of private universities in Nigeria. I also examine some pertinent issues that are germane to the existence and relevance of private universities in Nigeria.

Development of Private Universities in Nigeria

In many countries in Africa, it has been observed that public universities had a monopoly in providing higher education. According to Varghese (2004a), the market-friendly reforms initiated under the structural adjustment programs, the deregulation policies, and the financial crisis of the state, created an encouraging environment for the emergence of the private higher education sector in Africa. The legislative measures initiated to establish private institutions of higher education also helped the entry of cross-border education, which is offered mainly through private providers. According to Varghese (2004b), there are a number of reasons for the emergence of private higher education institutions. First, the inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing social demand for higher education has necessitated the entry of the private sector in order to expand access. Second, the changing political view of large-scale public subsidies to social sectors will reduce investment possibilities in the “productive sectors” and hence the overall growth potentials of the economy. Third, in many countries, the demand for courses and subjects of study had changed and public universities were thus unable to respond to this phenomenon. Fourth, in countries where the public sector is criticised for inefficiency, the private sector is increasingly promoted for its efficiency. Fifth, in many centrally planned economies, the transition from state planning to market forces was also associated with the expansion of the private sector in higher education.

In Africa, Kenya has been one of the few countries where private universities have a longer history and have co-existed with public universities. According to Varghese (2004a), in Kenya the Kamunge Report (Presidential Working Party on Education, 1988) recommended cost sharing and establishment of private institutions. In 1991, the World Bank, in advancing credit assistance, prevailed upon the government to restrict the growth of enrollment of public universities to not more than three percent per annum up to year 2017. These developments encouraged the establishment of a large number of private universities and institutions in Kenya. Senegal also passed a law in 1991, which enabled the establishment of private higher education institutions. This law was reinforced by another law in 1994.
Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience

Olalekan Arikewuyo National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Ondo, Nigeria

Table 1:
Pattern of Applications and Admissions into Nigerian Universities, 2008-2010.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>States</th>
<th>No of applicants 2008</th>
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<th>No of applicants 2009</th>
<th>% admitted 2009</th>
<th>No of applicants 2010</th>
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## Table 2:
The 2011/2012 Recommended Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Nigeria.

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<th>Year of establishment</th>
<th>Total 2011/2012 quota</th>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bowen University, Iwo</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Postgraduate University</td>
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<td>American University of Nigeria, Yola</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bells University of Technology, Badagry</td>
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<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bingham University, Jos</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Paul University, Awka</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rhema University, Obema-Asa</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Wellspring University, Evbuobanosa</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Landmark University, Omu-Aran</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Adeleke University, Ede</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>39,263</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: National Universities Commission, www.nuc.edu.ng*
In Africa today, the development of private higher education institutions has been made popular in African countries like Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, and Cameroon. Indeed, it has been observed that in general, the Francophone African countries lagged behind their Anglophone counterparts in terms of a move towards the establishment of private higher institutions in Africa (Levy, 2003). Consequently, between 1991 and 1999, nearly 65 private universities were established in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2002).

It should be noted that private universities do not receive governmental funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards. Such universities are, however, subject to governmental supervision like publicly owned universities.

In Nigeria, the emergence of private universities dates back to the Second Republic (1979-1983), when some individuals took advantage of the 1979 presidential constitution to establish that kind of tertiary institution. Arikewuyo (2004) reported that even though such universities were initially declared illegal by the then government, private universities had been given a legal backing by the Supreme Court judgment of 30 March, 1983, in favour of the Imo Technical University, founded by Dr Basil Ukagaebu. When the military came to power in December, 1983, all private universities were proscribed. However, the same military regime also gave a legal backing to private universities with the promulgation of Education (National Minimum Standard and Establishment of Institutions Amendment) Decree No 9 of 1993. Consequently, on 10 May, 1999, the first set of private universities in Nigeria were licensed. They were Babcock University, Igbinedion University, and Madonna University.

Since 1999, when the first generation of private universities were licensed, private universities have been growing in Nigeria, almost on a yearly basis. Records from the National Universities Commission (NUC) show that in 2001, only one private university was approved. In 2002, three universities were licensed, and one was approved in 2003. The upsurge in private universities started in 2005, when 15 were licensed by the NUC. The development continued in 2007 with the approval of ten universities, while seven were licensed in 2009. An additional nine universities were approved between 2011 and 2012. Thus, as at December, 2012, the NUC had licensed 50 private universities in Nigeria (NUC Monday memo, 2012). This is in addition to the 75 government-owned universities in the country.

The Nigerian Experience in Private Universities: Some Issues

Since 1999, when private universities emerged in Nigeria, a number of issues have arisen, especially as the upsurge affects national development. The main issues are discussed below.

Justification for the existence of private universities

The question has often been asked: Does Nigeria need more universities? It has been observed that the number of universities in Nigeria (both public and private), have not been able to cope with the increase in the number of applicants. For instance, Okogie (2004) remarked that in 2004, out of over one million candidates who sat for Unified Matriculation Examination (UME), the universities were able to admit only 154,000 (representing 15 percent). Table 1 also indicates that in spite of the increasing number of universities in 2008, 2009, and 2010, universities in Nigeria were still unable to admit more than 25 percent of the applicants. Thus, access to higher education and the lack of capacity of the existing universities to absorb the number of candidates, according to Moti (2010), poses a serious problem in the country. The proliferation of private universities can therefore be justified because the existing public universities are still unable to cope with the yearly increase in the number of applicants.

In Africa today, private higher education institutions have become popular in Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, and Cameroon.

Carrying capacity of private universities

The issue of carrying capacity of the private universities is also of great concern. Carrying capacity is a new dimension introduced by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to enhance quality assurance in the Nigerian university system. According to Moti (2010), carrying capacity means that students are admitted based on the facilities available. These include such things as adequate lecture rooms, well stocked libraries, good staff/student ratios, and accommodation. A closer look at the carrying capacity of the private universities shows that 80 percent of them did not have the capacity to even admit 1,000 candidates in the 2011/2012 session. Most of them could admit only between 500 and 800 candidates. In fact, only eight private universities could admit more than 1,000 students for that session, demonstrating that private universities in Nigeria have very low carrying capacity (Table 2).

Courses offered by private universities

The low carrying capacity of the private universities is not surprising judging from the type of courses offered by the institutions. From the approved/accredited programs of Nigerian universities by the NUC in February, 2012, it is evident that most private universities in Nigeria offer courses in the areas of management sciences, social sciences, arts, and the natural sciences. Very few of the private universities offer courses in...
Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience

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engineering, medicine, technology, and agricultural sciences. This observation about Nigeria further confirms the findings of Varghese (2004a) that private universities in Africa generally offer courses that require less investment in terms of infrastructure and equipment. He also reported that the courses offered in most private universities reflect either a commercial consideration or religious orientation. Courses in business administration, computer sciences, accounting, marketing, economics, communication, and similar disciplines are very common in the private universities. Furthermore, Varghese observed that this is in contrast with some of the private initiatives in other countries, such as India, where Engineering and Medical Colleges, which require a high level of investment in infrastructure and other facilities, are common in the private sector.

In addition, some private universities in Nigeria, especially those established by religious bodies have the challenge of combining religious instruction with their courses. Adebayo (2010), in writing about Islamic private universities, contended that whether in the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences, every discipline must be recast to embody the principles of Islam in its methodology, strategy, problems, objectives, and aspirations. According to him, every discipline must be remoulded to incorporate the relevance of Islam along the axis constitutive of tawhid (fear of God).

Also related to this is the issue of postgraduate programs. It has been observed that most of the private universities in Nigeria offer sub degree and undergraduate courses. Records from the NUC show that only eight out of the 50 approved private universities in Nigeria run postgraduate programs (NUC Monday memo, 2012). This may be due to inadequate teaching personnel in many of the private universities. According to Varghese (2004a), one of the unique features of private higher institutions in Africa is that they have very few regular staff. Reliance on part-time teachers is a common feature among the institutions irrespective of their location and orientation (Varghese, 2004b).

Therefore since most of the universities have inadequate teaching personnel and rely on part-time lecturers, it may be difficult for them to offer postgraduate courses, particularly as one of the criteria for accrediting postgraduate programs in Nigerian universities by the NUC is the availability of full time academic staff.

Funding of private universities in Nigeria

One of the major challenges facing the development of education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. For instance, UNESCO (2010) in a report on the state of education in Nigeria indicated that expenditure on education when compared with annual overall budget has been grossly inadequate. Earlier, Fagbamiye (2003) observed that while Lesotho spent 25.5 percent of its annual budget on education and South Africa spent 24.4 percent of its annual budget on education, Nigeria spent an average of only 9.9 percent of its annual budget on education. Even the Federal Ministry of Education (2011) reported that when compared with the annual budget, allocation to education dwindled from 8.5 percent of the total budget in 2006 to 5.30 percent in 2010.

Therefore, a major issue that is arising for proprietors of private universities is how to fund these institutions adequately. Private universities are principally funded by their proprietors, and through student fees. This perhaps accounts for the reason why tuition and other fees are relatively high. This is also similar to the situation in Asia, where studies have shown that student fees seem to be the dominant source of finance in private institutions (Southorn & Yibing, 1995). Even in other African countries, Varghese (2004a) observed that private higher institutions derive their income mainly from student fees. And in most cases, this appears to be the main source of income.

The emergence of private universities has widened the opportunities and access to higher education in Nigeria.

The problem of funding made the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Registrars of private universities in Nigeria appeal to the federal government to assist in funding private universities. The committee argued that since all citizens pay taxes to the government, private universities should benefit from the Education Tax Fund (“Private Varsities Appeal to FG for Funding”, 2012).

All these are an indication of the fact that operators of private institutions are finding it very difficult to fund their institutions.

The issue of quality assurance

Another major issue that arises for private universities in Nigeria is the question of quality assurance. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is the body that has been recognised by law to ensure quality in all universities, both public and private.

However, some private universities do not take the issue of quality assurance very seriously. It is perhaps in this regard that the Commission, in April, 2012, suspended the operational licences of seven private universities (including one first generation private university). The universities were accused of being unwilling to comply with NUC regulations, inappropriate governance structure and ethos, poor management of academic activities, generally poor learning environments, and mismanagement of students’ examination records.
Conclusion

The emergence of private universities has widened the opportunities and access to higher education in Nigeria. From three private universities in 1999, the number of private universities has risen considerably to 50 in 2012. In spite of this development, there is the need for the universities to examine a number of pertinent issues that have been discussed in this paper. Private universities should ensure the efficient management of institutions. The various governing councils and other organs of the university should be allowed to perform their statutory functions as specified in their laws. Private universities should broaden the base of their courses by ensuring that courses in medicine, engineering, and agricultural sciences are given their right of place. The private university system should also ensure that it is adequately funded, that it is complies with a robust quality assurance and regulatory framework, ensuring that it makes a valuable contribution to the educational and economic development of the country.

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Commentary on “Proliferation of Private Universities: The Nigerian Experience”

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Australian School of Management
Member of the Journal Editorial Board

Introduction
One of the stated aims of The ACPET Journal for Private Higher Education is that it “takes a broad, innovative, and international focus across various aspects of higher education”. Therefore, it is pleasing to receive an article on private higher education for publication from Africa.

The article by Olalekan Arikewuyo in this issue of the journal provides a thought-provoking insight into the historical development of the private higher education sector in Nigeria. Of concern to many Australians would be the volatile political climate and changing government policies described in the paper which would at one point support the provision of private higher education, then in the next breath, not.

Based on the published article, this commentary provides some insights on the similarities and differences between the private higher education sector in Nigeria and Australia.

Similarities
In both Nigeria and Australia, private institutions are independent bodies that can be governed by faith-based or secular boards. In Australia, however, 23% of what are commonly called “private higher education providers” are in fact owned by departments of the federal or state governments (www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register). In common though, private providers in both countries do not receive any financial support from the government, but nevertheless are subjected to the same regulatory supervision as publicly-owned universities.

The growth of private higher education providers in Nigeria has been significant, from only a handful in 2005 to a total of 50 by the end of 2012, although some of those private universities have had their operational licences suspended. This is not unlike the situation in Australia, where 63 private higher education providers have been approved since 2005, although not all of them survive to this day because they were subsumed by larger providers, chose to close their doors, or, in the case of one provider, was forcibly closed by the regulator.

The predominance of courses in management sciences, social sciences, and arts offered by Nigerian providers is similar to Australian private providers, with little being offered in either country in such disciplines as engineering, technology, and medicine. The commonality is that private providers, according to Nigerian research by Varghese (2004a) cited by Arikewuyo, “generally offer courses that require less investment in terms of infrastructure and equipment”.

The reliance of private providers on part-time teachers is a common theme in both countries, although in Australia this is becoming increasingly an issue for public providers as well. However, the paper goes on to note that the reliance of Nigerian private providers on part-time staff may be a major barrier to offering postgraduate courses. This same barrier would not appear to be evident in Australian private providers.

Arikewuyo states that “one of the major challenges facing the development of education in Nigeria is inadequate funding”. This same statement (with the word Australia substituted for Nigeria) is a common mantra of the Australian public higher education sector. Private providers in both Nigeria and Australia are predominantly funded by student fees, both for recurrent expenses and infrastructure.

Differences
While similarities between the private higher education sectors of Nigeria and Australia can be observed, there are also notable differences. In Nigeria all higher education institutions are permitted to call themselves universities. In comparison, in Australia the term “university” is still highly protected by those...
institutions that have been accorded that title by tradition. The bar remains high in Australia for the right to use the term “university”, with only a handful of new institutions being permitted to do so in the last decade.

A major difference between the two countries is the number of public universities, with Australia having 36 government-owned universities while Nigeria has 75 federal- and state-owned institutions. However, if the 23 government-owned non-university higher education providers are added, Australia has in fact 59 publicly-owned institutions.

Of the 50 Nigerian private providers, only eight (16%) offer post-graduate courses, whereas over 50% of Australia’s private providers offer postgraduate courses. Of these, 17% offer research degrees (www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register).

The Nigerian concept of “carrying capacity”, whereby the number of students an institution can enrol is based on the facilities available, is not one that is familiar to Australian private providers operating in the domestic market. The number of domestic students that any Australian higher education provider — public or private — can enrol is not limited by a regulator. This is different, however, for Australian providers that offer courses to international students, where there are regulator-imposed limitations on the number of international students they can have on campus at any one time.

The issue of free intellectual enquiry in faith-based higher education providers seems to be more of a concern in Nigeria than in Australia, and this is especially true of Islamic universities in Nigeria where, according to Adebyo (2010) as cited by Arikewuyo, course content must be recast to embody the principles of Islam in its methodology, strategy, problems, objectives, and aspirations.

In Nigeria, all higher education providers are regulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC); in Australia it is the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Arikewuyo states that some private providers are not taking the issue of quality assurance very seriously, being accused of “unwillingness to comply with NUC regulations, inappropriate governance structure and ethos, poor management of academic activities, general poor learning environment, and mismanagement of students’ examination records”. This was evidenced by the suspension of seven Nigerian private providers in 2012. This same level of unwillingness to meet the quality standards has not been in evidence in Australia to-date.

Conclusion

There are both similarities and differences between the Nigerian and the Australian higher education sectors. The Australian political situation is more stable and overarching policy is relatively constant, ameliorating business risk. However, policy detail is constantly changing, with Australia transitioning to a new higher education regulatory framework and regulator during 2012.

The limitation of this commentary is that it is based on a single paper. Future research could embrace a broader comparison of the Nigerian and Australian higher education sectors, especially in regard to equivalence of academic standards and awards. The experiences of Nigerians studying in both Nigeria and Australia may also provide some valuable insights.
Who Do You Think You Are? Profile of International Students in a Private HE Provider Pathway Program: Implications for International Education

Louise Kaktinš
Sydney Institute of Business and Technology

Abstract
In recent decades, higher education (HE) in Australia has undergone enormous changes, not least of which is the composition of the student population, most markedly reflected in the large numbers of international students who avail themselves of pathway programs offered by private HE providers. The significance of the international student market in Australia, as elsewhere, means that research in this area is of great importance for educational institutions generally, and for private HE providers in particular, not only in economic terms, but also to understand their clientele (the students) in broader terms, in order to gain in-depth knowledge about what constitutes HE today. This case study examines the current profile of international students in a private HE provider pathway program in Sydney, Australia. What emerges is a profile of a young single adult, mainly of Asian descent, not entirely confident of the level of his/her English language but aware of the linguistic currency it represents and its impact on classroom dynamics. Such a student attaches great importance to the student–teacher relationship. Due to the restricted nature of the preliminary findings within a very specific location, at this stage inferences and conclusions can only be tentative.

Keywords
international students, private HE providers, pathway programs, Australia

Introduction
In recent decades, Australia has become a major destination for international students pursuing educational opportunities, to the extent that it is considered, in company with the USA and the UK, one of the most prolific in international education activity (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007). In the higher education sector, the largest volumes of students come from specific markets, especially China (40.6%) (Australia Education International, 2012). There is a heavy reliance of Australian universities on international students. For example, at Macquarie University these students formed 33.6% of the total student population in 2010 (ABS, 2011), and more recently they increased to 35% (MyUniversity, 2012); 80% of the fee revenue of Queensland’s seven public universities is currently generated from international students (Hare, 2013). As a result, the economic imperative alone to continue attracting such students and maximising their opportunities for academic success, is great. Especially relevant for private HE providers is that even before these students enrol in mainstream university degrees, more than 50% are estimated to do so via pathway programs that provide a bridge to facilitate this transition (Adams, 2007).

Especially in light of intensified competition for recruitment of international students (Brown, 2009; Gallagher, 2010; Healy, 2010), an in-depth understanding of the target consumers (the students) is invaluable for private HE pathway providers as well as for the affiliated universities. Such understanding provides a basis for a wider-ranging examination of future trends in the private HE sector. This article presents some relevant demographic data, focusing on issues related to the identity of international students studying at a private HE institution.

The private higher education provider that is the focus of the present study (de-identified as PHEP) is associated with a metropolitan university (de-identified as Met_U) in Sydney, Australia, and has been operating from Met_U’s campus for well over a decade. PHEP mainly targets international students but in recent years has also marketed to local students who have become a growing presence. PHEP is one of a number of similar institutions (also affiliated with various Australian universities) owned by a large, for-profit, publicly listed, private higher education conglomerate that is also expanding its operations overseas.
Who Do You Think You Are? Profile of International Students in a Private HE Provider Pathway Program: Implications for International Education

Louise Kaktinç
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The strong presence of Chinese students in the international student cohort both in Australia and overseas is noted in the literature (Birguglio & Smith, 2012; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2011) dealing with various aspects of their adaptation to Western style academia and at various stages in their academic careers—pre-sessional (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009), undergraduate (Gu, 2011), and postgraduate levels (Ryan & Viete, 2009; Zhou, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2011).

The method and key findings will be presented initially, followed by discussion and implications, addressing some of the issues noted in earlier research literature. Recommendations for consideration by private HE providers take into account current trends and associated challenges.

Method

During the course of one teaching week in December, 2012 (during the third PHEP academic session, October 2012 to January 2013), a pencil-and-paper survey was administered to 13 classes (average class size of 25 students, totalling 315, excluding local students). A total of 232 international students responded (approximately 74%). The students were enrolled in a core unit dealing with academic literacy (de-identified as ABLE), specifically streamlined for those intending to major in business, economics, commerce, finance, accounting, or related disciplines. It is a unit also offered to mainstream students at Met_U, through which PHEP students gain credit points towards their university degree. Students enrolled in ABLE at PHEP are those who obtained a Band 4 or less in HSC English (or equivalent) or less than a 7 in IELTS (or the equivalent), and who were concurrently enrolled in a first year microeconomics unit.

The current article is based on the first half of the survey which gathered demographic information and preliminary data regarding the international students’ perception of their language skills, their motivations and expectations, their future plans, and their preference for using English names.

Findings

For the sake of convenience and ready accessibility, findings are grouped into demographic data (age, gender, country of origin, living arrangements, and work commitments); perceptions regarding their English language skills; expectations and aspirations; and use of a preferred name, as the latter emerged as a prominent trend amongst Chinese students.

Demographic overview

Of the 232 respondents, the largest percentage (84%) falls into the age range of 19-23 years. See Figure 1. From 24-27 years, the numbers taper off substantially, with percentages only in single digits, and beyond 27 years there are only 2 respondents: one of 38 years and one of 42 years. Respondents below 19 years are minimally represented: 1% of 17 year olds and 1% of 18 year olds.

The majority of respondents are from China (59%), and the next greatest percentage is from Hong Kong (15%). There is minimal representation from Korea (6%), Indonesia (5%), Japan (2%), and Pakistan (2%), and negligible representations from other countries. The majority of students (76%) claim Chinese (53%), Cantonese (17%), or Mandarin (13%) as their native (first) language. Of the 75 respondents who claimed to speak additional languages (other than English and their native tongue), the largest representations were Mandarin (39%), Japanese (29%), Cantonese (11%), and Korean (8%).

The number of male respondents (59%) outweighs the number of female respondents (41%). Overwhelmingly, respondents are single (91%), while a minority are living with a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner (7%), and only a few are married (2%). With the exception of one female respondent (age = 42 years), the rest are childless. The two categories of most popular living arrangements include “by yourself” (33%) and “with international students from your home country” (31%). A majority (68%) indicated they were not engaged in paid employment, but approximately one third (32%) were.

English language skills

Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of their spoken and written English based on a Likert scale from 1 (Excellent) to 5 (Poor). Generally, respondents rated their quality of spoken English (57%) and written English (53%) as reasonably good (rating 3).

Expectations and aspirations

In terms of their expectations regarding academic staff, a significant number of respondents (89%) believed that their academic success was contingent upon their teachers. While 41% of respondents indicated that an undergraduate degree would be sufficient to achieve the type of job they wanted, 58% disagreed. See Table 1. Of the other options, 25% indicated that they would “return to their home country to work”, 22% that they would “remain in Australia to work”, and 22% that they would look for “a good job anywhere in the world”.

Table 1: Respondents’ Perceptions about Undergraduate Degrees for Their Careers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think getting an undergraduate degree is enough to get the kind of job you want?</th>
<th># Respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to data shown in Table 2, the most significant trends regarding expectations and aspirations were from students whose home countries were China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Korea. It appears that the aspirations are prioritised somewhat differently for students from each of these countries. Respondents from China indicated a strong preference for undertaking a postgraduate degree (36%), followed closely by returning to work in their home country (25%). Those from Hong Kong preferred to remain in Australia to work (29%), followed closely by returning to work in their home country (26%) or undertaking postgraduate study (26%). Those from Indonesia favoured getting a job anywhere in the world (58%), followed by remaining in Australia to find employment (50%). For Korean students, the most significant aspiration was to return home to gain employment (46%). Some students made several selections from those available.

Use of preferred names

As indicated in Table 3, a majority of students (64%) preferred to use an alternative first name, and the breakdown by gender indicates this is a much more significant trend among female students (73%) than among male students (57%), a differentiation that is worthy of further research.
Who Do You Think You Are? Profile of International Students in a Private HE Provider Pathway Program: Implications for International Education

Louise Kaktinš Sydney Institute of Business and Technology

Table 3: Respondents’ Use of Preferred Names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of preferred name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of this case study, a “preferred name” is defined as a first name/given name chosen by the student to be used preferentially when interacting with teachers, other students, and administrators, and is different from the official first/given name of the student. The official PHEP student records and attendance rolls include a specific field for this purpose. Consistently, the experience of the PHEP academics indicates that such names are generally English ones and their appropriateness or otherwise is a matter of some discussion especially in terms of occasionally cautioning students about selections that may be socially embarrassing, highly risible, or extremely quirky.

Data regarding reasons for using a preferred name (Figure 4) indicate that the major reasons are that both teachers and local students are able to better pronounce preferred names and remember the students.

Discussion and Implications

In this section, the findings are related to the research literature covering a number of issues that have been identified in relation to very specific cohorts of international students, such as stereotyping; the prevalence of a deficit model; the students’ views of their English language skills, particularly in relation to their perceptions of classroom dynamics; and, finally, the competing demands of globalisation and diversification as they are played out in the classroom.

Students as stereotypes

The first issue identified in this study is the tendency to classify and categorise students in ways that stereotype (Fitch & Surma, 2006) and homogenise them as “an undifferentiated block” (Jones, 2005, p. 341) leading to generalised inferences by virtue of such association. The demographic results of the current study confirm recent statistics (AEI, 2013) that reinforce the continuing dominant presence of Chinese students—41% of HE international enrolments in Australia overall, and 45% of HE international enrolments in NSW. At PHEP, overwhelmingly these students are young adults (19 to 23 years of age), single, and childless.

Having a student group that displays various cultural similarities may on the surface appear to offer an invaluable opportunity to streamline educational offerings. Indeed, the current data invite comparatively facile classifications and there may be a temptation to categorise Chinese students as a homogeneous entity to be treated pedagogically, and otherwise, in a generic fashion. This is a particular concern when certain nationalities are concentrated in limited, specific types of study programs, a situation labelled as “ghettoisation” by Coverdale-Jones (2006, p. 148). This is supported by Skryme and White’s (2011) research that the highest concentration of Chinese students was in business-related discipline areas similar to those selected by the ABLE students in this study.

Students as “deficient other”

A second critical challenge is highlighted by research in education and cultural studies, suggesting that perceptions of international students by teachers, academics, and often the media, are related to a “deficit” model with the focus on students’ deficiences rather than on their constructive contributions (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003). This can impinge on many aspects of pedagogy, the curricula, and academic identity formation of students, especially since 89% of respondents place importance on the role of teachers in their academic success. The consequence can be fairly long-term, especially with a significant number (58%) indicating that an undergraduate degree is inadequate for their professional aspirations (see Table 1) and many (36%) planning postgraduate study (see Figure 3).

Some examples of negative perceptions include the othering of international students (Coverdale-Jones, 2006; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Koehne, 2005), implying a divergence from some accepted standard presumably that of the native English speaker; the students’ negative impact on academia (Devos, 2003) (e.g., widespread plagiarism, the weakening of academic values); and the assumption that the lack of English language skills is aligned with lack of intelligence (Ryan & Viete, 2009). The result is a dramatic erosion of self-confidence as these students, often having achieved academic success in their home countries, become repositioned as a minority group, marginalised within Western academia (Ryan & Viete, 2009).

These interrelated issues are discussed in the following sections. However, it is important to point out that in the case of pathway programs such as those at PHEP, the symbiotic relationship with the affiliated university has particular challenges where negative misconceptions such as those discussed above might impinge on moderation and finalisation of the PHEP students’ academic results, especially in cases where university moderators lack any direct experience of teaching international students.
The issue of English proficiency is a particularly thorny and complex one that impinges on, and often exacerbates, many other challenges that international students’ experience. Some prominent ones are related to plagiarism and academic integrity, which are of ongoing concern in the current academic climate as evidenced in the wide-ranging policies by Australian universities regarding such matters (Kaktiņš, 2010). For international students, the contentious issue of plagiarism appears to be significantly related to English proficiency (Tran, 2012) and is, therefore, of particular interest because of the linkage to academic acculturation. Both the understanding of referencing procedures and the roles they play in differentiating “voices” in academic writing, including supporting and developing the author’s (writer’s) voice (in this case the student’s voice), are fundamental to understanding the nature of academic culture which has at its core the advancement of knowledge set within the context of earlier and current research which, in turn, one is obliged to acknowledge (Brick, 2011).

Such academic acculturation is vital if students, regardless of their background or country of origin, are to move beyond very limited success in their studies. For international students, the language barrier can be a major obstacle in this regard, as can merely acquiring superficial English proficiency. Based on research by Lovorn, Sunal, Christensen, Sunal, and Shwery (2012, p.76), authentic language acquisition needs to be accompanied by “active acculturation” so that students can understand new ways of behaving and thinking. The same study suggests that facility with the dominant language is inextricably linked to the empowerment of both teachers and students. Sears (2012, pp. 119-120) reinforces this, highlighting that in English-language-based academic environments, “linguistic capital via the acquisition of the right type of English is an essential element in the path to school-wide achievement and acceptance—and thus in how second language students contest and reconstitute their social identities”.

The PHEP students’ self-assessment of their spoken and written English implies that they may be experiencing difficulties with their written assignments. In addition, their living arrangements (33% by themselves and 31% with co-nationals) may mean that outside the classroom environment they experience limited exposure to English language interactions. Here, competing needs—only one of which is to develop their English language skills—may come into conflict with their desires to establish support networks and connect with the familiar, especially as many of them may be away from their families for the first time.

Divergence in the fluency of spoken versus written English can impact markedly on the relative quality of international students’ academic work. Although many courses (including the ABLE unit) include an oral presentation as part of the assignment schedule, the majority of tertiary level assignments need to be submitted in formal written English, effectively hampering students whose written English may be relatively less proficient, resulting in lower grades. In contrast, students’ comparatively better spoken English may generate higher grades for only a minority of assignments.

The solution offered by Zhang and Mi (2010) that host institutions raise the language proficiency level for admission, while eminently pragmatic, may be too simple and ultimately inappropriate for private HE providers whose raison d’être
is often accepting lower level students (who are initially not accepted into mainstream university degrees), and providing them with additional (literacy/academic) support to facilitate their advancement leading to eventual acceptance into their chosen degree programs.

**Student-teacher dynamics**

Both the current data and earlier research support the contention that international students have a good grasp of the power dynamics operating within the classroom (Lovorn et al., 2012). As noted earlier, English is recognised as the linguistic currency of the Western academic world in which the international students must make their way. It is therefore noteworthy that international students have particular expectations of the student–teacher relationship and will make significant efforts to facilitate such relationships, for example, by choosing to use an anglicised first name in the classroom.

Gutierrez and Dyson (2009), in an earlier study with a similar cohort of students (though a much more limited sample), noted the heavy reliance on the teacher-student relationship for academic achievement. Similar findings are evident in the current study, with a significant number of respondents (89%) believing that their academic success is contingent upon their teachers. This supports the perceived key role of teaching staff in the overall successful academic progress of the international (principally Chinese) students in this study.

Edwards (2006, p. 90) is convinced that the widespread strategy used by Chinese students of adopting English first names “cannot be divorced from Chinese learners’ perceptions of themselves, their own culture, and their experience of learning English”. Edwards goes on to contend that this is a strategy of both compliance and resistance that is employed within the learning environment to deal with the tensions created in the use of names in a classroom setting. She believes that this strategy is a way for students to gain “linguistic capital” (p. 97) within a classroom (and, as an extension, probably the entire learning environment, if it is English-language-based). The current data indicate that 64% of international students choose preferred names but that this is a much more significant trend among female students (73%), than among male students (57%). The major reasons given for this practice (Figure 4) relate to students’ perceptions that both teachers and local students would be better able to pronounce preferred names and to better remember the international students who had such names, confirming the results returned by Edwards.

In terms of Edwards’ notion of *resistance*, such choices (of anglicised names) are ways of paying homage to the asymmetrical relationship implied in the classroom (between teacher/student) despite the Western style emphasis on what Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 202) call “symmetrical solidarity” implying that all in a classroom are equals. If that really is the case, there is some understanding on the part of the Chinese students of the nature and subtlety of complex power relations.

In relation to teachers, their views of these name modifications can be various, including the attitude that Chinese students do so due to their lack of a robust sense of identity (Edwards 2006, p. 96), compounding a negative stereotype that such students are “passive rote learners, who are unoriginal, illogical and insincere”. Such potential misinterpretations need to be further investigated if they operate to the students’ detriment.

It appears that international students place great value on the student–teacher relationship and believe that the teacher is vital to their academic success. If this is so, private HE providers (as well as universities generally) may need to be more circumspect in their ambitions to expand e-learning or even blended learning bearing in mind that new models (e.g., MOOCs) are being vigorously discussed as alternative teaching platforms, especially as it is by no means certain that e-learning performs favourably in a cost/benefit analysis compared with traditional face-to-face delivery (Kong, 2010).

Pedagogically, the crucial importance of developing their English language skills means that international students will still require face-to-face teaching as an essential component of their tertiary careers. Appana (2008), for instance, draws attention to the added dimension of complexity for ESL students (those for whom English is a second language) imposed by text-only formats such as those principally employed in e-learning to date.

**Globalise or diversify?**

One of the key challenges in future, especially for private profit-driven HE providers, will be balancing the tension between what Pincas (2001) labels standardisation vs diversification, or Karim’s (2012) preferred terms of globalism vs tribalism. The commercial imperatives that led to the creation of the private HE sector may propel that sector into more standardised/globalised philosophies and pedagogies, while being confronted with challenges in developing inclusive learning environments where individual cultural and intellectual diversity is valued, acknowledged, and handled with care and understanding.
Helping young people to develop their own multiple identities is one of the biggest challenges facing not just international education but any kind of education in the contemporary world. It should influence how the school handles diversity within its community, how it helps students engage with the wider society, and how it structures its curricula and chooses its teaching materials (Tate, 2012, p. 209).

Within the microcosm of a classroom, being attuned to individual student diversity may well be central to genuine educational achievement. Robinson (2013), for instance, argues for the nurturing of diversity amongst students, claiming that to do otherwise would run counter to the natural diversity inherent in the human race and would ultimately be detrimental to those being educated as well as the educators themselves. He insists that a climate of possibility in which more personalised educational programs can be developed is the context in which learning occurs best. Here, as elsewhere in this case study, the crucial role of the educator re-emerges.

Conclusion

Within an increasingly challenging global economic environment, a significant concern for private HE providers may be the inevitable friction that arises from the competing demands of commercial obligations and pedagogical imperatives. How this is resolved will require vision, commitment, and some compromise if private providers are to contribute effectively to the advancement of higher education. While more extensive research in this area is planned for the future, the tentative findings of this case study imply that some consideration be given to re-focusing on the key role of educators—that there should be more not less focus on them, that they should be elevated to a much higher status, and that they should be supported in providing more personalised programs (with smaller classes) for the students in their care. This is even more relevant in the case of international students whose perceptions of the importance of teachers, whose need to acquire an appropriate level of English language mastery, and whose aspirations for post-graduate education suggest the need for a far greater mentoring/pastoral role on the part of teachers if these students are to achieve the academic ambitions to which they aspire.

References


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