

**Looking into “A BLACK BOX” - Vocational Education and
Training for international students in private registered training
organisations in Melbourne, Australia**

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Declaration

This is to certify that some of the work contained in this thesis has been discussed in the following publications and conferences:

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And

- Except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is mine alone.
- The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award.
- The content of the thesis is the result of work, which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

Abstract

This study investigated and analysed situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in seven commercial for profit private Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers in Melbourne, Australia. It draws from the notions of social structure – a system of human relations – as its theoretical and analytical lens to explore how the restructuring of the VET system using the competitive training market model in Australia reorganised the way it is understood and practised. The study shows that commercial for profit private VET providers operating in a competitive VET market mostly emphasise profit imperatives and education-migration policy frameworks to conceptualise and define international students' characteristics, expectations, learning and educational outcomes.

The study used a mixed methodology consisting of both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather data in seven research sites in Melbourne. It used a longitudinal survey of international students; in-depth interviews of training managers and quality assurance auditors; and a survey of vocational teachers to gather the research data. General systems theory and interpretive approaches were used to analyse these data. The findings were triangulated to form core themes and sub themes comprising the contexts of delivery and assessments, international students' characteristics and outcomes, and teacher pedagogic practices and perceptions.

The study offers a basis for understanding how the intertwined, complex and situated mechanisms in a market model for VET combine to influence international students' outcomes and skills training in general. It shows that when international VET students' purposes for undertaking VET in Australia are divergent and shifting, the competitive training market model policy dimensions, which frame their participation, are mostly neither aligned nor congruent with the students' expectations and aspirations for participating. Most international students' educational and employment aspirations were not met; their prior employment and educational experiences were not emphasised; they were narrowly represented, conceptualised and defined in migration terms; and most of them were working in jobs unrelated to their training.

It further shows that the situated factors influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study are interconnected with the market model for VET, policy imperatives, international students' characteristics and aspirations and the market-based environmental demands. Hence these factors, particularly the way international students and their providers are represented in the education-migration discourses and the way courses are delivered, cannot be understood in isolation. By implication, the construction of educational policy frameworks, which enable the naming of values inherent in the training packages model, must include international students' learning contexts, expectations and purposes for studying in commercial for profit private VET providers. But, this cannot be achieved in a training environment where perceptions about the skills, knowledge and work-readiness of the graduates from this sector are viewed to be inconsistent with what their qualifications claim they have. Hence, policy makers and educators must reconstruct the purposes of VET outside the education-migration framework to include the internationalised VET cohorts' educational and employment expectations and aspirations.

Overall, the study shows that policy imperatives (interpretation and reinterpretation of policy), training packages implementation, teacher pedagogic choices and teaching and learning resources in a business environment influenced commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in the study, particularly international students' aspirations, experiences and outcomes. Whilst some international students used VET as a pathway into higher education, to get a job in their field of training, to build and broaden their knowledge and skills and to improve their credentials with the hope to gain a better future, most of them made these choices at a severe cost to their aspirations and goals. By implication, the competitive VET market system elements may not be congruent with the other components of the education system and that the other components of the system do not support each other. Hence the study argues that international students and commercial for profit private VET providers' contribution can only be more clearly understood and more substantially recognised if their characteristics, relationships in the delivery contexts and the discourses informing their participation are comprehensively mapped and analysed.

Abbreviations

AEI – Australian Education International

ANTA – Australian National Training Authority

AQF – Australian Quality Framework

AQTF – Australian Quality Training Framework

ASQA – Australian Skills Quality Authority

CBT – Competency Based Training

CRICOS – Commonwealth Register of Institutions & Courses for Overseas Students

ESOS – Education Services for Overseas Students

NSSC – National Skills Standards Council

NCVER – National Centre for Vocational Education Research

NTRA – National Training Reform Agenda

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

NVR – National VET Regulator

OS – Overseas Students

RTO – Registered Training Organisation

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

SCOTESE – Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment

VET – Vocational Education and Training

VQF – VET Quality Framework

VRQA – Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

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Chapter 1

Introduction and overview

In Australia since the 1990s, Conservative and Labor governments have been reforming the vocational education and training (VET) sector using the concept of a competitive training market (Anderson, 2005). Some of the most radical changes have been the redesigning of funding policy to allow for the recognition and participation of private VET providers, the move to competency-based training (CBT) and the participation of full-fee paying international students (Anderson, 2006b; Smith, 2002). This redesign of the VET sector changed the way the sector has been traditionally structured, organised and most importantly financed and delivered (Anderson, 2006b). Indeed one of the most important developments has been the recognition and participation of commercial for profit private VET providers and full-fee paying international students (Anderson, 2005; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). Hence,

international markets have become a significant focus of competitive activity and a source of income for TAFE institutes and non-TAFE registered training organisations, particularly business colleges (Anderson, 2005, p. 31).

Historically, the literature suggests that stagflation and the oil shocks of the 1970s and 1980s led to the onset of a radical restructure of the Australian education system (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; Keating, 2003; Ryan, 2011; Seddon & Anderson, 2006). Australia did not have a robust VET system but instead it had a highly disparate collection of technical colleges, schools and institutes (Agbola & Lambert, 2010). However, a committee led by Kangan, leading later to the release of the Kangan Report, was appointed by the Australian government to advise on the establishment of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges (Smith & Keating, 2003). After the Kangan Report of 1974, the disparate collection of technical colleges, schools and institutes was systematised through the gradual incorporation of secondary technical schools into comprehensive schools and the incorporation of the technical colleges into TAFE institutes through Federal Government intervention (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; Keating, 2003).

Overall, VET in Australia was delivered through TAFE institutes or colleges that were formally established after the 1974 Kangan Review of the education system and some private training organisations that - pre-date these training reforms, for example, secretarial colleges (Anderson, 2006b; Ryan, 2011). It is also argued that:

Smaller in size than the industry training sector, the commercial training sector operated on the margins of the public TAFE system and comprised independent for-profit and non-profit providers mainly secretarial and business colleges (Anderson, 2006b, p. 5).

Anderson (2006b) further suggests that these providers were privately owned and controlled like most industry and enterprise vocational training institutions but received no formal public recognition or government funding. Otherwise the main exception was, during the late 1970s, when private non-profit secretarial colleges received Commonwealth subsidies to compensate for income lost caused by the 1973 embargo on tuition fees in tertiary education (Anderson, 2006b). Hence up until the late 1980s, commercial providers were financially self-sufficient and autonomous organisations attracting fee-paying clients seeking new skills for emerging service industries and awarding their own certificates outside the public qualifications framework (Anderson, 2006b).

Indeed, this study is focused on a few private VET providers described as commercial for profit private VET registered training organisations (RTOs) listed on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) in order to enrol international or overseas students in their onshore programs (Anderson, 2006a; ASQA, 2013). These VET providers are

...required by the National Training Framework (NTF) to deliver only training package based qualifications with prescribed outcomes and nomenclature, in place of their own distinctive courses (Anderson, 2006a, p. 2).

Hence without national registration and accreditation for the CRICOS listing, it is not possible to export education and training in Australia; therefore these providers are forced to operate within the framework of national government regulation (Anderson, 2006a). A detailed discussion of their characteristics and emphases is offered in

Chapter 2.

In fact, the above historical analysis of the VET sector suggests that up until the end of the 1980s, a dual system of VET provision existed in Australia, which comprised a mass public sector operating under non-market conditions and a parallel private sector operating under free market conditions (Anderson, 2006b). Otherwise, the mass public Australian VET system was planned, coordinated and delivered through state sponsored institutions (Anderson, 2005; Seddon & Anderson, 2006; Taylor et al., 1997). On the other hand,

although non-TAFE training institutions performed an important role in the provision of certain forms of VET during the 1970s and 1980s, they were generally ignored by government (Anderson, 2006b, p. 4).

However, following a change in political discourse in the early 1980s towards neoliberal economics, the prevailing social and economic organisation was challenged (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; Ryan, 2011).

A further review of the sector was undertaken resulting in what is known today as the Deveson Review. It is argued that:

The Deveson Report recommended the establishment of the contestability of public VET funding to encourage publicly funded private training organisations, so as to create a training market for the VET sector (Agbola & Lambert, 2010, p. 333).

Hence in the early 1990s, after the Deveson Review, a market-based model for VET was adopted in Australia with the aim of producing a more highly skilled and flexible workforce (Anderson, 2005, 2006b).

Unlike the Kangan Review that recommended amongst other things public funding and the delivery of VET through TAFE colleges, the Deveson Review emphasised a competitive training ‘market’ model for VET (Anderson, 2005). The subsequent deregulation and restructure of the sector was premised on the assumption that it would produce a range of beneficial outcomes not possible through centralised planning and funding (Anderson, 2006b). The reforms that followed unproblematically assumed that increased choice, diversity, efficiency, equity and

quality student outcomes would follow (Anderson, 2005; Seddon & Anderson, 2006; Taylor et al., 1997).

But, the ‘market’ is an economic concept, which has been variously defined to mean ‘a group of firms and individuals in touch with each other in order to buy or sell some good’ (Mansfield, 1982, p. 21). This suggests that services are bought and sold, as are goods in a market, for a fee payable at a given price. Hence it can be argued that a competitive training market is one where there is competition amongst providers of VET for the supply of goods and services to consumers (students – local or international). Thus, in this instance,

the key assumptions are that competitive markets allocate resources more efficiently and effectively than centralised state planning, and that client choice ensures a better match between supply and demand (Anderson, 2005, p. 15).

Hence it can be argued that a competitive training market is a market system where education providers analyse economic and demographic trends affecting their businesses and use this analysis to guide which courses they offer students (Seddon, 2009). By implication, under market distribution, the interaction of education providers and students determines how education and training places are allocated. Hence, for the purposes of this study, a competitive training market is part of the VET system, which provides accredited courses delivered by RTOs to VET students whether they are local or international students. In this instance, this definition excludes a broad spectrum of providers that participate in this market, but this study focuses on commercial for profit private VET providers only that are operating in this market.

Indeed in Australia, the competitive training market has now become one of the central focuses and motivations for VET providers to increase the participation of full-fee paying students as an alternative to government funding that has been reduced (Taylor et al., 1997). Hence one of the notable policy decisions is the education-

migration incentive to attract international¹ students to schools, TAFE and non-TAFE vocational education and training registered providers (Birrell, Healy & Kinnaird, 2007). In addition, through the ‘two-step’ migration process, Australian governments encouraged international student graduates to apply for onshore skilled migration visas to reduce the country’s skilled labour shortages (Hawthorne, 2010).

The ‘two-step’ migration is a process that has been used to explain the education-migration nexus that is referred to later in this study. This process, a by-product of the marketisation of the internationalisation of education processes in Australia, involves the onshore recruitment of international students as skilled migrants after completing their studies (Hawthorne, 2010). Hawthorne (2010) further argues that commercial for profit private VET providers are also a big part of the ‘two-step’ migration process. This process (two-step migration) is

intended to improve skilled migration outcomes - in particular to secure applicants capable of making an immediate positive contribution to the Australian economy, labour market and budget (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999: vii, cited in Hawthorne, 2010, p. 39).

Accordingly, this policy position assumes that Australian employers would accept former international students, in virtually any field, regardless of their ethnic origin (Hawthorne, 2010). Hence, it can be argued that the two-step migration process, amongst other factors formed part of the broad policy dimensions that could have influenced the participation of international students. Arguably, this resulted in a surge in international student enrolments and a burgeoning private VET sector for international students in Australia.

But, the VET sector did not have the exposure, resources and experiences enjoyed by the higher education sector in training international students (Tran & Nyland, 2009). The higher education sector developed the knowledge, skills, experiences and resources they use today over many decades, since the Colombo Plan was first implemented (Tran & Nyland, 2009). The Colombo Plan, which took its name from

¹ Refers to non-citizen/non-resident Australian and New Zealander students - a distinction based on nationality and immigration status (Morrison, Merrick, Higgs, & Le M'etias, 2005). The terms ‘overseas students and international students’ will be used interchangeably in this study.

the location of its meeting in 1950 in Colombo, was a mechanism (albeit changed) for regional co-operation formulated by the British Commonwealth Foreign Ministers (Cuthbert, Smith & Boey, 2008).

(U)nder the Colombo Plan, Australia provided scholarships and fellowships for students from a range of countries in the region and beyond to study in Australia (Cuthbert et al., 2008, p. 256).

Cuthbert et al. (2008) suggest that the main focus of the Colombo Plan was to promote regional cooperation through the provision of education as aid. Consequently, it can be argued that on the one hand the higher education sector in Australia was involved in the recruitment and training of international students for many decades, a position they enjoy to this day. On the other hand the VET sector, which started to participate in the international education sector in the 1990s, had limited time and capacity to develop the knowledge, experiences and expertise needed to deliver training to international students (Tran & Nyland, 2009).

Over time, as the focus shifted from education as aid to provision of education on commercial basis and the introduction of the competitive training markets in VET, the VET sector started to significantly participate in the international education field (Tran & Nyland, 2009; Cuthbert et al., 2008). Hence this study argues that the increases in international students' enrolments and commencements in the VET sector have occurred with limited or no research on the consequences of international students' participation in the Australian VET system.

Much of the existing literature and research about international students has focused on the higher education sector whilst the contemporary critical debates on VET for international students and their providers have been about the poor quality of training offered by private registered training organisations (RTOs) and the migration aspirations of international students (Smith, 2010; Tran & Nyland, 2009; Hawthorne, 2010). For example, it is argued that:

Much of the debate on VET for international students during 2009 [and at present] in particular was negative and critical, focusing on RTOs seen as 'dodgy' or on the activities of overseas agents of education providers (Smith,

2010, p. 2, parentheses added).

Indeed the increasing demand for VET courses by international students, which offered easy permanent residency pathways, also raised debates in the media about the quality of courses offered by these providers and the nexus between education and migration policies (Devos, 2003; Das, 2008). From the mid-2000s onwards, there was increased negative media attention and student protests around college closures and poor quality training provision, which also led to a spate of violent attacks on Indian students (Robertson, 2011). In addition, concerns were also raised by academics and echoed by the media that student migrants were not readily integrating into the labour market (Das, 2008). By 2009, although the international student market in VET was thriving in terms of growth, international students were staging protests on streets and campuses outside some private colleges (Robertson, 2011; Das, 2008).

It can be argued that the above views reflect the emergence of a particular discourse, which portrays international students as strategic opportunists who exploit the system to gain entry into Australia, and training providers and migration agents as also exploiting international students' migration aspirations without focusing on the quality of training provision (Robertson, 2011). Devos (2003) also suggests that this discourse highlights and provides a conceptual basis for the processes by which an identity was constructed for international students and simultaneously for commercial for profit private VET providers, which includes providers included in this study. In this instance, the term discourse is used here to mean a set of discursive practices, which is:

...the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories (Foucault, 1993 [1977], p. 199).

By implication, the above view suggests that:

a discourse sets out the parameters of a field of study or a type of intellectual activity, and establishes a set of rules both for individuals participating in the field of activity and for the theoretical models that they create (Kennedy, 2000, p. 21).

These perspectives suggest that discourses define and through their operations police the boundaries of accepted debate around a particular topic. They (discourses) can be embodied in institutions but do not stand alone; they often interlock with other discourses. For example, pedagogic discourses can intersect with political, policy and migration discourses (Devos, 2003). Hence this study in part explores perspectives and debates embedded in the commercial for profit private providers in this study, which operate in a competitive training market environment in Melbourne, Australia.

Whilst this study focuses on a few selected commercial for profit private VET colleges and international students in Melbourne, it also acknowledges that significant proportions of international students participate in the public TAFE system and are also influenced by the recent reorganisation of the VET sector in Australia. However, the publicly funded Australian TAFE sector has not attracted as much critical and negative criticisms as that focused on the commercial for profit private VET sector (Anderson, 2006b). There are also not as many international students in the TAFE sector as there are in private VET RTOs (Anderson, 2005, 2006b; AEI, 2009). Hence, it is reasonable to argue that the debate about international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs has failed to provide objective and empirically informed arguments. This study argues that this debate and research have not holistically focused on the VET system policy frameworks, delivery contexts and the VET teaching and learning processes that are important in influencing international students' outcomes. Indeed, the understanding of international students' characteristics, VET pedagogic practices and the institutional contexts that influence international students' outcomes are an important part of this study.

Drawing from the preceding perspectives, this study examines the VET market-based structural relationships, particularly how the commercial for profit private VET providers and international students are represented in this debate and whether these providers are able to deliver quality training to a complex and hugely diverse international student cohort. It offers a holistic critical empirical exploration and analysis of situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in the study. To do this, it draws from the concept of social structure as systems of human relations amongst social positions to show how this structure

influences and is influenced by individuals with intended and unintended consequences (Archer, 2000; Porpora, 1989).

This study also acknowledges that the way social structure affects individuals is manifested in the ‘...material circumstances in which people must act and which must motivate them to act in certain ways’ (Porpora, 1989, p. 200). In this context, the circumstances are the competitive VET market as opposed to government or centralised control and funding that compel commercial for profit private VET RTOs to relate to their customers (international students), teachers, managers and quality assurance processes using a competitive economic logic. In addition, the thesis argues that the way the Australian VET sector was restructured in the 1990s affected the way commercial for profit private VET institutions operate, students learn, teachers practice and the perspectives they hold and how quality training outcomes are assured. The study also argues that when VET was redefined as a ‘product’ that was subject to the market forces of supply and demand, the definition of a VET student changed and the delivery contexts were altered.

The study also investigates whether forces of supply and demand have influenced the relationships that emerge between and amongst VET RTO customers and traders in the specific context of a selection of private RTOs in Melbourne, Australia. It investigates the nature of the commercial relationship between the VET RTO in general, and the commercial for profit private VET RTO in particular, and the student, and whether this commercial relationship has supplanted the education and learning relationships. It asks whether these relationship dynamics, particularly the provider profit motive, are combining with other factors to support or undermine quality education and training services to VET students, particularly international students in this study.

The research questions asked are used to explore the emerging multi-dimensional perceptions in these providers. The evidence gathered is used to show the interrelatedness and the complexity of structural factors influencing international students’ outcomes in a small number of commercial for profit private VET providers in Melbourne, Australia, which are operating in a market model for VET. The mixed

methods approach is used to gather evidence that is used to define and analyse these factors. Consequently, a longitudinal survey of international students in seven commercial for profit private VET providers in Melbourne, interviews with their training managers and VET quality assurance auditors, and a survey of their VET teachers are used in the study. General systems theory and thematic analyses are also used to analyse these data.

The use of mixed methods and interpretive approaches enabled the researcher to offer a comprehensive and integrated view of the commercial for profit private VET system as it is perceived and experienced by key participants in seven commercial for profit private VET provider settings. By adopting this approach, the study argues that much of the existing educational research in this area tackles specific parts of the education system and theorises about them without offering a comprehensive and integrated review of the whole (Ballantine, 2001; Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). Therefore, the study offers a basis for understanding how the intertwined, complex and situated mechanisms in a market model for VET combine to influence international students' outcomes and skills training in general. Most importantly, by using the mixed methods approach on multiple sites, the study offers a holistic opportunity to critically examine and use the evidence gathered to support the argument for a reconceptualisation of the dimensions influencing the commercial for profit private VET providers for international students in the study.

Research background and focus

The evidence from the Australian Education International (AEI) research snapshot, which informed the inception of this study in 2010, showed that the number of international students' enrolments in the Australian VET sector increased by 45.1 per cent in 2008 as compared to 4.5 per cent in higher education (AEI 2009). Notwithstanding the recent declines in international student enrolments, there were 232,475 VET enrolments in 2009, representing 36.8 per cent of total enrolments, and a growth of 33.3 per cent on 2008 figures (AEI, 2010b). Over the 2010-11 periods, the enrolments and commencements of international students in VET remained high and comparable to the previous years of marked growth (AEI, 2010b).

AEI statistics also suggest that ‘Vocational Education and Training was the fastest growing sector for international students studying in Australia in 2008’ (AEI, 2009, p. 1). The strongest growth was registered in Victoria and Queensland respectively and the majority of all VET enrolments were in the non-government provider sector (AEI, 2009). ‘The non-government provider share grew from 73 per cent in 2002 to 84 per cent in 2008’ (AEI, 2009, p. 1). The majority of international students’ enrolments are from Asia, with a growth rate of 51.5 per cent and the bulk of these students come from India and China (AEI, 2009). About four in every five new VET enrolments also occurred in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria in 2008, leading to the decision to undertake this study in Melbourne (AEI, 2009).

Australian Education International enrolment statistics further show that major course destinations for international students are management and commerce, food and hospitality, personal services, and society and culture educational fields, which accounted for four in five enrolments and commencements of international students in the VET sector in 2008, with all other broad fields contributing less than 10 per cent (AEI, 2009). Historical data also show that ‘the most common fields of education were management and commerce (33%); health (19%); food and hospitality (18%); education (16%); and information technology (12%)’ (Harris, Simons & McCarthy, 2006, p. 9). But in 2009, the most popular field of education was management and commerce with 20.4 per cent of all students, whilst engineering and related technologies was the second most popular field with 16.6 per cent of students (NCVER, 2009a). The national demographic data for vocational students in Australia in 2009 also showed that ‘males made up more than half of the student population (52 per cent)’ (NCVER, 2009a, p. 6).

In addition, ‘around 73 per cent of the VET international graduates were working in the same or related field as their qualification when compared with 75 per cent of Australian domestic VET graduates’ (AEI, 2009, p. 1). But other researchers argue that there are thousands of international students training as chefs and cooks in Australia but employed as kitchen hands in the food industry after graduation; they are certainly employed in the industry they trained in but not as skilled labour (Birrell

et al., 2007, 2009; Hawthorne, 2010). Unavoidably, this observation gives rise to questions about international students' outcomes, the quality of their training and the alignment between vocational training and work.

Recently, the national VET regulator's report (Australian Skills Quality Authority – ASQA) suggests that there are issues emerging in the VET sector about compliance and quality training for international students (ASQA, 2013). The following overview from this report offers useful insights into the sector:

In its second year of operation, ASQA finalised 282 applications for initial registration as a new provider. Of these, 185 were approved, and 42 were rejected, meaning that ASQA continues to find approximately 20 per cent of applicants (or one in five applicants) for initial registration do not meet the required standards to enter the system and become a registered provider. In 2012–13, ASQA also finalised some 664 applications to renew the registration of providers, of which 556 were approved and 63 rejected. As in 2011–12, ASQA is finding that approximately ten per cent of previously registered providers do not meet the required national standards. Where significant non-compliance with the standards was identified, ASQA took action to cancel (34) or suspend (31) the registrations of 65 providers during 2012–13. Of these, eight were decisions to partially cancel or suspend a provider's registration. ASQA also gave 134 written 'notices of intention' to cancel or suspend the registration of providers, and in 24 cases, imposed another type of administrative sanction for example, by placing conditions on a provider's registration (ASQA, 2013, p. 17).

The preceding ASQA 2013 report overview shows that the VET regulator monitors and regulates the quality of training offered by RTOs registered to train international students. It also seems that ASQA uses regulatory mechanisms to ensure that Australian vocational education and training providers are delivering high-quality training outcomes, which can lead to VET graduates having the appropriate skills and competencies to support the demands of the Australian labour market.

However, in the public domain, concerns have also been canvassed by the Australian media, which has over recent years chronicled numerous accounts related to the quality of training and poor-quality education services provided to international students (Wesley, 2009; Das, 2008; Devos, 2003). There are also claims of product (VET training) misrepresentation to prospective international students by private VET RTOs and their agents (ASQA, 2013; Wesley, 2009; Das, 2008). Most recent studies and debates also show that the model adopted by most private VET providers led to ‘shop-front facilities, intensive training and no research focus’ (Wesley, 2009, p. 4). Others argue that these media and regulating authority criticisms have led to more regulatory impositions on the sector (Wesley, 2009; ASQA, 2013). Hence, it can also be argued that these criticisms have set up discourses which limit the boundaries of the debate, about commercial for profit private VET providers and their international clients.

The above critical perspectives are also repeated in some recent studies, which demonstrate that there are concerns about the quality of training offered by commercial for profit private registered training organisations operating in a market model for VET (Gallagher & Anderson, 2005; Smith, 2010; Tran & Nyland, 2010). This critical and negative debate has not only focused on commercial for profit private VET providers but has also been critical of the quality of the students enrolled in the courses they offer (Tran & Nyland, 2010). However, the glaring omissions in these debates and reviews are the lack of critical empirical research on the context of learning delivery and the circumstances under which international students study vocational courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in a market model for VET.

Nonetheless, a review of three Melbourne based commercial for profit private VET RTOs’ brochures (not included in the study) advertising for international students revealed claims to:

- a) Offer training with state of the art modern training facilities
- b) Have modern libraries and expansive information technology facilities
- c) Have experienced and highly trained teachers for all courses

- d) Have course articulation and easy pathways to the best universities in Australia and meeting Australian Quality Framework (AQF) standards
- e) Assure students of easy transition to employment in their respective fields of training.

However, this study argues that the aforementioned claims have never been tested empirically. What we know is that there have been critical and negative public debates about the ability of the commercial for profit private VET provider sector for international students in Australia to deliver quality training.

This study therefore offers holistic and critical analyses of international students' characteristics, experiences and outcomes and commercial for profit private VET provider delivery contexts and contextual policy imperatives influencing them. It seeks to explore, explain and demonstrate that the redesign of the VET sector using the concept of competitive training markets structurally reorganised institutional relationships with implications for international students' experiences and outcomes. The study also explores, explains and reflects on international students' characteristics, priorities, aspirations and outcomes whilst analysing the contexts of delivery of training in a complex Australian commercial for profit private VET market system.

The thesis argues that there is limited understanding of the aspirations and characteristics of international students participating in the VET system in Australia. It further argues that the VET sector and indeed the commercial for profit private VET provider sector for international students in particular are not sufficiently structured and adequately prepared to deliver to international students' aspirations and expectations. It also contends that there is merit in the argument that the way the Australian private VET sector educational and occupational pathways are understood and structured must be revisited in order to reflect and include international students' realistic priorities and aspirations.

This thesis also revisits more than a century-old debate about the purposes of vocational education and training by emphasising international students' characteristics, aspirations and outcomes that are seldom recognised or emphasised. It

is argued that the predominant perspectives discerned from these debates about the purposes of VET leads to two positions; one emphasising the development of human capital required by industry and the other assisting individuals to realise their aspirations (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998). On the other hand, whilst the distinction between and definition of social and economic goals are often taken for granted, there is also a considerable overlap between them (Ferrier and Anderson (1998). Their views suggest that there is merit in the argument that the way educational and occupational pathways are understood and structured must be realistic and inclusive of the person's priorities and aspirations to include non-economic goals.

Overall, the thesis concerns itself with the lived training experiences of international students in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study whilst simultaneously exploring the intertwined concepts of contemporary VET studentship, pedagogy, contexts and outcomes that are useful in understanding the consequences for international students' participation. Most importantly, this study is neither an evaluation of the quality of a small number of commercial for profit private VET providers nor an evaluation of a small number of private VET programmes. Instead, the study provides a lens, more broadly, on the factors that interconnect to influence international students' experiences and outcomes.

The question is: What are the situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia? To answer this question, the study broadly aims to:

- Examine the influence of institutional teaching and learning dynamics in private VET RTOs that specialise in teaching international students.
- Understand international students' experiences, perspectives and outcomes.
- Identify and analyse government policy impact and influence on private VET RTOs' ability to contribute to the VET sector skills training effort.

In order to achieve the aforementioned broad aims, the study addresses the following specific questions:

- What are the educational characteristics and expectations of international students upon enrolment in VET courses at private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) for international students, in Melbourne?
- What are the international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at private RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?
- What are the trainers' perceptions about educational and employment outcomes for international students enrolled in the courses they deliver?
- What are the internal organisational contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?
- What government policy initiatives influence international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne Victoria?

Study contribution

This is an original study of international students' characteristics, aspirations and outcomes that empirically demonstrates the interconnectedness of the complex dimensions of VET studentship (particularly overseas students), VET pedagogy and practices, and market-based contexts of training in VET for international students in this study. It uses a multi-methods approach to investigate multiple private study sites to capture, compare and contrast international students' training experiences and outcomes with the perceptions their teachers hold and the views of training managers and quality assurance auditors. A few researchers have started to use empirical evidence to question the prevalent misconceptions about international students and their learning, for example Tran and Nyland (2010) and Smith (2010). However, this study differs from their studies in that it is not focused on specific elements of the private VET sector but offers an integrated in-depth analysis of the perspectives and experiences of international students, training managers, quality assurance auditors and VET teachers participating in private VET providers in a market model for VET.

Hence this empirical investigation, which uses the mixed methods tools on seven study sites to gather data in inner and outer Melbourne, illuminates on the factors which influence international students' outcomes in private VET providers operating

in market model for VET. Surveys and interviews were used to identify and capture participant narratives about the perceived and actual contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study operating in a market model for VET. The students' perceived expectations and actual experiences, their teachers' experiences and expectations and their training managers and quality assurance auditors' experiential narratives are triangulated between cases and across data sets. This approach enabled empirical comparisons to be made between study sites and different levels of the VET system's immediate operating platforms (operations and quality assurance) that directly influence the study contexts and international students' outcomes in a competitive training market environment.

Whilst this study focuses on the particularities of the international students' training expectations in VET in Melbourne at points of entry and their experiences until they exited from the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs, the questions that are asked and analysed may be cautiously applied more broadly to the study of students in similar commercial for profit VET providers. The study also adds to the existing knowledge and understanding of international students in the VET market system in Australia. Whilst the study is focused on seven commercial for profit private registered VET providers in Melbourne, it nonetheless provides a background for further studies into the participation and consequences for international students in VET in Australia. The following discussion explains how the thesis is organised.

The thesis structure

This thesis comprises nine chapters. In Chapter 2, the study critically reviews empirical and other literature in order to situate this study within the literature in order to provide the conceptual framework upon which the study is based. The review is particularly focused on how policy ensembles alter webs of relationships that bind VET participants in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. It explores the historical and contemporary perspectives that influenced the participation of full-fee paying international students and commercial for profit private VET providers in the study and provides insights into the inter-connectedness of the

globalised education and training policy reforms and the experiences of the participants, particularly the experiences and outcomes of international students in this VET sector in Melbourne, Australia. The multi-dimensional concepts of VET studentship (student characteristics), vocational education and training and VET market contexts are explored and analysed in relation to the factors influencing international students' outcomes in these providers.

In Chapter 3 the methodological approach adopted for the study is described. The mixed methods approach was adopted for the study. The chapter provides a justification and rationale for the research methodology adopted and describes the research design and processes that were used in carrying out this study. Further, the chapter shows how the use of the mixed methods approach enabled the researcher to analyse different kinds of data gathered. It also explains how the mixed methods approach was used by the researcher to present divergent and confirmatory views about situated realities influencing international students in a competitive training market environment in Melbourne, Australia (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Chapter 3 also explains how the triangulation of the findings across cases, data sets and empirical literature was carried out to examine and analyse for corroboration, peculiarities, contradictions and subtle contextual nuances that are implicated in influencing international students' outcomes. The selection of the survey and the interview data collection procedures and the analytical platform are also examined to include the limitations of the selection of the mixed methods approach for the study.

Chapter 4 uses empirical data from the study's participants to explore and identify the dominant competitive training market dimensions that underpin the delivery of courses to international students in the RTOs included in the study. The essence of Chapter 4 therefore is to understand the complex nature of the market model for VET, particularly the assumption that international students can unproblematically participate in the Australian VET sector and achieve quality-training outcomes. Hence this chapter draws evidence from training managers, quality assurance auditors, VET teachers and international students to understand their relationships and the implications for business and training quality in a market model for VET.

In Chapter 5 international students' actual characteristics are made 'visible', especially those characteristics – outside the deficit view – that they bring into commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in the study. It explores and analyses international students' social and prior educational characteristics; international students' prior educational qualifications, gender, age, aspirations and expectations. It situates international students in the market model for VET and compares the normalised traditional notions of a VET student and the dominant perspectives in Australia about them with their real characteristics and the social capital they carry.

Chapter 6 explores the narratives of international students, particularly those students who took part in the outcomes survey after 12 months of training. It offers insights into whether or not their expectations and aspirations were met by participating in commercial for profit private providers in the study. It also shows and analyses the meanings international students attach to their training. Through their narratives during training and after graduation, international students' backgrounds, prior educational qualifications, experiences, priorities and outcomes are explored, presented and analysed. The chapter uses these categorisations and analyses to illustrate how the previously discussed situated VET structural factors combine to influence the choices international students made and the pathways they took.

The educational and employment perspectives of VET teachers regarding international students are explored and analysed in Chapter 7. The chapter draws on the views of VET teachers to show how the competitive training market discourse has influenced teacher perceptions of international students and their practices, which in turn shape their teaching and learning environment. The VET teachers' perspectives, particularly about significant factors influencing the delivery of training to international students and the influences of the student-teacher relationships in a market model for VET, are also presented.

Chapter 8 focuses on the external factors that can influence the way VET is understood and delivered in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. It argues that there is a symbiotic relationship between the commercial for profit

private providers in this study, international students' learning experiences and the education system's external environment. It explores the potential of the education system's external environment to influence students' learning experiences, particularly international students' learning experiences in host countries. It also argues that living in another country can involve significant cultural differences that can influence international students' ability to adapt to the new social and learning environments with both negative and positive consequences for their outcomes.

In Chapter 9, the implications for international students and the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' participation in the market model for VET are summarised. The study evidence is conceptually drawn together. The situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in seven commercial for profit private VET providers in the study are assembled and categorised using the general systems theory analytical platform. It argues that the 'one size fits all' approach in the training packages nomenclature and the structures and processes of the commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts in this study operating in a market model for VET had both intended and unintended consequences for international students.

Overall, the thesis draws from the Marxian tradition, especially the concept of social structure as systems of human relations amongst social positions. 'The systems referred to here are characteristically modes of production whilst the social positions referred to are class positions' (Porpora, 1989, p. 200). Therefore, the relationships referred to are essentially between and amongst class relations. These are relationships and positions in the education system and the relationships between the community objectives (framed in policies), the school, teachers, students and the quality of their outcomes.

The following thesis chapters describe and offer complex narratives and conceptualisations that are used to holistically explore situated realities that influence international students' outcomes in seven commercial for profit private registered vocational education and training organisations in the study operating in a market based model for VET. The study findings and the conclusions reached must be read cautiously.

Chapter 2

Literature review

Introduction

The endorsement of the National Training Framework for vocational education and training (VET) in Australia by Australian and state ministers for training in 1996 was the culmination of almost a decade of policy reform that sought to reorient VET so that it was aligned with and designed to produce the skills needed by industry (Goozee, 2001, p. 97). The establishment of the National Training Framework and its later iterations led to the reconstruction of the VET sector into a competitive training market, placing significant emphases on the flexibility and the role of industry and the participation of private training providers and ultimately on full-fee paying international students (Anderson, 2006b; Harris et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 1997; Tran & Nyland, 2013). As a result, teaching and learning contexts in VET in general, and in commercial for profit private VET registered training organisations (RTOs) in particular, became increasingly diverse. Hence these learning spaces no longer reflected the traditional training characteristics and boundaries that applied for domestic students (Harris et al., 2006; Tran & Nyland, 2013).

Much of the discourse on VET for international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs has been particularly negative and critical, focusing on RTOs described as ‘dodgy’ and on the international students’ permanent residence ‘PR’ reasons for participating in the Australia VET sector (Smith, 2010; Tran & Nyland, 2013). Furthermore,

Until recently most of the ‘positive’ press has related only to the importance of international students to the national economy (e.g. Access Economics, 2009), while ignoring the other benefits that accrue to Australia and Australians. Few people in the popular or professional press have seemed prepared to advocate for the students and for the people who teach them (Smith, 2010, p. 1).

Smith’s (2010) views show the broad outlines of contemporary Australian VET

discourses about international students and private VET providers, particularly commercial for profit private VET providers. These debates, which are further explored in this chapter, suggest that local discourses are set within the contemporary Australian VET policy landscape. Hence, these debates must be questioned in order to move our analytical lenses beyond the current narrow economic boundaries. Analysis of contemporary Australian VET policies should enable us to understand how international students interact both with the local VET contexts and global economic markets. In this way, their contribution can be more comprehensively mapped, more clearly understood and more substantially recognised.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literature about the implications of the participation of international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Australia and to situate this study within the literature in order to provide the conceptual framework upon which the study is based. The review is particularly focused on how policy ensembles alter webs of relationships that bind VET participants – training managers, quality assurance auditors, teachers and international students – with intended and unintended consequences.

The study draws insights from social structure and the general systems theoretical frameworks to argue that the impact and outcomes of commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students in VET in Australia are interconnected with global neoliberal economic markets, educational policy prescriptions and contemporary Australian VET practices. It provides insights into the interconnectedness of the globalised education and training policy reforms and the experiences of the participants, particularly the experiences and outcomes of international students in this VET sector in Melbourne, Australia. Due to a dearth of research on international students and private VET RTOs in Australia, the study also draws heavily on National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) studies and reports, which cover and represent broad-based, peer reviewed and authoritative studies in VET in Australia.

NCVER is a not-for-profit company owned by the Commonwealth and state and territory ministers responsible for vocational education and training in Australia.

Although there is debate in Australian research circles about its role, NCVER is a professional and independent agency responsible for collecting, managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training nationally. Its publications seek to inform and influence vocational education and training in Australia through credible, reliable and responsive research and statistical services (NCVER, 2014). Hence this review of the literature draws heavily on the NCVER's publications.

Nonetheless, the chapter begins by outlining the concept of social structure followed by an analysis of Australian VET policy – structuring students' participation. This is followed by a critique and examination of the notion of globalisation and its influence on vocational education and training reforms. Next, vocational education and training perspectives are explored to offer insights into the shifting historical and contemporary purposes or focuses of VET, particularly the dimensions of – *'education'* and *'training'* in VET. Further, vocational education and training – international comparisons – at a global level, is explored to connect the local VET discourses with global reform movements, which impact on education policy reforms. This is followed by the analysis of commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts, particularly defining commercial for profit VET RTOs, the delivery of training in commercial for profit private VET RTOs using the training packages model and the assessment of training quality. The chapter concludes by providing a summative overview of international students' characteristics and the key planks of the focus of this study.

Social structure and the VET sector

Historical and contemporary sociological debates show that social structure is a central concept in sociology but there are slippages and contestations about what it means (Archer, 2010; Porpora, 1989). Some see social structure as patterns of aggregate human behaviour that are stable over time (Archer, 2010; Porpora, 1989), with regularities amongst social facts, or rules and resources, whilst others see social structure as both the medium and outcome of practices (Giddens, 1984). Critical realists argue that social structure is the product of a system of human relationships

situated in a natural and social world that comprises complex entities with tendencies, capabilities and forces (Porpora, 1989). Hence it can be argued that the prevalence of these contestations suggests that different approaches are used to study social issues.

This thesis draws from Archer (2010) and Porpora's (1989) notions of social structure as its theoretical lens to explore how the restructuring of the VET system in Australia reorganised the way it is understood and practised. It also draws insights from the argument that social practice is inescapably shaped by the unacknowledged conditions of action, which in turn generate unpredictable consequences (Archer, 2010). This view accepts that the consequences of human action form the contexts of subsequent interaction.

Archer (2010) argues that social structure is a human product, which in turn shapes and influences human actions. Archer (2010) and indeed Porpora (1989) do not accept the theoretical developments that have focused towards either structure or action but agree that social structure is not something that operates over the heads of human actors. This view about social structure suggests that the relationships amongst social positions in society, particularly in social institutions, constitute mechanisms, resources, powers and constraints that motivate individuals to act (Porpora, 1989).

In drawing from this framework, this study contends that we are capable of intervening in the world in a purposive way but this relationship is not a deterministic one. It argues, like Archer (2010), that while individuals are able to exercise agency, they do so within parameters that have been bequeathed to them by previous social actors. It accepts that 'there is a dialectical causal path that leads from structure to interests to motives to action and finally back to structure' (Porpora, 1989, p. 200).

Indeed '...social practice is ineluctably shaped by the unacknowledged conditions of action and generates unintended consequences, which form the context of subsequent interaction' (Archer, 2010, p. 226). These views acknowledge that in changing our social and natural contexts, we change the forces and circumstances, which shape the character of society and its people (Archer, 2010; Porpora, 1989; Sayer, 1992). Hence in this study, the analysis of the context in which learning takes place is important

because it enables us to explore the impact and outcomes of learning environments and the relationships within which learning takes place (Felstead, Fuller, Jewson, & Unwin, 2009).

If we accept that VET institutions have inherent tendencies, forces or capabilities wherein human actors are allocated social or class positions, which motivate them to act in certain specific ways, and focus our analyses on these tendencies, we can explore how the adoption of the competitive VET market structure influences commercial for profit private VET institutions and international students in this study. In this instance, inherent tendencies refer to structural factors or predominant perspectives that foster particular relationships amongst participants. For example, the relationship between the institute's manager and the teacher, the teacher and the student, and the student and the institute's powerful other foster relationships that are organised through powerful internal structural rules of subordination and institutional self-preservation (Sayer, 1992; Balantine, 2001). By implication, it can be argued that these relationships refer to social positions, which define how individuals act.

Hence, this approach – which focuses on context – provides us with analytical tools that enable us to examine how these institutions are constituted and organised, particularly how their participants are motivated to act. Thus, we can gain insights into the competitive VET market's material processes that form the mechanisms, structures and tendencies that serve as a basis of the participants' activities in relation to other positions in the system. In this instance, 'systems of meaning are negotiated by people in the course of social interaction' (Sayer, 2010, p. 14). Hence these systems have conventional characteristics, which become conventions through which individuals relate. Indeed, organisational participants' activities are constrained by practices or internal conventions that form the basis of what can be judged as either successful or unsuccessful in context (Sayer, 1992).

In Australia, the VET market system is subordinated to prevailing neoliberal competitive market policies and global economic and social imperatives (Avis, 2012; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006; Taylor et al., 1997). The VET sector's focus derives from a neoliberal economic logic which has seen the growth and

participation of private VET providers and full-fee paying international students, where vocational education and training has become a product sold for a fee to customers, including international students (McDonald et al., 2008). It can be argued that the preceding arguments support the view that ‘...the relationships of social positions [jobs] to each other and to space’ have been altered (Porpora, 1989, pp. 206-207, parentheses added). By implication, the relationships amongst VET institutions, managers, teachers, quality assurance auditors and international students have been altered or realigned.

This conceptualisation of social structure provides a means of exploring the consequences of the reorganisation of the Australian VET sector. It helps to show how the context of training (the training school environment or social structure) is intertwined with the teacher’s actions, the training manager’s work, quality assurance processes and students’ learning experiences and outcomes. Hence, the study focuses on the ways in which government restructuring of the Australian VET sector, using a neoliberal economic framework, reorganised the training contexts and the relationships between VET students and VET RTOs; VET students and their teachers; VET managers and quality assurance processes with consequences for all participants. Further, it seeks to understand how the VET sector is organised and constituted, through ensembles of policies, especially VET qualifications, which are bundled in the training packages framework (Taylor et al., 1997).

In addition, because learning is inherently contextual, the study builds on the premise that the impact and outcomes of the competitive VET markets on international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study cannot be understood in isolation. Hence the ensuing policy analysis, particularly the analysis of education policies, examines not only specific content but also the contexts that provide policies with meaning and legitimacy.

Australian VET policy: structuring students’ participation

At a conceptual level, there are slippages in the definition of policy (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984; Michael, 2005). Although the definition of policy remains elusive, there

are different uses of the word 'policy' that are useful (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). One possible scheme for conceptualisation and categorisation is to view policy in the context of its usage. Hence policy can be viewed as a label, expressed as a purpose, a proposal, a government decision, formal authority, programme, output, model or process (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984, pp. 13-18). Yet 'another categorisation focuses on the various characteristics and uses of policy' (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 14-17). But, these researchers agree that policy is more than just text. It is multi-dimensional, value laden, contextual, and a state activity, that interacts with other fields; it is never straightforward, and results in both intended and unintended consequences (Ball, 2006; Hogwood & Gunn, 1984; Taylor et al., 1997).

In addition, the threads running in these views proffered above also suggest a processual and contextual nature of policy. Essentially, these views acknowledge that as a process, policy harbours various contestations, struggles and changes; policies are in continuous flux, invariably in the process of forming and reforming. Indeed policy is contextual because it cannot be understood in isolation; there is always a prior history of significant events, an ideology and a political environment informing a policy direction (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984; Taylor et al., 1997).

Gale (2003) also proposes a definition of policy that borrows heavily from other policy analysts such as Prunty (1985), Anderson (1979) and Easton (1953). These policy analysts contend that policy is 'an authoritative allocation of values' (Gale, 2003, p. 51). This conceptualisation is very important because it explains the *who* and *how* of policy production and in turn allows us to examine the power dynamics in the policy process (Gale, 2003). It also shows us that there are 'definitional problems of the policy concept; ...it is difficult to treat it as a very specific and concrete phenomenon' (Michael, 2005, p. 7).

Yet another conceptualisation that incorporates and extends the above approaches is Ball's (2006) approach that sees policy firstly as text and secondly as discourse. As text 'we see policies as representations which are encoded ... and decoded in complex ways...' (Ball, 2006, p. 44). In this conceptualisation, the readerly interpretations and reinterpretations in context are important. The encoding and decoding is done in a

complex environment where meanings are full of contestations, possibilities and impossibilities, contradictions and confusions in powerful social relations (Ball, 2006).

Similarly, this study argues that the encoding and decoding of policy is broadly illustrated in the interpretations and reinterpretations we see in the commercial for profit private VET RTO competitive training environments in Melbourne, Australia today. In other words, there is a continuous flux of meanings and effects. Hence this study argues that these interpretations and effects are manifested through training managers' actions, VET teachers' workplace activities in the delivery of courses and their students' experiences and outcomes. Most importantly, these interpretations and reinterpretations are influenced by the key structures of the Australian VET policy framework, which consists of the VET Quality Framework standards and training packages specifications.

The complex readerly interpretations and contestations that can arise from policy representations are also illustrated in concerns that were raised about the Australian national VET system in the 1990s, which led to a Senate² inquiry into the quality of VET (Smith & Keating, 2003). This Senate inquiry resulted in the Australian Quality Training Framework, which, amongst other issues, led to the standards for RTO registration, renewal, and addition of qualifications to what an RTO is permitted to offer (called scope of registration) and their standards of operation were made subject to supervision and audit (Smith & Keating, 2003). A new quality framework in VET was introduced in 2011. This new framework established the National Skills Standards Council, which is responsible for developing and overseeing the new National VET Standards and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). ASQA is a government agency responsible for implementing the standards and auditing providers to make sure they comply with the national VET standards.³

² The Senate is one of the two houses of the Australian Federal Parliament. It shares the power to make laws with the other House of Parliament, the House of Representatives (Parliament of Australia (2013)).

³ The National VET Regulator (NVR) is based on AQTF and is now the governing frameworks for all States and Territories, except for Victoria and Western Australia who declined to participate in the ASQA and the NVR. However, RTOs that teach international students come under the jurisdiction of ASQA and not the Victorian or Western Australian VET regulators. The AQTF is aligned with the new National VET Standards. Both states use the AQTF and the AQTF and the NVR will remain aligned (ASQA, 2013).

The competency-based training packages model, which is the primary delivery platform in VET in Australia, includes ‘national competency standards, titles and details of national qualifications and national assessment guidelines’ (Smith & Keating, 2003, p. 156). Units of competency, which are further divided into elements of competency and performance criteria, form the building blocks of training packages; they are the key resources for the sector’s structured training arrangements (Simons, Meyers, Harris, & Blom, 2003). Whilst training packages are not a curriculum because they specify the outcomes of learning, they are likened to a curriculum because they specify the outcomes of learning and how assessment will take place, which leads Wheelahan (2008, p. 5) to argue that they constitute a curriculum ‘by any other name’.

In Australia, the VET Quality Framework (VQF), AQTF and training packages policies form part of the ruling relations of a wider VET discourse (Grace, 2005). Grace (2005) further argues that training packages and AQTF standards provide the framework for local RTO judgement and innovation in learning, assessment and student outcomes. These standards invariably influence and are influenced by the ‘policy-speak’ as characterised by Gale (2003). Policy-speak, in this case policy text, enables ‘naming of values inherent in things that are seemingly technical... as a legitimate basis for policy’s authority’ (Gale, 2003, p. 52). Thus, training packages define what is legitimate in terms of VET outcomes and the desired future. Hence it can be argued that the relational structures that are formed through training packages prescribe the circumstances in which people (students, teachers, managers, and auditors) must act. This also suggests that the neoliberal economic framework has had effect on VET structures, on individuals and on their training outcomes.

The second conceptualisation of policy as discourse is also significant because, ‘we need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of truth and knowledge as discourses’ (Ball, 2006, p. 49). Contemporary Australian VET discourse speaks of industry based training packages and competency based training constructed around the VET Quality Framework (VQF), AQTF and training packages standards. In this instance, the VQF,

AQTF and training packages standards ‘policy speak’ form a discourse. Policy speak as discourses,

...are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... they are not objects... they constitute them... they are irreducible to language or speech... we do not speak a discourse, it speaks us (Ball, 2006, p. 48).

The above argument shows that policy reflects dominant discourses of an assumed normative – in Australia the neoliberal competitive training market is the normative. Hence it can also be argued that all the elements of the system (the Australian VET system) are designed to support a competitive VET market aligned to the needs of industry, based on conceptualisations of skills and training that align to the particular requirements of enterprises and employers.

In addition, one element of this normative, in Australia, is reflected in three government policy directives that have influenced the VET market for international students since 2001 (Wesley, 2009). These three structural factors or policy directives underpinned the expansion of the VET sector and the way courses are customised to meet client needs (Wesley, 2009). These policy directives are:

- The decision in 2001 to allow international students to apply for permanent residency while in Australia, with extra migration points incurred for having studied in Australia
- The release of a list of skills or occupations in demand 2005 (updated in 2010 as well) and the agility of the private college industry in responding to the increased demand; students get extra migrations points for studying these in demand courses
- The accreditation of students with Certificate III qualifications for one-year courses without the usual requirements of industry experience (Wesley, 2009, p. 11).

Wesley’s (2009) last point refers to processes that accredited international students’ qualifications, after proving 900 hours of work experience, as certified equivalent to four-year apprenticeships or trade qualified practitioners. This approach has since changed after the recent review of the Education Services for Overseas Students [ESOS Act 2000] (Baird, 2010).

It can be argued that these policy directives are based on the assumptions that international students' learning in the VET sector is beneficial to those involved, including commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study. The consequences of these policies – amongst other things the participation of international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs – show that 'policy' matters in the evaluation of student outcomes because 'they' (policies) are 'textual interventions into practice' (Ball, 1994, p. 18).

Overall, although the concept 'policy' still remains vague and elusive, this study accepts and draws from the notion of policy as a process. This position allows us to gain holistic insights into the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' delivery contexts through the analyses of inputs, delivery (processes) and outcomes of training. But the organisation, delivery and assessment of training for international students in the commercial for profit Australian VET sector in Melbourne, Australia, cannot be fully understood if the Australian VET reforms are not explained and situated in the global context.

Globalisation and vocational education reforms

In recent years, governments have used the ideas of globalisation and the knowledge economy to construct strategies for legitimating the development of educational policy reforms (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006; Wolf et al., 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Taylor et al., 1997). Most governments of the world are pouring billions of dollars into education reform initiatives; on pre-schools, universities, vocational education and training, new apprenticeships, modernisation of education facilities and vocational education and training in schools in order to remain competitive in the global economic market (Anderson, 2006b; Wolf, 2002). This suggests that there is an unprecedented global consensus and faith in education to deliver economic success, which is driven by our views of the current rate of technological change, globalisation, the economy and competition (Wolf, 2002).

In Australia, the influence of the ideas of globalisation and knowledge economy are, amongst other things, manifested in the VET sector reforms; the emergence of competitive VET training markets with international students and private VET

colleges participating in the delivery of training. Although private markets for adult and vocational education and training have existed since the late nineteenth century, the creation of a market for publicly financed and recognised VET is a relatively recent phenomenon (Anderson, 2006b). The origins of the private VET markets lie in the 1986 balance of payments crisis and the rise of neo-liberal economics and public choice theory in government during the 1980s (Anderson, 2006b). However, radical changes began in earnest in the late 1970s when governments sought to realign Australia's social and economic position amongst other industrialised countries of the world (Seddon & Anderson, 2006).

In the early 1980s, in Australia, what became known as the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) also coincided with reform movements occurring in a number of overseas countries, including Scotland, England, New Zealand and the United States (Harris et al., 1995). These education reform movements were aimed at changing the relationship between education and industry, particularly linking of educational goals to industry competencies and standards (Anderson, 2006a). Subsequent VET sector reforms, which occurred in Australia later in the 1990s, specifically sought to install competency-based training packages, particularly in the trades where industry was given a controlling hand in the policy and curriculum process (Anderson, 2006b; Hager, 2004; Smith & Keating, 2003; Simons et al., 2003).

The implementation of a competency-based curriculum framework in particular was a central feature of the newly emerging VET landscape, which laid the foundations for the introduction of training packages in Australia (Simons et al., 2003). The change process that was embarked upon was a multi-dimensional phenomenon that required substantial shifts in the way in which vocational education and training was designed, implemented and assessed (Simons et al., 2003). Overall, the policy reform process gave industry (initially defined as employers and employees) a far greater influence and ownership of the training process, the content of the training courses and ultimately the outcomes (Anderson, 1999, 2006; Ryan, 2011; Smith & Keating 2003).

Anderson's (2005) research further shows that since the 1990s, Australian governments have deregulated and reorganised the VET sector using the concept of a

competitive training market to allow greater competition for clients (students) and funding between and amongst public and private providers. Central to competitive markets philosophy is the notion of 'User Choice', which aims to stimulate direct competition amongst VET providers to drive improvements in efficiency, quality and responsiveness by empowering clients over providers (Anderson, 2006b). Hence policy ensembles, especially the education-migration policy decisions, were also introduced as incentives to attract full-fee paying international students to schools, TAFE and non-TAFE VET providers (Birrell et al., 2007). It can be argued that these measures, amongst other push-pull factors, formed a platform that prompted a surge in international student enrolments and a burgeoning private VET sector for international students in Australia; a consequence of the globalised neoliberal economic markets.

But, it is also argued that the debate, nature and effects of globalisation are complex and contested (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Avis, 2012; Robertson, Weis & Rizvi, 2011). Despite these contestations about the meaning of globalisation and the differences in the ways in which countries are governed, some argue that the ascendancy of neoliberalism and globalisation has meant that the governance of VET is set within the hegemony of neoliberalism (Avis, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Hence, the notions of up-skilling, wellbeing and improved standards of living continue to be unproblematically associated with the development of economic competitiveness (Avis, 2012; Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011). Others also argue that the prominence of neoliberal forms of governance; the notions of globalisation, competitiveness, skills and knowledge have led to an easy and ready association between the needs of capital and the development of the workforce (Avis, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Anderson, 2006a). They argue that these views see no contradictions arising from the development of the workforce to address the needs of capital with the interests and aspirations of those participating, especially those groups at the margins of society (Avis, 2012; Brown et al., 2011). In this instance, the faith in education and training to deliver economic success is emphasised and is used as a means to promote the dominance of the neoliberal economic logic (Avis, 2012).

However, globalisation is a complex process of international relations, which

manifests itself in different dimensions (Lauder et al., 2006). It is a process that emphasises an economic perspective that has strong influences, amongst other things, on culture, national policy, the corporate world and educational processes (Lauder et al., 2006). Globalisation has also been shaped through neoliberalism; a political ideology that privileges marketisation and individualism over command or controlled economics (Anderson, 2006a; Hall, Buchanan, Bretherton, van Barneveld, & Pickersgill, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Notably, neoliberalism is a governance approach and a political settlement that has been used to restructure economic activities, particularly education systems in western democracies after the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialism (Lauder et al., 2006). Neoliberalism is also defined as

...an approach to govern society in such a way as to reconfigure people as productive, economic entrepreneurs who are responsible for making sound choices in their education, work, health and life style (McDonald, Hay & Williams, 2008, p. 6).

However, globalisation means different things to different people (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Globalisation has many dimensions: economic, environmental, political, information, health and many more that are profoundly affecting our ways of life (Hall, et al., 2000). This inevitably makes the nature and effects of globalisation complex (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). What we know is that in pursuit of national comparative economic advantage on the global stage, education and training have increasingly been relied upon (Anderson, 2006a; Wolf, 2002). Most governments have rejected the ownership and control of public sector production and have adopted small governments, free markets and public choice policies, which are meant to produce a highly skilled and flexible workforce (Anderson, 2006a). Yet, others have argued, using the notion of the American dream as an example, that this faith in global free markets, education and the production of social economic structure has led to discourses that are unproblematically informed by the education-economic nexus, competitive advantage and the opportunity myth (Brown et al., 2011).

Overall, even though there is no agreed definition of globalisation, most writers and researchers focus on specifics such as international trade and cultural globalisation (Avis, 2012; Lauder et al., 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Tylor et al., 1997). The following ideas are usually included in most definitions:

- The transition from national ‘walled’ and regional economies towards global ‘free’ trade markets;
- The declining importance of geographical, national and cultural borders... leading to greater dependence of people and countries worldwide;
- Greater connection and interconnectedness through information technologies.
- More extensive global networks of companies, universities, students, migrants, faith groups, etc.;
- An exponential increase in the flow of goods and services...
- More extensive and rapid diffusion of technologies, knowledge and ideas; and,
- The compression of time and space across the planet (Lauder et al., 2006, p. 30).

The above analysis illustrates that the notion of globalisation has many facets, which are not easily amenable to neat categorisations (Lauder et al., 2006). It also shows that although globalisation is a highly contested multi-dimension concept with multiple meanings, there is some definitional consensus in the literature. For example, economic globalisation – the removal of trade barriers through liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation – has been and continues to be the platform from which political and cultural globalisation flow (Anderson, 2006a; Hall et al., 2000). Whilst some suggest that the main character, aim and thrust of economic globalisation is the removal of obstacles to the global movement of capital and the production of goods and services, others view it as a process or set of processes that embody the ‘spatial organisation of social relations and transactions’ (Lauder et al., 2006, p. 30).

But, a limitation within the theoretical debate is that ‘it is difficult to assess the impact of globalisation on education given the lack of agreement about the processes with which it is associated’ (Lauder et al., 2006, p. 31). This implies that the debates about the significance and benefits of globalisation to the education sector, particularly the Australian VET sector, remain inconclusive (Lauder et al., 2006). Yet in Australia,

besides Anderson's 2006 study on the impact and outcomes of market reforms in the Australian VET sector in general, Tran and Nyland's 2010 studies on international students in VET in Australia, and this study in particular, there has been no comprehensive study on the outcomes and implications for international students' participation specifically in commercial for profit private providers. This is reflected in our limited understanding and characterisation of the impact and outcomes of international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs' participation in globalised VET contexts, particularly in Australia (Tran & Nyland, 2013; Smith, 2010).

In Australia, 'the most important element of VET reforms has been the development of a competitive training market' – marketisation (Anderson, 2006b, p. 13). Marketisation, a process 'where market forces of supply and demand are driven by the principles of competition and choice', has been used as a platform to deliver VET courses (Anderson, 2005, p. 30). This economic view about the world today (marketisation) and its implementation in Australia in particular, has transformed VET providers into places of trade and commerce (Anderson, 2005). The VET provider space has been redefined to offer education and training services subject to market forces of supply and demand, thus subordinating VET to business and corporate interests (Anderson, 1999, 2006b). As a consequence, it can be argued that the purposes of VET were redefined from producing life skills to producing skills and competencies that are relevant to business economic interests.

But, if the marketisation of the VET sector meant that all VET providers and indeed commercial for profit private VET RTOs became trading places, then there is merit in the suggestion that 'nearly everything in education and schooling sector is for sale' (McDonald et al., 2008, p. 8). By implication, VET RTOs in Australia, particularly commercial for profit private VET providers, are commercial entities trading in VET products and services locally and globally. In this scenario, VET providers in Australia buy and sell vocational education and training products and services – an economic equivalent of trading goods and services.

The neoliberal belief in market forces assumes that all people have the capacity and means to make informed choices in pursuit of self-interest whilst the government's role is to empower these entrepreneurial subjects (Lauder et al., 2006). This neoliberal belief raises fundamental questions about individuals' participation and possible outcomes. Can a poorly educated citizenry in a segregated non-equitable political environment make informed choices? If market choices are limited, can governments adequately steer the VET market and make it fair?

The above questions bring forth debates about our contemporary notions of VET, particularly its purposes and focuses in a globalised context and how VET reforms in Australia reflect global perspectives. In Australia, ensembles of government policies were used to reorganise and determine the '*what*' and '*how*' of VET, resulting in a significant increase in the participation of international students in private VET RTOs or colleges (Anderson, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Taylor et al., 1997). Hence an examination of VET purposes and perspectives offers useful insights.

Vocational education and training perspectives

Historically, the purposes of education were closely linked to their origins – in monasteries, cathedrals and the church – and focused on the preparation of a religious and governmental elite (Durkeim, 1977). As secularism began to have an impact on educational philosophies and the narrowly classical humanities curricula of our early schools and universities broadened to include modern languages and the sciences, the aims and purposes of education became broader and more contested 'there were no common goals or motives' for the purposes of education (Durkeim, 1977, p. 28). Inevitably, education systems' purposes have remained contestable and in flux. Even now there is a body of literature, which argues that the relationship between the economic and social goals of education and training is fraught with tensions (Anderson, Brown, & Rushbrook, 2004; Ferrier & Anderson, 1998; Seddon & Anderson, 2006; Tesse & Polesel, 2003; Volkoff & Golding, 1998). These tensions arise primarily from changing demands and conflicting views about the roles and functions of education and educational institutions (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998).

In Australia, there are two broad perspectives that can be discerned from the literature (Anderson et al., 2004). One perspective argues in support of the view that education and training must contribute to economic achievement whilst the other supports the view that education must support the individual to realise their full potential (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998). The emphasis given to each of these goals has fluctuated based on the prevailing socioeconomic circumstances and government priorities (Seddon & Anderson, 2006). It can be argued that, in the Australian VET sector today, the debate about the purposes of VET has not been settled (Anderson, 2009). Hence, the purposes and role of VET in general, and in commercial for profit private VET RTOs and TAFEs in particular, remain contested.

But, our historical understanding of vocational education and training is associated with on-the-job training, initially as humans struggled for survival as hunter-gatherers but later transformed through the mechanisation of agricultural practices, specialisation and the industrial revolution (Hager, 2007). ‘Vocational education and training, unlike mainstream academic education, later developed independently from government structures of schools and universities’ (Bateman, Keating & Vickers, 2009, p. 14). For example, in Germany, apprenticeships date back to the Middle-Ages and these were established through industry chambers (Anderson et al., 2004).

Today, some of what is constituted in vocational education and training remains informal and some systems of VET remain differentiated from systems of academic education. But, there are developments in other countries to align VET more closely with higher education (Deissinger, Aff, Fuller & Jorgensen, 2013; Wolf, 2002). For example, Denmark, France, UK, the Netherlands and Switzerland have used hybrid qualifications to strengthen access to higher education from VET (Deissinger et al. 2013).

However, it is also observed that in most countries the organisation and management of VET has traditionally been located with the employers and trade unions or worker organisations, with no or minimal government involvement (Anderson et al., 2004). Over the years in Britain as well as in Australia, vocational education and training has become complex and varied with a plethora of qualifications and increasing numbers

of persons enrolled but many obtaining no formal qualifications (Wolf, 2002). Notably, Australian and British apprenticeships share similarities but were traditionally distinctly different from the American and some European models that had little or no government involvement (Anderson et al., 2004). The rise of mass secondary schooling more recently has led to the use of vocational education and training, in various ways, to accommodate the diversity of new student cohorts in schools, as social, economic and political imperatives have dictated, but this too is contested (Clarke & Winch, 2007; Polesel, 2008; Wolf, 2002).

In Australia, it has been argued that it was not until the emergence of the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector in the late 1970s, that Australian technical education (vocational education) began to take on a clearer identity, rather than its previous role of ad-hoc responses to post-war labour demands (Darwin, 2007).

The above brief history is indicative of vocational education and training as a contested concept (Anderson et al., 2004; Ferrier & Anderson, 1998; Wolf, 2002). But it is also argued that there are two competing traditions; one emphasises 'vocational education' and the other 'vocational training' (Anderson et al., 2004, p.234). Historically though, 'in the Anglo-Saxon world, vocational education is confined to preparing young people and adults for working life, a process regarded as of a rather technical and practical nature' (Clarke & Winch, 2007, p. 9). It refers to courses offered as an alternative to academic schooling, leading to manual craft jobs (Wolf, 2002). This view is contrasted with liberal education but the two are not mutually exclusive. An analysis of these two competing traditions can offer useful insights that can help to explain VET purposes and focuses today.

Vocational '*education*' and training

There is a body of studies that argues that vocational education is diverse in terms of its purposes, institutions, programmes and participants (Anderson et al., 2004; Billet, 2011; Buchanan, Yu, Marginson & Wheelahan, 2009). Some researchers argue that 'VET extends far more beyond the traditional skilled, blue collar, male dominated trades' (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 13). Others see it (vocational education) as a form of

education, which is an extension of the schooling system (Billett, 2011). Hence ‘both VET and school or university sector have a general education dimension’ (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 13). Proponents of this tradition emphasise a holistic and integrated development of knowledge and transferable skills for work and life (Anderson et al., 2004). Their views concur with the views about liberal education, which focus on personal development.

Liberal education is concerned with individual development and personal fulfilment (Donnelly, 2005; Billett, 2011). Associated with the liberal view of education is the recognition that education cannot be restricted to the contemporary and utilitarian alone. It concerns values; public forms of meaning, in which expressions of meaning, human excellence, moral and aesthetic domains are investigated (Donnelly, 2005). This educational approach privileges the ‘holistic and integrated development of underpinning knowledge and broad-based, transferable work and life skills’ (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 234).

Therefore, vocational education is not seen as primarily concerned with the development of knowledge required for effective performance in an occupation only (Billett, 2011). It is concerned with developing and sustaining the capacities required for working life (Billett, 2011). In this instance vocational education, regardless of whether the student studies medicine, law, cookery or tourism, the learning outcomes are set within a coherent set of educational goals (Billett, 2011; Buchanan et al., 2009). It can also be argued that by delineating vocational education as a field of education, we also accept that it can be enacted outside traditional contexts; for example, TAFE in Australia, community colleges in Canada or further education colleges in Britain (Billett, 2011). Implicitly, the participants and the provision of this form of education are extremely diverse and difficult to neatly define and categorise. But, VET in TAFE or private VET RTOs in Australia, community colleges in Canada, or further education colleges in Britain today have workplace affiliation – training packages in Australia and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Britain are typical examples of this close affiliation (Billett, 2011).

As a broad field of education, vocational education is offered at schools, universities and the VET sector (Billett, 2011). This means that societal and professional purposes are considered significant. Hence, vocational education is concerned with the development of procedural, conceptual and dispositional attributes for practice, making vocational education a coherent field of education. Thus, vocational education is used to address the interests, needs and developmental trajectories of those who participate in it. This proposition accepts that vocational education assists individuals and communities to realise their goals and ambitions; and its worth is measured in terms of the extent to which it meets the needs of the participants (Anderson et al., 2004; Billett, 2011).

However, historically most people used to learn informally on the job whereas some, the elite, lawyers, religious and government officials undertook college and university education (Clarke & Winch, 2007). Clarke and Winch (2007) suggest that the advent of the industrial revolution and the subsequent mass production systems gave rise to working-class education and gradually this educated working class became organised, formalised and unionised. Technical colleges and the institutionalisation of apprenticeships are typical examples of the formalisation of VET (Clarke & Winch, 2007).

Overall, the above argument suggests that at different times some vocational education and training goals have been emphasised at the expense of others (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998; Anderson et al., 2004). Recently, vocational education's primary function in the eyes of most governments and indeed industry and the elite has been to provide working-class education (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998; Anderson et al., 2004; Seddon & Anderson, 2006). Some argue that this form of education is considered to be below 'professional education' and is meant for people who lack 'cultural capital in society' (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 241). However, the way vocational education is delivered, structured and organised varies considerably from country to country. Some privilege VET's broader educational and social aims whilst others emphasise narrow job-related skills (Clarke & Winch, 2007). But, today 'VET is assumed to be interested in developing practical skills solely for work' (Buchanan et al., 2009). It can also be argued that this aligns with the views of those who emphasise the training

dimension of VET. Their perspectives are analysed next.

Vocational education and *training*

Those who emphasise the training dimension argue that VET should address specifically the acquisition of job-related skills and competencies, thus subordinating vocational training to industry needs (Anderson et al., 2004; Buchanan et al., 2009). Some further argue that this approach allows for the external control of VET and is implicated in the reproduction and maintenance of inequalities that inevitably marginalise minority groups and the disadvantaged in the labour market (Watkins, 1991; Butler, 1999; Kincheloe, 1999 cited in Anderson et al., 2004, p. 235). In industry, the traditional function of training is to supply skilled manpower (Garavan, 1997). In this instance, training

is generally defined as a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through learning experiences, to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities (Garavan, 1997, p. 40).

If we accepted the above definition, training therefore must play a critical role as ‘guardian entry into the labour market ...acting as a filter, dividing labour into occupations, each with distinct quality, skill and status’ (Clarke & Winch, 2007, p. 1). This implies that training acts as a means of inclusion or exclusion, giving certain groups access to certain occupations whilst denying others (Clarke & Winch, 2007; Karmel, Mlotkowski & Awodeyi, 2008).

Another definition of the purposes of the training dimension of VET shows that

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is... by definition, vocational in intent. Its purpose is unashamedly instrumental; it is about acquiring skills to be used at work. This contrasts with the broader purposes of school education and university education, where education is often seen as an end in its own right (Karmel et al., 2008, p. 7).

The above views do not preclude the instrumental value of other forms of education but emphasise some of the focuses and purposes of VET in Australia. By comparison,

although university education is not as clearly instrumental as vocational education, much of what happens in this sector is highly vocational (Buchanan et al., 2009). However, we can still acknowledge that VET is closely linked with the social development of labour whilst at the same time a major source of skilled labour supply but unavoidably influenced by global economic changes and labour market dictates.

Yet another definition comes from a critique of vocational education in England, which defines vocational education as

...courses for young people which are offered as a lower-prestige alternative to academic secondary schooling which lead to manual, craft and more recently secretarial jobs (Wolf, 2002, p. 1).

Wolf (2002) argues that this is the way vocational education in England is now and not necessarily how it should be. Her definition of vocational education in England now is not inclusive of different conceptualisations and purposes of VET but shows us the premises for most dualised systems of education today. However, whilst vocational education and training has been accused of the production and maintenance of skills hierarchies it has also been acknowledged for providing people with access to practical skills and useful knowledge that is relevant to their everyday life.

Overall, the above definitions of vocational training emphasise on-the-job training and suggest that training is application driven. This form of learning is mostly associated with enterprise-based or workplace-based training (Wolf, 2002). Hence students gain skills for immediate use at the workplace. In the Australian VET context, the advent of training packages resulted in fundamentally new ways of providing training and assessment services (Simons et al., 2003). These new ways of providing training and assessment services are informed by the training packages model, which:

...enable flexible delivery on the job in workplaces, or off the job in training institutions, or utilising a combination of both. All learning in a training package context should occur under conditions that simulate real workplace conditions as closely as possible (Simons et al., 2003, p. 11).

But there are contestations and debates about the difficulties arising from work-based training packages (Smith & Keating, 2003). Smith and Keating (2003) argue that industry-based training packages are difficult to deliver when students are not employed in the field of practice. They further suggest that in order to overcome this limitation, a variety of strategies can be used to include work placements, which may be difficult for some commercial for profit private RTOs and international students.

Overall, the preceding arguments have demonstrated that VET harbours tensions, threats and opportunities. Invariably, vocational education purposes will always generate contestations (Anderson et al., 2004; Ferrier & Anderson, 1998). However, this study is informed by the view that VET is complex and varied. It argues that like other forms of education, VET has many aims that can be combined in many different ways. Some can see VET as concerning personal emancipation, whilst others see it as concerning economic development (Clarke & Winch, 2007). This makes VET purposes diverse and contestable and vocational education and training purposes vary from society to society. This raises the question of why international students come into the Australian VET market and into commercial for profit private VET RTOs, like those, which form the focus of this study. It also raises the question of whether these courses are regarded as a means of direct entry to the workplace, a pathway to further study or perhaps a means of immigration (Birrell & Healy, 2008; Hawthorne, 2010; Volkoff & Golding, 1998).

With the introduction of the competitive training markets in Australia, which now include international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs, it is argued that the training contexts are becoming increasingly diverse and no longer reflect the traditional training characteristics and boundaries that apply for local students (Simons et al., 2003). To what extent are these learning contexts aligned with the purposes and aspirations of their participants? Does the contemporary Australian VET system serve the interests of the new global student cohorts and their countries of origin's industries? An exploration of VET practices internationally can provide useful insights.

Vocational education and training – international comparisons

The redesign of education and training systems globally has been organised on the basis of models informed by each country's historical, social, political, and economic circumstances (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998; Anderson et al., 2004). This means that vocational education and training models adopted by different countries are in most cases influenced by structural differences in both formal and informal educational systems, labour relations and systems of governance (Ferrier & Anderson, 1998). For example, the stratification of secondary education (segregation of academic from vocational education) is a common feature of most systems internationally, but varying in terms of institutional arrangements, the role of apprenticeships and the age at which students' pathways are determined (Taylor et al., 1997). 'Australia was hardly alone, for similarly stratified educational arrangements, though with considerable variations, were found in most western societies' (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 102).

Recently, especially in the European Union, countries seem to have advanced particular themes as they move to transform vocational education and training. These themes are:

- A trend towards the partial integration of vocational and general education in secondary schools (Norway, England and Wales, France, Netherlands)
- The establishment of national qualifications frameworks; measures to promote the recognition of prior learning; and
- The adoption of competency-based approaches to VET delivery and the recognition and the use of industry-led sector agencies to develop standards (Keating, 2009, p. 529, citing OECD, 2006a,b; Sung et al., 2006).

There are also local (country specific) labour markets; industry structures and educational and training systems cultures that influence skills training and VET market reforms (Anderson et al., 2004; Clarke & Winch, 2007; Keating, 2009). Keating (2009) further states that there are structural influences that mediate the mix of interventions to include vocational and school sector relationships, government structure, labour markets and tertiary education characteristics. Keating's (2009)

argument further demonstrates that nation states play major but different roles in the provision of VET. For example, we have countries that have a highly centralised and interventionist approach like Singapore and Japan, whilst in federal systems like Germany and Australia VET control is devolved to state governments, with the most radical example being a system like the USA, which has a highly decentralised non-interventionist approach (Anderson et al., 2004; Bateman et al., 2009; Keating, 2009).

The degree of autonomy of the VET sector in these countries varies considerably but still VET does not have the same independence enjoyed by universities (Keating, 2009). However, the global trend has been a strong shift towards central government intervention coupled with a devolved management responsibility allowing for a free market approach (Bateman et al., 2009). Notably, a considerable variation and mixture of private and public VET provision has been promoted, mostly in Australia where this has resulted in a burgeoning private VET sector (Keating, 2009).

In addition,

Until recently, the private VET sector was also relatively small in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, largely because they have a long tradition of government ownership, financing and control (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 242).

In Australia, over the last two decades beginning in the 1980s, private VET sector expansion and less government funding for the public TAFE system has contributed to the internationalisation of the student cohort (Anderson, 2005). 'Full fee-paying overseas students have also become important in this new scenario, with some institutions becoming heavily dependent upon this funding source' (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 90).

Consequently, the international student market has become a potentially lucrative one but more unstable than the domestic markets (McKenzie, 2008; Xiaoying & Abbott, 2009, p. 242). In fact, besides the economic benefits associated with competitive VET markets

...leaders and managers are being challenged to strike some balance between managing the business and managing the educational imperatives in their organisations, in a context where the operating conditions of registered

training organisations are becoming more diverse with the growth of private providers... (Harris & Simons, 2012, p. 12).

The above analysis suggests that there are inherent tensions associated with those who manage VET institutions today, particularly managing commercial for profit private VET RTOs' educational quality relative to business profit imperatives (Anderson, 2006a; Harris & Simons, 2012). Therefore, commercial for profit private VET RTO managers' perspectives on the education quality and business imperatives nexus is important to provide insights into their businesses foci – one of the focuses of this study.

However, the presence of international students at universities and some public VET institutions is not a recent phenomenon (Xiaoying & Abbott, 2009). It can be argued that the internationalisation of the student cohorts is a manifestation of enabling government policies, which allow for greater competition between public and private VET providers and user choice policies.

Commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts: delivery and assessment of training

In Australia, one of the most important stated objectives of the vocational education and training reforms was

...to strengthen Australia's economic base through providing a highly skilled workforce that will meet the future needs of Australian businesses, industries, communities and individuals (Darwin, 2007, p. 57).

Hence, through deliberate government policies, 'private providers were granted access to government recognition and funding, and were encouraged to compete with TAFE institutes' (Anderson, 2005, p. 30). As a result, the number of private providers in competition with TAFE institutes increased. 'By 2001, there were 4306 non-TAFE registered training organisations in Australia as compared to 1209 in 1994 and these were delivering a substantial number of VET programmes and services' (Anderson, 2005, p. 30).

In addition, the Australian government took

...steps to link its highly developed and comprehensive international student market to skilled migration programmes to facilitate the entry of migrants who have gained Australian qualifications (Saunders, 2008, p. 7).

Against this backdrop, the private VET sector burgeoned, but what has not been thoroughly assessed at a policy level or researched and examined is the growth of the private VET sector that specialises in training international students. ‘Despite their increasing numbers and significance of their role, relatively little research has been undertaken on the nature and extent of their contribution’ (Harris et al., 2006, p. 1).

It is argued that ‘the full extent of VET delivered by private providers is largely still a mystery’, ‘a black box’ (Harris et al., 2006, p. 11, citing Robinson, 2003). ‘Few people in the popular or professional press have seemed prepared to advocate for the students and for the people who teach them’ (Smith, 2010, p. 1). We also know that the growth in participation of private VET RTOs and international students in Australian VET is a consequence of the deregulation and commercialisation of VET, which has been traditionally driven by other factors, especially the need to improve international students’ economic and social status among other factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Therefore it is important to examine the complex nature of commercial for profit private VET RTOs’ operating contexts. This helps us to explain how the various contextual factors combine to influence international students’ educational outcomes and the teaching and learning relationships that emerge. It also helps us to explain how the various contextual factors combine to influence international students’ educational outcomes and the teaching and learning relationships.

Defining commercial for profit private VET RTOs

It can be argued that the public TAFE system and its impact on student outcomes has been extensively researched, but there is very little we know about private VET institutions for international students (Harris et al., 2006). But, are private VET RTOs conceptualised and operated along the same lines as the public TAFEs? Can this private VET sector for international students be viewed as a disparate, amorphous VET and non-TAFE effort? The definition of a private VET RTO and a commercial

for profit private VET RTO in particular is contested, as various terms have been used to mean the same thing (Harris et al., 2006). Private training providers have been labelled variously as ‘private sector providers’, ‘non-government sector providers’, ‘private providers’ or simply non-TAFE and post-school VET in the non-government sector (McPhee, 2003, cited in Harris et. al., 2006, p. 14). A narrower definition views private providers as commercially based businesses involved in education and training – a focus of this study.

The definitions above connote different provider characteristics and emphases of training. These definitions of commercial for profit private VET RTOs in particular are clearly open to interpretation (Harris et al., 2006). However, ‘the National Training Information System uses a typology containing 16 sub-categories to further distinguish private training providers from their TAFE counterparts’ (Harris et al., 2006, p. 14). Some of these sub-categories include adult education centre; adult migrant education provider; agricultural college; commercial training organisation; community access centre; community education provider and not for profit organisations to name a few (Harris et al., 2006). Hence, the way commercial for profit private VET RTOs are defined not only influences the way they offer education and training but also the way research questions about them can be framed. Whilst risking over-simplification, the definition of commercial for profit private VET RTOs used in this study includes those organisations that can be described as non-government commercial entities seeking to make a profit involved in the delivery of VET at a commercial rate. They are involved in selling VET products and services to local and international clients. However, it can be argued that this definition does not adequately capture the complexity and great diversity in the training that private VET RTOs provide in general.

Most registered training organisations in Melbourne have a mixed student cohort (international and local students) but commercial for profit private VET RTOs for international students are businesses that trade in education and training services to international students only (Anderson, 2006a). Recently, the focus on recruiting international students only is beginning to change due to the marked decline in international students’ enrolments and commencements in the VET sector in Australia

(AEI, 2012). There was a marked decline in international students' enrolments and the income attributed to the export education sector in Australia in 2010, especially VET students (AEI, 2012). This resulted in a \$2.4 billion income decline in 2011 compared to the 2010 export income figures (AEI, 2012). Whilst some commercial for profit private VET RTOs are now forced to recruit local students in order to maintain their businesses' profitability and survival, the income attributed to the VET sector in general and commercial for profit private VET RTOs in particular shows that they are 'fully commercial entities that trade in education and training services and compete for private fee-paying clients in the domestic and export markets' (Anderson, 2006a, p. 7).

In fact, the changing market conditions experienced by commercial for profit private VET RTOs recently means that commercial for profit private VET providers for international students operate in rapidly changing and unstable export markets. It also suggests that their commercial viability rests on their capacity to offer distinguished customised courses that are qualitatively different from their competitors (Anderson, 2006a). Unavoidably, commercial for profit private VET RTOs have to offer courses 'that are guided by their knowledge of immigration policy settings and are directed to the immigration market' (Birrell, Healy & Kinnaird, 2009, p. 33). Hence, commercial for profit private VET RTOs for international students are forced to innovate and adapt to changes in customer demands and expectations (Anderson, 2006a).

There are also policy frameworks, which place conditions for private RTO registration on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students [CRICOS] (AEI, 2012). These policies also guide their operations. Providers of education to international students can only be registered on the CRICOS in Australia where they have been approved by the designated authority to provide courses of education or training to international students in that state (AEI, 2012; VRQA, 2010; ASQA, 2013). This approval can only be given where the provider to be registered has been found to comply with all the requirements for registration under the relevant state or territory legislation and section 9 of the ESOS Act (AEI, 2012). This registration also includes complying with the requirements of the national code (ASQA, 2013).

The CRICOS conditions are part of the national code that applies to all providers registered under the ESOS Act to deliver education and training courses to international students who come to Australia to study on a student visa (AEI, 2012; ASQA, 2013). The ESOS Act is also used by the state and territory government authorities (designated authorities) for the purpose of recommending courses for registration on the CRICOS register and regulating the activities of VET providers who train international students (AEI, 2012). CRICOS conditions also require all RTOs delivering VET courses to international students, including commercial for profit private VET RTOs, to deliver ‘only Training Package-based qualifications with prescribed outcomes’ (Gallagher & Anderson, 2005, p. 2). The justification for this is that training packages as instruments of the regulatory framework are meant to offer greater simplicity, consistency, and portability of VET qualifications (Anderson, 2006a, citing ANTA, 1999). Hence the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and Training Packages, construct a web of relationships that guide and organise complex private VET RTO practices (Grace, 2005).

Delivery of training in commercial for profit private VET RTOs: the training packages model

Training packages form the basis for most VET qualifications in Australia (Smith & Keating, 2003). They (training packages) shape the nature of training ‘because they specify *what* is to be taught and, in broad terms, *how* it should be assessed’ (Wheelahan, 2008, p. 5). They were conceived amongst other things as a means to align training outcomes with industry skills requirements (Anderson, 2006a). It is also argued that the training packages nomenclature offers a one size fits all approach to training, limiting VET RTOs’ flexibility and capacity to offer customised courses to their diverse international and local clients (Wheelahan, 2008; Smith, 2002; Jackson, 1993; Anderson, 2006a).

At a conceptual level, proponents of the competence-based training packages model are persuaded by the view that what is ‘worthy of learning should be judged by what

learners can do with their learning' (Hager, 2004, p. 411). Proponents of the training packages model also emphasise the metaphor of learning as acquisition (Hager, 2004). Hence during the course delivery process, the teacher or assessor must demonstrate the expected skill, attributes and attitudes whilst the student participates by repeating the demonstrated skill and the teacher in turn modifies and corrects the novice's performance until competence is achieved (Truman, 2009).

Although the analysis of the assumptions of learning in the above paragraph, which inform the training packages framework, emphasise the acquisition metaphor (behaviourist approach), some researchers argue that this position is limited and unhelpful (Sfard, 1998; Felstead et al., 2009). They suggest that learning is also 'a process in which individuals learn as part of social engagement with other people and resources' (Felstead et al., 2009, p. 4). This view subscribes to the learning as participation metaphor, which emphasises the notions of communities of practice (Sfard, 1998; Felstead et al., 2009). However, Sfard (1998) argues that although the acquisitive and the participative theories of learning are seemingly incompatible, they are incommensurable, which means that they are irreducible but can share a peaceful co-existence in a teaching and learning environment. Sfard (1998, p. 11) further argues that 'because no two students have the same needs and no two teachers arrive at their best performance in the same way...a combination of the acquisition and participation metaphors would bring to the fore the advantages of each of them'.

Sfard's (1998) argument suggests that both the acquisitive and participatory theories of learning have something to offer that the other cannot offer. Yet it seems that policy makers in Australia, through the training packages model emphasise the learning as acquisition approach. But it can be argued that the contextual nature of learning assumed in the training packages model requires a pedagogic flexibility, which is inherently reflected in today's employment environment where workers are required to continually develop new skills across the duration of their careers (Felstead, et al., 2009).

However, others argue that:

Training packages are concerned with defining the outcomes of training rather

than a prescription of the pathway of learning and assessment to arrive at those outcomes (Simons et al., 2003, p. 20).

Hence, training packages are designed to be flexible and inclusive of a broad range of delivery and assessment strategies to meet the needs of a broad audience of both large and small businesses (Simons et al., 2003). This suggests that training packages are intended to ‘increase flexibility, accessibility and respond to the training to the needs of industry in general, and individual enterprises in particular’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 29). Hence the new environment requires VET practitioners to have a sophisticated pedagogic appreciation of all pedagogic choices that are consistent with the contexts, diverse student cohorts and learning sites in which they work.

However, commercial for profit private VET RTOs are business entities that have to maximise efficiencies whilst at the same time deliver quality training (Anderson, 2006a; Harris & Simons, 2012). They need to vigorously market their products and deliver them cost effectively to their local and international business clients. But some have argued that whilst Australian AQTF requirements and regulations assure quality and compel training providers to use training packages, sometimes hastily developed and rapidly delivered courses using limited teaching and learning resources are used in order to increase efficiencies (Anderson, 2006a; Wesley, 2009). Commercial for profit private VET providers have always argued that:

Training packages comprise rigid and inflexible sets of product specifications ... imposed on RTOs regardless of the diverse markets in which they operate and the differential needs of their clients (Anderson, 2006a, p. 12).

Regardless of the competency-based training assumptions that form the bedrock of the current Australian VET system and the existing quality assurance mechanisms, training packages have to be delivered to international students in a specified time frame because of student visa time specifications (Gallagher & Anderson, 2005). This suggests that commercial for profit private VET RTOs have to maximise student attendance in order to minimise extra tuition fee costs to their international students whilst delivering their training within the students’ visa time frame.

If we took the view that ‘VET is aligned directly to learning for work and includes

training for specific job roles' commercial for profit private VET RTO training must be associated with providing people with access to practical skills and knowledge useful at work (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 234). Ideally, the delivery process and learning must be driven 'by acting or doing in a range of contexts or communities of practice' (Foley, 2004, p. 29). By implication, the learning site at the VET provider should therefore approximate workplace conditions or at least provide the student with realistic training experiences (ANTA, 2003). However, if training packages are designed to focus on Australian industry job roles to address Australia's own industries' global economic competitiveness, this workplace training focus poses a dilemma for those international students who want to go back home after training.

The dilemma posed above is especially so if the student country's economic circumstances do not mirror Australian industries' skills maturity and requirements. It also makes it difficult for commercial for profit private VET RTOs to differentiate the needs of their clients based on their countries of origin's skills requirements. Hence international students who gain skills in the Australian VET sector and choose to return home may find their skills irrelevant and misaligned with the requirements of the industries in their home countries (Tran & Nyland, 2013). This is illustrated in a recent study, which has also shown that

a number of students had trained overseas and found their qualifications weren't recognised. Some were studying programs at the same or higher level as their original qualification, but there were a number doing programs that would lead them to less skilled occupations (Wheelahen et al., 2012, p. 24).

Essentially, the above insights into the RTO delivery contexts compel us to raise questions about the quality of training offered by commercial for profit private VET RTOs and the quality assurance frameworks that are supposed to maintain quality educational outcomes. How is the quality of training in these providers assured? How does the existing quality assurance process give confidence in the VET system operating in a market model for VET? The examination of quality assurance processes can offer useful insights.

Assessment of training: quality assurance

Vocational education and training quality assurance processes are intended to give confidence in the educational services provided by educational providers (Bateman et al., 2009). Therefore, quality assurance is important to the purpose, structure and the process of VET. ‘Quality assurance in Australian VET is organised through the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and governed by the National Quality Council’ (Seddon, 2009a, p. 69). At the time of writing this report, this policy arrangement was under review and subject to change. The organisation and structure of the National Quality Council has changed (AEI, 2012).

The National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) which commenced operations on 1 July 2011 as a committee of the Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) provides advice on national standards for quality assurance, performance monitoring, reporting, risk, audit, review and renewal of providers’ accreditation status, and accreditation of VET qualifications (ASQA, 2013). The NSSC undertakes many of the functions formerly carried out by the National Quality Council, which was dissolved on 30 June 2011. The new council mandates new registration and reporting standards for all RTOs, which are not explored in this study. In addition, the Standards for National VET Regulator (NVR) for Registered Training Organisations replace the former AQTF standards for relevant applicants or RTOs (ASQA, 2013). However, the focus of training in VET has largely remained the same – industry driven. The VET quality model in Australia is still premised on industry standards, continuous improvement and national recognition (VRQA, 2010; ASQA, 2013).

The new national arrangements also use the VET Quality Framework (VQF), which replaces references to the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). These new arrangements also recognise Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) as the body responsible for registration and compliance arrangements (ASQA, 2013). In addition, the VQF ensures nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for clients of Australia's vocation education and training (VET) system (ASQA, 2013; Gibb, 2003). This framework underpins the training packages model and sets out the competency standards for the industry, assessment standards and a

qualifications framework, which inevitably influence students' outcomes (Bateman et al., 2009; Gibb, 2003). Whilst acknowledging that quality assurance in VET has multiple purposes, one of the main focuses of this research is to investigate perceptions of the quality of international students' VET outcomes.

Whilst the quality assurance system is meant to provide confidence in the educational services provided by training institutions, it does not guarantee the quality of the services (Bateman et al., 2009). But, drawing from research into manufacturing practices, we can understand outcomes as products of a production process that comprises a distinct structure of inputs, processes and outputs – holistic processes (Ballantine, 2001). This means that quality assurance mechanisms can be described either as front-end - input mechanisms - or back-end - output mechanisms or a holistic process (Bateman et al., 2009). Bateman et al.'s (2009) analysis assumes a general systems theory analytical framework, which suggests that there are inputs, processes and output categories in the educational production process. It can be argued that these system inputs, processes and outputs dimensions are interrelated and influence each other and that they cannot be understood in isolation (Ballantine, 2001).

In Australia, the front-end model is emphasised (Bateman et al., 2009). It is argued that the 'front-end systems typically are designed to ensure the quality and the authenticity of VET programmes and the quality, effectiveness and integrity of training providers' (Bateman et al., 2009, p. 4). This suggests that the quality of the students' educational outcomes is not emphasised. It can be argued that this lack of emphasis on the other dimensions of the VET system can lead to a lack of congruence between and amongst the education system's components, the students' expectations and participating VET providers' priorities. If the process (learning) and output (skills, knowledge and attitudes) dimensions of learning are not emphasised, it also means that their influences and interdependencies may not be subjected to sufficient empirical scrutiny.

The quality framework's purpose in VET in Australia is intended to 'address risks of information asymmetry, ensure providers' quality signals are recognised and support quality improvements in the Australian VET' (Seddon, 2009a, p. 74). However,

‘defining quality and measuring quality improvements in VET are highly problematic’ exercises’ (Anderson, 2006b, p. 58). Quality, in particular the quality of outcomes, is impacted by a number of factors that are difficult to disentangle and quantify (Gibb, 2003). It involves different values held by individuals and groups (communities of practice) and ‘quality signals are value propositions’ which guide communities of practice about their good practice (Seddon, 2009a, p. 67).

In the marketised model of VET, the quality signal is an important determinant of student destination (choice) by enrolment. It mediates market actors’ responses to market information asymmetries (Seddon, 2009a). This means that the market quality signal (private VET RTO quality) is distributed variously through different media but most importantly through direct and indirect private VET RTO advertising and marketing. Hence, prospective students will use the advertised commercial for profit private VET RTO quality signals in the training market to project and anticipate future educational, social and economic outcomes influenced by labour market contexts.

From the Australian market perspective and viewed from the supply side, VET quality means complying with quality frameworks and being compliance driven (Seddon, 2009a). But, when viewed from the demand side, personal experiences, scepticisms and outcomes drive individual and group quality evaluations. These two views do not narrow the definitional gap but help to emphasise that neither view addresses the risks arising from the market choice, in particular the marketised model for VET (Seddon, 2009a).

What we know is that training packages specify the standards that represent the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the individual employee at the local workplace level (Grace, 2005). Therefore, the role of the VET market in defining the quality of training is limited if it does not include workplace standards and expectations. Hence there is a potential risk for considerable mismatches between the skills levels the student gains and work requirements if a market based quality assurance (front-end) approach is used to determine the quality of training inputs and student’s outcomes only.

It is also argued that ‘the quality of teaching... is the largest influence on student achievement...’ (Barber et al., 2009, p. 6). But in Australia, the term VET teacher or trainer has remained contested in terms of the qualities, skills and attributes they need to have (Wheelahan & Curtin, 2010). It is argued that,

in part, this (contestation about role and meaning) reflects the different purposes of VET qualifications, the different contexts of VET teaching and desired outcomes, and the wide-ranging needs of the increasingly diverse VET student population (Wheelahan & Curtin, 2010, p. 4, parentheses added).

These researchers also argue that we know less about VET teachers than teachers in the other two sectors of education. Notably, ‘the data on the VET workforce are (very) problematic, and whilst an overall picture may be possible, this must be viewed cautiously’ (Mlotkowski & Guthrie, 2010, cited in Wheelahan, 2010).

However, the term teacher rather than instructor or trainer ‘better captures the complex array of practices which make up educational work in vocational contexts’ (Robertson, 2008, p. 2). In comparison with teachers, it is argued that ‘trainers are usually ‘in-company’ trainers and sometimes hold no formal qualifications’ (Wheelahan et al., 2010, p. 30). Hence both terms, teacher and trainer, are used in this study in order to capture the complexity of their work.

Nonetheless, the difficulty that VET teachers or trainers face is also the lack of distinction between levels of performance since learners are assessed only as either competent or not yet competent in a simulated work environment. This difficulty is heightened by

...a competency-based training system that expects trainers and assessors operating in either institutional or workplace contexts to customise assessments to local and workplace situations and gives them the flexibility to develop and determine how and when they will go about assessing students (Halliday-Wynes & Misko, 2013, p. 9).

At the same time, this difficulty is further compounded by the fact that:

Competency-based assessment only provides information on whether the person is able to do certain tasks but does not make transparent how well the performance is undertaken (Hellwig, 2004, p. 64).

Whilst the debate about grading is outside the purview of this thesis, the CBT model, as it is understood in the providers in this study, is meant to use the competent or not yet competent grading approach.

Although CBT assessments and grading criteria are meant to use competent or not yet competent, some institutions (TAFEs) in some jurisdictions in Australia have grading systems outside the CBT model (Maxwell, 2010). For example, 'the reporting of assessment in the Western Australian model is based on students getting two reports: one with competent or not-yet-competent, and one with the grade and grading criteria' (Maxwell, 2010, p. 13). It can be argued that this assessment criteria may constitute a rather simplistic approach to assessing quality in skills training, especially the worth of the educational services provided by commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the absence of empirical evidence from industry about students' skills levels and the industry's institutional training capability validation.

Overall, this study accepts that quality is a multidimensional concept open to various interpretations. But, one amongst many important indicators of quality in VET is the level of client or student satisfaction and employer satisfaction with graduates' performance (Anderson, 2006b; Gibb, 2003). This study defines quality as a fitness for purpose and consistency across similar contexts as understood by communities of practice. Hence, one way of understanding the quality of VET or how well VET students' skills match workplace requirements may be demonstrated in their employability and employer satisfaction.

Since in Australia only the front-end (provider supply) quality assurance model is emphasised, it seems we have limited structural requirements needed at enrolment to analyse prospective students' characteristics. It can also be argued that we have limited knowledge of the preparedness of the VET students in general, and in particular international students attracted to VET courses offered by commercial for profit private VET RTOs. Hence the analysis of international students' characteristics

and perceptions proposed in this study is intended to address this gap in our knowledge by providing insights into students' educational trajectories, their motivations and the congruency of the training model and contexts with the students' and industry's expectations.

International students: characteristics and perceptions

In adult education, it is argued that there is no 'generic essentialised adult learner who can be accurately described...' (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 55). Drawing from this conception of an adult learner, there is merit in the argument that there is essentially no generic description that can accurately portray international students in VET. The definition of international or overseas students can vary depending on the country making the distinction (Morrison et al., 2005; AEI, 2013). In Australia and New Zealand, the international student is distinguished from the home student by immigration and citizenship or nationality statuses (AEI, 2013).

However, the definition of who is an international student is often varied and open to interpretations and contestations (Morrison et al., 2005). Most definitions offer categorisations according to the student's country of origin or immigration status (Morrison et al., 2005). But, the country of domicile or immigration status categorisation is not usually obvious and straightforward where regional economic blocs have policy frameworks that blur this distinction. For example, on the one hand, students living in the European Union (EU) may not be distinguished as international students when studying in the United Kingdom (UK) when that categorisation is based on European Union (EU) geopolitical and economic dimensions. On the other hand, students from the EU countries can still be considered to be international students when studying in the UK if a non-EU context is used.

The country of domicile or origin is mostly used in the literature to make the distinction between local and international students (Morrison et al., 2005; Cuthbert et al. 2008). But, this distinction, in Australia does not include immigrants who gain permanent residency status and continue to study in host countries. Therefore, in this instance, the basis for defining who is an international student and who is not is a

function of the socio-economic policy framework of the country making the distinction at that time.

Indeed international students in the VET sector have become an important part of the internationalisation of the Australian VET products and services but the terms 'international' or 'overseas' student have not been clearly delineated (Morrison et al, 2005). They argue that the country of the student's destination determines the definition used at any point in time. Hence, the definition of 'international' student, and hence of 'home' student, can vary. In the UK the distinction may be made on the basis of fee status, so 'home' students in that sense can include other European Union (EU) students, whereas in other contexts 'international' students include non-UK EU students. 'In Australia 'home' students usually includes New Zealanders, and vice versa' (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 327).

In Australia, international students are defined as students not domiciled in Australia. But the terms 'international' and 'overseas' have been used interchangeably in many studies to describe students who study outside their countries of origin. For example, these references are found in Sanderson, (2007), Smith (2010), Tran and Nyland (2009, 2013), Cuthbert et al. (2008), to name a few. Nonetheless, because of the contestability of meaning and the dual usage of the terms 'international' or 'overseas' student in research, both terms international and overseas students are used interchangeably in this report.

Another useful framework used to define international students 'uses the pervasiveness of economic instrumentalism and globalisation rhetoric as a springboard for the discussion of international students' (Liddicoat, Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2003, p. 5). This means that international students are redefined as clients of VET providers and consumers of VET programmes and services (Anderson, 2006b). Hence, it can be argued that international students' recruitment, characteristics, participation and contribution are considered in economic terms. This suggests that the prevalent VET discourses in Australia privilege and give prominence to provider profitability and national economic gains.

Biggs' (1999) analysis of international students in higher education also provides a useful framework for this study because of the similarities between the higher education and the VET markets – full fee paying international students in education markets. His studies show that the dominant Western worldviews about knowledge and the characteristics of an ideal student are usually privileged in analyses of outcomes (Biggs, 1999). The non-Western international student is usually categorised as 'other' whilst ignoring that American, New Zealander or UK students participating in the Australian VET sector are international students (Biggs, 2003; Devos, 2003). It is also argued that although Western international students encounter problems, present characteristics and carry cultural knowledge that is clearly different from domestic Australian VET students, they are not categorised or perceived as international students or other (Biggs, 1999).

The 'other' categorisation can also lead to international students being lumped together clumsily, resulting in varied and unhelpful analytical characterisations and overgeneralisations (Biggs, 1999; Morrison et al., 2005; Tran & Nyland, 2009; Devos, 2003). For example, a deficit model is usually used to define international students' learning characteristics in a simplistic relative comparison with local students (Biggs, 1999). According to Biggs (1999), this can lead to a deficit approach to teaching. A deficit approach to teaching is a 'strategy to identify the skills and procedural knowledge that the target students lack and that the mainstream students are presumed to have already' (Biggs, 1999, p. 136). He argues that the teacher then sees the international student as having a deficit to remedy. This motivates the teacher to give an out-of-class and sometimes an in-class remediation and at times results in teaching the student to the level of the deficit (Biggs, 2003). Whilst this literature is about international students in higher education, what is particularly clear in VET in Australia is that international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs and their learning characteristics, aspirations and outcomes have not been thoroughly problematised.

These debates about international students' performance in higher education, and in VET in particular, have also been built around the students' countries of origin, cultural diversity, prior educational levels, language and their learning characteristics

(Arenas, 2009; Hawthorne, 2010; Morrison et al., 2005). Yet, implicated in influencing students' approach to learning, performance and arguably outcomes, are enduring personal characteristics existing prior to learning and the prevalent learning environment in which students' aspirations and expectations are being realised [or not] (Lizzio, Wilson & Simons, 2002, parentheses added). Hence it can be argued that these studies show that VET international students' prior educational qualifications and experiences are sometimes not sufficiently considered or emphasised (Tran & Nyland, 2013).

Yet, prior education is inextricably intertwined with all forms of training (Wolf, 2002). All forms of training or tertiary education 'do not involve discrete free-standing skills which can get added to any employee's [student's] repertoire... but continue from what was learned in full-time education' (Wolf, 2002, p. 149, parentheses added). This means that prior education levels form an important learning platform for all education and training and the training that takes place after secondary education may depend directly on what was learned previously.

What is implicit in the international students' debate is the assumption that international students perform less favourably in Western-based conventional educational systems, giving rise to questions about their countries of origin and the likely influences of prior educational qualifications on performance and outcomes. As a result, in the Australian context, it seems that international students' backgrounds are emphasised to the exclusion of other important learning characteristics. Whilst diversity is important and should not be ignored; good teaching also relies on the universality of the learning process (Sanderson, 2007). Teaching as educating must be focused on what students do rather than on what students are or what the teacher does (Biggs, 2003).

In addition, prior educational achievement has been shown to be a reliable predictor of students' future achievement in further studies and plays an important role in predicting student outcomes (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010). This proposition also assumes that the learner will integrate new materials with prior knowledge. They also argued that although there are some demographic features such as age, gender and

other institutional factors that can influence student performance and subsequently outcomes, there is also a possibility for interaction between these factors (Li et al., 2010).

Because historically, some viewed VET as a destination for those who could not meet entry-level requirements for higher education or academic courses, international students' prior educational qualifications and the social capital they carry have not been thoroughly problematised. Hence we have to ask; who are they? Where do they come from? International students who study in the Australian VET sector come from all over the world (AEI, 2009). Invariably, 'international students do not form a homogeneous group...' that can be neatly categorised (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 329). Hence this study seeks to investigate international students' positive learning characteristics and the social capital they carry and to move beyond a focus on their deficits only, which, in isolation, cannot help to improve international students' leaning outcomes. It seeks to analyse the students' holistic learning characteristics in order to gain insights into the individuals' learning territories.

Critical issues and emerging questions

Overall, the review of the literature has shown that with the advent of VET market reforms in Australia, the traditional purposes, participants and outcomes of VET in Australia have been challenged. Market-driven VET policies have led to increasingly diverse learning environments that no longer reflect the traditional training characteristics and boundaries that apply for local students. The new learning environments have led to a more diverse provider and student cohort composition. This has also led to ambiguities about the congruency and relevancy of the internally focused training packages model, which is underpinned by the economically focused global competitive VET market system.

The preceding literature review has also referred to debates about international students and their participation in commercial for profit private VET RTOs, which have set up discourses of international students and their providers as foreign and 'the other' motivated by immigration outcomes only. This presents a paradox, which

positions and reflects the ambivalence of the local VET discourse towards them. International students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs are simultaneously characterised as problematic and as a source of economic benefit to the Australian economy. This discourse sits uneasily alongside the National Training Framework assumptions, which endorsed in the mid-1990s the competitive VET training markets designed to produce a highly skilled, mobile and competitive workforce. It also makes simplistic assumptions about international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs by failing to consider more comprehensively the RTOs' operating contexts, practices and characteristics. One of the effects of the construction of this discourse is the imposition of limitations on the available positions that one might take up in the debate. It can be argued that the scope for a counter discourse is limited by the terms of the discourse and the way in which the issues are represented in the absence of dissenting or confirmatory empirical studies.

Paradoxically, the contestations and slippages inherent in the notions of globalisation upon which these discourses are set also remain contested and unsettled. Hence it is difficult to assess the impact of globalisation on education given the lack of agreement about the processes with which globalisation is associated. Indeed, different communities experience globalisation differently often with heterogeneous, conflicting and unequal outcomes (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Hence, it can be argued that it is difficult to attain a singular common view of the educational experience with the same broad purpose for all in a global context. Yet there have been few attempts, besides this study and Anderson's (2006b) work, to explore and analyse the impact and outcomes of the competitive VET market in Australia, particularly in terms of the situated realities influencing international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia.

The study seeks to understand the impact and outcomes of commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students' participation in the competitive training market in Melbourne, Australia. Recent VET studies, particularly NCVER studies have shown that

private providers are, so far, not included in official statistics except in the case of those in receipt of government funds and for their activity in relation to the government funds only (Harris et al., 2006, p. 11).

Hence, this thesis investigates and reports on situated realities, which influence international students' outcomes in a few commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia. It focuses on showing international students' characteristics, lived experiences and outcomes. Further, it explores and analyses their training managers' perspectives about commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts and quality assurance auditors' views about policy and the market environment, as well as VET teachers' educational expectations and perspectives. It also attempts to understand the competitive VET markets' inputs, processes and outcomes to illustrate the impact and outcomes of international students and commercial for profit private VET RTOs' participation in VET in the study.

Drawing from the above literature review, the following questions emerge

1. What are the characteristics, educational and employment expectations of international students upon enrolment in VET courses at private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that specialise in teaching international students?
2. What are the international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at private RTOs for international students in Melbourne, Australia?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions about educational and employment outcomes for international students enrolled in the courses delivered by private VET RTOs?
4. What are the internal organisational contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?
5. What government policy and regulatory initiatives influence international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?

Conclusion

This chapter first examined the conceptual framework that is used to underpin this study. This analysis was followed by an examination of policy as a concept, globalisation and VET, VET perspectives, Australian VET structures and private RTO contexts and perceptions about international students respectively. It argued that social structure is not something that operates independently of human actors (Archer, 2010; Porpora, 1989). Hence the chapter supported the view that by changing our social and natural contexts, we change the forces and circumstances that shape the character of society and its people. It further argued that the relationships amongst social positions in society, particularly social institutions, might constitute the sort of mechanisms that we see in the Australian competitive VET market today – situated realities influencing international students’ outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia.

In addition, the chapter has shown that since the late 1980s, the Australian VET sector has undergone significant and far-reaching structural reforms. This restructuring was influenced by the neoliberal economic views of both the Labor and Liberal Australian governments. It argued that globalisation and marketisation concepts were used as the foundations for developing the VET policy ‘speak’ about competition and training standards. Consequently, the Australian industry training standards were privileged over general educational standards. This emphasis was based on the assumption that this would deliver a highly skilled flexible workforce that can enhance Australia’s global economic competitiveness. Against this backdrop, commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international student enrolments burgeoned with little research to theoretically and practically problematise their contexts and their students’ outcomes.

The chapter has also shown that whilst societal purposes for VET are contestable, they are always influenced by contemporary economic and social factors. It argued that although historically VET has often been a destination for those with limited social capital, this conception of VET has been challenged not only by the participation of international students but by the forces of globalisation and

competitive market forces of supply and demand. Indeed what is still unclear, at least for now, is whether or not VET is still limited to those from low social economic status or those who could not qualify to study university courses. This study makes an attempt to challenge this conception by providing empirical evidence to support a rethink of the definition of the characteristics, and educational and employment trajectories of VET students, particularly international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study in Melbourne, Australia.

In the following chapters, the thesis explores the webs of relationships built into the existing Australian competitive VET market system. It analyses evidence from international students, VET teachers, training managers and quality assurance auditors to show that the competitive VET market system constitutes the material circumstances that compel commercial for profit private VET RTOs, international students, their VET teachers, training managers, and quality assurance auditors to act in the ways they do with consequences for international students' outcomes.

To holistically analyse the context in which learning takes place in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia and drawing from critical realism and situated learning approaches, the next section examines the methodological framework and the research processes that underpin this study. It presents and explains the research process that was used to collect, collate, analyse and interpret data from those involved in the contexts of learning in commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students in the study.

Chapter 3

Research methodology: design and process

Introduction

This study is conceived and designed as a broad analysis of the impact and outcomes of the participation of international students in commercial for profit private VET Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in competitive VET markets in Melbourne, Australia. It specifically focuses on the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' operating contexts by investigating factors that influence international students' outcomes. To do this, it uses a mixed methods design consisting of the quantitative-qualitative analyses of international students' characteristics and outcomes, their trainers' perspectives and a qualitative analysis of interviews with training managers and quality assurance auditors in the commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts.

This chapter provides a justification and rationale for the research methodology adopted and describes the research design and processes that were used in carrying out this study. The study aims and questions are presented first. Second, the justification of the methodology and the clarification of the study approach to include the assumptions underpinning the research process are examined. This is followed by the explication of the research design and the research process. Next, the definition of the data collection process using surveys and interviews, and the study population and sample are presented respectively. Ethical considerations and the limitations of the study methods form the last sections of the chapter.

Research questions and study aims

In order to gain insights into and knowledge from seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs operating in a market model for VET, the study was shaped by five key questions that were drawn from the review of the literature. These questions also help us to understand the relationship between international students' learning outcomes

and their learning environment. Hence, the study examines the participants' interpretations of learning opportunities and constraints, experiences and outcomes in competitive VET markets in Melbourne, Australia. The study broadly aims to

- Examine the influence of institutional teaching and learning dynamics in private VET RTOs that specialise in teaching international students.
- Understand international students' experiences, perspectives and outcomes.
- Identify and analyse government policy impact and influence on private VET RTOs' ability to contribute to the VET sector skills training effort.

In order to achieve these aims, the study addresses the following questions:

- What are the characteristics, educational and employment expectations of international students upon enrolment in VET courses at private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that specialise in teaching international students?
- What are the international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at private RTOs for international students in Melbourne, Australia?
- What are the teachers' perceptions about educational and employment outcomes for international students enrolled in the courses delivered by private VET RTOs?
- What are the internal organisational contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?
- What government policy and regulatory initiatives influence international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?

Research methodology: justification and rationale

Clarification of the approach to thinking about and doing research is important. It critically explains the researcher's worldviews and the assumptions that were used to form the methodological platform chosen to undertake a research study (Yin, 2003). It is argued that 'there are three major research paradigms or approaches: quantitative

research, qualitative research and mixed research' that the social researcher can choose from (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 31). These paradigms represent researcher ontological and epistemological dispositions that inform and shape the study process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). By implication, these researcher beliefs or views inform and shape researcher practice.

Therefore, the social researcher paradigm, in particular how they perceive social reality, informs the 'how' and 'what' of the study (Bryman, 2008). In this instance, how the researcher perceives social reality, informs the 'how' and 'what' of the study (Bryman, 2008). Hence, a paradigm is considered to be '...a worldview, a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Creswell, 2007, p. 19, citing Guba 1990). But, these research paradigms can also be broadly categorised as positivism, interpretivism and post-positivism (Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The positivism/interpretivism paradigm is understood as similar to the quantitative/qualitative divide. However, quantitative research approaches depend on a positivist tradition of the natural sciences, which emphasise objectivity and generalisability (Bryman, 2004, 2008).

Since quantitative research approaches depend on a positivist tradition of the natural sciences, it is assumed that human cognition and behaviour are highly predictable and explainable (Bryman, 2004, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). As a consequence quantitative researchers try to understand cause-effect relationships in order to make probabilistic predictions and generalisations (Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). To do this, 'quantitative research relies on the collection of quantitative data [i.e. numerical data]' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 33, parentheses added). These data are drawn using a narrow lens that is focused on one or a few factors at a time with the factors not being studied held constant (Bryman, 2004). This narrow lens focus on a subject or subjects of study is driven by the assumptions that 'there is a reality to be observed and that rational observers who look at the same phenomenon will basically agree on its existence and its characteristics' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 36). Thus, the quantitative researcher makes this observation from a distance using standard quantitative measuring instruments (Bryman, 2008).

It is also argued that quantitative research contrasts with the qualitative research tradition, which is based on the assumption that human behaviour is fluid, dynamic and changing over time and place and less amenable to generalisations (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). The qualitative research approach is based on the assumption that ‘human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs...’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). Hence the researcher attempts to address questions of meaning and interpretation in context (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In this instance the qualitative researcher focuses on: explaining (learning or generating ideas about) a phenomenon; describing the characteristics of the phenomenon; showing how and why the phenomenon operates; helping us to understand and explain the phenomenon; and tries to influence or control certain specific outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the qualitative researcher is expected to embrace the idea of multiple worldviews and reports on these multiple realities (Creswell, 2012).

In addition, the role of the qualitative researcher is to interpret the meanings that people hold in their natural settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This means that a wide-angle lens is brought into the natural human setting where human choice and behaviour occur (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). They argue that human choice and behaviour is then interpreted and understood using multiple dimensions, which allows the social researcher to interpret the human context and meaning from the participant’s point of view while accurately capturing the participant’s perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Hence the researcher explores or explains the reality of the person, group or community under study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). This standpoint is important because different groups or participants

Construct their different realities or perspectives, and these social constructions, reciprocally, influence how they ‘see’ or understand their worlds, what they see as normal or abnormal, and how they should act (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 35).

It is for the above reason that the qualitative researcher gets closer to the subjects, asks questions about the subjects, collects non-numerical data, records and makes an

interpretation of what is observed (Bryman, 2008). The researcher therefore explores or explains the reality of the person, group or community under study; ‘the researcher is an instrument of data collection’ (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 36). Hence it is argued that this approach is appropriate ‘when little is known about a topic or a phenomenon and when one wants to discover and learn more about it’ (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 32). Notably, social ‘realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts...’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39).

But, the qualitative approach to research alone cannot adequately offer explanatory and descriptive demographic details that are usually possible with the quantitative research approach (Bryman, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Hence others subscribe to the third research paradigm – the mixed method approach (Bryman, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Venkatesh, Brown & Bala, 2013). They argue that fundamental subject/object dichotomy often creates partial or fractured views of social reality (Sayer, 2010). Indeed it can be argued that such an oppositional position potentially disregards the collection of data, which works best when investigating complex social issues. Hence the mixed methods approach to research acts as a bridge between quantitative and qualitative research, particularly when the phenomenon of focus is complex and under-explored (Venkatesh et al., 2013). In this instance, the goal of a mixed methods approach is to use both the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research, which minimise their weaknesses in order to offer the best opportunities for answering the research questions (Bryman, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

It is also argued that the mixed methods approach – combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods – presents better insights into the research problem/s and question/s than using one of the methods independently (Creswell, 2012; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These researchers suggest that mixing research methods can lead to complimentary and richer insights that result in more questions of interest for future studies (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Overall, there are several purposes that the mixed methods approach can be used for (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Amongst some of these important purposes are

complementarity, corroboration or confirmation and diversity from which the researcher benefits (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Venkatesh et al., 2013). In this instance, complementarity brings about mutual viewpoints about similar experiences or associations. Corroboration or confirmation offers opportunities to evaluate the trustworthiness of inferences gained from one method whilst diversity of opinions enables the researcher to obtain opposing viewpoints of the same experiences or associations (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

It is for the above reasons that the mixed methods approach has been chosen here as appropriate for the study of complex and contestable Australian VET market contexts because both approaches are needed to respond to the research questions chosen. Hence this study not only acknowledges the significance of the objective paradigm in which the nature of reality is considered to be objective but accepts as well that real human experiences cannot be understood in isolation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence the strengths of both approaches were used in this study to enable multiple lenses to be focused onto the contextual issues mediating international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

In addition, although there are significant tensions between different research approaches, the position taken for this study does not support the incompatibility thesis, which argues that it is inappropriate to mix qualitative and quantitative research methods because of fundamental differences between the paradigms that underlie these methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Hence the methodological position taken in this study does not 'take an adversarial or polemic stand toward other approaches' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 4). Instead it argues that mixing research approaches and ideas has historical precedence and significance, especially when dealing with complex social research issues on dynamic and contestable sites (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Bryman, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Overall in this study, the combination of different research methods – each appropriate to answer specific questions – is useful to draw out explanatory circumstances that are implicated in shaping the social structural relationships in the delivery of training to international students in a market-based model for VET. As a

result, this study comprised several elements, which are explained as quantitative and qualitative approaches in the following sections.

Research design: the mixed methods process

It has been argued that ‘every type of study has an implicit, if not explicit, research design’ (Yin, 2003, p. 20). This design in most cases is a logical sequence of steps that connect the research data to the ‘initial research questions, and ultimately to the conclusions’ (Yin, 2003, p. 20). It is a logical plan. In this study, the design focused on the use of the mixed research methods approach. Both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative study methods were used.

The study was conducted in three phases (see Figure 1 below). Phase one – February 2011 – commencing international students in seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs completed a total of 194 questionnaires and their teachers completed 19 questionnaires. Phase two – August to November 2011 – in-depth interviews were held with four training managers from the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs and five VET quality assurance auditors. Phase three, the last stage – January to March 2012 – a total of 47 international students, who agreed to participate after graduation were surveyed using online questionnaires. Figure 1 below shows the data collection phases or stages that were used during the study.

Figure 1 Data collection process

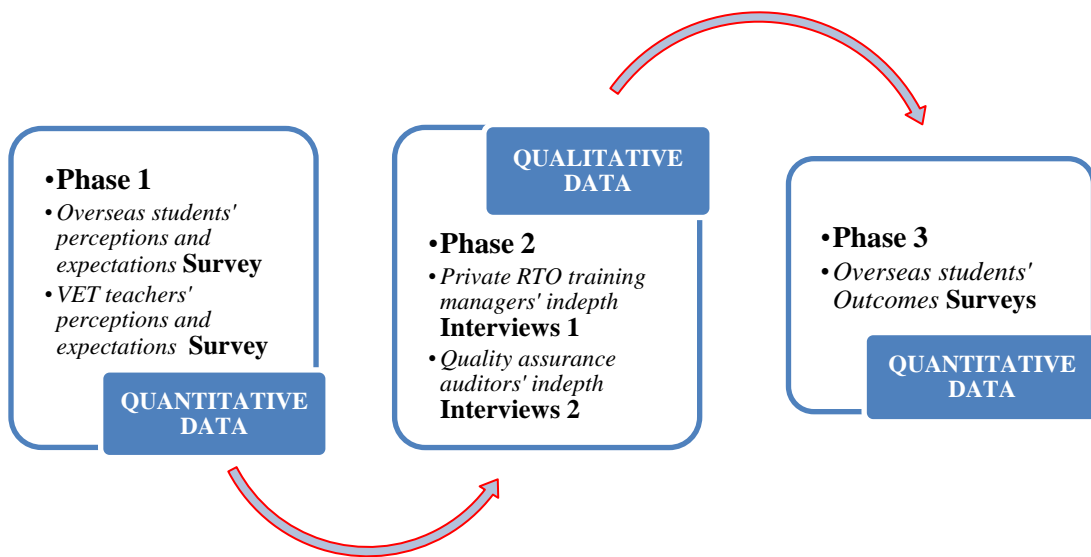


Figure 1 shows the stages that were used to collect the study data. Phase one of the study involved collecting demographic data; expectations and perceptions from international students to answer study questions one and two. This questionnaire also allowed the researcher to collect international students' contact details and consent to survey them in the third and last phase of the study – six to twelve months later.

Whilst 194 international students participated in the baseline surveys during the first phase, a total of 134 students consented to be contacted by the researcher to participate in the outcomes surveys after VET course completion. Of the 134 international students who agreed to take part in the second stage survey, 34 emails could not be used because they were either incorrect or no longer in use. Consequently, a total of 100 international students presumably received the second stage survey through the online survey platform, Survey Monkey. From these 100-second stage surveys (last study phase), 47 participants completed the online questionnaire.

In this study, commencing students are described as those commencing studies at commercial for profit private VET RTOs for the first time and beginning VET courses during the time of the survey. This description led to two categories of commencing students: a) enrolled and commencing studies at commercial for profit private VET RTO for the first time, b) commencing any course excluding ELICOS at

commercial for profit private VET RTO. This distinction is not used in the analyses of data, as it did not have explanatory value, but is used here to clarify the student sample composition.

In addition, during the first phase, 19 VET trainers teaching international students during the study agreed to take part in the study. These teachers were drawn from the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs participating in the study, particularly those involved in teaching the most popular VET courses for international students by enrolment. The VET trainers' questionnaires were administered concurrently with the first international students' questionnaires. This enabled the researcher to examine and analyse simultaneously two data sets that spoke directly about international students' lived experiences, VET pedagogy, and practices in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

In the second phase, seven months after the first survey, in-depth interviews were held with commercial for profit private VET RTOs' training managers. A total of four training managers from the seven participating registered training organisations agreed to participate in the study. The training managers' in-depth interview questions were directly informed by the first stage responses from international students and trainers' surveys. It is argued that training managers occupy influential positions in private VET RTOs and therefore can comment and provide rich insights into their organisation's activities, priorities and directions (Anderson, 2006b). Their participation gave the researcher information about their organisations' internal structure, activities and directions.

In addition, in the second phase, two months after the first interviews were concluded and after the preliminary data analyses, five quality assurance auditors' in-depth interviews were also held. The quality assurance auditors' in-depth interview data provided insights into policy and quality assurance expectations in a market model for VET where full-fee paying international students are participating.

The third and final phase involved international students' outcomes surveys. This self-administered online survey was distributed to 100 international students using the

online Survey Monkey platform. Participating international students' outcomes and experiences were collected, collated and analysed. A total of five data sets were therefore gathered; three surveys and two sets of in-depth interviews. These research participants' data, particularly their perspectives, formed a multiplicity of worldviews (constructed realities), which formed the key factors that are presented in this report. It can also be argued that these contextual factors comprise material circumstances that limited their choices to act (Porpora, 1989; Sayer, 1992).

The study approach described above approximates the mixed method approach called the explanatory sequential design, which involves 'the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data' (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 104). However, whilst there are similarities between this study's approach and Hesse-Biber's (2010) approach, this study is framed differently in that it collected and analysed quantitative data first followed by qualitative data and finally more quantitative data (i.e. quantitative-qualitative-quantitative process). The major difference between Hesse-Biber's (2010) model and this study's design is that the qualitative part of the study was not used on international students and the quantitative part was not used on training managers and auditors. In this study, questionnaires were used to gather data from international students and their teachers whilst in-depth interviews were used to explore training managers and quality assurance auditors' perspectives. Therefore, quantitative-qualitative-quantitative logic was not used on the same subjects.

Quantitative methods

The quantitative aspect of this study addresses the first, second and a part of the third research questions, which are:

- What are the characteristics, educational and employment expectations of international students upon enrolment in VET courses at private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that specialise in teaching international students?

- What are the international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at private RTOs for international students in Melbourne, Australia?
- What are the teachers' perceptions about educational and employment outcomes for international students enrolled in the courses delivered by private VET RTOs?

The study's national sources of the quantitative data were

- NCVET national statistics – VET students' enrolment data;
- Commercial for profit private RTO CRICOS data – registration currency, scope of training and enrolment capacity;
- Australian Education International (AEI) statistics – international students' enrolments and commencements from 2004 to 2012, and educational export income for the years between 2008 and 2012.

These national data were compared with institutional data from the seven commercial providers' admission records.

Whilst institutional admissions records enabled the study to categorise students by course, the demographic data captured were inadequate to enable precise international students' educational characterisations. Hence, three questionnaires were generated from these research questions; two international students' questionnaires – baseline and outcomes; and one VET teachers' questionnaire. The two student questionnaires were part of the quantitative instruments used to collect data from international students in commercial for profit private VET providers to support institutional and nationally available data.

The first survey was used to capture

- International students' demographic data
- International students' prior educational qualifications
- Courses and levels they were enrolled in and how they rated them
- Their initial rating of the adequacy of the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' learning resources
- Their aspirations.

The second online survey was used to provide data about internal students' overall training experiences and outcomes. Hence a longitudinal approach was used to follow international students through thirteen months (January 2011 to March 2012) from course commencement until completion.

The VET teacher questionnaire was designed to explore their pedagogic perspectives, choices and expectations including

- Courses and levels they were teaching, including course codes
- Whether their students were becoming employment ready or not (students' outcomes)
- Their rating of the usefulness of the courses they were teaching to international students
- The rating of the adequacy of their RTOs' learning and teaching resources
- International students' aspirations and learning barriers.

The questionnaires were also designed to draw out these views about international students' outcomes whilst using training packages under the Australian Quality Training Frameworks in a market model for VET. In addition, through written questions, these VET teachers were able to offer explanatory and descriptive details that were useful in characterising international students in comparison with local student discourses about them discussed in Chapter 2.

Table 1 below offers summative details of the participants, timing of data collection and how these data contributed to answering the study questions.

Table 1 Quantitative data sources

Quantitative data sources	Timing and number of participants	Purpose
1. Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary – Education - Training.gov.au 2. RTO1, RTO2, RTO3, RTO4, RTO5, RTO6 and RTO7	Commercial for profit private VET RTOs: N=7 March to August 2010	RTO scope and capacity to determine sample size 1. Initial date of registration 2. VET courses on scope 3. Registered enrolment maximum capacity
Australian Education International (AEI)	International students' enrolments and commencements: December 2004 – 2012	Growth of international students' enrolments and commencements in Australia: National international student growth statistics in VET <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform study context • Explain local enrolment growth
Australian Education International	International students economic contribution Export income to Australia by December 2012	Export income to Australia from international education activity in 2011.
National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER)	Students & courses: National VET enrolment statistics for 2010 & 2012	Australian vocational education & training enrolment statistics 1. Gender comparisons 2. Age related participation
Commercial for profit private VET international students	Baseline survey data from RTOs 1-7 N=194 February to March 2011	Defining international students in VET 1. Demographic characteristics 2. Aspirations 3. Expectations
Commercial for profit private VET international students	Outcomes survey data online RTOs 1-7 N=47 December 2011 to March 2012	International students' VET outcomes 1. Social background 2. Completion rate 3. Experiences 4. Expectations 5. Employment and educational outcomes
Commercial for profit private VET teachers	VET teachers' surveys: RTOs 1-7 N=19 February to March 2011	VET teachers' perspectives about international students and RTOs 1-7 1. International students' study purposes 2. International students' aspirations 3. RTO resources 4. Pedagogic choices and experiences

As a result, a total of 194 international students were surveyed at course commencement whilst 47 were surveyed six to twelve months after course completion. Further, a total of 19 VET teachers were also surveyed for their perspectives about teaching practices and international students' outcomes.

Qualitative methods

The qualitative approach to this study further enabled the researcher to understand how participants' behaviour and experiences shaped their relationships in a market model for VET. The training managers and quality assurance auditors' in-depth experiences in commercial for profit private VET provider contexts and their professional interpretation of the policies, practices and consequences for international students' participation in this form of VET were examined. Their perspectives particularly addressed the fourth and fifth research questions, which are:

- What are the internal organisational contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne Australia?
- What government policy and regulatory initiatives influence international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne Victoria?

The qualitative data sources were international students, VET teachers, training managers and quality assurance auditors. The qualitative data from international students and VET teachers were drawn from questionnaire written responses. International students' written responses were focused on their first experiences and perceptions at enrolment, and training experiences during training and after course completion. In both the students' and teachers' questionnaires, the qualitative part of the questions complemented the quantitative data. The first stage questionnaire responses (international students and VET teachers) informed the development of the training managers' questions whilst training managers' interview responses, particularly preliminary data analyses, informed the auditors' in-depth interview questions.

A total of four training managers from the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs and five quality assurance auditors were included in the study and were interviewed. Commercial for profit private VET RTO training managers were employed by the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs that were selected for this study whilst quality assurance auditors (employed by ASQA) were also selected for their broad association with commercial for profit private RTOs and their

professional knowledge of the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

Quality assurance auditors are appointed by ASQA – the VET regulator in Australia – to conduct broad-based audits and assess VET providers' ongoing compliance with the AQTF standards (ASQA, 2014). Compliance audits are scheduled at ASQA's discretion, with the authority of an ASQA Commissioner. The auditor or auditors will discuss with the provider the most appropriate site or sites to visit to conduct the audit. The auditor or audit team, which may include industry specialists, compiles a report or reports about the VET provider's ongoing compliance with the VET Quality Framework (ASQA, 2014).

Nonetheless, the managers and auditors were interviewed and tape-recorded following the university's ethical guidelines for such processes. The researcher recorded and transcribed each interview and these data were collated and combined in NVivo analytical software.

Table 2 below provides a summative overview of the participants, timing of data collection and how these data contributed to answering the study questions.

Table 2 Qualitative data sources

Qualitative data sources	Timing and number of participants	Purpose
Training Managers' in-depth interviews (4) a. Training manager RTO 1-XP b. Training manager RTO 5-XB c. Training manager RTO 3-XG d. Training manager RTO 7-XS	In-depth interviews: July to August 2011 N=4 (From the 7 RTOs in the study, 3 managers did not accept to be interviewed)	To complement quantitative data: 1. Explore institutional contexts 2. Explain international students' experiences 3. Explain VET teacher' experiences
Quality assurance auditors' in-depth interviews (5) Auditor 1 DD Auditor 2 DN Auditor 3 DW Auditor 4 DB Auditor 5 DC	In-depth interviews: October to November 2011 N=5	To complement quantitative data: 1. Explain RTO institutional contexts 2. Compare training managers' perceptions 3. Understand policy influences 4. Explore the training packages model constraints 5. Explain international students' outcomes
International students – Baseline and Outcomes written surveys data	Questionnaire written responses: February 2011 to March 2012 N=194 baseline survey N=47 outcomes survey	To complement quantitative data: 1. Explain personal experiences and expectations at enrolment 2. Explain personal experiences and expectations after graduation 3. Analyse RTO operating contexts and resources 4. Analyse students' perceptions about RTO quality
VET teachers' written survey response data	Questionnaire written responses: February to March 2011 N=19	To complement quantitative data: 1. Explain personal experiences whilst teaching international students 2. Understand and locate international students' learning characteristics 3. Explain international students' outcomes 4. Understand the training packages model

The evidence gathered from training managers and quality assurance auditors provided insights into the implications for using the AQTF and the Training Packages frameworks in the delivery of VET for international students and the participation of commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia. This qualitative sample was not designed to be statistically representative of a particular population. Instead, a purposive sample was used to collect a range of perspectives between and within study sites.

Data collection process: interview and survey

The main data gathering instruments for the study were the survey and the interview. The first and second international students' surveys were used to capture international students' demographic data and aspirations, and their training experiences and

outcomes respectively. The VET teachers' surveys sought to draw out teacher perceptions about international students' outcomes and the pedagogic choices they make whilst using training packages under the Australian Quality Training Frameworks in a market model for VET. In addition, in-depth interviews were also held with training managers and quality assurance auditors to gain knowledge and insights into their in-depth experiences in commercial for profit private VET provider contexts. However, international students and their trainers were the principal sources of the information gathered. The trainers' and international students' survey information was triangulated across cases and the other two data sets.

In-depth interviews were used to gather data about the practical knowledge of more or less tacit constitutive rules concerning not only what can and cannot be done but also how things should be done in competitive VET markets in commercial for profit private VET RTOs. Interviews can be used for a number of purposes but perhaps the most important of them are obtaining information or the interpretation held by the person being interviewed; finding out what researchers could not observe; and collecting a numerical aggregation of information from many persons (Stake, 2010). Stake (2010) argues that although the interview is usually structured (focused on research questions), it is sometimes reasonable to ask questions that allow the interviewees to tell their own stories. In this study, this represents personal experiences in a competitive training environment in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia.

It is also argued that the interview 'is the most common form of data collection technique used in qualitative research' (Lichtman, 2006, p. 116). In this study, structured in-depth interviews were used to enable the participants to offer consistent responses relevant to the research question. This method of collecting data begins with the assumption that people's perspectives are meaningful, knowable and can be made explicit (Patton, 2002). The interview also 'allows the researcher to enter into another person's perspective' and capture the interviewee's perspectives, thoughts and experiences' (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

In addition, interviewing people is important when we want to find out those things that we cannot directly observe. Hence, the views people hold can be explained through an interview; when combined with observations, ‘interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings people hold for their everyday activities’ (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 81). For instance, ‘we cannot always directly observe behaviours that took place at some point in time’ nor can we observe the meanings people attach to their world or interpretations they have about the events occurring around them (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

However, besides interviewing managers and quality assurance auditors, there was also the need to characterise and understand the principal research participants (international students and their trainers). A survey is effective in doing this. What the survey brings to the study is the capacity to measure numerically (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The survey ‘allows us to delineate fine differences between people in terms of the characteristics in question’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 144). The researcher is able to distinguish people in terms of categories, usually difficult to do when using an interview. In this study, international students were categorised by gender, age, background, prior educational qualifications and aspirations. These characteristics are significant in influencing students’ learning and subsequently their outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002). It can be argued that international students’ subcultures, demography, groups, class, prior learning and family constitute the social capital they bring into the education system and influence the environments within which students learn (Lizzio et al., 2002).

In addition, the survey brings into the study a consistent yardstick for denoting the aforementioned differences over time (Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Comparability is thus made possible across similar populations. The survey measurement also provides ‘for more precise estimates of the degree of the relationship between concepts’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 144). Therefore, when the survey is used in support of the interview data it brings a different analytical lens, which can be used for corroboration analyses and triangulation capabilities (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

In order to collect the data relevant to the research study, in-depth interview guidelines were developed for training managers and quality assurance auditors. The development of interview questions for training managers was influenced and shaped by the research questions, preliminary findings from international students' and VET teachers' phase one data. The interview questions, which were initially created, were piloted on one academic and two TAFE-based coordinators. They were all asked to provide feedback on the relevance and clarity of the interview questions and the piloting process. Their feedback also included suggestions about the clarity of text; ordering of the initial sequencing of questions; the standard of language used in questions; the clarity of questions; formatting; and skipping particular questions. As a result, new interview questions were developed.

A similar process was used to develop quality assurance auditors' interview questions. The auditors' in-depth interview questions were informed by the preliminary findings from international students' baseline surveys, VET teachers' surveys and training managers' interviews. The auditors' interview questions were initially created and piloted on one academic. The feedback from the academic was used to improve the clarity of text, ordering and relevance of questions. This led to the development of new interview questions, which were used in the study.

In addition, the development of the international students' baseline and outcomes questionnaires were influenced by the approach used by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research to assess local (Australian) VET students' outcomes in public and other VET training institutions (NCVER, 2010). After the questions had been developed, international students' questionnaires were piloted amongst 15 randomly selected international students not taking part in the study whilst VET teachers' questionnaires were piloted amongst three academics.

In addition, a similar approach was used to develop the VET teachers' questionnaire – that is, drawing from institutional experiences and similar NCVER studies. The initial questions were piloted amongst four VET teachers not taking part in the study and one academic. The feedback from four VET teachers and the academic was used to improve the clarity of text, ordering and relevance of questions.

Overall, the data gathering instruments' pilot feedback from VET teachers, international students and academic colleagues included suggestions about standardising the language used in questions and clarifying ambiguous questions. In addition, advice from the thesis supervisors was enlisted with reference to formatting; adding additional categories to some items; separating out questions which dealt with more than one idea; and changing the format for participants skipping particular questions. After these changes were made, draft versions of the data gathering instruments were then trialled, reviewed, checked and edited in response to the feedback. The survey instruments were then edited and corrected for content, validity, reliability and errors. The pilot data were also analysed for efficacy in light of the research questions.

Population, sampling and data collection

At the time of conducting the fieldwork, there were more than 300 commercial for profit private VET RTOs operating in Melbourne and approximately more than 150 of them were training international students only (VRQA, 2010). Of the more than 150 commercial for profit private VET RTOs on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS), approximately 60 fitted the study categorisation of a commercial for profit private VET RTO specialising in international students only. This categorisation excluded those commercial for profit private VET RTOs specialising in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and those combining local and international students. The purposive selection of cases for the study and the categorisation used also included all commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne teaching the most popular VET courses recorded in the AEI and NCVER data (AEI, 2011; NCVER, 2010; Harris et al, 2006), excluding ELICOS. The most common fields of education were management and commerce (33%); health (19%); food and hospitality (18%); education (16%); and information technology (AEI, 2011).

After the private VET RTO delineation and categorisation, a total of 60 private VET providers in Melbourne were invited to participate in the study. Due to commercial-

in-confidence sensitivity and the turmoil in the Australian international student VET markets in the 2010-11 period – a peak period of sudden decline – access to the commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne was limited. A total of seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs for international students granted the researcher access to their students, teachers and training managers. The number of international students commencing in these seven private VET RTOs during the study period was approximately 1500. Thus, all commencing international students doing VET programmes in the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs, including their teachers, training managers and course coordinators, were invited to participate.

Through official letters signed by the principal researcher and the researcher, a total of 60 commercial for profit private VET RTOs were invited to participate in this study. Follow up emails and telephone communications were used to remind and encourage these providers to give consent to researcher access and participation of their teaching staff and student cohorts. Most of them declined to participate citing amongst other things, commercial in confidence issues, disinterest in quasi-government studies, potential for misrepresentation, suspicions that the study might be a covert journalistic investigation and other suspicions regarding the purposes of the study.

Table 3 below provides a summary of the key characteristics of the commercial for profit private VET RTOs that gave consent to participate in this study. It shows an overview of the size (number of campuses), teaching staff complement (permanent), enrolment capacity, number of courses offered and date of initial registration of the seven commercial for profit private VET providers included in the study.

Table 3 Commercial for profit private VET RTO summaries

Commercial for profit private VET RTO ID	Date of initial registration	Total estimated capacity	Number of campuses	Teaching staff complement (Estimate)		TOTAL number of VET courses on scope	VET teacher sample distribution by RTO
				Male	Female		
RTO 1	2009	200	1	3	1	3	1
RTO 2	2004	1500	3	9	12	25	3
RTO 3	2007	700	1	4	2	17	4
RTO 4	2005	1000	2	5	15	47	2
RTO 5	2008	180	1	2	3	2	1
RTO 6	2002	2000	2	6	12	28	5
RTO 7	2004	1100	5	4	3	18	3
Total	N/A	6680	15	33	48	N/A	19

N = 7. Three RTOs closed for business and changed ownership and scope. Data source: Training.gov.au – period: 2010.

The sample of seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs (Table 3) was based on the providers' consent and willingness to participate and researcher accessibility. To gather data from international students and their teachers, internal RTO administrative systems were requested for assistance in order to have a broad and less intrusive access to the targeted groups. The commercial for profit private VET RTOs and all students enrolled in hospitality or food industry, engineering and business management – offering the most popular courses for international students – were selected.

During the fieldwork, the researcher relied heavily on four of the participating RTOs (RTOs 1, 4, 6 and 7) where teachers and course coordinators agreed to supervise the completion of the two first stage questionnaires. Researcher identification of the targeted groups (commencing international students), their location and the timing for administering the questionnaires was difficult due to the institutions' timetabling and dispersed locations. As a result, course coordinators and teachers were especially instrumental in getting the questionnaires to commencing students and their teachers. To facilitate the correct data collection process consistent with the research design, the researcher explained to course coordinators and or teachers involved through presentations, short seminars and one-on-one coaching of what was expected regarding ethical considerations, consent requirements and researcher obligations.

Four participating commercial for profit private VET RTOs were given 50 questionnaires to administer with one RTO receiving 20 questionnaires and the other two RTOs receiving 30 questionnaires respectively based on commencing international students' attendance on their courses' enrolment registers. The completed and non-completed questionnaires were then collected two weeks later from the respective commercial for profit private VET RTO coordinators and or teachers. The researcher directly administered some of these questionnaires at two participating commercial for profit private VET RTOs.

The final number of commercial for profit private VET RTOs that participated in the research project determined the number of international students, trainers and managers that participated. Overall, a total of 280 questionnaires were distributed amongst seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs' international students who agreed to participate in the study. The number of questionnaires allocated to each RTO was based on their daily attendance registers for commencing students on VET courses nominated. Table 4 below presents the international student sample distribution and categorisations used in the study.

Table 4 Demographic distribution of the study sample of international students

Age in years	Gender N		Total N	Sec. education N		Total N	Tertiary education		Total N
	Male	Female		Below Yr 12	Yr 12 & Above		VET/ Below	Degree/ Higher	
15-19	63	26	89	10	79	89	62	21	83
20-24	45	35	80	4	75	79	44	33	77
25-44	7	2	9	0	9	9	4	5	9
44-65	4	2	6	2	4	6	5	1	6
65 +	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	6
Total	120	65	185	16	168	184	116	60	176

N = 194 – Nine (9) international students did not respond to these questions (Sec. – secondary; Yr – year)

Table 4 presents the age, gender, prior secondary education and tertiary educational distribution of the international students who responded to the surveys. Whilst 185 international students provided demographic data, nine (9) students did not respond to the demographic questions. Overall, a total of 194 international students out of 280 responded to the baseline questionnaires distributed. Although a total of 280 international students' questionnaires were received, 86 of the returned surveys were

either incomplete or unsuitable for inclusion in the study. In addition, the final international students' outcomes surveys also recorded 47 responses out of 100 questionnaires distributed through an online survey platform.

It must be noted as well that a small number of survey respondents did not provide their demographic information. Table 4 shows that nine respondents did not reveal their ages and gender. In addition, 10 international students did not disclose their prior secondary education qualifications whilst 18 students did not reveal their prior tertiary-level qualifications. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 65 years of age. This age distribution shows that there were 89 (45.9 per cent) 15-19 year olds, 80 (41.2 per cent) 20-24 year olds, nine (4.6 per cent) 25-44 year olds, six (3.1 per cent) 45-64 year olds and one (0.5 per cent) 65-year-old international student in the sample respectively – nine (4.6 per cent) international students did not respond to this question.

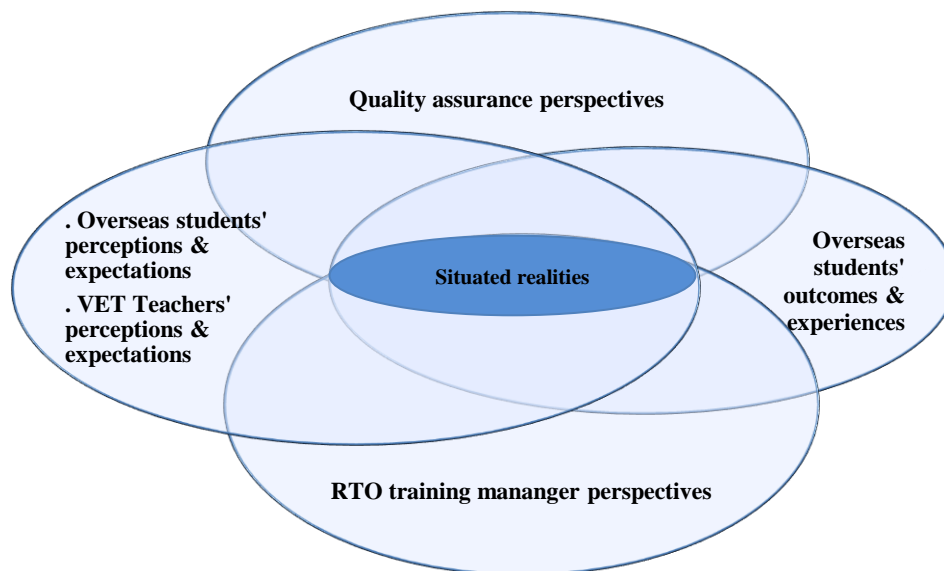
In the study sample (Table 4), out of 194 international students, there were 120 (62 per cent) males and 65 (34 per cent) females; nine (4 per cent) students did not answer this question). In summary, the above data show that the study sample had a younger population of international students and also a greater proportion of males participating in VET in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia.

Data analysis

Mixed method approaches to research require multiple methods of gathering research materials and multiple approaches to data analysis (Green, 1999). Just as the writing up of the thesis was not a distinct exercise at the end of fieldwork, the analysis of data was an integral part of the research process – the iterative process was used continuously (Figure 2). The data analysis process, in particular triangulation, was not linear but involved moving from one data set to another in search for corroboration, peculiarities, irregularities and consistencies or inconsistencies – forming themes and sets of factors implicated in influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private RTOs (Figure 2). Once the baseline data were collected

from commencing international students and their VET teachers, the analysis process began. The analyses involved moving from quantitative to qualitative data, back and forth (Figure 2). The implications of the first stage data shaped the next steps in the generation of the interview questions and in how the second, third and fourth data collection stages were to proceed (Bryman, 2008).

Figure 2 The data analysis process



Although there are general strategies of qualitative data analysis such as analytic induction and grounded theory, Riessman distinguished four main models of narrative analysis, namely ‘thematic analysis, structural analysis, interactional analysis, and performative analysis’ (cited in Bryman, 2004, p. 412). This thesis follows a thematic analysis approach where the emphasis is on *what* is said rather than *how* it is said. This approach to analysing the data is based on ‘segmenting, coding and categorisation, which are valuable in attempts to find and conceptualise regularities in the data’ (Punch, 2005, p. 216). However, this approach also tends to decontextualise and fragment study data. It is for this reason that an interpretive-narrative approach was used as the main method for writing this report.

The thematic-interpretive approach was used to analyse the interviews in order to understand the meanings of the participants. Hence, the researcher consistently looked for emerging patterns from these data and used them to unpack the complex and

internally diverse private VET provider sector contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A list of techniques can be used to identify emerging themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). They argue that some of these techniques are repetition, indigenous or localised categories, metaphors and analogies, and similarities and differences – variously used in this study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Tape-recorded interview data from training managers and quality assurance auditors were analysed using NVivo data analysis software. Both transcripts and audio recordings from the interviews were imported into NVivo where they were coded in order to offer visual relationships within these data. Hence, transcripts in particular, were dissected to identify single and multiple concepts. The transcribed interview data were broken down into concepts and categories using the spanning tree method in NVivo. These concepts are usually a single sentence or several sentences centered on a single idea or ideas. For example, keywords and phrases were identified within each transcript and quotations. Using these phrases and keywords, categories with names meaningful to the study were created. For example, training packages, permanent residency (PR), profit, skilled, quality assurance, workplace experience, resources, outcomes, students and learning, to name a few key words, were identified. Single and multiple categories were then assigned to individual quotes.

In addition, whilst NVivo data analysis software was used to organise categories, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences, SPSS software was also used to categorise quantitative data in relation to the identified qualitative themes. The process involved searching across the five data sets for repeated patterns of meanings. This process was also used to discover any structures that lay within the data and their relationships with the research questions. Hence, the qualitative data analysis process together with the quantitative analytical processes enabled the researcher to combine data sets and qualitatively analyse them into a coherent whole. The identified patterns of meaning were used to form themes, thesis chapters, headings and sub-headings that are used in this report.

As a result, a multi-methodological perspective to data analysis runs throughout this thesis, a position that allowed the researcher to take different standpoints while

negotiating the significance of each data set in answering the research questions. This required familiarity with interdisciplinary practices (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Notably, 'one of the main difficulties with qualitative research is that it very rapidly generates a large and cumbersome data base...' (Bryman, 2008, p. 538). There are few well-established rules that are widely accepted (Bryman, 2008). In contrast, quantitative analyses offer clear guidelines that are widely accepted and used. However, the analysis of quantitative data required a descriptive statistical approach whilst the treatment of qualitative data required a thematic strategy, but not limited to it alone.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to 'describe, summarise or make sense of a particular set of data' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 450). The international students' characteristics and outcomes and their teachers' perceptions were collected, grouped and displayed using proportional representation. The students' characteristics were calculated using frequency distributions to generate graphical displays.

In addition, in order to display international students' characteristics that are identified in shaping student outcomes, contingency tables were used. It is argued that these tables can be used to display a rate or proportion of people or group likely to have a specific characteristic (Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The prevalence or lack of each characteristic was examined using the literature on educational inequality as a framework. These characteristics, especially international students' characteristics, were triangulated with qualitative data solicited from commercial for profit private VET RTO training managers' and quality assurance auditors' perceptions about teaching and learning in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

In order to present and describe international students' background, age, and prior educational qualifications data, frequency distribution tables were also used. This was intended to establish how the students were distributed by age and gender and whether this had a bearing on their educational choices and aspirations.

Similarly, international students' prior educational qualifications were also presented and described using frequency distribution tables. A binary categorisation was chosen to narrow prior secondary education qualifications' variability amongst the international students' sample. All international students in the study with prior secondary education levels below year 12 were categorised as *low* and year 12 and above prior educational qualifications were categorised as *high* (see Table 7 and Figure 8). Wolf (2002) argues that prior education has been seen to be a reliable predictor of future educational performance. Therefore, these and other categories canvassed in this report were interpreted and analysed for their significance in answering the research questions, especially influences on international students' outcomes (variously described as educational, social and employment) in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

Table 5 below shows pseudonyms used throughout the report to identify commercial for profit private VET RTOs, training managers and quality assurance auditors.

Table 5 Participant identification – pseudonyms used

RTO and location		Training managers		Quality assurance auditors	
RTO1	Melbourne East	Manager 1	XP	QA Auditor 1	DD
RTO2	Northern CBD			QA Auditor 2	DN
RTO3	Melbourne West	Manager 3	XG	QA Auditor 3	DW
RTO4	Melbourne South Eastern			QA Auditor 4	DC
RTO5	Central CBD	Manager 2	XB	QA Auditor 5	DB
RTO6	Melbourne West				
RTO7	Central CBD	Manager 4	XS		
Total	7	4			5

[CBD – Central Business District] Commencing international students number: approximately 1500 (source date: December, 2010)

Ethical considerations

The University of Melbourne's current human ethics guidelines were used to inform the conduct of the study. The University's Human Research Ethics Committee or its Sub-Committees lay down the guidelines of the University's Code of Conduct for Research. Research projects are normally approved to 31 December of the year of approval and may be renewed every year up to a total of five years subject to a satisfactory annual report. The researcher identified and acknowledged possible risks

related to the research that could arise in conducting the study by accepting obligations and the rights of the participants as specified in the University's Code of Conduct for Research. Hence, the study was granted permission by the University in strict accordance with the approved university protocol and relevant laws, regulations and guidelines. This project's ethics identification number is 1034445.

The University's Code of Conduct for Research requires researchers to obtain permission, protect anonymity, avoid disruption of sites, and communicate the purpose/s of the study accurately. Therefore, the researcher had to communicate the purpose/s of the study accurately, avoided deceptive practices, respected the study population, and responded to potential concerns and confidentiality issues. Consistent with these researcher obligations, the participants were given plain language statements of the study; invitations to participate; explanatory notes where technical and unfamiliar terms were used; and consent forms prior to questionnaire or interview administration (see Appendices 6-8). All study participants were advised that the project results would be made public in journal articles, conference papers, seminars, book and participant summaries where possible. Further, participants were notified that where information about the study results was requested, a summary of these results would be made available. The teachers and course co-ordinators that assisted in data collection were made aware of broad cultural sensitivities, which could affect international students' participation in the study. Information about the international students' diversity in these providers was based on available Australian Education International country specific categorisation data.

Consistent with university's Code of Conduct for Research, all relevant data obtained through the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed and reported anonymously. Survey data were also recorded and reported anonymously in this study. Participant identity has been kept strictly confidential. Where direct reference is made to any data obtained from the participants, pseudonyms have been used. Similarly, pseudonyms have been used for any references to commercial for profit private VET RTOs. These data are kept in a locked secure storage at the University of Melbourne and will be stored for a period of five years. After that period, these data will be destroyed in accordance with university regulations. These data can only be accessed through the

explicit authority of the University, researcher and principal researcher in accordance with the specified guidelines.

Other than for professional and quality assurance purposes, there are no direct relationships between the auditors and the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs involved in this study. The seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs enrolled students in: Engineering – Trades Training; Management and Commerce; Food, Hospitality and Personal Services; and Society and Culture educational fields. These educational fields accounted for four in five enrolments and commencements in the VET sector in 2008 with all other broad fields contributing less than 10 per cent (AEI, 2009).

Limitations of the research strategy

It is argued that ‘although mixed research studies have great potential for enhancing understanding of the issues facing educational research, there are several limitations’ (Johnson and Christensen, 2012, p. 444). The combination of research methods may yield contradictory findings and may not support the relative merits of combining them in the first place (Bryman, 2008). Further, mixed methods approaches are more complex than single method studies, and therefore they tend to require more time and resources to do (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Time, resources and access were some of the major limitations that affected the sample size in the case of this study.

The use of the quantitative approach also assumes that human behaviour is highly predictable and that events have a cause effect relationship. Yet, much social science research contends that reality is socially constructed and cannot be predicted in advance (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Porpora, 1989). Social researchers using the qualitative approach believe in the dynamism and fluidity of human behaviour (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). They accept that human behaviour is generally context bound and less amenable to generalisability. As a consequence, the conclusions arrived at from this study must be used cautiously. Their generalisability is limited to the commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study only but with

some potential to be generalised across similar commercial for profit private VET RTOs contexts in Australia.

In addition, the use of a longitudinal survey also meant that there was a time lag between the first and the final international students' surveys. Indeed longitudinal surveys have a notoriously high participant dropout rate due to a number of factors. It is argued that 'the problem occurs when certain types of people drop out of the research study' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 363). This further suggests that both internal and external validity can be reduced when certain types of people drop out from the study sample, thus rendering it unrepresentative of the study population. In this study, only a third of the international students who agreed to take part in the second survey were able to respond to the second stage survey. Although the participant attrition limitation was addressed or minimised by using the online, postal and telephone communication follow-up processes, the attrition rate was still very high. However, online reminders, postal notices, and phone calls were used to raise the levels of participation.

It can also be argued that the use of a survey, in particular, assumes that there is a direct causal relationship between teaching-learning contexts and student outcomes and educational policy and student outcomes, overlooking several complex contextual factors such as culture, technology, language, economics, politics and the way power relations shape both the input and output processes in education. In addition, it assumes that VET is a neutral value-free process with no vested interests and contestations. This study sought to address these limitations by addressing the very political, economic and social nature of the education context in the analysis of the data (Anderson, 2005; Teese & Polesel, 2003), but nevertheless, the data should be treated with caution as being only indicative of more general relationships.

Another limitation is how to measure quality in education, especially quality of educational outcomes. Quality is a value proposition (Seddon, 2009a). It provides signals of the values and meanings embedded in the communities of practice and these meanings are not fixed (Seddon, 2009a). This difficulty is evident in VET where some components of communities of practice (Skills Councils) determine quality

judgements for each industry-training sector. We also know that quality ‘judgements are more difficult in VET because quality signals are not well developed’ (NCVER, 2009b, p. 66). For example in Australia, a competent (C) and not yet competent (NYC) are used to rate or rank the quality of student performance.

Overall, the question is: How does one judge the quality of training if student assessment outcomes are judged as either competent or not yet competent, irrespective of the quality of the outcome? The contestability of the meaning of quality also means that different components within communities of practice attribute different meanings to quality. This makes the task of selecting and developing quality measurement instruments problematic and elusive, especially when the ‘history and culture of VET has not encouraged practitioners to articulate distinctive value propositions that can convey ‘good’ in VET practice’ (NCVER, 2009b).

In addition, the inclusion of government policy assessments in this study also assumes that government can control and influence private VET RTO business contexts. Yet, ‘governments can influence but cannot control the design and implementation of institutional frameworks and value propositions they endorse’ (NCVER, 2009b, p. 68). In fact, it can be argued that there are underlying policy tensions and contestations that may be ‘used to divert attention from the real underlying motives of reformers so as to secure public consent for potentially unpopular reforms’ (Anderson, 2006b, p. 17).

Overall, it can be argued that the preceding arguments acknowledge that there are limitations in the methodological approach used in this study. These were due to a number of factors, the most important of which was difficulty in gaining access to respondents in a commercially sensitive and economically stressed education environment. However, all efforts have been made to present the data fairly and within a sensitive treatment of the findings which acknowledges the extent of their generalisability.

The study findings and the conclusions reached must be read cautiously. They are necessarily tentative due to the nature and size of the study sample and the limitations of the research methodology (particularly the problem of attribution, and the

subjective nature of the interview responses of training managers and quality assurance auditors). Therefore, considerable care must be exercised when interpreting the results, some of which may be subject to differing interpretations. Nonetheless, this study has yielded results that shed light on a number of key trends and factors that influence the outcomes of international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study.

The next chapters present, analyse and interpret the study data in order answer the research question; what are the situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia?

Chapter 4

Private VET RTOs' operating contexts and the profit motive

Introduction

One of the objectives of this study is to understand, analyse and explain the VET market contextual realities influencing the delivery of training in the commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study. To do this, research participants were asked to describe the VET market contexts based on their experiences, their interpretation of policies and their practices. They were asked to describe the way courses are designed, delivered and assessed particularly to enable the researcher to gain insights into the extent to which these VET institutions or providers have become trading places, selling VET courses, services and products for a profit to international students.

This chapter therefore, uses empirical data from the study's participants to explore and identify the dominant competitive training market dimensions that underpin the delivery of courses to international students in the RTOs included in the study. Qualitative data were drawn from quality assurance auditors and training managers' interviews, and written responses from international students and their VET teachers' questionnaires to continue the overall examination of the situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in a competitive VET market in Melbourne, Australia.

First, the chapter presents qualitative data from quality assurance auditors and training managers' interview responses. This is followed by international students' qualitative written responses to open ended questions in the baseline and outcomes surveys and a summary of their teachers' responses to similar questions. These data are used to analyse and explore institutional perceptions and relationships in market-based delivery contexts. The analysis begins with the theme headed 'Business and training: prevalent perceptions in private provider contexts'. Second, commercial for profit private VET RTO context and content specific dimensions are analysed under the theme of 'Delivery contexts: flexibility or compliance-driven straightjacket?' In

addition, quantitative data are also used to explain the VET teacher pedagogic choices under the Training Packages and Competency Based Training (CBT) frameworks in a market model for VET. The chapter concludes by analysing VET teacher delivery strategies in the same competitive market. Where direct reference is made to any data obtained from the participants, pseudonyms have been used.

Business and training: prevalent perceptions in private provider contexts

In Chapter 2 it was argued that many VET systems consist of institutions, which are now places of trade selling VET courses and services to students for profit. To explore the extent to which this perspective influences the delivery of courses to international students, this section offers broad insights into business and training relationships in a competitive VET market for international students in this study. Overall it answers research question number four, which sought to explore internal provider realities that influence international students' outcomes.

Quality assurance auditors in particular provided useful perspectives, which shed light on the purposes of commercial for profit private providers in the existing training contexts. *'Private providers are always driven by profit. There is no philanthropy in private providers. They're set up to make a profit'* (DN). Auditor DN's views were also repeated and emphasised by quality assurance auditor DD. Quality assurance auditor DD argued that commercial for profit private VET RTOs *'are like any business; they are in the market; they sell products'* (DD).

Arguing along the same lines, auditor DW suggested that there is also a nexus between business profitability and training quality. He put forward the view that:

Profit and training are actually not strange bedfellows. The whole purpose of training is to achieve the level of expertise required by the employer, which means the level of profitability. In fact most employers do not have anything to do with training unless they see an outcome that enhances profitability (DW).

The above auditors' views were further illustrated in training managers' responses to

the question about their providers' role in the existing competitive training market contexts. Training manager XP of RTO 1, in particular, provided a useful explanation. 'Yes we are there to make money, which is what every business tries to achieve' (XP). Training manager XP's views were supported by RTO 7's training manager (XS). He argued:

Our business model is set in such a way that whatever profits, whatever amounts we make after we break even from the courses we have on scope, we continue to improve that course (XS).

Expressing similar sentiments, the words of training manager XG of RTO 3 reflected the views of training manager XS. According to training manager XG:

I think it's a fine line. It's a really difficult balance to maintain business profitability while maintaining quality training. If you can't maintain business profitability you go under.

Interestingly, the above views were also evident in comments made by the same auditors about their role and quality assurance mechanisms' purposes in the competitive market. Quality assurance auditor DD succinctly captured this perspective:

If there were no quality assurance requirements, if there were no ASQA or VRQA regulatory requirements, what you will get is rogue and more rogue RTOs because my experience with international students' RTOs from audits is that many of the RTOs are in there for a quick buck. They do as little as possible, sometimes nothing at all. They can swindle their customers and sometimes they do (DD).

In addition quality assurance auditor DW argued:

The Qualifications Authority has to be the Authority. It's the one who finally say yes or no. However, and yes they do have to have a process, you still have to have proper records set up, you have got enough finance to run the college, you have to have learning resources, of course you have to have teachers that are properly experienced and qualified (DW).

In support of DW's perspectives, quality assurance auditor DB also expressed similar sentiments, which were critical of provider motives. Auditor DB said:

Private RTOs have emerged because they have seen a business opportunity. Traditionally these RTOs will start up with a very small international student body. Recent changes in migration regulations changed all that resulting in some organisations setting up and within a year enrolling more than a 1000 students. Do they have the know it all to manage this? ...It's a business opportunity. Business opportunity is what drives this sector and the legislation is just chasing it. The regulatory requirements are part of consumer protection mechanisms. There is a need for consumer protection (DB).

But, to what extent are the concerns of these auditors reflected in international students' learning experiences at these commercial for profit VET providers? One student at RTO 3 reflected on this, saying:

The institutes running from rented floors in city buildings are a complete waste of time and money. The only thing I found helpful were the trainers who had a lot better understanding of the situation students were in. The sole motive of institutes like RTO 3 was to earn money and cared little about students and their future (KB).

International student KB's views were consistent with other international students' experiences at RTO 1. A student at RTO 1 commented:

I want to be a proper mechanic. We don't need small RTOs running out of rented floors in a city building. The Australian government is responsible to some extent for letting these small institutes and colleges flourish (Deepal).

Deepal's views had support from an international student at RTO 7 who was concerned about tuition fees. This hospitality student argued, '*the standard of learning is not very high compared to what I have to pay. In less money I can get more knowledge about this course*' (Anil).

In addition, a student from Mauritius at RTO 5 also captured some of the sentiments expressed by quality assurance auditors:

Australian vocational education and training centres need just more money off

the students and sometimes certain institutions don't care about the students. They even give all the answers for assignments sometimes. This demonstrates how bad the VET course level is in this country (Levi).

Yet another student from India reiterated the Mauritian student's views. According to this student at RTO 3, *'some of the colleges are running only for money. They are not delivering good training so government must concentrate on these colleges'*. Levi's views also found support from an international student at RTO 6 who came from the Republic of Korea. *'Educational services the RTOs have provided is less quality than my expectation (sic)'* (Hun).

Overall, it can be argued that the above comments about commercial for profit private VET RTOs suggest that the operating contexts in these institutions are negatively influenced by predominantly commercial imperatives. These views help to explain commercial for profit private providers' priorities and emphases, which are encapsulated in auditors DW and DB's comments. It can be argued that these auditors' views suggest that the quality assurance approach of commercial for profit private providers is based on operational compliance and customer (international students) protection but does not seem to question the efficacy of the training and delivery model. These operational practices concern the delivery and assessment of courses in these providers, which are captured in international students Deepal, KB and Levi's comments.

These data can also be used to argue that policy constructions and mechanisms in this VET sector should not deny the profit motive emphases of commercial for profit training organisations. The perspectives expressed by auditor DW in particular provide us with insights into prevalent policy perceptions and the discourses that shape business and training relationships in this sector. This auditor's views illustrate the policy position taken in VET in Australia and the mutual dependencies that exist between business activity and training. However, in contrast with the other auditors' views, auditor DW's argument also reflected the understanding that human activity is built up in the relation between the orientations of the individual and the possibilities for action within the social context. This implies that in a competitive VET market

environment, the business profit motives can take precedence and can impact negatively on the learning experiences of the students.

Notable also were training managers' responses, which were more nuanced about their profit motives, particularly training manager XS. When training manager XS argued that his VET RTO reinvests most of the profits they make from their training business activities into training programmes, XS, like auditor DW, provided an argument which suggests that profit motives can co-exist with strategies designed to achieve positive student outcomes. This can be used to explain the ambivalence auditors feel about commercial for profit provider motives, as we see in auditors DD and DB's comments.

Overall, training managers' business perspectives are captured in DD's comments about quality assurance mechanisms. Quality assurance auditor DD's comments emphasised the role of policy and quality assurance frameworks that are supervised by government or quasi-government bodies. His views suggest that quality assurance regulatory mechanisms are focused on regulating inputs only. It can be argued that this view supports the focus of the current Australian VET Quality Framework (VQF) quality assurance approach on commercial for profit private providers – input driven approach to quality assurance. However, what is not clear is how the quality assurance monitoring agencies, through quality assurance auditors, ensure that international students' outcomes are at the standard assumed in the quality assurance frameworks.

Hence, further analyses of the quantitative study data from international students and their VET teachers were important to provide further insights into how the provider directions and priorities described above influenced learning and teacher practices. These data showed an interesting dichotomy of views between those who occupy influential positions in commercial for profit private VET RTOs (auditors and managers) and international students and their VET teachers.

International students' baseline survey (n=194) data showed that a small number (\approx 4%) of international students were concerned with the private VET RTOs'

commercial business focus whilst just over one third of the teachers surveyed (seven out of nineteen) believed that commercial business profit imperatives were affecting international students' performance (Figure 15, page 194). Whilst not a majority, it suggests that disquiet regarding the commercial imperatives of these institutions may be emerging. The teachers' views about the impact of these imperatives on their teaching are further discussed in Chapter 7.

It can also be argued that the positive views expressed by the majority of commencing international students and their teachers are a reflection of their positions at these providers relative to dominant organisational priorities and emphases. The 194 international students who participated in the baseline surveys had less than three months of experience at these providers, which suggests that they may not have had sufficient exposure to institutional practices to offer critical assessments of their situation, whereas their teachers could have been influenced by their roles and institutional power relations that subordinate their positions to organisational goals and emphases.

Nonetheless, in order to provide further analyses of VET teachers' views, later sections of this chapter under the subheadings context (practical) and content (theory) specific learning resources offer us useful insights. But, how are the delivery contexts influenced?

Delivery contexts: flexibility or compliance-driven straightjacket?

In order to gain insights into commercial for profit private VET providers' delivery contexts, this section focuses on the competency-based training packages that are the current official texts that inform and describe the design of the curriculum or course content in VET. It provides insight into how the training packages model is implicated in the construction of the activities in the providers' operating environment.

Since quality assurance auditors' views offer official interpretations of policy meaning and expectations, their views about the training packages model are analysed first, followed by training managers, teachers and international students' views. One

of the auditors started by explaining the official perspectives about nominal teaching times for each unit of competency, which are specified in the training packages model. This auditor's analysis is particularly important because official nominal training time is specified for a given unit or course in the training package; an approach that is not consistent with the competency-based approach, which is not time-based.

Auditor DB provided useful perspectives. According to auditor DB, time specifications for a unit of competency create an easy business opportunity for profit seeking commercial for profit private VET RTOs. To explain this, quality assurance auditor DB argued that there is a misunderstanding between the purposes of the nominal hours specified in the training packages and their uses:

Nominal hours are a funding issue. They are about how government will fund you, if you use government funding and it's about teacher time and not student learning time. It is about how much they will pay to fund the teacher per student. RTOs don't actually do that. It is a funding guide for the government about how much they will pay a teacher per student for that unit (DB).

Auditor DB's views seem to reflect on the current practices in VET, which use the training packages' units of competencies nominal hours to specify the duration of training for each course.

When VET teachers, in this study, were asked to explain whether the time allocated for course delivery was adequate or not, most (14 out of 19) VET trainers in this study considered the time allocated for the delivery of training to their students adequate whilst a small number (5) was not satisfied with the allocated nominal teaching times. Indeed course delivery time is a critical element of any curriculum because allocated delivery time places a limit on what is included and what is not in VET courses.

If we take the dominant teachers' views, it seems regardless of the competency-based training assumptions and the students' levels of performance, training packages have to be delivered to international students in a specified timeframe. Simply put, international students have to complete their studies within the specified student visa timeframes regardless of the level of their competencies in each unit.

However, it is also reasonable to argue that the training packages time impositions – a practice outside the competency-based training model – help commercial for profit private VET RTOs to maximise profits because they impose an inflexibility that does not recognise international students’ learning differences and competency levels. Hence, this can lead to practices observed by the Mauritian student who suggested that sometimes assignment answers were provided at their commercial for profit private VET RTO, possibly to ensure that the student completes the course in the specified timeframe.

The Mauritian student’s comments in particular are important because they question the quality of assessments and the pedagogic model used by some of the teachers in the study. If time allocation for units of competency is outside the CBT model, it is interesting to note that this student’s, KB and Deepal’s concerns referred to earlier, are not reflected in VET teachers’ assessments of the times allocated for each unit – a government funding model to pay teachers. Nonetheless, it is still reasonable to argue that international students’ training time in commercial for profit private providers is constrained by the time specified for each unit and the courses they are enrolled in.

However, an examination of context and content specific learning resources provided by these commercial for profit private VET providers offered further insights into the extent to which business profit motives can influence the delivery of training in the private VET sector in Melbourne. Quantitative data from VET teachers and qualitative data from international students, training managers and quality assurance auditors about these providers are used to analyse the availability of the resources that can shape the tenor of the teaching and learning environment.

Availability of context specific learning resources in private RTOs in the study

If we accept the proposition that VET should be aligned with training for specific job roles; international students’ learning should be focused on the skills required for work. The learning sites (commercial for profit private VET RTOs) should therefore approximate workplace conditions or on-the-job experiences. In this instance,

learning becomes doing, so commercial for profit private VET providers should offer opportunities that make it possible for the learner to generate and apply knowledge and skills beyond the immediate training provider contexts.

Therefore, the study asked international students, VET teachers, training managers and quality assurance auditors about the availability and the significance of context-based (practical) learning resources. The views expressed by training managers as well as quality assurance auditors enable us to examine the adequacy of context-based learning resources and the role of internships in VET.

RTO 3's training manager (XG) captured a common perspective expressed by all managers interviewed. XG argued that workplace experience, as part of learning, is important for students, particularly international students. XG made the following observations:

We know that students who're actually working in their selected vocation, in a very short time are much clearer and understanding of the requirements of that area. I believe actually working and doing a lot of work experience in their area of study will definitely increase their employability skills and their impression to the trainers (XG).

In addition, RTO 1's training manager (XP) not only acknowledged that context-based learning resources (workplace learning opportunities) are important but also observed that they were facing a lot of challenges placing international students in companies for workplace training. Training manager XP expressed his RTO's situation as follows:

If you have got 100 students studying a practical aspect of a course, you know we are not an employment agency; to try and get students in industry is too hard, it's not our role. It's not the role of our college. TAFEs don't do it. We don't have the facilities to do it (XP).

Training manager XP's views were also supported by some quality assurance auditors, particularly quality assurance auditor DW. With reference to some of the providers he audited, DW argued: *'Some private RTOs have better facilities and are*

set up beyond what I have seen in TAFE colleges' (DW). Auditor DW's further comments seemed to suggest that there is merit in XP's position. To explain his point, quality assurance auditor DW summarised the general context-based resourcing overview of this sector as follows:

Of all existing colleges I have probably dealt with, most of them, just about all of them, in fact all of those I recommended were set up to do what they said they were going to do. I certainly know of colleges that didn't do what they said they were going to do but there are a good number that are doing the right thing.

Auditor DW's observations were also repeated by RTO 3's training manager (XG). In support of his provider's resources, XG argued:

I believe, to a large extent private RTOs offer a good service...99 per cent of the trainers at most of these RTOs are qualified trainers hence they offer a good service. The trainers have empathy; they do understand students' requirements. Our RTO in particular has terrific facilities (XG).

It seems training manager XG, like manager XP, did not believe commercial for profit private providers had inadequate workplace learning facilities. Yet, all managers and all auditors acknowledged that workplace-based learning resources were important. In fact, auditor DW succinctly captured this perspective and said:

I maintain that if your student can't get work experience to actually be assessed that they can actually do the work, then what I will expect is ok do it in your workshop but the process required here is that the student must do all the learning. They must have a chance to practise that learning on the actual workplace and when the time is right they must be given a scenario or a case ... they must actually be able to go and work on ... to find what's wrong and fix it ... and say it's working properly (DW).

But, to what extent do international students corroborate their training managers and DW's views? A student from the Republic of Korea at RTO 6 provided a useful analysis of the adequacy of the practical learning opportunities in his commercial for profit private VET RTO. He reflected on this and said:

I am not sure that I can get a job after I have finished. This means that VET is meaningless. The organisation, which is responsible, must give students the opportunity to get jobs (Hun).

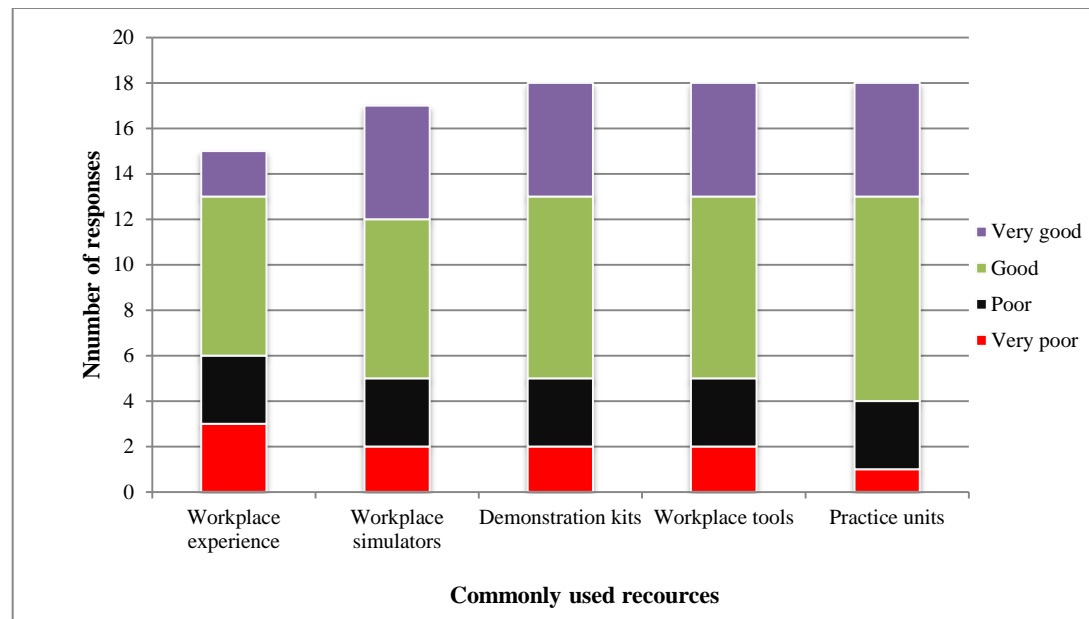
A student from Sri Lanka at RTO 2 expressed similar sentiments. She also repeated Hun's views: *'they are not fully prepared to train students. We lack practical exposure.'*

These students' concerns were also corroborated by one of RTO 2's teachers. The teacher suggested, *'more government inspections or involvement on on-site training is needed to ensure facilities; resources and conditions required are actually in place'* (Terrence). But, to what extent are the above training managers, auditors and some international students' views consistent with their VET teachers' experiences across all learning contexts included in the study? To determine the extent of learning support and resourcing that can support learner doing (skills) in a range of contexts, VET teachers were asked to rate the adequacy of their commercial for profit private VET RTO's context-based training resources.

Figure 3 below shows summaries of the VET teachers' views about context-based learning resources across the seven learning sites included in the study. It shows how commercial for profit private VET RTO teachers rated the availability of context-based (practical) learning resources in their institutions. The learning resource that attracted the highest level of dissatisfaction proportionally is workplace experience (six out of 15 rating it as poor or very poor).

However, a total of 12 VET teachers believed that their providers had sufficient workplace simulators whilst five thought that they had inadequate simulators. In addition, 13 VET teachers were of the view that their providers had sufficient demonstration kits and workplace tools respectively whilst five thought that these resources were inadequate. A similar but slightly larger number (14) of teachers also thought that their providers had enough practice units whilst four were of a different view. A small number of VET teachers did not respond to this question (see table notes).

Figure 3 Teachers' lenses: availability of context specific training resources in their institutions



N = 19 (No response: Workplace experience – 4; Workplace simulators – 2; Demonstration kits – 1; Workplace tools – 1; Practice units – 1)

Overall, Figure 3 shows that on the one hand, a small number of the trainers surveyed (6) were of the view that workplace experience for international students in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study was inadequate. On the other hand, nine trainers were satisfied with the context-based training resources their providers used to support learning (four trainers did not respond to this question). However, if we take the dominant perspectives expressed by these teachers, these data suggest that most of these providers had a reasonable level of context specific learning resources.

These data can also be used to support the competitive training market argument that profitable training organisations can provide adequate learning resources for their students through the forces of supply and demand. This educational competitive markets argument suggests that greater competition leads to quality training and user choice in the training market environment. In fact these data (Figure 3) show that these providers may not be as poorly resourced as most contemporary debates about commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in Melbourne suggest. However, the same data (Figure 3) and the previous data from managers, quality assurance auditors and international students can be interpreted to mean that there are different

perspectives about the appropriate level of resources in commercial for private VET RTOs in the study.

The preceding analysis also shows that quality assurance auditors' views were different from those of the teachers. But, quality assurance auditors' views matter because of the power invested in them through government policy prescriptions. They (auditors) interpret and police government policy positions on commercial for profit private provider compliance with the ESOS act, thus define what can or cannot be done. The auditors can provide negative reports to the regulator about the adequacy of resources at private VET RTOs, which can have implications on profitability and future business success. On the other hand, VET teachers' positive views could have been influenced by internal RTO power relationships. It can also be argued that the teachers' positions can be threatened if feelings of ambivalence towards context specific resources are explicitly demonstrated or expressed internally or externally.

Nonetheless, whilst auditor DW was satisfied with most of the resourcing of most providers he audited and recommended for registration, most quality assurance auditors in this study expressed reservations about the adequacy of context specific learning in some commercial for profit private VET RTOs. Indeed the views expressed by most quality assurance auditors were consistent with a small number of trainers who were most critical of the adequacy of these resources. Most importantly, these auditors' assessments have implications for future audits and international students' outcomes. Interestingly, the most critical VET teachers came from RTO 3, which closed for financial reasons 12 months after the study surveys.

Overall, it can be argued that there are contested views about the adequacy of context-based learning resources to support international students' learning in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study. The above contestations about the adequacy of context specific learning resources also suggest a lack of coherence between education and training manifested in the way quality assurance auditors, training managers and teachers understand skills training for work.

Hence, a further analysis of international students' outcomes in Chapters 6 can offer us useful insights into whether the claims made by most VET teachers about the adequacy of context-based learning resources can be supported. Next, analyses of content-based learning resources offer useful insights.

Availability of content specific learning resources in private RTOs in the study

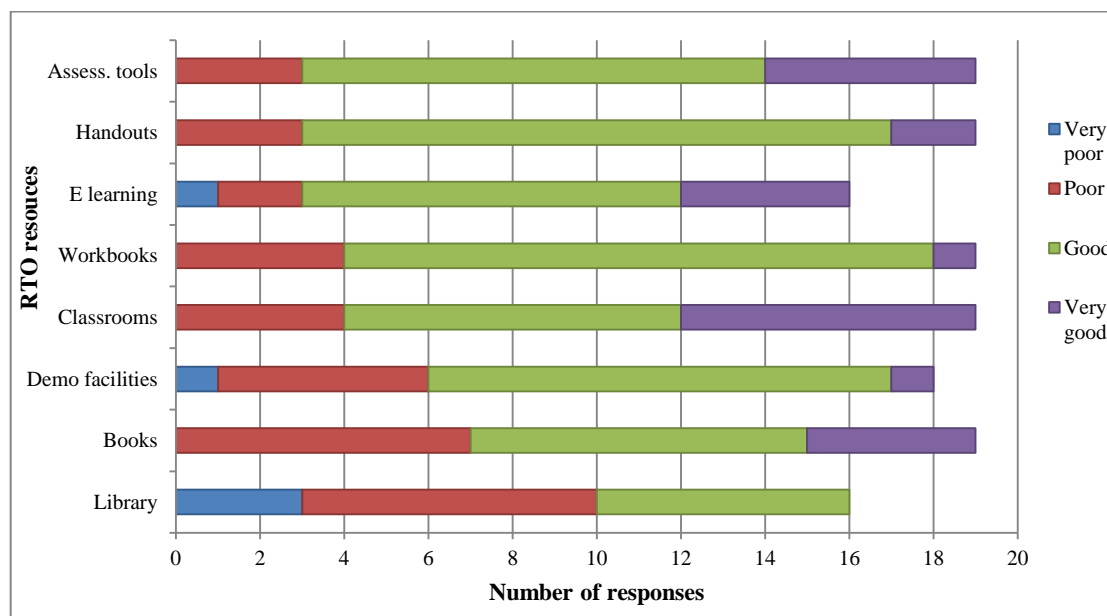
A review by the author in 2010 of three randomly selected commercial for profit private VET RTOs' (not part of the research sample) brochures advertising for international students revealed that they offered a number of services (Chapter 1). These three commercial for profit private VET providers were claiming to offer modern training facilities and easy course articulation and pathways to the best universities in Australia. They also claimed to meet Australian VET Quality Framework (VQF) standards whilst assuring international students easy transition into employment in their respective fields of training in Australia. A review of the brochures of the commercial for profit private VET providers included in this study also showed a similar advertising approach.

Are these advertisements consistent with situated realities that influence the delivery of training in these providers? Useful insights were drawn from auditor DC's observations concerning content specific learning resources. Quality assurance auditor DC observed:

There is a serious inadequacy in the availability of teaching and learning resources, the workbooks, information books etc. There are a lot of training packages without teaching and learning resources. Most units don't have resources but someone has to create them (DC).

Although auditor DC's observations were important, they lacked corroboration from other auditors. Hence, VET teachers' perspectives were used for comparative analysis to rate and analyse the adequacy of content specific (theory or classroom-based) learning resources in the seven commercial private VET providers in the study. The VET teachers' views were drawn from questionnaires that were completed during the first phase of the study (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Teachers' views: content learning resources in their institutions



N=19 [No response: e-learning – 3; demonstration facilities – 1; library – 3; Assess. - Assessment] (Assess. – Assessment; Demo. – Demonstration)

Figure 4 provides a summative analysis of VET teachers' views. It shows that a total of 10 VET teachers out of 16 who responded to this question were unhappy with the library services offered. In addition, a small but important number of trainers (4) expressed reservations about the quality of classrooms and workbooks. Assessment tools, handouts, e-learning, workbooks and classroom resources were all rated highly by VET teachers in the study.

Figure 4 above shows that on the one hand VET teachers rated highly the availability of assessment tools (16), handouts (16), e-learning (13), workbooks (15), classrooms (15), demonstration facilities (12) and books (12) at their providers. On the other hand the resources that received low to poor ratings were demonstration facilities (6), books (7) and library (10). Library facilities and books were the most poorly rated. Overall, these data show that some commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study have adequate content specific learning facilities.

In fact, these positive VET teacher perspectives about content specific learning resources are consistent with the assumptions of the competitive training market

referred to earlier in this chapter. In addition, the teacher perspectives in Figure 4 above also mirror earlier observations made by VET teachers about the adequacy of context specific resources at their commercial for profit private VET RTOs. These observations make quality assurance auditor DC's comments about the inadequacy of the content specific learning resources seem isolated. However it can be argued that auditor DC's views resonate with the views expressed by the VET teachers who suggested that there were noticeable inadequacies in the availability of demonstration facilities, books and library resources at some commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

Notably earlier in this chapter, it was explained that some commercial for profit private VET RTO brochures and advertising showed that they have modern learning facilities, which include library facilities and books. Whilst it seems that these provider claims are consistent with the data presented in Figures 3 (see page 120) and 4 (see page 123), which suggest that commercial for profit private VET RTOs have reasonably adequate context and content specific learning resources, workplace experience, demonstration facilities, books and library resources were mostly rated poorly by between six to 10 VET teachers out of 19.

The teachers' views (Figure 4) about the adequacy of books and library facilities can also be used to argue that the training packages are focused on skills acquisition and not cognitive skills development. Hence, from a business perspective, particularly the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' profit motive, it seems that training providers may favour those resources necessary for skills acquisition, with less emphasis on those required for knowledge acquisition.

It can also be argued that these poorly rated resources are in fact the most important resources in VET because they expose the student to both theoretical and practical learning experiences that are important in skills training. Hence these negative sentiments show partial support for the auditors' views about the commercial for profit private providers' teaching and learning environment.

However, the inconsistent or contradictory perspectives emerging from VET teachers' experiences, particularly the adequacy of teaching and learning resources suggest that they (VET teachers) are confronted with a pedagogic dilemma depending on their professional disposition and choices. But, what we do not know for now is whether the VET teachers' views about these providers' resources can or cannot translate into employability skills that match employers' expectations for international students. The question is, to what extent does the allocation of resources at commercial for profit private VET providers in this study influence teacher pedagogic choices?

VET practice: a pedagogic dilemma

The analysis and interpretation of the study data presented in the earlier sections of this chapter show that although most respondents were agreed on the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' business commercial interests, there were differing perspectives about what constitutes a suitable teaching and learning environment for work related skills training. Further, the different and at times contradictory views expressed by VET teachers in this study and the contestations that emerged about the adequacy of content and context specific resources presented earlier suggest that the selection of delivery methods can be fraught with complex challenges, especially when the student cohort is diverse.

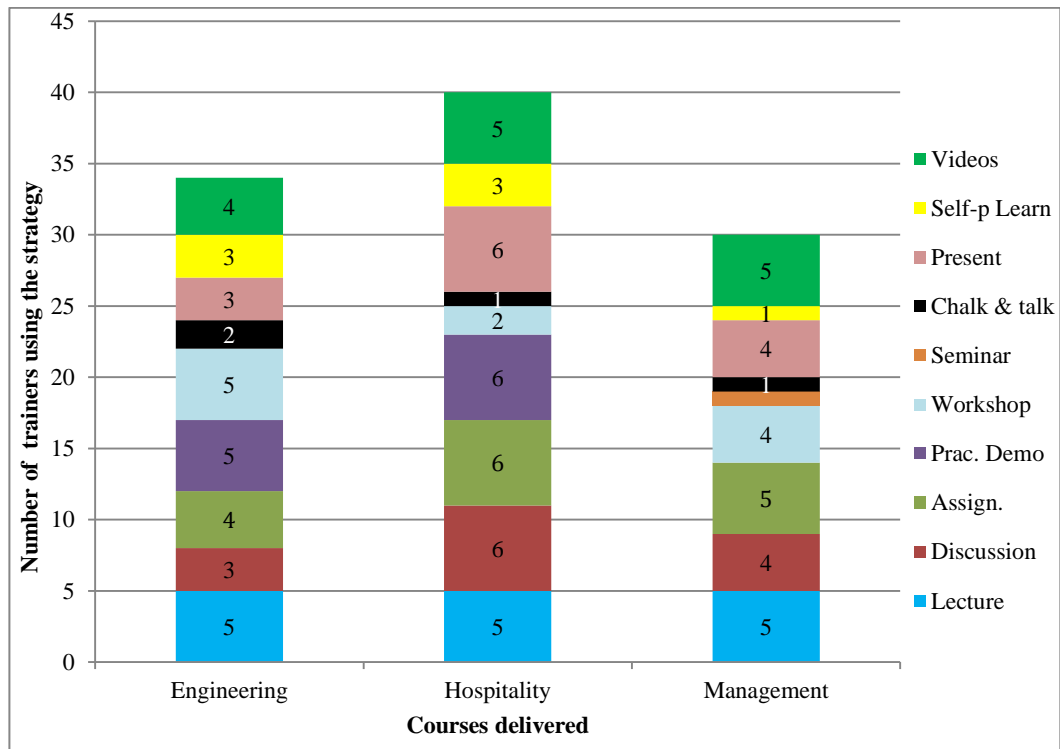
Nonetheless, quality assurance auditor DB's views about delivery of courses in commercial for profit private RTOs are worth noting. Quality assurance auditor DB contends that there are challenges in delivering training packages in VET institutional settings. Quality assurance auditor DB aptly sums up these challenges:

In a traditional classroom setting people cannot meet any unit of competency process. I think with training packages, there is inherent assumptions that you are in a workplace therefore if you are delivering it in a classroom how do you meet it? How do you make a simulated environment for an assessment? You almost bet your bottom dollar that they can't meet the requirements.

Quality assurance auditor DB's views were further explored by examining the teaching approaches VET teachers chose. Figure 5 below gives useful insights into

some of the delivery strategies VET teachers selected relative to the VET courses they teach and the teaching environment.

Figure 5 Teaching international students: commonly used delivery approaches



N=19 (Prac. Demos – practical demonstrations; Assign. – Assignment; self-p Learn – self-paced learning)

Figure 5 above shows that the lecture (15) and assignment (15) teaching strategies recorded the largest usage by VET trainers in the study. In addition, a total of 14 VET teachers used videos in their teaching but the uses of lecture, assignments, videos, discussions, presentations and practical demonstrations strategies were evenly distributed across the courses included in the study.

In addition, engineering teachers were more likely to use all teaching approaches with limited utilisation of chalk and talk, excluding seminars. Hospitality teachers were also more likely to use all delivery approaches with limited utilisation of chalk and talk, workshop and self-paced learning respectively (Figure 5). This teaching approach utilisation is also reflected in management courses where teachers were likely to use all teaching approaches with limited utilisation of chalk and talk, self-paced learning and seminars, excluding practical demonstration.

Figure 5 also shows that management course teachers were likely to use videos, presentation, workshop, assignment, discussion and lecture delivery strategies. They were less likely to use chalk and talk, seminar and self-paced learning approaches. Overall, most VET teachers, to deliver courses to international students in their commercial for profit private providers, predominantly used videos, presentation, assignment, lecture, discussion and workshop. These data suggests that, although these seven commercial for profit private VET providers were different business entities operating in different spaces (location), they were operating in the same competitive VET markets.

Whilst the selection of workshop and practical demonstrations were likely to be used by slightly more than half (11) of the teachers, videos (14), lecture (15), assignment (15), discussion (13 and presentation (13) were the most favoured teaching approaches. It can be argued that assignment and lecture were most likely to be used at these providers in all courses included in the study. But, these teacher delivery choices do not seem consistent with most of their predominant views of the availability of content and context specific learning resources ratings they suggested. Instead their delivery choices seem to confirm earlier observations made by quality assurance auditors and some international students who suggested that commercial for profit private VET providers in the study do not have adequate practical learning resources. One would have expected to see a bias towards practical demonstrations and workshops in delivery methods selection if practical resources were adequate.

However, it is also valid to argue that the VET teachers' delivery choices, in the absence of adequate teaching resources, especially context specific resources, mean that videos are sometimes heavily relied upon or used as an alternative to practical hands-on activities. This also suggests that the teaching environments in the seven commercial for profit private providers included in this study were either similar or were influenced by course type and possibly by resources availability. Overall, it can be argued that this illustrates that the delivery strategies VET teachers in this study chose were influenced by the individual commercial for profit private RTO contexts,

by the trainers' assessment of what needs to be done and by the teachers' pedagogic appreciation of delivery approaches available to them.

Except for workshops and practical demonstrations, it is possible that the other teaching strategies commonly used by VET teachers in this study allowed for large class sizes at a minimum cost to the business. Whilst these data do not enable us to analyse whether or not the choices of the least expensive teaching strategies were influenced by commercial realities or prudent teacher pedagogic choices, it is likely that private provider profit interests influenced the choices VET teachers made. Overall, it can be argued that teacher pedagogic choices were made with a view to the type of resources that were available and the institutional parameters that shaped the alternatives available to them.

One of the most important observations in the selection of delivery strategies by VET teachers in this study is the similarity in course delivery strategy selection across all seven commercial for profit private providers. Based on the teacher delivery strategy selection, the data presented in the preceding discussion suggests that although the study sites were different, the delivery contexts were similar. In addition, these data suggest that there are contestations about what constitutes adequate context and content learning resources needed to enable commercial for profit private VET RTOs to deliver to VQF standards and industry' expectations. This means that VET teachers in these providers operating in a competitive training environment are confronted with difficult choices and material circumstances that can limit their pedagogic choices – their selection is context-bound.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how policy imperatives can influence and motivate commercial for profit private VET institutions to act in certain specific ways. It suggests that predominantly commercial business profit perspectives in these institutions fostered business-training relationships amongst participants, which influenced them to act in the ways they did. It also showed that the interpretations of the participants of what constitutes an ideal training environment for international

students in these learning spaces is context-bound. Hence, it argued that the relationships between the training managers (as representative of these RTOs) and the quality assurance auditors (representing official policy interpretations), the teachers and the students, and between the students and the commercial for profit private providers in this study were likely to be influenced by commercial business imperatives.

The chapter also showed that there are contestations and contradictions about what constitutes an ideal commercial for profit private VET provider teaching and learning environment. Whilst training managers, auditors and a few international students thought that commercial for profit private VET RTOs are primarily focused on profit and secondarily on delivering quality training to international students, most international students and their teachers believed commercial imperatives were not encumbrances to their work. It can be argued that the formulation of Australian government policy aimed at making training quality possible and predictable is a direct consequence of these contestations. It appears that, in order to adequately deliver quality training for full-fee paying international students, strong government steering and customer protection are needed. This view is aptly captured by auditor DD's comments (see pages 109-110), which in part also raises questions about the efficacy of the existing quality assurance model and policy interventions in VET.

Whilst most VET teachers in this study did not think of the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' commercial focus as an encumbrance to quality training, most of the evidence showed that teacher pedagogic choices and teaching and learning resources were more likely influenced by the business profit focus than by pedagogical factors. This is illustrated in the contestations about the adequacy of context and content specific learning resources and the way quality assurance auditors and VET teachers understand skills training for work. Indeed most VET teachers were satisfied with the competitive training market environment and the adequacy of learning resources available to them. This suggests that there is no convergence of views about the effects of the competitive training markets and what constitutes an ideal training environment for VET.

These data can also be used to argue that VET teachers understand their circumstances differently from training managers and quality assurance auditors, because of their professional diversity, varied experiences in VET, loyalty to their employers and regular contact with international students. This also reflects commercial for profit private VET providers' internal tendencies, particularly the fact that these learning spaces no longer reflected the traditional training characteristics and boundaries that applied for domestic students (Harris et al., 2006; Tran & Nyland, 2013).

In the next chapter (Chapter 5), business-training relationships' effects on the recruitment of international students into courses delivered by commercial for profit VET providers are analysed, particularly with respect to international students' educational characteristics, composition, aspirations and expectations.

Chapter 5

Learner factors: international students' characteristics, aspirations and expectations

Introduction

This chapter focuses on making international students' characteristics 'visible', especially those characteristics – outside the deficit view – that they bring into commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in Melbourne, Australia. To do this, qualitative data from training managers' interviews and from VET teachers' written responses, and quantitative data from Australian Education International (AEI), National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and international students are used. These data are analysed in order to answer study question number one, which is:

What are the characteristics, educational and employment expectations of international students upon enrolment in VET courses at private registered training organisations (RTOs) that specialise in teaching international students?

The chapter also provides useful insights into how these providers' economic focuses (competitive training market focus), examined in Chapter 4, influenced international students' selection for enrolment, particularly institutional perceptions and expectations about their training. These perceptions are further compared with international students' actual 'backpack' of experiences and learning characteristics they bring into the competitive training environment. This focus on the educational characteristics and the social capital international students bring into the learning environment also helps to illuminate local discourses, which see them as foreign and 'other' motivated by immigration outcomes only.

The chapter firstly provides an institutional perspective on international students, as drawn from training managers and VET teachers' views of international students' characteristics and aspirations. Secondly, international students' gender, age and prior educational qualifications are examined and contrasted with their training managers

and teachers' expectations and perspectives. Thirdly, the international students' own motivations and aspirations are presented and analysed to offer insights into their expectations and aspirations relative to institutional perceptions. The chapter concludes by examining the implications for local VET training and practices in light of the background and aspirations of the international students themselves.

International students' characteristics emphasised in private RTOs in the study

It was argued in Chapters 2 and 4 that commercial for profit private VET RTO learning environments do not align with the traditional training characteristics and boundaries that apply to local students. In order to explore this contention further, this section describes and examines the views of training managers and VET teachers regarding international students, particularly how they define international students' expectations and their motivations for undertaking VET courses in a competitive training environment in the training providers included in the study.

In order to gain insights into how they recruited their students, all training managers in the study were asked to describe the most important characteristics they emphasised when recruiting international students into their training programmes. All managers interviewed repeated similar focuses and emphases. Training manager XP of RTO 1 in particular succinctly captured these perspectives as follows: *'We recruit international students firstly on their ability to pay and secondly on whether they meet the minimum government student visa criteria'* (XP). To clarify the 'ability to pay' perspective, training manager XP suggested, *'At least from the agent's point of view that is the student they will direct into these courses'* – a student who can afford to pay tuition fees.

Training manager XP's views were further illuminated by training manager XS of RTO 7 who provided further useful categorisations that captured broad provider sentiments about international students' aspirations. According to training manager XS, there are either *'genuine or non-genuine international students in the private VET sector'*. To expand on the meaning of these two categories, training manager XS

offered the following broad explanation: '*Genuine students focus on their study while non-genuine students are driven by the desire to gain Permanent Residency (PR) only*' (XS).

These perspectives, which were repeated by all training managers, were further compared with VET teachers' views in order to understand how prevalent and institutionalised training managers' views were. Hence, VET teachers in the study were asked to describe what motivated international students to take up the courses they teach. More than 84 per cent of the 19 VET teachers surveyed repeated sentiments expressed by their training managers. In addition, their written responses offered descriptive views that were similar to the training managers' interview responses. For example, a bakery teacher at RTO 6 argued, '*My students are not interested in the courses I teach, it's just an easy way to PR*'.

An automotive teacher at RTO 5 also repeated the bakery teacher's views as follows: '*It is a 12 months course and the students think it's easy but this work is equivalent to a four year apprenticeship... it's about Permanent Residency nothing else*'. At RTO 1, a business management teacher's responses corroborated the bakery and automotive teachers' views. '*There are a lot of employment opportunities but I think PR makes this course attractive,*' the management course teacher explained.

In addition, one VET teacher at RTO 7, reflecting on the popularity of the courses they teach, also gave a policy-based perspective whilst projecting common sentiments expressed by training managers. '*They enrol on these courses because the courses are on the skilled occupation shortage list*'. Similarly, all (three) teachers surveyed at RTO 2 repeated these perspectives. '*The courses offer the students the ability to gain PR,*' a management course teacher said. '*They study these courses to get entry requirements in this country,*' a hospitality teacher suggested. '*They get absolutely nothing from this course – just an easy approach to PR. Students are only here to try and gain some sort of residency,*' the engineering teacher argued. Most (84 per cent) teachers in the study repeated these sentiments – a reflection of prevalent institutional teacher perceptions.

It can be argued that the above descriptive examples from training managers and VET teachers' perspectives not only use international students' aspirations to characterise them but also reflect the ambivalence they feel towards them. Hence their views feed into the contemporary debates about international students and their participation in commercial for profit private VET RTOs, which have set up discourses of international students and their providers as foreign and 'other' motivated by immigration outcomes only (see Chapter 2). In this instance a subtle connection is made, which implies that all 'international students' are motivated by permanent residence and immigration aspirations.

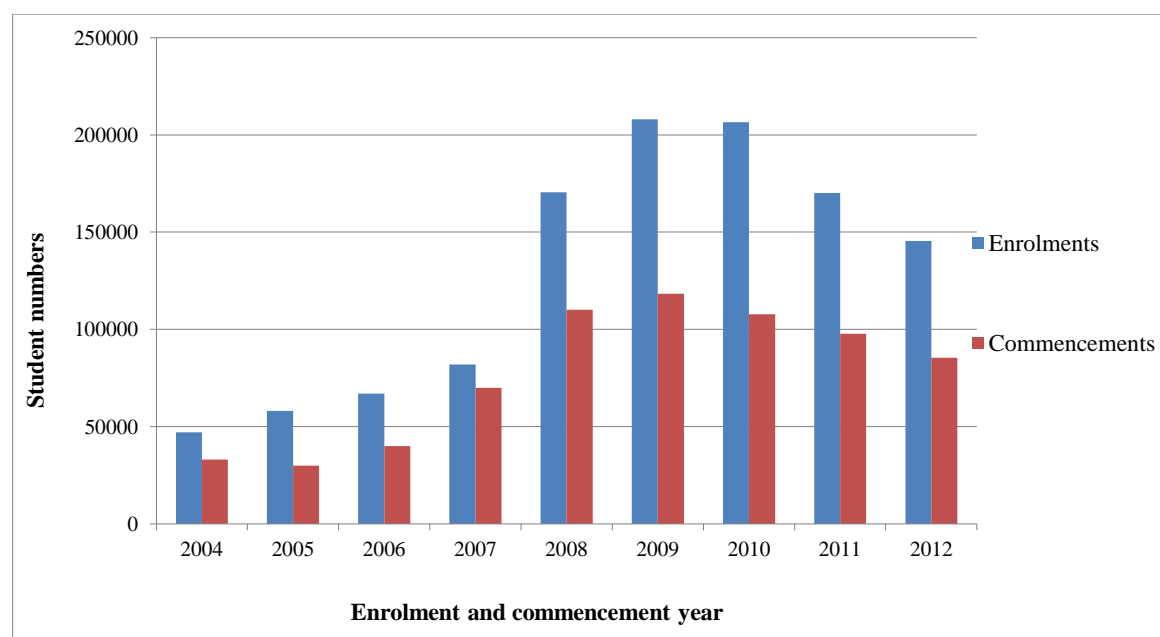
Hence, it can be argued that the important issues of defining the learning characteristics of international students are subsumed within the 'other-ing' discourses wherein their participation in commercial for profit providers is equated with anything negative about their experiences and immigration outcomes. By implication, the 'other-ing' discourses create a dichotomy between the local and the international, with the international assuming a paradoxical position, which suggests that the other is less valued and at the same time highly valued in economic terms – a consequence of institutional commercial imperatives and migration policies examined in Chapter 4.

Indeed, the above comments also show that in the absence of critical analyses of international students' actual learning characteristics, prior educational qualifications and aspirations, local RTO knowledge and general community perceptions are used as a basis to describe them (stereotyping). But where do these allegedly genuine and non-genuine, permanent residency visa focused international students come from? Australia Education International (AEI) enrolment and commencement data offer useful insights.

International students in this research study came from India, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Brazil and countries categorised as 'other'. Countries categorised as 'other' are those countries whose overall contribution to the international students' population in Australia is outside the top 12 source countries included in the

Australian Education International statistics (AEI, 2011a) [Figure 6]. According to AEI (2011a), the two largest markets in the VET sector for international students in Australia are India and China whilst the fastest growing market is Nepal. Recently, India dominated in the VET sector with 33 per cent of the total number of students in the sector followed by China with 12 per cent (AEI, 2011b). The growth in international students' enrolments and commencements in VET in Australia over the last nine years is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 International student enrolments and commencements in VET (2004-2012)



Source: Australian Education International 2009-2013

Recently, enrolments and commencements, cumulatively as at March 2011, fell by 21 per cent and 4 per cent respectively compared to the same period in 2010 (AEI, 2011a). According to AEI (2013), India had the largest share of total enrolments (33.4 per cent) and commencements (26 per cent). China was the next largest source country by enrolments with 11 per cent, followed by Nepal and Thailand with 6 per cent each. In the year ending December 2012, students from China contributed 30 per cent of all international students in 2012, representing the highest of any nationality. India and the Republic of Korea were the next highest, contributing 9 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. No other nationality contributed more than 5 per cent. 'Nationalities outside of the top ten countries together contributed 33 per cent of total international student numbers' (AEI, 2013, p. 1).

The data reported in Figure 6 also show that enrolments and commencements by full-fee paying international students in VET in Australia declined by approximately five per cent for the period ending February 2011 and approximately six per cent for the period ending December 2012. This decline is in contrast with enrolments since 2002, which averaged a 10 per cent annual growth rate. India and Thailand contributed larger shares of students in VET in 2012 in Australia (AEI, 2013).

The above data give us an overview of the rapid increase in international students enrolled in VET in Australia beginning in 2004. In addition, these data help us to contextualise the international students' enrolments and commencements in the commercial for profit providers included in the study. These data can also be used to justify and emphasise the need for research to focus attention on this fast growing sector. But, when these data are disaggregated at institutional level, they can be used to show the overwhelming presence of international students at commercial for profit private providers in the study, which recruit international students only into their VET programmes. Hence, these data can be used to explain the feelings of ambivalence training managers and VET teachers feel towards them. However, these AEI data (Figure 6) are also useful when making country specific population distribution comparisons with this study's baseline data.

This research study's sample of 194 international students from which the baseline data are drawn, showed that in 2011, India contributed 56 per cent to the overall VET international student population in the seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study despite a 33 per cent overall national decline in students coming from this subcontinent. The fastest growth markets (Vietnam and Nepal) accounted for eight per cent of the total respectively whilst 'other' countries outside the Northeast and the Southeast Asia region (Asian region) accounted for 11 per cent of total international student commencements. China's contribution to international students' commencements in this study during the first 2011 semester was a paltry two per cent whilst the rest (15 per cent) of the students came from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Brazil.

This study's sample is more narrowly drawn with Indian students dominating and countries such as Vietnam, Nepal and those outside the Asian subcontinent contributing proportionally fewer students (approximately 26 per cent) to the total. In all providers in the study, the study data showed that enrolments for some courses were mostly subscribed by students from the Indian sub-continent only. This suggests that India was the target market for this form of training in these Melbourne providers. Hence it can be argued that there are regional variations in international students' concentrations in VET in Australia.

However, international students in this study came from different countries with different social and educational backgrounds. They came with a 'backpack' full of personal experiences and exclusive prior knowledge. Chapters 6 and 8 provided useful analyses and exploration of international students' performance and experiences, the next section brings to our attention international students' actual educational backgrounds.

The 'backpack' of characteristics international students in the study carry

This section describes international students' characteristics outside the lenses emphasised by their training managers and VET teachers referred to earlier and seeks to present a more nuanced view of their motivations and background. It brings into focus the real 'backpack' of educational and social experiences international students in this study carry or at least make them visible outside the economic-migration lens. This focus provides insights into the definition of an international student in VET, particularly whether the international student fits our normalised definition of a VET student described in the literature section.

In the baseline survey, international students in this study were asked to nominate their prior knowledge, gender, age, and other demographic information (Table 4, Chapter 3, page 97). Hence the students' prior secondary and tertiary educational qualifications, gender and age were collected and analysed. What was particularly notable besides other important characteristics was the gender disparity in

international students' participation. The students' (international students in this study) demographic data showed that males constituted a larger percentage (62 per cent) of this group compared with females (34 per cent) [some students (4 per cent) did not provide their demographic details].

This research study's data, which shows a larger distribution of males amongst international students can be explained by the types of courses that are mostly popular with international students in commercial for profit private providers in the study. They (providers in the study) offer a disproportionate number of traditionally male dominated courses, for example, automotive and electronics engineering courses. These courses, with a disproportionate concentration of male trade students, are also on the skills shortage list, which attracts a huge proportion of immigration points required for PR purposes. However, further analyses of age and gender-based characteristics of international students in the study were conducted to explore international students' educational characteristics.

Age and gender-based characteristics of international students in the study

Further analyses of the international students in the study categorised by age as a proportion of the sample showed that there were proportionally fewer females in the 15-19 year old age group than males, and proportionally more females than males in the 20-24 year old group (Table 6). However, there were minimal gender related variations amongst the 25-44, 45-64 years and older age groups.

Table 6 International students' age distribution by gender

Age in Years	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
15-19	63	52	26	40	89	48
20-24	45	38	35	54	80	43
25-44	7	6	2	3	9	5
44-65	4	3	2	3	6	3
65 +	1	1	0	0	1	1
Total	120	100	65	100	185	100

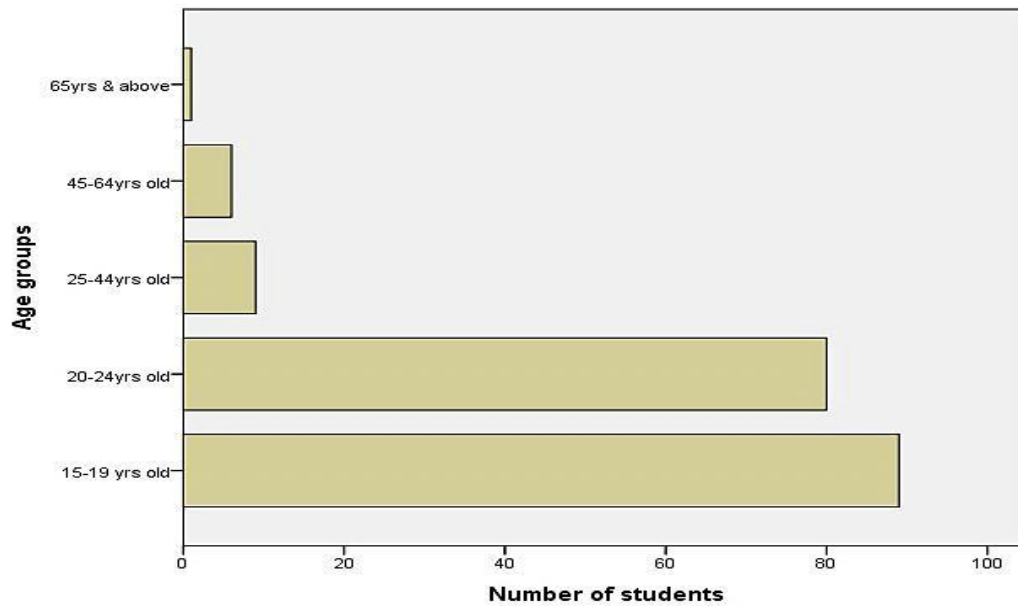
N-194=100 per cent: Nine respondents did not answer this question (4.6 per cent)

In addition, when the study data (Table 6) on international students' gender distribution were compared with the 2011 national public sector VET students' gender distribution data, it showed that in Australia in 2011, the public VET system comprised 48 per cent females and 51 per cent males (NCVER, 2012). The national Australian public sector VET student distribution by gender was more balanced than the study sample, which had [65] 36 per cent females and [120] 64 per cent males. The public sector VET student census also showed that in 2011, 43 per cent of the students were aged 24 years and under (NCVER, 2012). This proportion of the local 24 years and under age groups was smaller than the study sample, which had more than 80 per cent participation from the same age groups.

However, the large number (80 per cent) of international students aged 24 years and under in the study shows that the study sample composition of this age group is completely different from similar age groups in the public VET sector. The Australian VET courses census includes all training and courses outside schools and the higher education sectors (NCVER, 2012). The NCVER national statistics (excluding international students) also include but are not limited to single unit or subjects, Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) courses from entry level to higher diplomas, hobbies and training for leisure. However, international students in the commercial for profit private VET providers in this study were focused on accredited AQF courses recognised for workplace entry-level skills, pathways into higher education and PR migration points.

In addition, international students in the study were predominantly located in the 15-19 and 20-24 year old age groups. These data suggest that young international students, presumably in the early stages of their careers, dominate in the sample and possibly across all providers in the study. Hence, this can be used to argue that besides the economic and visa aspirations; most international students in these providers were likely to be pursuing career paths. Figure 7 below gives us a useful graphical overview of the participation of international students in this study by age.

Figure 7 International students in the sample: age group categories



NB - no age recorded by 9 respondents – N=194

Although the data presented in Figure 7 illustrate that there were large proportions of international students in the 15-19 year age group, there were no international students aged less than 18 years of age who were enrolled in the commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. Most of them were 19 years or older. This suggests that there are either family or government regulatory mechanisms that limited the enrolment of international students under the age of eighteen in the Australian education sector. Next, in order to gain further insights into international students' characteristics, their prior educational qualifications are examined.

Prior educational qualifications international students in the study hold

In the previous section, it was shown that international students in this study came from culturally diverse contexts. They came from India, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Brazil and countries categorised as 'other'. Hence in order to further explore international students' educational characteristics, the students were asked to specify

their prior educational qualifications before enrolment and recruitment by their recruiting agencies or commercial for profit private VET providers in the study.

The students' nominated prior educational qualifications were analysed, categorised and given an equivalent Australian secondary educational qualification level because of the differences and diversity in their qualifications. This categorisation was used to allow for comparison with Australian secondary educational qualifications. However, there was also a need to understand the general policy requirements for entry-level VET courses in Australia or parts of the enrolment criteria, which are used to recruit local students into similar courses. The general perspectives about prior secondary education qualifications expected for entry-level courses in VET in Australia was summarised by one of the quality assurance auditors in the study. The auditor argued,

In terms of local students' recruitment, there is no minimum criterion.... This is a VET wide problem. The only apprenticeship criterion is that you have to be above the age of 14 or 15 and that if you are below the age of 18 your parents must give consent and that your employer is willing to take you on (DW).

All quality assurance auditors in the study repeated the views expressed by quality assurance auditor DW whilst emphasising that the VET sector's entry-level prior education requirements in Australia are problematic and lack coherence across courses. Nonetheless, the data gathered from international students provide us with insights into their educational qualifications prior to their enrolment into VET courses at commercial for profit VET providers in this study.

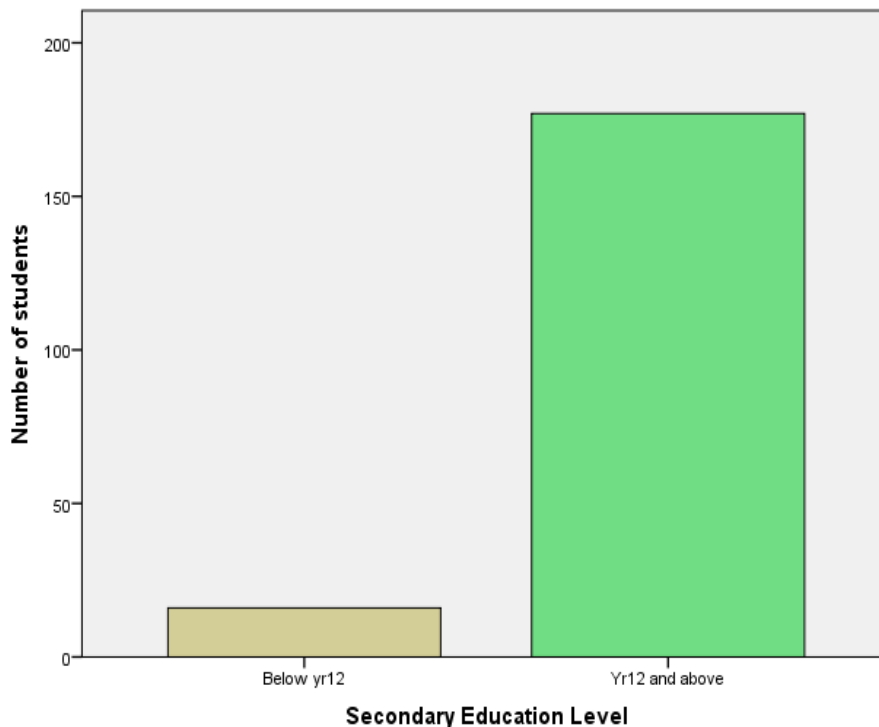
This analysis enables us to account for individual variables that the student can carry from provider to provider. Thus, we are able to distinguish between school-based variables and individual-level variables, which have the potential to influence international students' performance and outcomes. Hence, international students' entry-level qualifications were firstly collated, analysed and categorised using Australian secondary school levels. They were broadly categorised in this study as either low or advanced; below year 12 – *low*, completed year 12 and above – *high*.

Although these secondary education level categorisations disguised differences amongst qualifications in source countries, they allowed the researcher to have a consistent allocation of standards or equivalent educational levels for comparability. These qualifications are analysed in the next section.

International students' prior secondary education qualifications

Figure 8 below shows the number of international students in the study who did not complete year 12 and those who completed year 12. It shows that most (91 per cent) international students in the sample, as a proportion of the total number of students surveyed, had completed year 12 whilst a smaller number (9 per cent) did not complete year 12. The education levels presented below also show that international students' qualifications were high relative to the quality assurance auditors' policy perspectives on local students.

Figure 8 International students in the study: high school qualifications



NB - no secondary education level recorded by 1 respondent – N=194

The above data (Figure 8) can be used to argue that international students in the study were mostly educated beyond the minimum entry-level requirements for a standard VET course in Australia (certificate three level courses). According to most quality assurance auditors in this study, in Australia, there are no strict minimum VET entry-level prior education qualifications pre-requisites. By implication, besides their PR motives, international students in the study had the necessary educational pre-requisites and potential to succeed in their VET courses because higher levels of prior learning are likely to influence students' intrinsic motivation towards learning, study approach and academic performance.

Nonetheless, further analyses of international students' prior educational qualifications using gender showed that there were small differences between male and female international students with low secondary education levels (Table 7). The data showed that 91 per cent of male and 93 per cent of female international students had completed a year 12 level secondary education prior to enrolment. Their educational qualifications were relatively similar between the two gender groups.

Table 7 International students in the sample: high school qualifications by gender

High school completed		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
High school	Below yr12 – low	11	9	5	7	16	8
Qualifications	Yr12 – high	113	91	64	93	177	92
Total		124	100	69	100	193	100

N=194; one student did not respond to this question (Males: 124 – 66 per cent; Females: 69 – 36 per cent)

Hence, further analyses into international students' other tertiary-level qualifications were important to explore their post high school experiences. These experiences and tertiary-level qualifications provided useful insights into their aspirations and motivations to study the VET courses they chose.

International students' tertiary-level educational qualifications

In order to further understand and explain international students' prior tertiary level education, international students were asked to nominate their highest tertiary-level qualifications. Table 8 below shows that 72 per cent of males and 55 per cent of females held VET qualifications in this group compared with 28 per cent of males and 45 per cent of females who held a degree or higher in this group.

Table 8 International students in the study: Tertiary education qualifications by gender

Tertiary level qualifications	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
VET or below	84	72	36	55	120	66
Degree/higher	33	28	30	45	63	34
Total	117	100	66	100	183	100

NB – no tertiary education level recorded by 11 respondents – N=194

Overall, Table 8 shows that a large proportion (66 per cent) of international students in the study held a VET or lower qualification whilst 34 per cent held a degree or higher tertiary level qualifications at enrolment. There was a larger proportion of females who held a degree or higher qualification than males. These prior tertiary-level qualifications are part of the backpack of international students' characteristics and experiences that have a potential to influence their learning experiences. They suggest that families are more likely to send abroad students who are most likely to achieve positive educational and economic outcomes – i.e. those with higher previous qualifications. It can be argued that these data also suggest that female international students were more likely to hold a bachelor degree or higher qualification upon enrolment than their male counterparts prior to choosing to study abroad (Table 8).

In addition, the fact that international students in the study came with additional tertiary-level qualifications, in some cases post-graduate qualifications to do entry-level certificate courses in VET in Australia is a further example of the potential international students have to achieve positive outcomes in their studies. It can also be argued that this level of tertiary education is seldom acknowledged or recognised or

for the best part ignored at enrolment into entry-level VET courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study. But, these postgraduate-level prior education and training qualifications international students bring into the learning environment can present challenges to the local pedagogic expectations and practices.

It was suggested in Chapter 2 that historically, VET was meant for those who could not meet university entry-level requirements. In fact, the composition of our international sample suggests that these VET courses are not being populated by obviously disadvantaged students with low-level educational qualifications. In fact, the above analysis can be used as an example to argue that TAFE students and indeed commercial for profit private provider VET students have considerable potential. This highlights one of the purposes of this thesis, which is to show the richness and diversity in the students' backgrounds that exist in TAFE and the private VET sector outside the limited historical and economic perspectives.

Nonetheless, this high level of international students with prior tertiary educational qualifications studying entry-level VET courses in the seven commercial for profit providers in the study must also be considered in the light of the students' own motivations and aspirations. But, how were their choices to study abroad informed?

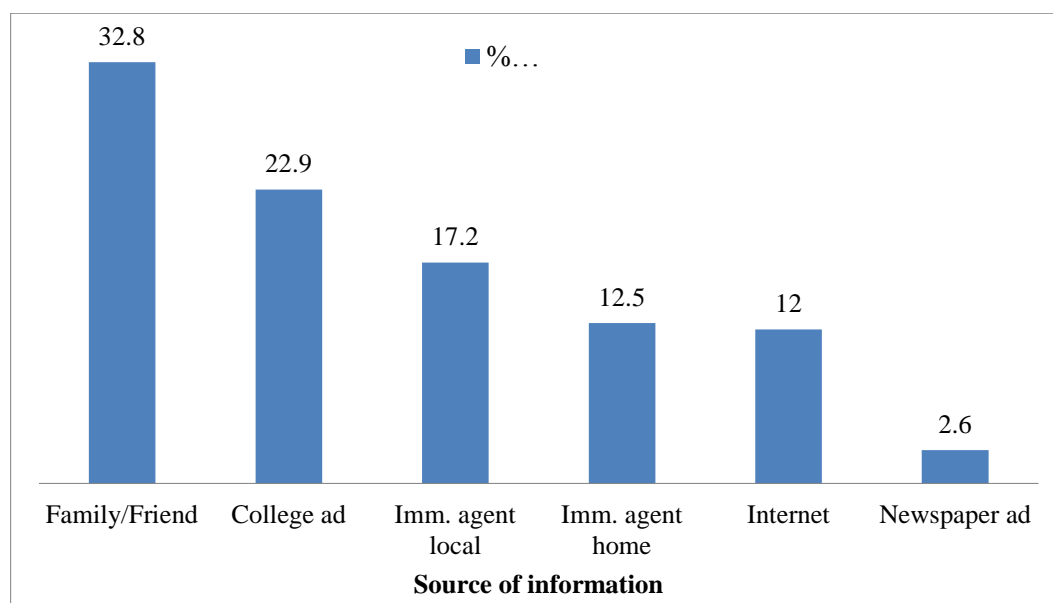
International students in the study: motivations and aspirations

One of the main purposes of this study is to understand international students' aspirations, motivations and expectations. The study makes an attempt to establish whether there is congruence between international students' expectations, their teachers' expectations and commercial for profit private VET RTOs' motives. To do this, the study firstly examined informational sources used by international students to inform their choices to study abroad. Figure 9 below offers useful insights into sources of information they used to make their study destination choices.

Figure 9 below shows that 33 per cent used family or friend, 23 per cent provider [college] advertising, 17 per cent local (home country) immigration agents, 13 per cent host country immigration agents, 12 per cent internet sources and approximately

3 per cent used newspaper advertising to inform their choices to study abroad. These data show that family or friends and provider advertising were the most important information sources whilst newspaper advertising played a very limited role in providing students in this study with useful information to study abroad.

Figure 9 Informational opportunities used by international students in the sample



NB - no response recorded by 2 respondents N=194 (ad – advertisement; Imm. – immigration)

In addition, Figure 9 above shows that home country-based immigration agents (17 per cent) and host country immigration agents (12.5 per cent) were also used but to a lesser extent than family and provider sources of information. This suggests that international students' choices to study abroad were personal and driven by a variety of factors, not simply the desire for immigration. However, family, friends, alumni perceptions and experiences about VET providers in Australia were particularly important in influencing prospective international student's choices. This suggests that family and alumni experiences are important in shaping international students' study choices and destinations abroad.

The use of VET provider advertising (23 per cent), which was the second most important primary source of information, suggests that RTO advertising plays an important role in influencing international students' ability to navigate the Australian VET market and make course and provider choices excluding the quality of their

training provision. In Chapters 1 and 4, a review by the author of the commercial for profit private providers advertising showed that they were claiming to offer modern training facilities and easy course articulation and pathways to the best universities in Australia. They also claimed to meet AQF standards whilst assuring international students easy transition into employment in their respective fields of training in Australia.

Whilst it can be argued that the accuracy of provider advertising content, particularly the specification of deliverable outcomes, is important in influencing international students' destination choices, the consequences of VET providers' advertising approach will be analysed in Chapter 6. But, to further analyse the extent of the influences of these information sources on students' expectations, the second analysis phase involved exploring international students' aspirations and expectations.

The students were asked to explain what it was they expected to gain from the VET courses they were enrolled in. Most of the students' written responses showed that they were interested to *gain knowledge, start own businesses, gain experience and achieve a better life or better future*. Table 9 below shows that 74 per cent of the students in the study wanted to remain in Australia permanently whilst 20 per cent chose to return to their home countries and 12 students did not indicate their choice under this category.

Table 9 International students in the study: residency aspirations

Residency options	Intl. students	Percentage
	N	%
Australian permanent residency	143	74
Home country	39	20
Total	182	94

NB – no residency choice recorded by 12 respondents – N=194 (Intl. = international)

Overall, Table 9 data aligns with the students' VET teachers and training managers' characterisations of international students' aspirations, which also aligns with the focuses of their providers' enrolment emphases and criteria. Whilst on the one hand it can be argued that these data (Table 9) project long-term aspirations, which are arguably unachievable in Australia without enabling immigration visa outcomes, on

the other hand, getting a permanent residency visa in Australia is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Notably, it can be argued that there are several ways in which the permanent residency visa immigration outcome can be achieved in Australia without studying VET courses at these providers.

But, it can also be argued that these data reflect the influences of policy in the competitive VET market, particularly the education-migration policy nexus, which is referred to in Chapter 2. It is argued in Chapter 2 that the decision in 2001 to allow international students to apply for permanent residency whilst in Australia, the release of a list of skills or occupations in demand in 2005 (updated in 2010 as well), and the accreditation of students with Certificate III qualifications for one-year courses without the usual requirements of industry experience all influenced the way courses are customised to meet clients' needs. Hence the above data about international students' aspiration is accurately portraying policy expectations and institutional perspectives that influence their relationships.

This implies that those international students who were likely to settle permanently in Australia were acutely aware of the link between their educational and employment aspirations and one's immigration status. Notably, Table 9 above shows that a large number (143) of international students in the study were likely to apply to stay in Australia whilst a smaller number (39) were likely to return home after graduating. This shows that the choices international students make mirror not only individual socio-economic expectations and aspirations that shaped their choices to study abroad but also the host country's education-migration policy expectations. It is also likely that it reflects individual international students' family circumstances that influenced their participation in this form of VET in the first place.

However, the data presented in the next section suggest that other factors are also at play and that the picture is considerably more complex than the simple focus on immigration and permanent residency might suggest.

International students' further education and training aspirations

If we consider the broader non-economic purposes of VET, we might expect that international students' participation in education and training abroad is also expected to facilitate individual and group social mobility in their home countries. It would be logical for international students to return or invest in their countries of origin. But, there were not a large number (39) of these students in the study committed to returning to their home countries after training. The data presented in this section suggest that, although the percentage of international students planning to return home after training was lower than those planning to adopt Australian residency, their aspirations for a better life are likely to be the motivators for them to participate in the Australian VET sector and subsequently to want to enter higher education. Table 10 below shows that international students in the study were also likely to wish to use their VET courses as pathways into higher education.

Table 10 International students' Further Education and Training aspirations

Further education and training pathways	Number N	Per cent %
Another VET course	12	6
Higher VET diploma	60	31
University bachelors' degree	82	42
University post graduate degree	14	7
Other	7	4
Total	175	90

NB – no record for 19 (9.8 per cent) respondents – N=194

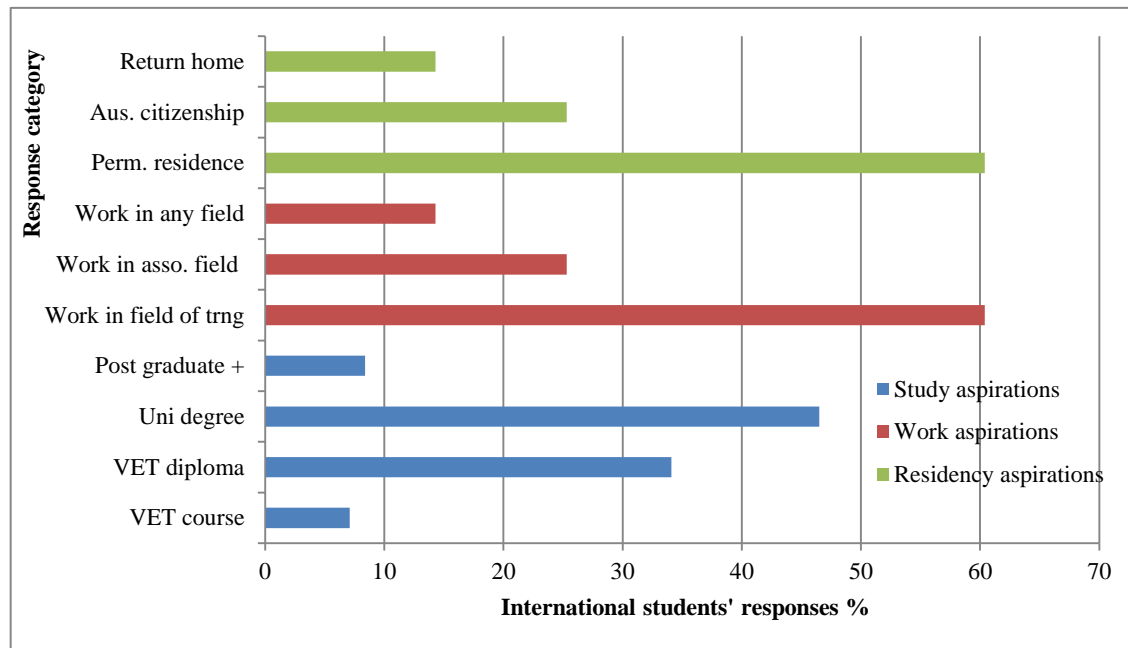
Table 10 shows that six per cent of the international students who responded to this question were motivated to continue with another VET course whilst 31 per cent were likely to continue with higher VET diploma courses. In addition, 42 per cent and seven per cent were likely to study bachelor and postgraduate degree courses respectively. Overall, these data show that 96 (49 per cent) international students in the study want to study a higher education course after completing the VET courses they were enrolled in and 72 (37 per cent) want to study another VET course. These broader aspirations were not captured in most commercial for profit private VET RTO training managers and VET teachers' views about their students' aspirations.

However, it can be argued that the second VET course pathway international students chose was also predetermined at enrolment contingent upon the existing migration-education policy frameworks and internal RTO course packaging. This policy framework can be used to explain why 168 out of 194 international students in this study aspired to take either a VET course or a higher education pathway after VET course completion. It can also be that some students wanted to study higher education courses but did not meet the enrolment criteria. Hence they were using VET as a pathway. However, the question that arises from this observation concerns packaging of courses at the VET provider level. Are these VET courses packaged in response to the two-stage migration frameworks or educationally sound training requirements?

It can be argued that in response to the two-stage migration requirement, most commercial for profit private VET RTOs packaged courses for international students to meet the two-year visa application requirements through a combination of several courses. For example, a 40-52 weeks Certificate III in Automotive Technology course plus a six months Certificate IV in Business and another six months of Diploma of Business Management courses or any such combination will meet the permanent residency visa eligibility criteria. This packaging of courses provides international students with a one-stop shop VET study option whilst the commercial for profit private VET RTOs have predictable income projections and student tenure for two years. Therefore, course packaging can also be used to explain the popularity of Business or Management courses amongst international students in the study. One can almost be certain that a significant proportion of international students in VET have to study a Business or Management course in addition to their basic Certificate III level VET courses. The usefulness or career benefits arising from such course packaging has not been investigated.

However, the data in Table 10 above can also be used to argue that the aspiration to participate in higher education after graduating with a VET qualification may be driven by other factors too. The summary of these aspirations, presented in Figure 10 below, provides us with useful insights.

Figure 10 International students in the study: A summary of aspirations



N=194 (Aus. – Australia; Perm. – Permanent; asso. – associated; trng. – training; Uni. – University)

Figure 10 summarises international students' post VET training aspirations. There were large proportions of international students in the study who aspired to gain permanent residency, but also many who wish to work in their field of training, transition into higher education and do another VET course after completing their VET courses respectively. This shows that their choices were more or less evenly distributed across the three pathways of residency, employment and further education and training and skewed in favour of migration pathways only.

These students' aspirational data summaries (Figure 10) show that international students were not focused on gaining Australian permanent residency only. Their aspirations and expectations were varied and likely to be influenced by their economic and social backgrounds. Historically, although it was expected that when students graduate from universities and VET colleges a significant proportion of them enter the job market, the study data suggests that a large proportion of international students were likely to want to enrol in further tertiary education and training courses after completing their VET courses (Figure 10 above).

Figure 10 also shows that more than 60 per cent (116) of international students in the study were likely to want to work in their field of training whilst a smaller proportion (about 40 per cent - 78) was likely to be undecided or to want to work in any field. It shows that international students' aspirations were varied and not focused on a single pathway or career. This illustrates that although international students were likely to benefit from the present education-migration policy arrangements, they were also able to determine what was likely to be beneficial in the long term.

Overall, the evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that international students in this study bring into the Australian competitive VET market, educational, experiential, age related and gender based characteristics; and aspirational goals that are complex and difficult to define using a single lens model. The international students' characteristics and aspirations in this study illustrated that they have complex aspirations across three broad areas of further education, work and immigration.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that there is no single descriptor that can capture international students' complexity in educational qualifications, expectations and diversity. It demonstrated that international students are heterogeneous and come from different countries with diverse aspirations. Although a large proportion comes from India or China, international students come from varied and complex backgrounds motivated by different socio-economic circumstances.

The preceding discussion has also illustrated that international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study were likely to be relatively well-educated young men and women. They aspired to enter the Australian labour market, participate in higher education and above all have a better life. Hence the debates about and critical literature on international students, particularly their characteristics and aspirations, which are based on the pervasive economic instrumentalism and permanent residency visas only, are particularly limited (Liddicoat et al., 2003).

In addition, it can be argued that the restructure of the VET sector using the concept of a competitive training market led commercial for profit private VET provider managers and their teachers in the study to view their students in economic and financial terms only, without considering the important educational and social characteristics international students carry. The training managers emphasised international students' ability to pay tuition fees more than the students' positive learning characteristics. It can be argued that this narrow focus has implications for pedagogy and international students' outcomes. This is especially so when international students are considered firstly as consumers of VET programmes and services and secondarily as VET students who want to train to gain employment skills. Hence this presents a paradox, which positions international students in Australia as cash cows whilst at the same time a big source of permanent skilled immigrants (Modood & Salt, 2011; Robertson, 2011). However, international students can do this by becoming an integral part of the international labour migration process.

Most importantly, the chapter offered insights, which can be used to illustrate that the definition of international students in VET in Australia has to be revisited to include the characteristics that are not presently emphasised, especially the prior educational qualifications and other social capital they bring in pursuit of their careers. The composition and characteristics of VET students today have fundamentally changed – VET in these providers no longer reflects the traditional characteristics that applied for local students. Hence the negative debates about international students, especially their aspirations, which have mostly led to the view that they are a homogeneous group 'with similar learning styles and expectations', are overly simplistic and unhelpful pedagogically (Carroll & Ryan, 2005, p. 93).

Overall, it can be argued that the other-ing discourses, which are prevalent in the VET sector debates about international students, have shifted the foci from important international students' prior achievements and characteristics that are related to performance. Hence it is reasonable to suggest that the commercial emphases of the commercial for profit providers in the study, reflected in a competitive training market logic, may be influencing perceptions of international students in a distorting and negative manner.

What then are the international students' outcomes and experiences after completing VET courses at these seven commercial for profit private VET providers? In Chapter 6, international students' experiences, expectations and outcomes are presented to offer insights and knowledge about the consequences for their participation in VET in commercial for profit providers in the study.

Chapter 6

International students' outcomes: perceptions, experiences and achievements

Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter 5), international students' educational characteristics, aspirations and expectations were explored. It was shown that the international students in this study had higher levels of prior learning than is usually acknowledged. In addition, they had a range of expectations of their studies, including obtaining employment in skilled vocational occupations in their fields of training, starting businesses, pursuing further studies and gaining Australian permanent residence visas. This chapter explores the narratives of a group of international students to gain insights into whether or not their expectations and aspirations were met by participating in commercial for profit private providers in the study. It particularly addresses the second research question, which seeks to examine international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at commercial for profit private VET RTOs for international students in the study. Where direct reference is made to any data obtained from all participants, pseudonyms have been used.

In order to answer the second research question of this study and gain insights into international students' outcomes and experiences, this chapter presents detailed summaries of their outcomes. It explores each international student graduate's journey, particularly those students who took part in the outcomes survey. It shows their lived experiences and the labour market choices they were able to make. The summaries of their destinations are also compared with their expectations and aspirations reported earlier in Chapter 5. This focus enables us to understand the pathways the students took and whether or not they were effective ones. These summaries also give us useful insights into individual international students' dispositions, their VET training circumstances and whether or not their expectations were met.

The chapter firstly tracks and explores international students in the study who had no tertiary-level qualifications at enrolment. This is followed by narrative summaries of the accounts of those with prior VET qualifications. The experiences and outcomes of those with bachelor or higher degree prior qualifications are considered and presented last. The chapter concludes by analysing the implications for international students, commercial for profit providers in the study in particular and VET in general. Pseudonyms are used to name and identify international students whose stories and journeys in the Australian commercial for profit private VET RTO sector are analysed.

International students in the study: a summary of their journeys and outcomes

In Chapter 5, it was shown that international students bring into the Australian tertiary education sector complex individual, social, cultural, and educational experiences. It was also shown that most international students had high entry-level qualifications for the VET courses they were enrolled in.

The sample of international students who responded to the final outcomes survey was small (n=47) but represented 47 per cent of the population of the students who agreed to participate in the last phase of the study (100) after course completion and this sample (47) represents 24 per cent of the baseline survey sample and is also distributed evenly across all providers included in the study. Hence it can be argued that these data are sufficiently suggestive of the range of journeys, perceptions, aspirations, outcomes and experiences of international students after participating in the commercial for profit private VET RTO contexts in the study. This group of respondents (47) comprised eight students who held no tertiary level prior qualifications, 21 students who held a VET qualification and 18 students with a degree or higher prior qualifications at enrolment in providers in this study. However, of the VET course completers (39) whose prior educational qualifications and detailed data were given, eight had no VET or other tertiary-level qualifications at enrolment whilst 17 had a VET qualification up to diploma and 14 had a bachelor or higher

degree at enrolment respectively (baseline data). A summary of these respondents' VET courses completions is illustrated in Table 11 below.

Table 11 International students' outcomes: VET course completions

Response category	Response	
	N	%
Completed	39	83
Did not complete	3	6
Doing the same course	5	11
Total	47	100

N = 47

Table 11 shows that 39 (83 per cent) of the 47 students who agreed to participate in the final outcomes survey completed their VET courses, five were still doing the same course whilst the other three students did not complete the course. Although the proportion of the course completers was lower than 100 per cent, international student course completions were high. If those who were still doing the same course completed their studies, the number of VET completers in these providers would be more than 90 per cent. However, Table 12 below shows the levels of VET qualifications that were awarded to the students after course completion.

Table 12 Course levels awarded after course completion

Qualification level	Qualifications awarded	
	N	%
Certificate III	10	21
Certificate IV	4	9
Diploma	17	36
Advanced diploma	5	11
Skipped question or N/A	11	23
Total	47	100

N = 47 – 100%

Table 12 shows that of these VET completers, 10 completed with a certificate III, four with certificate IV, 17 with a diploma and five with an advanced diploma level qualifications. A total of 11 students skipped this question because they were still studying or dropped out of their courses (see Table 12).

International students who participated in the outcomes surveys were also asked to specify the employment pathways they chose, that is, whether they were working, looking for work or not looking for work. Table 13 below provides summaries of their work statuses.

Table 13 International students graduates' work statuses

Response category	Response	
	N	%
Working	18	38
Looking for work	14	30
Not looking	5	11
Skipped question or N/A	10	21
Total	47	100

N = 47 – 100%

Table 13 shows that of those who chose the employment pathways, 18 were working, 14 were looking for work, and five were not working or looking for work whilst 10 did not respond to this question.

In addition, international students who participated in the employment pathways were asked whether or not the jobs they had were the types of jobs they would like as a career path. Table 14 below illustrates the students' views.

Table 14 Is this the type of job you would like as a career?

Response category	Response	
	N	%
Career job	11	23
Not a career job	7	15
Skipped question or N/A	29	62
Total	47	100

N = 47 – 100%; (N/A – Not applicable)

Table 14 above shows that of the eighteen students who chose the employment pathway, seven students did not think that their jobs were aligned with their career trajectories whilst 11 considered their jobs to be aligned with their career trajectories. In this group, there was a large number (29) of students who did not respond to the question about the alignment of their job choices with their career trajectories because they were not employed. The number of the students who did not respond to the

question about career alignment is equal to the number of students who were looking for work, not looking and those who skipped this question.

There were also those who chose the further education and training pathways. Table 15 below shows the students' further education and training pathways they chose.

Table 15 If you are studying, what course are you studying now?

Response category	Response	
	N	%
Another VET course	6	13
University course	7	14
Upgrade training	4	9
Skipped question or N/A	30	64
Total	47	100

N = 47 – 100%; (N/A – Not applicable)

Of those who chose the further education and training pathways, seven students chose the university pathways, six chose another VET course whilst four chose the upgrade training pathway. Table 15 also shows that under this category, there was a large number of students (30) who skipped this question on further education and training pathway choices because they had opted for other pathways.

There were also those who chose to work and study. Hence the numbers of working and non-working groups of international students were almost equal. The exploration of their journeys below shows the students' stories, which illustrate and give us useful insights into the complexity of their experiences, circumstances, priorities and the choices they made. The summaries are presented beginning with those with no prior VET qualifications followed by those with prior VET qualifications and finally those with degree or higher prior qualifications.

Experiences and outcomes for graduates with no prior tertiary qualifications

The narratives in this section show the outcomes and pathways international students with no prior tertiary level qualifications at enrolment chose. These narratives consider their family backgrounds, prior educational qualifications; their expectations

of training in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study and their labour market experiences.

Sal is from India and was enrolled at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne to study a VET course with no prior tertiary-level qualifications. His parents and relatives back home financed his education in Australia. However Sal did not describe his parents' occupations; whether or not they were working. Within one year of commencing his studies, Sal completed a certificate III level of VET training and is currently employed as a casual worker whilst studying another VET course at diploma level. He aspired to open a business in Australia but twelve months later Sal has mixed feelings about whether or not his expectations are likely to be met. Sal is still working as a taxi driver.

Tan is a VET student from Vietnam. Tan was enrolled to study commercial cookery with no prior tertiary-level education qualifications. She recently completed a certificate III level VET course and is still studying at advanced diploma level at the same training provider. Her parents supported her financially and she described their occupations as skilled trade and professional (mother and father respectively). Unlike Sal, Tan did not describe her aspirations and expectations but aimed to gain permanent residency in Australia after completing her VET course. However, Tan was happy with her training experiences at the last commercial for profit private training provider. Tan is currently unemployed and looking for work.

Deepal comes from India as well and was enrolled at another commercial for profit private RTO in Melbourne to study a diploma course in an automotive engineering. He completed his diploma course and is presently not enrolled in any course. His parents (mother: home duties, father: professional) were responsible for paying all his educational expenses whilst studying in Australia. Like Tan, Deepal hoped to gain permanent residency in Australia. Deepal is working at an automotive workshop in Melbourne as a workshop assistant, but was unhappy with his training and work experiences. It took him more than six months to gain employment as a workshop assistant. With reference to his current job, Deepal said: *'I want to be a proper motor mechanic. I am working in a workshop but not working on cars. It does not make me*

a proper mechanic. So I am not satisfied with my job. I want to make my profile and proper career, for that I need a proper job role. IN SHORT AS A CAREER I WANT TO BE A MOTOR MECHANIC' (emphasis - his). Deepal wanted a job associated with his Australian vocational training and to be given the opportunity to practise as a motor mechanic.

Sanjit is also from India and was enrolled at another commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne without any prior tertiary level qualifications. He described his single mother as a big business owner. He completed certificate III in automotive engineering and aspires to have a better future in Australia. Through part-time work, Sanjit financed his VET studies. He is still sharing accommodation with friends and said that he was struggling to find a job relevant to his area of training. He believes that doing the VET course did not help to improve his life at all. Sanjit is currently working as a casual packaging assistant.

Like Sal, Depaal and Sanjit, Kau is also an Indian student who completed her VET course at diploma level at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. She described her parents' occupations as skilled trade and home duties (father and mother respectively). Kau financed her studies in Australia through part-time work. She was satisfied with her training experiences at her last commercial for profit private VET provider and aimed to gain permanent residency in Australia. Kau is unemployed and is currently studying a business management course at the same local commercial for profit private VET provider.

Din comes from Vietnam and is still doing the same VET course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. He was enrolled without any prior tertiary level qualifications. He did not describe his parents' occupations but indicated that he has been working as a casual packaging worker to finance his studies. He also received financial support from his relatives to augment his income. Din aimed to gain permanent residency in Australia and was generally happy with his training experiences at the commercial for profit private VET RTO he was enrolled.

Jaspreet also comes from India and has completed his studies at certificate IV level in engineering. He was enrolled without any prior tertiary level qualifications. He described his parents' occupations as farmer and home duties (father and mother respectively). Through part-time jobs and support from parents at home, Jaspreet was able to finance his studies in Australia. He is still sharing accommodation with friends and is currently unemployed and looking for work. He expressed strong dissatisfaction with his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO's learning environment and the trainers. Jaspreet is still struggling to find a job relevant to his area of training and believes the course did not help to improve his life.

Jaswinder also comes from India and was enrolled at his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO without any tertiary level prior qualifications. He completed his certificate IV level VET course in business and is currently studying another VET course at the same RTO. Jaswinder describes his parents' occupations as farmer and home duties (father and mother respectively). His parents financed his education in Australia. Jaswinder is unemployed and looking for work. He believes that his training '*was a complete waste of time*' and was strongly disappointed with his learning and training experiences. He suggested that workplace training at his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO was in need of improvement.

The students' stories captured above show that whilst two international students did not indicate their parents' occupational circumstances, five respondents with the exception of one came from farming or working backgrounds. In this category, all but one completed their VET courses. Most (5) of the graduates were either not working or looking for work with the rest (3) working as casual employees or assistants in areas that were not aligned or associated with their VET qualifications. There is no evidence from these accounts that their circumstances improved by studying vocational courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

Overall, it can be argued that the above stories from international students with no prior tertiary-level qualifications suggest that they experienced considerably retrogressive outcomes in these RTOs. They expected to gain better qualifications

with a potential for improved employment opportunities but their goals appeared elusive.

Experiences and outcomes for graduates with prior VET qualifications

If we took the argument that high levels of prior education can predict positive future performance, one would expect international student graduates in this category to have better educational and employment outcomes than the last group. In addition, the international students in this category should be able to use their current qualifications and their prior tertiary-level educational qualifications and work experiences to get skilled employment. The summaries of their stories below offer invaluable insights into their learning experiences and outcomes.

Harpreet like many other international students in this study comes from India. Harpreet completed his diploma level training at a commercial for profit private RTO in Melbourne. He had a diploma-level prior tertiary qualification at enrolment. In addition, he had more than five years of post-training work experience prior to enrolment. He described his father and mother's occupations as professional and semi-skilled respectively. His parents back home financed his education and training in Australia. He is currently unemployed and looking for work. Overall, Harpreet was satisfied with his learning and training experiences but expressed strong dissatisfaction with the overall teaching and learning environment especially government immigration policies and his last commercial for profit private VET RTO policies.

Unlike most of the students, Kan comes from Nepal and completed his diploma level VET training to include studying commercial cookery. At enrolment, Kan held a VET diploma course from his home country. He is currently enrolled at Ballarat University (Federation University) studying a bachelor degree course. Kan changed RTOs before completing his VET course. He did not give details of the occupations of his parents. His parents paid his tuition fees. About the future, Kan said *'I want to do a bachelor degree course in commercial cookery and hospitality management and I am keen to study further.'* After completing his studies, Kan also wishes to gain Australian

permanent residency. He is currently unemployed and looking for work. His views about his learning experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO were balanced between dissatisfaction and satisfaction. He feels uncertain about the future and his self-confidence has not improved.

Dilbag also comes from India and holds a Diploma of Business qualification from his previous VET training in Australia. In addition, at enrolment Dilbag held a trade certificate-level prior qualification obtained from his home country. His father is a small business owner whilst his mother works at home (home duties). He financed his education in Australia through part-time work. Dilbag is currently employed as an assistant mechanic at a local automotive workshop. It took him three months to find this job. He hopes to gain Australian permanent residency in the future. Overall, Dilbag was very happy with his learning experiences in Australia.

Unlike most of the students, Levi comes from Mauritius. At enrolment he held a VET diploma-level qualification from his home country. He completed a certificate III level course in automotive engineering. Levi's father is a small business owner and his mother is a practising professional. He supplemented his parents' financial support with part time work to pay for his studies and upkeep in Australia. He is currently working as a motor mechanic at a local automotive workshop. It took him more than six months find this job. Levi was satisfied with the learning and training support he received at his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. Paradoxically, he suggested that his training '*was a complete waste of time.*' He hopes to gain Australian permanent residence status soon.

Like most of the students in the study, Gurpreet comes from India. He completed his certificate-level VET course. Prior to enrolment, Gurpreet had a diploma-level qualification obtained from his home country. In Australia, he studied both automotive and business management courses. His parents are farmers with his mother focussed on home duties. His parents paid his tuition fees whilst he supplemented his income through part-time work. He aspired to start his own business as soon as he gains Australian permanent residency. Gurpreet is unemployed and looking for work. Although Gurpreet was happy with his training experiences in

Australia, he was uncertain about the future and is finding it difficult to find a job relevant to his field of training.

Whilst most international students in VET come from India, Van comes from Vietnam. Van did not complete his diploma studies in hospitality but he managed to a complete certificate IV-level VET course. He held a prior diploma-level qualification from his home country at enrolment. His mother is a clerical worker whilst his father is a semi-skilled worker. During his studies, he was financially supported by his relatives hence could not complete his diploma studies. He is presently studying another VET course. Van is unemployed and looking for work. He was very disappointed with his learning and training experiences at the commercial for profit private VET RTO and is struggling to find a job relevant to his area of study. He, like most of the students, wants to stay in Australia as a permanent resident.

Dravid also comes from Nepal. He completed his VET studies at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO and was awarded an advanced diploma in hospitality at completion. At enrolment, Dravid also held a VET diploma from his home country. His father is a big business owner. He plans to go back to his home country after course completion. He is presently working as a chef at a local restaurant. Dravid is working as a Chef, a job he got after more than three months of looking for work. Dravid expressed dissatisfaction with his commercial for profit private VET RTO's learning environment and the relevance of his local VET training to industry, but overall, he was happy with most of his training experiences.

Raman comes from India and completed a diploma in automotive engineering from his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. He held a diploma-level qualification from his home country at enrolment. His mother is an office manager and his father holds a professional job. During his studies at the previous commercial for profit private VET provider in Melbourne, his parents paid his tuition fees. He is currently enrolled at Ballarat University (Federation University) doing a bachelor degree course. He aspired to gain Australian permanent residency whilst working in his field of training. Raman is currently unemployed and looking for work, sharing accommodation, unsure about the future and government regulation changes. Overall,

he was satisfied with his training experiences in Melbourne Australia but was particularly dissatisfied with the previous commercial for profit private VET provider's training environment.

Vishal also comes from India and completed his advanced level diploma VET course at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. At the time of enrolment, Vishal held a diploma-level qualification from his home country. He is currently enrolled at Ballarat University (Federation University) to do a bachelors degree course. His parents are business owners with his mother focussed on home duties. During his studies in Melbourne Australia, his parents paid his tuition fees. He hopes to gain Australian permanent residency. Vishal is currently unemployed, looking for work and struggling to find work in his area of training. He was strongly dissatisfied with his overall training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne Australia and feels that *'it was a complete waste of time.'*

Xin is from China and is still doing the same course. At the time of enrolment, Xin held a diploma-level qualification from his home country. His parents are farmers with his mother focussed on home duties. He financed his studies through part-time work and savings from his home country. He is currently employed on the assembly line as an assembler but aspires to be a motor mechanic. Through a network of friends, Xin got his assembly line job within one month of searching. Xin hopes to gain Australian permanent residency after completing his studies. Whilst Xin is satisfied with his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne Australia, he is uncertain about the future.

Faustinos comes from Sri Lanka and is still doing the same course. At the time of enrolment, Faustinos held a diploma-level qualification from his home country. His parents are farmers with his mother focused on home duties. He worked part-time doing clerical duties to finance his stay and studies. Faustinos was satisfied with his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. He is currently working in administration but admits he is struggling to find work relevant to his field of training. He also struggled for more than six months to find this job. For

Faustinos, the future is uncertain, particularly so because of continuously changing visa regulations.

Anil is also a student from India who completed his diploma studies at a commercial for profit private VET RTO. At the time of enrolment, Anil held a diploma-level qualification from his home country. He described his parents' occupations as semi-skilled and home duties (father and mother respectively). He financed his studies through part-time work. Anil was dissatisfied with most aspects of his training and experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO in Australia and feels that his training was '*a complete waste of time.*' He aspires to start his own business after gaining Australian permanent residency. Anil is currently working as a casual taxi driver, a job he got within three months of unsuccessfully trying other employment alternatives.

Unlike most of the students, Daniel comes from Portugal and completed a certificate III in patisserie. At enrolment, Daniel held a trade certificate-level qualification and has more than five years of work experience from his home country. He characterises his parents' occupations as semi-skilled and home duties (father and mother respectively). Through part time work, he financed his studies and upkeep in Melbourne, Australia. He is currently working as a Pastry Chef and hopes to start his own business as soon as he gains Australian permanent residency. He got this job within a month of course completion. Overall, he is satisfied with most of his training experiences so far. He also believes that his earnings increased as a result of his VET training in Australia.

Pilay is also from India and completed his diploma-level studies at his previous commercial for profit private VET provider. At enrolment, Pilay held a certificate-level prior qualification from his home country. He described his parents as being involved in big and small business enterprises. His parents paid his tuition fees. He is unemployed and looking for work. He felt that his training was a '*complete waste of time*'. As a result, he felt strongly dissatisfied with his training experiences in the commercial for profit private VET provider. He however wishes to gain Australian citizenship.

Jasi comes from India as well. He completed his diploma studies in VET and is currently studying nursing in Australia. At the time of enrolment, Jasi held a diploma level qualification from his home country. Jasi did not describe his parents' occupation but was sponsored by his parents for his upkeep and tuition fees. He is unemployed and looking for work. Overall, he felt that his training experiences were satisfactory but he had to change private VET RTOs before completion. He hopes to gain Australian permanent residency status.

Like Jasi, Shaki comes from India as well. She completed her VET diploma course and is currently studying a bachelor degree course (nursing) at Deakin University. At the time of enrolment, Shaki held a diploma-level qualification from her home country. Her parents are farmers with the mother focussed on home duties. She financed her upkeep and tuition fees through part-time work. She is currently working as a nurse. Although she got this job within six months of study at university, she is still not working in her VET field of training. Overall, her training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO were unsatisfactory and she felt that the training '*was a complete waste of time.*' She still hopes to gain Australian permanent residency in the future.

Simran comes from India as well and completed a certificate III-level training from his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. Prior to enrolment, Simran held a diploma-level qualification from his home country. His parents are farmers with the mother focussed on home duties. His parents paid his tuition fees and upkeep. Simran is currently working as a casual mechanic at a local automotive workshop. He got this job within three months of completing his VET course. Simran aspires to enrol at university to study a bachelor degree course and subsequently gain Australian permanent residency. Overall Simran was satisfied with his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO.

The above stories from international students who held prior VET qualifications at enrolment show that most of the VET qualifications they gained from training in Australia were either lower or equivalent to the qualifications they held at enrolment.

Their stories show that nine students studied at diploma or advanced diploma level, which was equivalent to their original qualifications at enrolment. Of this group, eight students were working and nine were not working. For those working, despite gaining Australian VET qualifications, they were working in low skilled entry-level occupations or working as casuals in fields not associated with their training.

Although the international students' stories above suggest that their prior educational qualifications and experiences were not recognised for work with some (8) working as casuals in low skilled occupations, some (4) of them used their newly acquired diploma qualifications as a platform to enrol in higher education courses. For those who chose the employment pathways, it can be argued that their choices of occupations were misaligned with their VET training and less skilled than their prior educational qualifications; reflecting the labour market circumstances they were in or the maturity of their skills. Whilst this group's outcomes and circumstances seem better than the group enrolled with no tertiary-level qualifications, their stories suggest that their circumstances did not improve as a result of studying VET courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

Experiences and outcomes of graduates with degree and above prior qualifications

In Chapter 5, it was shown that large numbers of international students studying VET courses at commercial for profit private VET providers in the study held high-level prior qualifications (year 12 and above) to study entry level VET courses. This section considers the outcomes of the degree-qualified international students in the study. The degree qualified international students' experiences and outcomes discussed below offer some very useful insights.

Degree qualified at enrolment, Pinnar comes from India. He completed his diploma-level VET training after changing from the first commercial for profit private VET RTO. He is currently studying another VET course. He did not describe the occupations of his parents. However, he financed his studies through part-time work. He aspires to study business management with a hope to gain Australian citizenship.

He was satisfied with his training experiences at the two previous commercial for profit private VET RTOs.

Mishar was also degree qualified at enrolment and comes from India. She is still doing the same course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. Her parents are farmers with the mother focussed on home duties. Mishar sponsored her studies through part-time work. She is unemployed and looking for work. Despite all this, Mishar hopes to gain Australian permanent residence status. She is satisfied with most of her training experiences so far.

Like Mishar, Hana is a student from India and held a degree qualification at enrolment. She completed advanced diploma-level training at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. Her parents are farmers with the mother focussed on home duties. Relatives sponsored her studies in Australia. However, she feels that her training at the previous commercial for profit VET RTO was satisfactory overall. She is working as a cook and believes that her salary earnings increased as a result of doing the VET course. It took her more than six months to get this job. Although she feels uncertain about the future, she still hopes to gain Australian permanent residence status.

Tish is a student from Nepal who held a bachelor degree qualification at enrolment. She completed her diploma-level course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. She described her mother and father's occupations as small business owner and professional respectively. Through parents and part-time work, she financed her studies in Australia. She is currently unemployed and looking for work. She plans to go back home after completing her studies. Tish was satisfied with most of her training experiences at her previous commercial for profit private VET provider.

Ishim is another student from India who held a bachelor degree qualification at enrolment. He completed a certificate III-level training at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO and is studying a diploma course at a different RTO. His father owns a big business and his mother has a professional job. Through part-time

work and sponsorship from parents, he financed his upkeep and tuition fees. However, Ishim thinks he was promoted as a result of doing this course. Ishim is also a volunteer (unemployed and looking for work) in a sales and marketing company. It took him more than six months to get this job. He hopes to have a good future and go back to his home country.

Marti is also another Indian student who was enrolled with a bachelor degree to do a VET course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. He completed a diploma course in business management. His parents own a big business but his mother is focused on home duties. He did not indicate how his studies were sponsored. Marti is working as a casual store assistant and is struggling to find a job relevant to his area of training. It also took him more than three months to get this job. He did not indicate what he aspires to do in the future. Overall, Marti was strongly dissatisfied with his training experiences with the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO and believes his training was not relevant to his current job.

Kandibhai is also a student from India and held a bachelor degree qualification at enrolment to do a VET course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. He completed his certificate III-level studies and is currently employed as a tradesman after undergoing further training at his workplace. It took him more than six months to get this job. His father is a tradesman and his mother is an administrator. His parents paid for his tuition fees and upkeep in Australia. He aspires to work in the field of training and subsequently gain Australian permanent residence status. Overall Kandibhai said: *'I hoped to gain sufficient skills to find full time employment in the relevant area, which would have further strengthened my prospect for living in Australia permanently. But it turned out to be a complete waste of time and money.'* Kandibhai was strongly disappointed with his training experiences at his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO.

Asim is also a student from India who was enrolled at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne with a bachelor degree prior qualification. He completed his diploma studies and is currently working as a casual truck driver. He did not provide details about his parents but indicated that he sponsored his studies through part-time

work and parents' support. Despite being dissatisfied with the overall training environment, Asim was happy with most of his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. He is also uncertain about the future and struggling to find a job relevant to his field of training.

Bipenjit is a student from India. He held a bachelor degree qualification at enrolment. He has since completed his VET course and is now studying a university course at Ballarat University (Federation University). He did not provide any information about his parents' occupation but indicated that they were paying for his upkeep and tuition. Overall, he was satisfied with his training experiences at his previous commercial for profit private VET RTO and hopes to gain Australian permanent residence status. Bipenjit did not indicate his employment status.

Kulpreet also comes from India. She held a bachelor degree qualification from her home country at enrolment. Kulpreet is still doing the same VET course. Her father is working as a professional and her mother is focussed on home duties. Her relatives sponsored her upkeep and tuition fees. She supplemented this support through part-time work in Australia. Kulpreet aspires to start her own business. She is unemployed and looking for work but was once promoted as result of doing the VET course. Kulpreet is satisfied with her training experiences at her previous commercial for profit private VET RTO.

Casper is a student from India who enrolled to do a VET course at a commercial for profit private VET RTO in Melbourne. At enrolment, Casper held an MBA postgraduate degree qualification from his home country. He has since completed his VET course at diploma level. He did not provide details about his parents or his current work status. His parents sponsored his training. He aspires to do a postgraduate course and is very happy with his training experiences at the last commercial for profit private VET RTO.

Unlike most of the students, Ajay is a student from the Philippines. At enrolment Ajay held a bachelor degree from his home country. He has since completed his advanced diploma-level VET course in hospitality management. His father is a big business

owner. His tuition fees and his upkeep were sponsored by relatives and augmented through local part-time work. He is working as a Chef and overall, he is happy with his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. He got this job within one month of completing his VET studies. He hopes to gain Australian permanent residency.

Sahan comes from India. At enrolment, Sahan held a bachelor degree qualification. She has since completed her certificate III-level training and is continuing with further studies at degree level at Ballarat University (Federation University). Her father is professionally employed whilst her mother is focussed on home duties. To meet her educational expenses, Sahan works part-time. She aspires to gain Australian permanent resident status. Currently she is unemployed and looking for work. Sahan is very dissatisfied with most of her training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO and labels it '*a complete waste of time.*'

KB is also from India. He held a postgraduate degree in commerce at enrolment and worked as production manager in his home country. His parents are subsistence farmers. He sponsored his training through part-time work and has since completed his advanced diploma-level VET course in business management after studying a certificate III level course in automotive engineering. He wanted to start his own business but he is currently working as a packaging assistant. He is unhappy with his training experiences at the previous commercial for profit private VET RTO. He argued: '*the institutes running from rented floors in city buildings are a complete waste of time and money. The only thing I found helpful were the trainers who had a lot better understanding of the situation students were in. The sole motive of institutes like RTO 3 was to earn money and cared little about students and their future.*' He hopes to get an Australian permanent residence visa.

Overall, the stories from international students with degree-level prior qualifications, whilst seemingly looking better than the other two groups discussed earlier, also show that their VET outcomes were neither better nor satisfactory relative to their aspirations and previously held prior qualifications. The graduates who held degree-level prior qualifications at enrolment were either pursuing further studies or working

as casuals in fields not related to their VET courses. Overall, the three groups' circumstances did not improve as a result of their VET training in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study; this suggests the graduates' aspirations were not met.

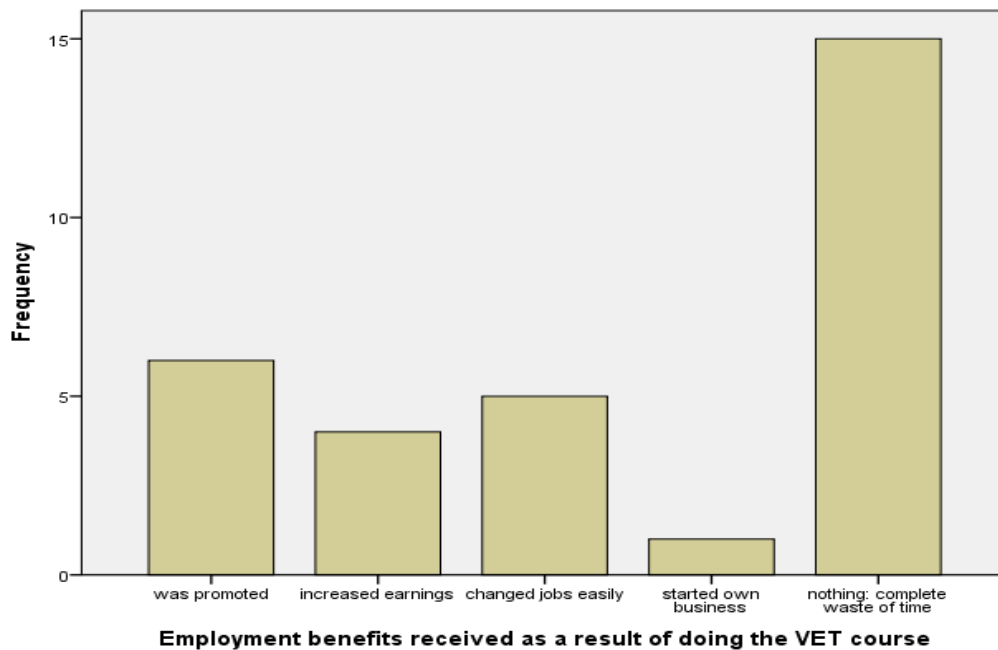
The analytical summaries below bring together some of the intended and unintended consequences of the international students' participation in this form of VET. These summaries capture the sample's overall outcomes trajectories.

Implications for international students' experiences and outcomes

The international students' experiences and stories described above show that their aspirations and expectations did not change over time. They were focused on gaining employment in their fields of training, pursuing further studies, returning to their home countries, getting Australian permanent residency visas and achieving a better life (Chapter 5). Whilst it can be argued that, for most of them, their aspirations and expectations were not met, some of them chose pathways that were aligned with their aspirations and training.

The individual student accounts from the international students who chose the employment pathways showed that out of 47 aspirants, 18 students were working in various capacities with 19 students either looking for work or not working whilst 10 did not indicate their employment statuses. Of the 18 students working, 10 were employed as casual employees in areas that were either lower or not in their field of training and eight were employed in the field of their VET training. These data from the students working in fields unrelated to their courses suggest that they made choices that led to deskilling after completing their VET courses in Melbourne, Australia. Seventeen international students were still involved in further education and training. Of these 17 students, seven were studying a university course and ten were studying another VET course. Were there any gains made by making these choices? Figure 11 below shows international students' views about the gains they made by making educational and employment choices.

Figure 11 VET graduates in the sample: VET course benefits and outcomes



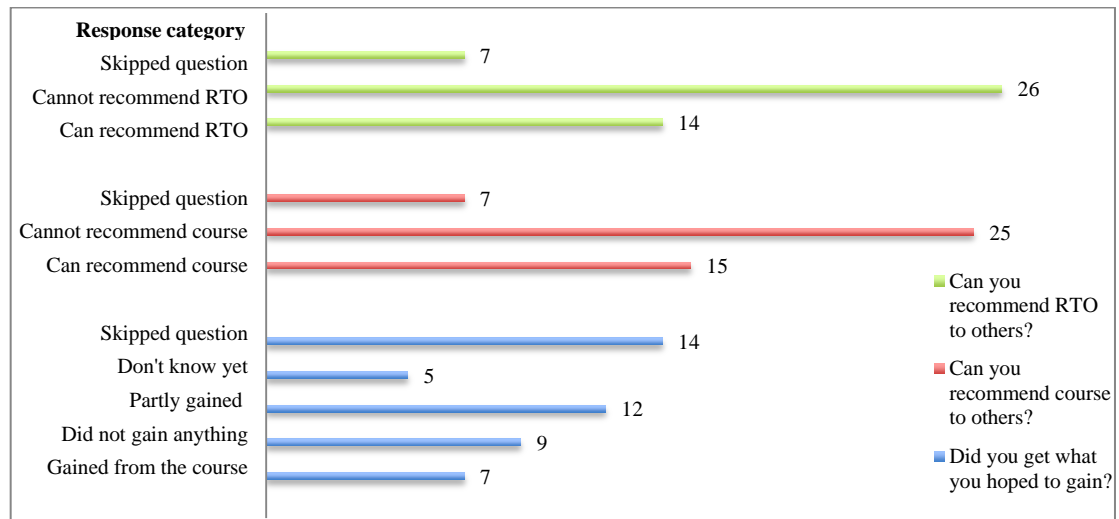
N = 47 (31 responded; 16 did not respond to the question)

Figure 11 shows that, 17 (52 per cent) international students felt their courses ‘*were a complete waste of time*’ or gained nothing at all in contrast with six (18 per cent) who were promoted, four (12 per cent) who enjoyed increased earnings, five (15 per cent) who were able to change jobs and only one who was able to start a business. Whilst this might be pointing at training quality issues, it also points at complex individual aspirations or motivations, which may not be easy to achieve in the Australian competitive labour market contexts.

Although employers consider previous work experience, tertiary and prior educational qualifications when recruiting workers, amongst other requirements, overall, it can be argued that the views expressed by international students in this study are indicative of the misalignment between their expectations and the situated realities of the employment and labour markets. This also suggests that obtaining a VET qualification or any other educational qualification does not guarantee employment in the field of training. However, the students’ rating of the benefits gained from their training helps us to critically examine the relationships between the courses offered and employment pathways available. This analysis helps VET policy makers and course providers to improve educational policy direction, course content, purposes and outcomes, particularly alignment with work and employment pathways. Further

analyses of the students' perspectives after graduation showed that when students do not achieve their aspirations and expectations, they are unlikely to present a positive picture of their training or to recommend their course or their RTO. Figure 12 below provides an overview of the consequences to the provider and the sector when students experience unsatisfactory results during training.

Figure 12 International students' perceptions about courses and providers



N = 47

Figure 12 shows that 26 out of 47 (55 per cent) international students could not recommend their commercial for profit private VET RTOs to others whilst 14 (30 per cent) could. A total of seven (15 per cent) students did not answer this question. A similar response was recorded from the students about whether they could recommend their courses to other international students. A total of 26 students could not recommend their courses to others whilst 14 could and seven students did not respond to this question.

In answer to the question whether or not they gained what they hoped to gain by undertaking their VET courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne, Australia, Figure 12 shows that international students offered more nuanced responses. A total of seven students accepted that they gained from participating in their courses whilst nine students did not. In addition, 12 students felt that they partly gained from participating in their courses whilst five did not know yet. A total of 14 students skipped this question.

Although the data presented in Figures 11 and 12 show a high disapproval rating of the providers and the VET courses they attended, these data also suggest that international students were able to recognise what is valued in the Australian labour market even though most of them were unable to obtain a skilled job. This suggests that international students in the study diagnosed the Australian labour market and were able to judge whether or not the skills they had acquired would offer positive or negative gains in employment. Overall, it can be argued that the negative views expressed by these international students about their commercial for profit private VET RTOs and courses in this study may have implications for course enrolments and the commercial viability of these providers in the future. Notably, RTOs 3, 2 and 7 recently closed down for commercial viability reasons during the periods ending 2012 and 2013.

The preceding analysis of international students' stories and journeys in this study also demonstrates that they were mostly unhappy with their training and employment outcomes and experiences. It showed that international students who graduated from commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study had mixed employment outcomes including working as taxi or truck drivers, assemblers or factory hands or as assistants. In addition a large proportion of this group, the outcomes surveys showed, were either unemployed or looking for work. Hence it can be argued that this led to high dissatisfaction levels amongst them. This can also be taken to mean that low-level VET qualifications can offer poor or negative employment returns. Indeed, given their prior educational qualifications reported earlier, many international students in this study secured work only at the cost of severe deskilling.

Given that international students who were enrolled in the commercial for profit private VET providers in the study came with additional tertiary-level qualifications and prior work experiences to study entry-level VET courses, the overall students' outcomes summaries suggest that the tertiary-level qualifications and work experiences gained from their home countries were not considered for study and employment. Interestingly, the largest proportion of these international students (108 [56 per cent] of students out of 194) came from India followed by Vietnam and Nepal

with eight per cent. The rest (36 per cent) came from a number of countries to include those countries classified in this study as ‘other’. Overall, the outcomes survey data presented in this chapter suggests that international students in VET in this study were unlikely to achieve their employment aspirations. Although it can be argued that there were positive outcomes for some international students in this study, their experiences and outcomes suggest that there were considerable mismatches between some VET courses they studied and the skills requirements for employment in the Australian labour market.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided – from the students’ perspectives – different situated narratives about international students’ lived experiences in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study. It showed that they had mixed experiences and outcomes. It can be argued that most of them did not achieve their goals. The students’ social capital, prior educational qualifications and current educational qualifications were neither considered nor used to their benefit. It showed that the pathways they chose were influenced by the prevalent Australian educational and employment market circumstances. The employment pathways they chose led to unskilled jobs, with some working as taxi or truck drivers, assemblers or factory hands or as assistants. This evidence suggests that the participation of international students in the commercial for profit private VET sector in Melbourne, which uses a market model for VET, resulted in mostly mediocre outcomes.

Overall, the chapter has shown that whilst getting an Australian permanent residency visa was the concern of most students, this formed a part of broader priorities, values and desires for their future. It can be argued that the individual’s occupational choices are multi-fold, personally distinct, shaped by experiences within their lives, family and situated realities in their VET providers, an illustration made in this chapter (Billet et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2011). The international students’ journeys and stories presented in this chapter also suggest that there are complex family expectations and individual life experiences that shape international students’ aspirations, motivations and decisions (outcomes). Although the student’s immediate

expectation may be Australian permanent residency status, they achieved a range of outcomes and followed different pathways into employment and further education.

Nonetheless, the outcomes analysed in the preceding sections reveal individual dispositions that influenced international students' outcomes. Their long and short-term choices were influenced by the circumstances that they described. The chapter showed that international students: a) aspired to gain Australian permanent residency and a better future, b) most of them were unemployed and looking for work, c) most of those employed worked outside their field of training, d) those employed in their field of training were dissatisfied with their work or had to undergo further training to be accepted as skilled workers, e) most of them had marginal sponsorship from home and so had to work to support themselves, and f) most of them were dissatisfied with their training experiences.

Overall, the preceding analysis allows us to cast further light onto the delivery of VET courses in commercial for profit VET providers included in the study. In this sense the competitive market model for VET, which provided the structure and material circumstances that compelled international students, training managers, and VET teachers to participate in the ways they did needs to be analysed using a pedagogic lens. This will allow us to examine teacher-related dimensions in the competitive training market contexts, which seem to have influenced these international students not only to study lower entry-level VET courses but also to work or study in circumstances that did not make use of their previously gained skills. The next chapter provides insights into the pedagogic influences – using teachers' lenses – on international students' outcomes in commercial for profit providers in the study.

Chapter 7

VET teachers perceptions about the delivery of vocational courses in private RTOs in the study

Introduction

It was argued in Chapter 2 that the training contexts in which commercial for profit private VET providers and international students are participating in Melbourne, Australia no longer reflect the traditional training characteristics and boundaries of VET providers in the past. In order to further explore this contention and understand the influences and impact of these environments on international students' outcomes reported earlier in Chapter 6, this chapter explores and analyses the educational and employment perspectives of VET teachers regarding international students. The chapter draws on the views of VET teachers to show how the competitive training market discourse has influenced teacher perceptions of international students and their practices in shaping their teaching and learning environment.

If as argued in Chapter 4, teachers in commercial for profit private VET providers are constrained and primarily motivated by the providers' commercial business profit motives, then it will follow that they will consider the student firstly as a customer or client and secondly as a student. By implication this teacher-client (student) relationship means that students wield immense purchasing power, not only to pay their tuition fees but also because their aggregate fees sustain the private commercial training business, which in turn pays the teachers' wages. In this context, the notion of serving the customer takes precedence, which means that the relationship between the teacher and the students is fundamentally altered, with consequences for both the teacher and the student.

In this chapter, factors that influence the delivery of VET courses in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study are first explored and analysed in order to understand teacher dispositions towards the learning contexts. This is followed by the presentation and analyses of VET teachers' perceptions about international students'

motivations to do their courses. Secondly, teacher perceptions of international students' educational and employment outcomes are presented and analysed. Lastly, the teachers' perceptions of training quality, pedagogical practices and expectations are examined to illustrate how international students' outcomes reported earlier in Chapter 6 were mediated. In conclusion, the implications of these views for learning and teaching practices in the commercial for profit private VET provider contexts are examined.

VET teacher perceptions about international students and commercial for profit private provider learning contexts

In Chapters 5 and 6 it was demonstrated that in an environment where international students have complex and different priorities, commercial for profit private VET providers are called upon not only to deliver government objectives but also must strive to achieve their own economic goals and the international student's economic and non-economic goals. This suggests that a single lens view of international students, which focuses on their immigration aspirations or on employment and utilitarian goals alone, as reflected upon in the previous chapters, is no longer adequate. This section examines VET teachers' perspectives, particularly their dispositions towards international students. It accepts that good teaching quality and positive teacher-student perceptions are linked to the students' adoption of either deep or surface approaches to learning.

In order to focus our attention on VET teachers' overall dispositions towards the delivery contexts and their students' motivations, 19 VET teachers were asked whether or not there were any factors that limited their ability to deliver the courses they taught. A total of 11 teachers did not believe that there were any factors that limited the delivery of their courses whilst eight believed that there were factors that limited the delivery of courses in their providers. The majority (11 out of 19) of VET teachers' perspectives were consistent with international students' views expressed in Chapter 4 but were mostly at variance with the students' experiences and outcomes reported in Chapter 6. Overall, international students and their teachers positively

rated their learning and teaching contexts, but dissenting views amongst them are worth exploring because they offer critical insights into teacher dispositions.

Indeed, we cannot ignore the dissenting views expressed by eight teachers in the study. Their views open up a discursive construction, which does not impose limitations on the available positions that one might take up in the debate. Alternatively, their views can be taken to mean that some teachers are becoming critical of the delivery contexts and international students' participation in this sector. In this instance, a smaller (8 out of 19) but equally important group of teachers felt that there were factors that limited the delivery of training to international students in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. Consequently, the teachers who expressed dissenting views were asked to nominate factors that limited their ability to deliver the courses they taught.

Teachers at RTO 6 expressed the following sentiments: *'student commitment and attendance are a huge problem for us,'* the diploma of business management teacher said. *'Students' interests is a big challenge for me,'* the engineering teacher suggested. In addition, teachers teaching engineering, business management and hospitality courses at RTOs 2, 3, 4 and 7 also expressed similar sentiments.

At RTOs 1 and 5, a similar line of argument was also taken by the VET teachers. *'Students' attendance is a main factor. Nowadays RTOs are facing big challenges to bring students into the classroom,'* a business management teacher at RTO 5 said. *'Students' co-operation and involvement is the biggest factor that limit my ability to deliver this unit,'* the hospitality teacher at RTO 1 suggested. *'Students' attendance hampers the trainers' ability to deliver a course that flows and get the most of the available hours,'* yet another teacher at RTO 1 added.

In addition, two teachers at RTOs 2 and 7 not only expressed similar sentiments to those expressed above but also provided explicit critical analyses of their students, relative to local students. The electronics teacher at RTO 2 wrote: *'International students don't easily relate to everyday life in Australia. I find it hard to give examples when they have no clue about what I am talking about'.* This teacher's

views resonated with a diploma of management teacher's views at RTO 7. *'Student interest is a big issue for me. Language... they don't understand the Australian way of doing things,'* the diploma teacher suggested. These two teachers' views suggest that their analyses were focused on the other-ing discourses, which make simplistic relative comparisons between local and international students' learning characteristics.

There were also other teachers at RTOs 3, 4 and 7 who suggested that inadequate resources at their commercial for profit private VET providers limited their ability to deliver their courses (see Chapter 4). *'We have limited resources,'* said the management course teacher at RTO 3. *'We don't have enough practical resources,'* the automotive and electronics course teachers at RTOs 4 and 7 suggested. *'There are not enough practical activities,'* the hospitality course teacher at RTO3 added. *'Course materials (are a problem),'* yet another teacher at RTO 7 briefly commented.

All VET teachers who suggested that there were factors that limited the delivery of courses in their providers consistently expressed these negative sentiments or themes. Although a minority, their views can be taken to be suggestive of a pattern of critical and reflective perspectives about international students and their learning environments. Another way of explaining these negative sentiments is that these perspectives are a manifestation of the broader understanding of the discourses in this sector about international students and their learning environments referred to earlier in Chapter 5. By implication, these perspectives, which were repeated by this small group of VET teachers, have the potential to influence teacher-student relationships.

Yet another possibility is to view these negative VET teachers' perspectives as an attempt to assimilate international students into the ways things are done in the host institutions in Australia. By implication, in the classroom, the teachers are focused on what the students are and not what they do. In this instance, the learning deficits international students present provide teachers with a convenient stereotypical way of interpreting their behaviour instead of the quality of their learning. This focus may lead us to avoid a critical evaluation of the teacher's pedagogic choices and practices. Hence, the problems the teachers encounter with international students are seen as

students' problems and are not attributed to teaching approaches or other contextual dimensions – they are focused on the students' lack of commitment to the Australian way of learning.

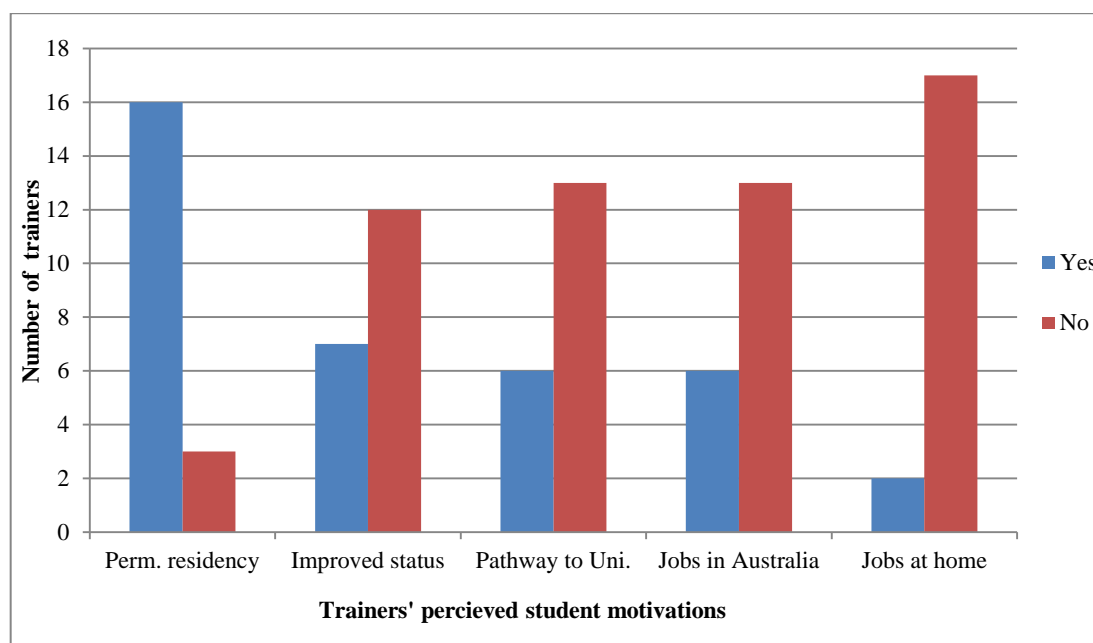
Overall, the majority (58 per cent) of the teachers did not find any factors that limited their ability to deliver courses to international students. But assuming that all learning environments invariably present challenges to the delivery of any course, the mainly positive teacher views can be taken to mean that they represent the dominant discourse, which seeks to insulate the teacher practices from critical scrutiny. It can be argued that it prevents a legitimate and productive debate about the quality of teaching. In this instance, if the student performs poorly the teacher points to the students' characteristics – genuine and non-genuine international students (see Chapter 4). Hence, this debate is limited by the terms of the discourse and the way in which the issues are represented – it closes down rather than opens up a holistic discussion about international students' learning.

However, further analyses of international students' motivations – using VET teachers' lenses – were explored in order to provide more insights into teacher dispositions towards their students and the learning environment.

International students' motivations through VET teachers' lenses

To gain further insights into the perspectives VET teachers hold about their international students' education and employment aspirations, VET teachers' in this study were asked to shed light on what they thought motivated their students to study their courses. Quantitative data from 19 VET teachers about their students' motivations were analysed. This analysis offered useful insights into the teachers' presumptions and educational beliefs that underpin their teaching practices in this group of providers. Figure 13 below summarises these perspectives.

Figure 13 Teachers' perceptions about their students' motivations



N-19: Q - What do you think motivates your students to do this course? (Uni. – University; Perm. – permanent)

When asked what motivated their students to do their courses, 16 (84 per cent) out of 19 VET teachers in the study believed that their students were motivated to gain permanent residency visas by enrolling in VET courses whilst three did not believe so (Figure 13). Figure 13 also shows that seven teachers thought their courses improved international students' status whilst twelve did not. There were also six teachers who thought that their students were motivated by university pathways whilst 13 did not think so. In addition, six teachers believed that their students were motivated by local jobs (Australian jobs) whilst 13 did not think so. An equally large proportion (89 per cent) was not convinced that their students were motivated by jobs in their home countries whilst only two teachers believed their students were motivated by jobs in their home countries.

Overall, the data in Figure 13 suggest that, like the training managers, most VET teachers (84 per cent) in this study believed that their students were motivated mainly by immigration outcomes (PR), with only approximately a third of them believing that they were motivated to improve their status, gain pathways into university education and get jobs in Australia.

If we accept that teachers' intentions and beliefs are context dependent, it is reasonable to argue that the pedagogical approaches that these VET teachers selected, the resources they identified and used and the activities they engaged their students in were influenced, in this instance, by their beliefs regarding their students' motivations. Although the teachers' views were linked to the international students' broad aspirational goals reported in Chapter 5, these teacher perceptions have implications for students' learning and learning environments. This is particularly so if these beliefs are misaligned with the students' expectations. Overall, it can be argued that these data (Figure 13) are reflective of the teachers' views that there were factors that limited the delivery of their courses in these providers.

Although international students' outcomes reported in Chapter 6 showed that broadly, the students' were motivated to improve their status, only seven out of 19 teachers thought their students were motivated to improve their status. International students' actual aspirations and expectations reported earlier in Chapters 5 and 6 showed that international students in this study had complex and multiple expectations and motivations. In addition, we know – as outlined in Chapter 2 – that teachers' attitudes affect their expectations regarding the students and that students' attitudes are also affected by their expectations about their teachers.

Overall, the above data (Figure 13), when compared with international students' actual aspirations (Chapter 5) and their experiences and outcomes (Chapter 6), can be used to argue that international students' expectations and aspirations were not readily acknowledged or emphasised by their teachers. This can be used as a basis to raise questions about VET teacher practices and the notions of a good teacher.

Nonetheless, in order to further explore the implications of these views on international students' outcomes, VET teachers in this study were asked to assess the employability and skills maturity of their students. The next section provides detailed analyses of their perspectives.

VET teachers' views about international students' employability and skills maturity

The study also sought to explain international students' outcomes reported earlier (Chapter 6) by understanding VET teachers' confidence in the skills and employability of their students. To do this, VET teachers in this study were asked to assess international students' work-readiness and the maturity of their skills. This enabled us to further critique and understand VET teacher dispositions and the consequences of their beliefs in the delivery of courses in these providers. Hence, quantitative data were gathered and analysed. In addition, qualitative data were also gathered from those teachers who felt that their students were not employment ready. The teachers who did not believe in the maturity and employability skills of their students offered useful critical analyses of the study contexts, which can be used to explain the negative international students' outcomes reported earlier in Chapter 6.

The group of teachers who had no confidence in their students' employability skills had this to say: *'My students are not focused on this course... it's about immigration points,'* the automotive teacher argued. *'Some students are not interested in the qualification at all... it makes it difficult to teach them,'* the business management teacher said. *'This is a practical course but there is too much theory... they lack practical experience,'* the electronics teacher suggested. *'These students are not ready to take on practical training with employers,'* the automotive teacher said. *'They lack industry experience expected with this level of qualification,'* the hospitality teacher noted. *'They thought there is less work in automotive courses – a misconception no doubt,'* said another automotive teacher.

There were also those teachers who argued that their students were motivated by further education pathways when their courses were practically focused. *'My students want to pursue higher degree courses...they use this course as a pathway to university,'* the advanced diploma course teacher suggested. *'This course teaches only basic skills, but some students need more knowledge through to higher study,'* another advanced diploma teacher opined. Yet another diploma teacher at RTO 1 offered an interesting overview of their students, which reflected upon their performance; *'I am*

unsure how they complete their courses when personally marking a lot of the students not yet competent (NYC).'

Overall, Table 16 below summarises VET teachers' assessments of the maturity and employability skills of their students. A total of 12 out of 19 VET teachers had confidence in the employability skills of their students whilst seven did not think that their students were employment ready.

Table 16 Teacher perceptions in the study: international students' employability skills

Courses delivered in seven RTOs	Are students becoming skilled or work ready?			Total
	Ready	Not very ready	Not ready at all	
Hospitality	5	2	0	7
Engineering	3	2	1	6
Business Management	4	2	0	6
Total	12	6	1	19

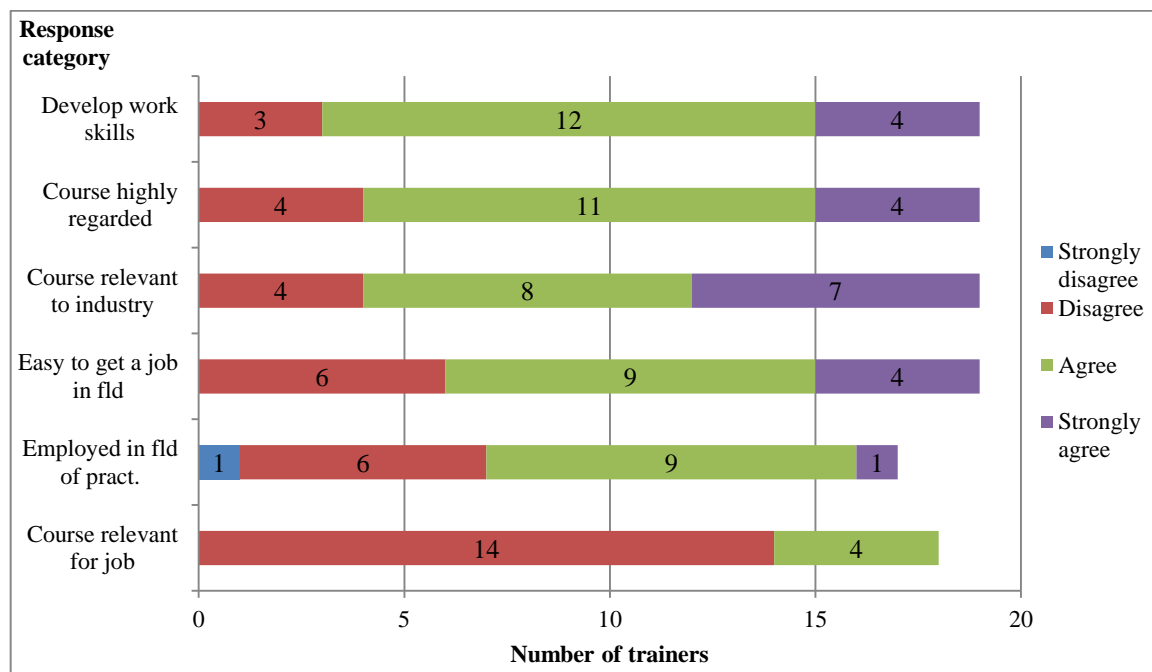
N = 19 - 100%

Table 16 shows that five hospitality teachers believed that their students were employment ready, whilst two did not think they were. Engineering teachers' views were equally split between ready (3) and not ready (3). In addition, there were four business management teachers who believed that their students were employment ready whilst two did not. Overall, these data show that there was a larger number of VET teachers (12) in the study who believed that their students were becoming skilled and work ready.

However, the highest quality approval rating for skills maturity comes from hospitality and business courses, which are female dominated and more popular with international students than engineering based courses (see Chapters 1 and 2). Engineering based courses under this category had equal satisfaction and dissatisfaction ratings, compared with the other courses included in the survey. Whilst the number of engineering teachers who participated in the study is small, their evidence is important because it offers useful insights about institutional based engineering training in these institutions.

In addition, it was reported in Chapter 6 that most international students (40 per cent) in this study were still unemployed, looking for work or had given up looking. Some of them were employed (38 per cent) but worked outside their field of training and others were employed in their field of training. The graduates who were dissatisfied with their work had to undergo further training to be accepted as skilled workers. Overall, 26 out of 47 (55 per cent) international students who participated in the outcomes surveys suggested that they could not recommend their commercial for profit private VET providers to other international students whilst 14 (30 per cent) could (see Chapter 6). These students' perceptions reported earlier in Chapter 6 and teacher perceptions about their employability skills illustrated in Table 16 above compel us to raise questions about the quality of training in commercial for profit private VET RTOs, particularly for traditional trade courses. This also raises questions about commercial for profit private VET provider contexts, the influences of VET teacher beliefs and teacher pedagogical practices and choices in the delivery of courses to international students. Figure 14 below provide useful insights into their views.

Figure 14 VET Teachers perceptions about the quality their courses



N = 19. Q - Statements about your students' employment outcomes? (Fld. – field; Pract. – practical)

To further understand and explain the implications of teacher views of students' outcomes, VET teachers in this study were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with specific characteristics of their students' courses and the relevance of their skills for employment.

Figure 14 above shows that most VET teachers in this study believed that the courses they were teaching were relevant to industry needs, highly regarded, relevant for the job market and developed work skills that made it easy for their students to find jobs. These VET teachers' views shown in Figure 14 illustrate VET teachers' understanding of the level of skills needed in Australian industries but their views were in sharp contrast to the international students' experiences and their lived realities after graduation.

Figure 14 also shows that most VET teachers in this study (14 out of 18) did not believe their courses were relevant for jobs and yet most of them thought that they were developing work skills (16 out of 19) and their courses were highly regarded (15 out of 19). Nonetheless, the teachers' views about whether their courses were relevant for jobs are consistent with earlier teacher observations reported in the preceding sections. A total of seven VET teachers out of 19 were of the view that their students were not employment ready. This could be because commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study (as illustrated through training managers' views) did not place international students in industry for work-based learning. Training managers in this study believed that work placements for international students were expensive and were not part of their role. This illustrates that VET teachers understood the importance of work-based learning and the influences of the external environment, particularly industry requirements and skills levels.

In addition, the evidence presented in Chapter 6 also shows that international VET graduates' experiences and outcomes were different and inconsistent with most VET teachers' views illustrated in Figure 14 above. Earlier in Chapter 6, it was reported that most international students in the study were unemployed and found it difficult to get a job in their field of training. Indeed, the VET teachers' views illustrated in Figure 14 can also be used to argue that there are contestations about what constitutes

quality training in VET in these providers. Both teachers and students reported conflicting views about the quality of training in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

The data in Figure 14 also illustrate the diversity of private VET teachers' views about the usefulness of their courses to industry. Most of their views contrast with their students' employment experiences and the relevance of their skills to jobs in the industry. However, if commercial for profit private VET providers deliver highly regarded courses, which develop work and highly regarded skills that make it easy for graduates to find jobs, why were international students unable to find jobs in their field of practice? One way of explaining this is to acknowledge that private VET teachers are aware of the various skills levels required for jobs in the Australian labour market and also the shortcomings inherent in institution-based training for international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study. This suggests that although VET teachers are conversant with the industry's skills requirements and the potential for their courses to deliver superior skills.

The above data also illustrate that there are diverse and complex influences that shape the relevance of the school or RTO to the economy and the community. Hence industry expectations can influence teacher perceptions, particularly how they choose their approaches to teaching and the quality of their assessments. The above teachers' views and international students' outcomes reported earlier in Chapter 6 can be used to argue that there are mismatches between international students' training and skills requirements in the job market or that employers are not only focused on tertiary qualifications alone when recruiting skilled employees.

Overall, although VET teachers' confidence with their students' employability skills was uneven, their views suggest that disquiet may be emerging about international students' motivations and the quality of their skills. Their perspectives about their students' motivations and how skilled and employment ready their students are becoming are suggestive of the way teacher expectations and student expectations can affect the individuals' own attitudes and behaviour, as well as the behaviour of those with whom they are interacting. Hence, if the Pygmalion effect is accepted as a valid

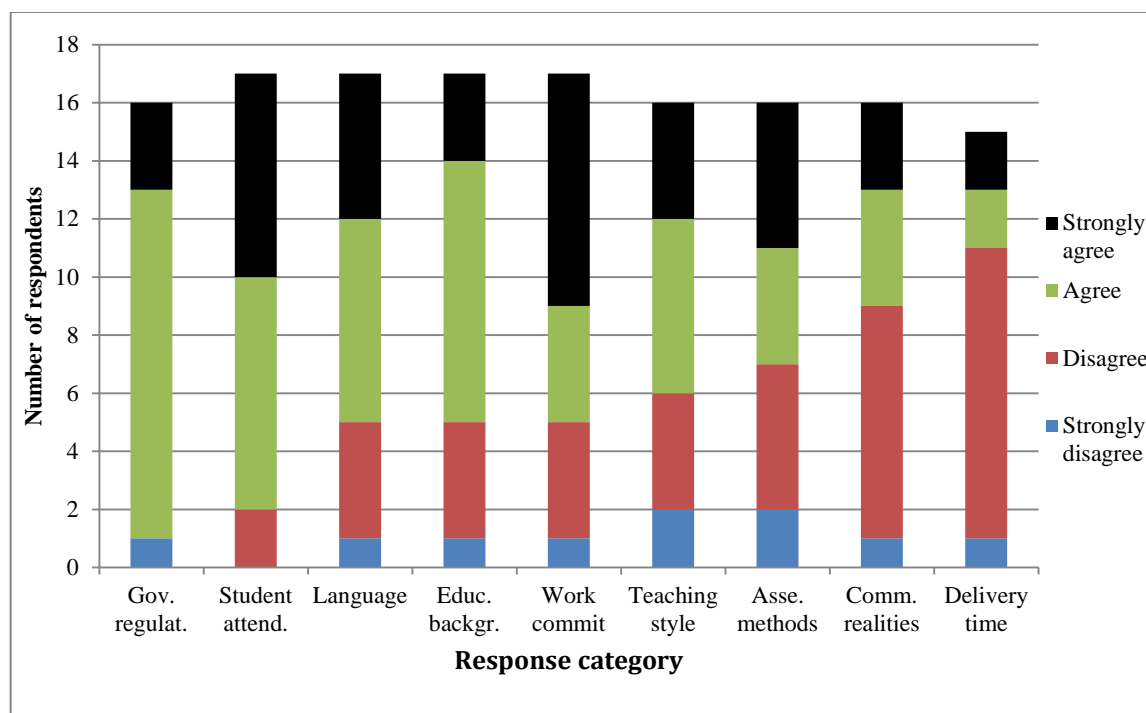
concept in showing that teacher beliefs and attitudes towards students can influence the learning environment in profound and far reaching ways, the VET teachers' perceptions and expectations about their students' motives and employability skills can be used to explain the relatively poor international students' employment outcomes reported in Chapter 6.

Indeed international student graduates' outcomes in this study show that most of them did not acquire skills that could help them to get jobs in their fields of training – an outcome inconsistent with some teachers' views about their students' skill levels and employment readiness. Although this can be explained by arguing that the link between vocational education and work is not strong, there were mismatches between teacher perceptions and expectations, and international students' aspirations, experiences and outcomes in this study. Hence we need to understand the relationships between the VET teacher and the international student in the delivery of courses in these providers.

VET teachers' perceptions of factors influencing the delivery of courses in commercial for profit private providers in the study

Besides defining international students' motivations and employability skills, VET teachers in this study were further asked to identify factors that influenced international students' performance. Their views, about how skilled and employment ready their students were, were used to shed more light into the factors that influence the delivery of courses in the commercial for profit providers in the study. However, Figure 15 below shows that there were also other factors that influence international students' performance.

Figure 15 Teacher perceptions in the study: Factors influencing international students' performance



N = 19; 2-3 responses were not recorded per category. (Gov. – government; Regulat. – Regulations; Asse. – Assessment; Comm. – Commercial; Attend. – Attendance; Educ. – Education; Backgr. – Background; Commit. – commitment)

Figure 15 shows that 15 (79 per cent) VET teachers in the study believed that their work was impacted upon by government regulations, while one did not think so and three teachers did not respond to this question. In addition, a similar proportion of the teachers (15 out of 19) believed that attendance is a factor, which also influences international students' performance. A further 12 teachers felt that language barriers influenced international students' performance, whilst five did not; two teachers did not answer this question. A similar number of the teachers (5) also believed that international students' backgrounds and work commitments during study influenced their performance.

There were also 10 teachers who believed that their teaching styles influenced international students' performance; six teachers did not think so whilst three did not respond to this question. A similar but slightly smaller number of teachers (9) accepted that assessment methods influenced students' performance whilst seven did

not; three teachers did not respond to this question. Interestingly, nine teachers did not believe that commercial for profit private VET providers' commercial realities influenced international students' performance whilst seven teachers did. In addition, 11 teachers did not see the time allocated for the delivery of their courses as an encumbrance to students' performance whilst four did, and four teachers did not respond to this question.

Overall, the data in Figure 15 above emphasise difficulties with government policies and international students' characteristics. VET teachers in this study agreed that these two factors, government policies and international students' characteristics, amongst other factors, influenced the delivery of their courses. Interestingly, these teachers' views mostly do not challenge the commercial imperatives of their employers (commercial for profit VET providers) – a view that has been persistently repeated by training managers, VET teachers and international students.

Besides government policy influences, 15 VET teachers in this study believed that international students' attendance patterns influenced their performance. This view is ranked second to government policies in influencing students' performance (Figure 15). In addition, a large proportion of teachers (12 – 63 per cent) believed the lack of English language proficiency was also a major factor in influencing their international students' performance in their commercial for profit providers.

The large proportion of teachers (79 per cent) who focused on international students' attendance can be explained in two ways. One is the attendance policy the provider chooses and the second is the nature of most VET courses – which are application driven. However, it is still valid to argue that simulation and practice under a master's supervision are a key part of the teaching and learning process in VET, which demands regular attendance to course lessons. This view is reflected in the proportion of VET teachers in this study who felt that attendance affected international students' performance. By implication, this suggests that, in a simulated or actual work context, the teacher must demonstrate the expected skill attributes and attitudes. The student is expected to repeat the demonstrated skill whilst the teacher modifies and corrects the novice's performance until mastery is achieved.

The argument in the last paragraph suggests that the teacher uses the demonstrate-repeat-modify teaching and learning cycle or model over a period of time until the novice is confident enough to work or perform under minimum supervision in similar or approximately similar contexts. In addition, the demonstrated skill complexity in context is then varied to further broaden the application of the skill in novel and complex work-based scenarios. Hence student attendance is important in this form of training. If the student's attendance is poor, in context-based learning processes, performance is most likely to be poor.

Alternatively, it can be argued that poor attendance by international students in the study is an illustration of broader motivation issues that require a different set of research questions. Indeed, since the international students' surveys used in this study were not designed to assess students' levels of interest or motivation, it is not possible to draw a causal relationship between motivation and attendance. However, it can be argued that there is a strong link between institutional factors, attendance, personal factors and students' performance.

In addition, it was also shown in Figure 14 that a large proportion of teachers (12 – 63 per cent) showed that English language proficiency influenced international students' performance in their commercial for profit VET providers. This suggests that, despite meeting minimum entry-level English language prerequisites, international students were likely to have English language problems that needed attention. Indeed, there is a minimum level of literacy and numeracy expected for entry-level VET courses. We also know that in the Australian VET system English language is the primary medium of instruction and in most cases forms an important platform for the technical language that will be used as the student specialises in their field of practice.

If 12 VET teachers out of 19, in this study, suggested that English language proficiency was a major factor influencing international students' performance (Figure 15), it can be argued that VET teachers may be attempting to teach to the student's level of English language proficiency. This suggests that VET teachers may teach to the deficit and not the expected standard of proficiency expected in the VET

courses they teach. Allied to, but not separate from English language problems were international students' attendance issues. Hence it is reasonable to argue that one cannot be motivated to learn or attend lessons if they are not proficient in the language used as a medium of instruction – language, learning and attendance are interconnected. The English language proficiency issue indicated by most VET teachers (63 per cent) in this study is arguably a formidable barrier to international students' learning. Unavoidably, the question to ask is: Can international students be motivated to attend lessons when they do not understand the language being used?

There were also 12 teachers (63 per cent) who believed that international students' backgrounds and diversity significantly influenced their performance. This observation shows that international students arrive in the new teaching and learning environment equipped with a set of skills and experiences successfully used in the past. It also shows that international students are likely to hold onto these tried and tested experiences and practices if not appropriately inducted into the new teaching and learning environment. Hence it can be argued that these VET teachers' observations about the influences of international students' social background on learning demonstrate that international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs use these learning experiences (social capital) to navigate and work the new teaching and learning environment in order to meet their subject or course expectations. Therefore, if VET teachers believed that the students' cultural baggage and country of origin is an encumbrance to their learning, the student can experience a form of cultural shock.

Overall, the data in Figure 15 show that international students' educational backgrounds, government regulations, student motivations and attendance, delivery and assessment of learning and the medium of instruction are important factors that can influence students' performance. Most importantly, the data in Figure 15 suggest that a consensus seems to be emerging not only amongst VET teachers but also amongst all quality assurance auditors and a large proportion of international students in this study. They all believed that government regulations and international students' characteristics are significant in influencing their participation and learning.

Indeed this illustrates that government policies in the education sector influence participation and practice (see Chapter 2 on policy analysis). The training packages policy in particular is implicated in shaping the lenses through which VET is critically analysed and delivered. Figure 15, in particular, shows how policy ensembles can influence perceptions and the discourses that inform the structure of the webs of relationships. Government policies are part of wider VET discourses constructed around international students' education-migration and economic aspirations. Hence, policy interpretations and re-interpretations informed how VET teachers explained and represented their own views and their students' everyday teaching and learning experiences in commercial for profit private VET providers included in this study but they were not equally critical about pedagogical issues.

It can be argued then that there is an urgent need to critically analyse VET pedagogy and teacher practices, especially now that many international students have been encouraged to participate in private and public RTOs. The question we have it ask is whether there are opportunities to improve international students' outcomes. The next section offers a brief overview of VET teachers' recommendations.

VET teachers' views about opportunities for improvement

Given the preceding analyses of the factors that influence international students' performance, all VET teachers in this study were asked whether the existing policy mechanisms can be improved in order to improve the quality of students' outcomes. Their views were used to answer parts of the fourth and fifth research questions, which sought to explore and analyse internal private RTO organisational realities and the role of government policies in influencing international students' outcomes.

Diploma and advanced diploma of business management teachers offered useful insights into some of the perceptions that are prevalent in RTOs 2 and 6. They suggested that there is

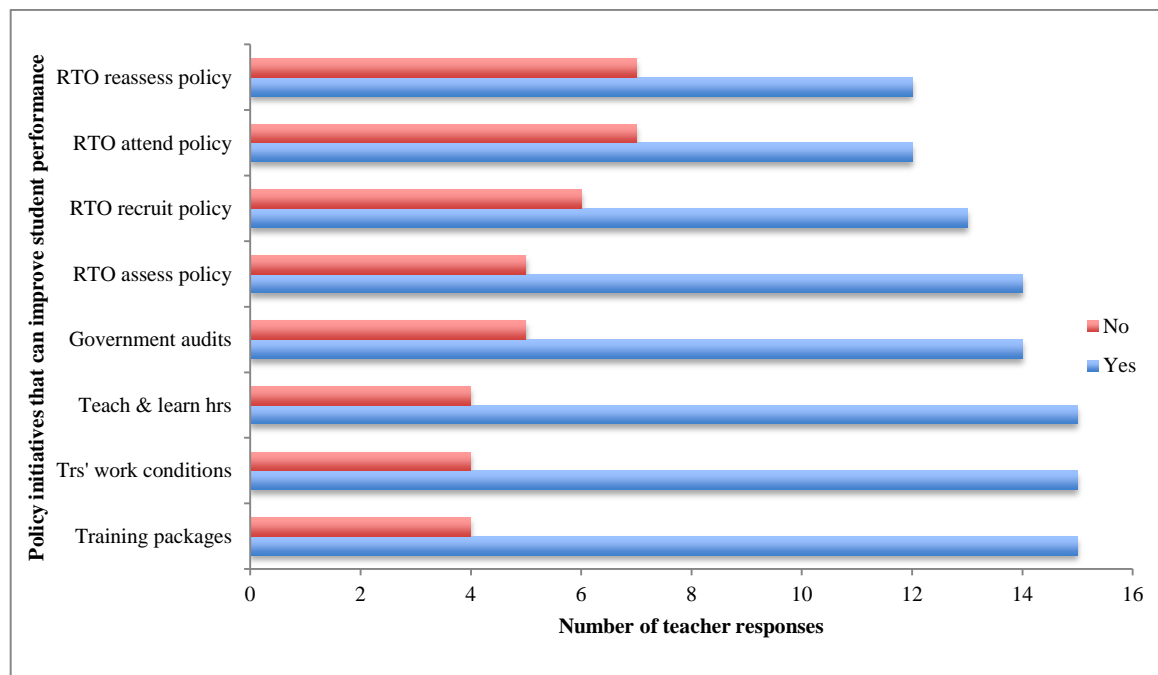
Lack of communication between training providers and government in order to ensure effective, realistic and legitimate training is limiting our ability to

deliver courses to overseas students (teacher - diploma of business management RTO 2).

There is no coordinated approach between government and students to provide them with live experiences in their chosen courses (teacher - advanced diploma of business management – RTO 6).

These teachers’ comments suggest that there is a lack of coherence between government policy intentions and commercial for profit private RTO practices – a view emphasised in the preceding sections of this chapter. However, Figure 16 below provides a summary of VET teacher perspectives about government and commercial for profit private RTO initiatives that can help to improve the quality of international students’ outcomes.

Figure 16 VET teachers’ views on policy initiatives that could improve VET students’ outcomes



N= 19 – 100% (learn – learning hours; hrs – hours; Trs – teachers; recruit. – recruitment; assess. – assessment; attend. – attendance; reassess. – reassessment)

Figure 16 shows that teachers’ conditions of work, training packages and teaching and learning hours were recommended for improvements by 79 per cent of the teachers

whilst government audits and RTO assessment policies were recommended for improvement by 74 per cent of the teachers respectively. An equally large proportion of the teachers, 63 per cent and 68 per cent, recommended improvements in RTO attendance, assessment policy and recruitment policies respectively. These recommendations mirror VET teachers' views about factors that influence international students' performance in the commercial for profit private VET providers referred to in the preceding sections. They reflect the complex nature of the delivery contexts in which international students and commercial for profit providers operate.

Without thoroughly exploring and explaining the impact of each category illustrated in Figure 16 above, these teachers' views demonstrate that the internal structure of commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study have certain tendencies that cannot support positive student outcomes. These views further illustrate that besides the competitive market training influences, there are other complex government and RTO policy dimensions influencing the teachers' ability to deliver quality training. Notably, improved assessment approaches supported by necessary policies were also some of the improvement areas they believed could influence international students' experiences and outcomes.

The VET teachers' suggestions captured in Figure 16 above, on the improvements to internal and external policy initiatives, show that they are concerned about the quality of their work. Their views also show that they analyse the impacts of internal and external policy on the students' learning experiences. Hence it can be argued that teachers regularly diagnose policies and their implications when delivering courses to international students. The evidence presented in this chapter also suggests that if teachers hold positive expectations towards students, they can give their students more learning opportunities or increased challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the perceptions VET teachers hold about their students and the aspirations students pursue, are important in influencing teaching and learning

practices in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study. It showed that most VET teachers hold negative perceptions about their students and the delivery contexts but the teachers did not diagnose their own pedagogical practices. Overall, VET teachers in this study viewed commercial private VET RTO policies, English language proficiency, student attendance, teaching and learning hours, teacher working conditions, students' background, and the assessment of learning as important factors that influence international students' outcomes. These factors form an important part of the commercial for profit private VET provider inputs and processes in a competitive training environment.

The chapter also illustrated that training packages and the delivery and assessment of training policies influence learning contexts in these providers in profound ways. The views canvassed in the preceding sections are also consistent with what we know; training packages *do* shape the teaching and learning contexts in VET, and they constitute an important component of the teaching and learning process because they specify *what* ought to be taught and, in broad terms, *how* it should be assessed (Wheelahan, 2008, p. 5).

Nonetheless, whilst the context in which learning takes place in VET is important, the role of the VET teacher cannot be ignored. The teachers' views examined in this chapter show that they can diagnose and manipulate the learning environment in order to offer every student the opportunity to learn. Whatever views they form, these VET teachers' perceptions and expectations about their students are important; they shape the lens through which complex pedagogic choices are made. Their perspectives also demonstrate that there are contestations about what constitutes good teaching for a mixed cohort. VET teachers in this study expressed different perspectives about international students' aspirations, outcomes and skills levels. They also showed that they hold negative views about their students' capabilities. Indeed teachers' beliefs, background and assumptions could have a negative influence on how they approach their teaching and students' learning (Arenas, 2009; Arkoudis, 2007; Biggs, 2003).

Overall, the chapter has shown that critical analyses of commercial for profit private VET providers and international students in the study are mostly focused on policies

and international students' characteristics, without sufficiently reflecting on and analysing teachers' pedagogical choices, their practices and the commercial imperatives of the providers. But it is reasonable to argue that a pattern is emerging, which shows that there is a general disquiet about VET processes in these providers and the influences of the market model for VET. In addition, the negative perceptions VET teachers hold about international students and their study contexts seem to be having unintended consequences.

Chapter 8

External environmental influences on international students' learning experiences and outcomes

Introduction

The preceding chapters focused on the commercial for profit private provider system's internal environment, particularly internal organisational factors that influenced international students' outcomes in this study. This chapter however focuses on the external factors that can influence the way VET is understood and delivered in commercial for profit private VET providers. It argues that both internal and external environmental factors have the potential to influence students' learning experiences, particularly international students' learning experiences in host countries. By implication, since living in another country can involve significant cultural differences, international students' life experiences in Melbourne can influence their learning experiences and outcomes. This also means that whilst international students are in Australia firstly to study, there are often great expectations placed upon them by the fee-payer for them to return to their countries of origin with a qualification or to gain a higher social status after graduating. Indeed international students' academic needs are as important as their social needs.

It can be argued that because students depend on their home environment for resources and must meet its expectations, the demands which that external environment places on them cannot be ignored. This means that various and at times conflicting community-based interests that are an inherent part of the school or RTO's external environment often place great expectations upon international students. The resulting culture shock, which they may experience, whether it happens in the classroom or in the broader community, is not a particularly easy issue that can be addressed through policies alone or a brief lecture. This suggests that the school's external environment shapes some of the students' 'backpack' of personal experiences and expectations the VET sector should respond to in order to survive.

In the following sections, VET international students' experiences are critiqued and analysed to show how interconnected the external environment in host countries is with the students' learning experiences, particularly their employment and educational outcomes. Training managers and quality assurance auditors' views are examined first followed by international students' actual experiences in the communities where they reside and study. The chapter concludes by examining the impact on the outcomes of international students.

The external environmental and personal factors influencing international students' outcomes

The preceding chapters offered insights into the factors that are emphasised by commercial for profit private providers in the study but international students' previous learning experiences were not emphasised. This suggests that there is also a possibility that international students' local life experiences were not understood by local providers when they settled in Melbourne. Nor was the extent to which international students' socio-economic circumstances may have been influenced by their experiences. To examine these issues, training managers and quality assurance auditors' perspectives were solicited in order to explore their understanding of international students' socio-economic circumstances in this study.

Training managers in this study were asked whether there were any external circumstances, excluding government quality assurance mechanisms, which influenced international students' performance in their providers. At RTO 1 training manager XP suggested:

Aah... one of the main ones would be work and lack of liquidity of the students. Very few of them are actually able to come to Australia and study and pay their way with the money they bring with them err... a great majority of them have to work in order to be able to live and survive and pay for what they need to do (XP).

Training manager XP's views, which are inconsistent with earlier assertions about one of the key criteria used in the recruitment of international students into their courses –

‘ability to pay criterion’ – were repeated by training manager XB of RTO 5. With reference to international students’ cost of accommodation and travel, training manager XB argued:

Some students do come from Geelong, from Bendigo, some from Sydney, aah... obviously not cost effective or time effective. I believe getting there is not a huge issue, but I believe the financial burden is a lot and is too much and is one of the major issues. Students tend to pay, I believe are made to pay from term to term or semester and if rent or something comes up or they have a car accident, and some they don’t have the extra income to pay their fees, that’s when we lose them for work. They won’t come to school they won’t attend because they will be working full time. The financial factor is I think probably one of the largest factors, which are causing issues with the students, and purely if they can pay their rent they can pay their school fees (XB).

Training manager XB’s views were consistent with training manager XP’s perspectives about their students’ ability to pay tuition fees. Yet, it seems training manager XB of RTO 5 showed concern and appreciation of international students’ socio-economic circumstances. Similarly, at RTO 3, training manager XG also offered a useful and detailed explication of the students’ circumstances, particularly the economic implications of the jobs, which international students choose. Training manager XG argued:

One of the big problems is because of the type work a lot of them are doing. Quite a few of them are exceeding the 20-hour allocation of work. If you are only earning \$10 an hour, 20 hours of work isn’t going to give you the required amount of money that you need particularly given that the rental properties, the prices have increased in Australia in the last few years, food is increasing in price, living expenses are generally high and also they have to pay college fees. So, that can be a big problem and has been in my experience throughout the industry in different colleges. There is always a proportion of students that may be working 60 hours a week. Ok if they are working 60 hours a week, clearly they are not going to be coming to college and be expected to do meaningful study (XG).

Training manager XG's views were consistent with international student's job choices reported earlier in Chapter 6. It was reported in Chapter 6 that international students drove taxis, worked as assistants, assemblers and in jobs that were not aligned with their VET courses. Training manager XG's views also seem to suggest that these jobs' remuneration could not sustain their upkeep, which suggest that there was a proportion of students who chose to work long hours to the detriment of their studies.

Following the same line of argument, training manager XS of RTO 7 explored the social implications for the work and study choices international students made. According to training manager XS:

Yes, from what I can gather, the Indian culture is quite restrictive, aah... the Chinese culture as well is very restrictive, so coming into Australia all of a sudden there is this massive freedom they can enjoy and they can pretty much do what they like within bounds and nobody is going to say no. So, the younger students by themselves... it's just a massive release and so yes partying, enjoying themselves, getting a car and going out; they seldom discover alcohol (XS).

By singling out Indian and Chinese students in a sector that recruits international students from countries all over the world, it can be argued that training manager XS's perspectives were limited but also reflective of the population of this provider's international students. More broadly, XS's views can also be viewed as indicative of the ambivalence the manager feels towards them. However, training manager XS's views were also aligned with the 'other-ing' discourses discussed in the previous chapters.

Using the same lens used by training manager XS, at RTO 1 training manager XP offered further insightful perspectives on how international students' family and culture can influence their participation and learning outcomes.

I think family is a big influence. Whilst we don't have a lot of parents calling up we have a couple of situations where parents have called up to say we see this letter, it's an attendance warning letter for the student. We just wanted to know what's going on. I think that's a big factor. At the same time because

they are adults and we don't call their parents when immediately something goes wrong. I think they are a big influence; including other things, the labour or job market yeah. Oh yes when the students see that there is a pathway to securing a job into the future; yeah I think that can influence their performance (XP).

Training manager XP's views suggest that the students' choices are important to them and their families. Their families invest significant resources in their preparing for, learning about, and effective participation in their occupational choices. It can also be argued that no learning is influenced by the individual's life context and that the quality of learning is affected by the teaching-learning situation.

Nonetheless, when quality assurance auditors were asked to offer their views about what they thought were the situated realities (internal and external) influencing commercial for profit private VET RTO performance and ultimately the quality of training in this sector for international students, they echoed the preceding training managers' perspectives. According to auditor DC,

As for the students you have to give them a reason to be there otherwise they don't come. In some cases it's the tail wagging the dog. In some RTOs the students do what they want. It's all to do with business profitability. The students get what they want and the RTO makes money. It's that simple (DC).

Auditor DC's views were focused on international students' motives to participate and commercial for profit providers' economic market imperatives and not on learning. Yet again this suggests that international students are represented in this debate as transient clients who boost business profitability with their spending and then return home. Or, more broadly, they collude with their business partners – commercial for profit providers – to achieve their goals.

Using the same lens, auditor DD repeated the above views, which succinctly captured the auditors' perspectives about the external environmental factors that can influence international students' learning experiences. Auditor DD argued:

Yes, one of the things that come up from time to time is students' attendance. RTOs have to monitor attendance as to whether the student attended the rest

of the course or a part of it and did not attend the class. Because of the audits, they are monitored; RTOs have to monitor if their students are attending a full course or a part of it and report on it. Then if the student doesn't attend the class that affects quality. Accordingly, AQTF standards requirements have to be met in terms of delivery to include assessment particularly, and probably assessments will drive them (DD).

The above auditors' views, although not critical of the underlying causes of poor attendance, reflected the broader VET policy perspectives about international students' participation in VET courses in these providers. In Chapter 7, VET teachers in this study also argued that attendance was one of the most important factors that influenced their students' performance. It seems a trend is emerging, which suggests that class attendance in this study is an important factor that can influence international students' performance.

But, why is this factor consistently emphasised amongst all other factors that can influence international students' outcomes? Quality assurance auditor DB offered a short but useful perspective that captured the dominant discourse that influences commercial for profit private VET providers and international students' attendance in this sector.

Money is the major factor and the sense of doing the right thing. It's also about the long and short-term goals of the provider. If you have a long-term goal you will reinvest in the business. The ability to manage risk is not to cry foul when, say, immigration rules change. It is a business and if it is a business on the long haul, you wouldn't have all your eggs in one basket. I think they are obviously not. Students can be party to this. If it's not that, they might be in fear and I have seen fear ... students being held hostage. I don't think we hear enough of that (DB).

Auditor DB's views suggest that there is an inextricably intertwined nexus between the providers' profit motives and the students' aspirations and motives (education-migration nexus), which are influenced by the complex and diverse socio-economic circumstances the students and the providers find themselves in. Provider

profitability, which depends upon international students' fees and the students' capacity to pay tuition fees, is in part dependent upon international students working part-time or full-time during their stay in host countries. Although class attendance is important and has been emphasised by VET teachers and training managers in this study, international students cannot work and attend classes at the same time. By implication, forcing international students to attend regular classes can lead to non-payment of tuition fees. Thus, provider profitability is affected.

Overall, as argued in Chapter 2, the marketisation of this sector means that international students are seen as consumers and part of an economic agenda. Indeed the preceding data shows that international students are seen as the ideal customers of the competitive VET market – potential residents or workers or citizens. In this instance, the education providers are seen as responsible for the fulfillment of their clients' needs. As consumers of education-as-product, international students are the providers' responsibility. Hence international students – customers and consumers of commercial for profit private VET providers – are unproblematically associated with providers described as dodgy. Interconnected in these debates are processes and constructions of identities ascribed to international students, which are persistently influenced by neoliberal conceptualisations of the VET market and a socio-personal process that is relational and interdependent between individuals' uniquely socially shaped circumstances and the social world they encounter.

Although all training managers acknowledged the significant impact of the external environment on international students' learning experiences, it seems commercial for profit private providers in this study find themselves in a paradox – the education and profitability paradox. The exploration of the students' social experiences in Melbourne helps to shed more light into their circumstances.

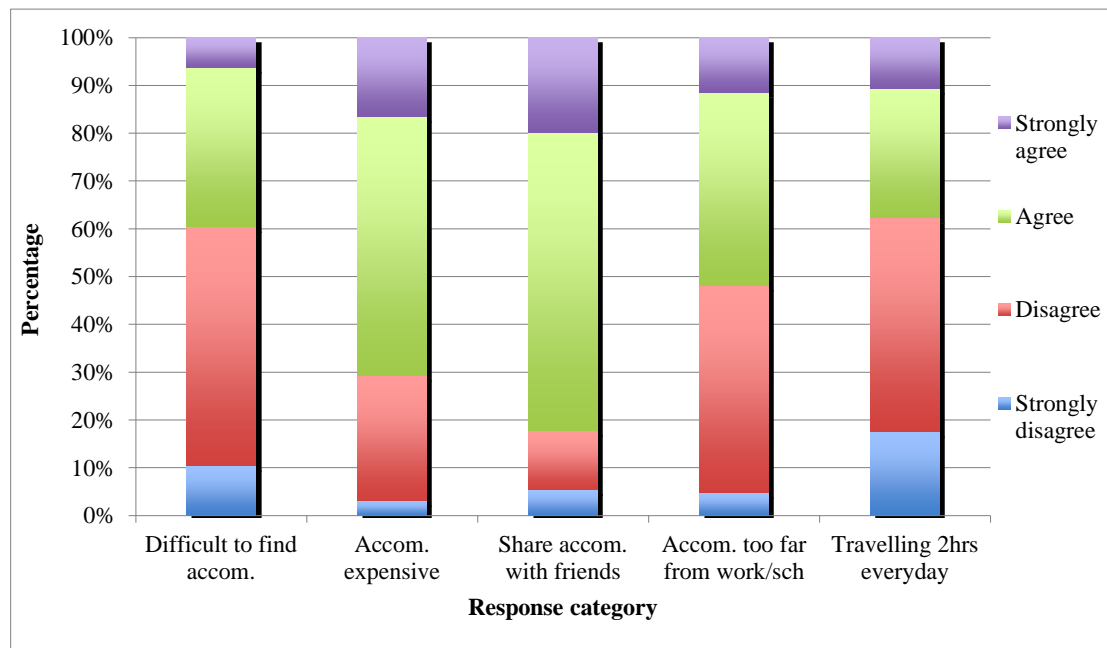
Living realities in Melbourne for international students in the study

It was argued in Chapter 5 that international students came from complex and diverse socio-economic backgrounds pursuing broad priorities and desires for the future but there was also a lack of emphasis on international students' social capital by their

training managers and teachers. Whilst their social experiences in Melbourne, outside the VET provider environment, were likely to be diverse the students' collective experiences were likely to be indicative of the social realities that influenced their learning.

In order to explore these social factors, particularly to explain and locate the training managers' perspectives described in the preceding section, the social factors that international students emphasised outside the commercial for profit private provider environments were explored. To do this, international students in the study were asked to describe their living experiences in Melbourne. Figure 17 below provides a useful illustration of some of the important external environment-based factors they emphasised, which have a potential to influence the students' learning experiences in their providers.

Figure 17 International students in the study: the external environment factors



N-194 –Accommodation in Melbourne (Accom. – accommodation; sch. - school)

Figure 17 shows that more than 80 per cent of the international students in the study shared accommodation with friends and more than 70 per cent thought that this accommodation was expensive. A large proportion (60 per cent) of this group believed that accommodation in Melbourne was not difficult to find. In addition, more

than 50 per cent felt that where they stayed was too far away from school and more than 35 per cent had to travel for more than two hours to and from their place of study.

With more than 150 (≥ 80 per cent) international students in the study sharing accommodation with friends and fellow overseas students, it seems that international students in the study largely depend on each other's support during their stay in Melbourne. It also suggests that international students are networked and use other students' resources and networks to navigate the school's external environment. This implies that international students' initial contexts of reception and transition in Melbourne are influenced by other students' experiences and perceptions about the host country's social and learning environments. Essentially, this also raises important questions about the commercial for profit private VET RTOs' role in the students' reception, transition and wellbeing.

The above data can also be used to argue that international students in this study were not sufficiently supported during transition and their study tenure. Their circumstances were also likely to have been influenced by their individual socio-economic backgrounds, which determined what they could and could not do outside the VET provider environment. This is illustrated in Chapter 5 in particular, which showed that 33 per cent of the students who participated in the baseline survey ($n=194$) were mostly influenced to study abroad by family and friends. It can be argued that the social environment they were in limited their learning experiences. But, what are the socio-economic backgrounds of the students in this study? Their family backgrounds can offer useful insights into their study choices and aspirations. Table 17 below offers a snapshot of a guide to the students' parents or guardians' main occupations.

Table 17 A summary of the main occupation of international students' parents or guardians

Occupational category	Response	
	N	%
Farming background	10	21
Working class background	6	13
Professional background	7	15
Business background	8	17
No response	16	34
Total	47	100

N = 47 – 100%

Table 17 shows that of the international students who completed the final outcomes survey questions about their family backgrounds, 10 came from a farming background, six from a working class background, seven from a professional background, and eight from a family business background. A total of 16 students (34 per cent) did not respond to this question.

The data in Table 17 above also show that international students in this study came from diverse backgrounds and not from disadvantaged backgrounds only. Although it can be argued that the notion of disadvantage is contestable and not universally applicable, the study data examined so far suggests that international students used their social and educational backgrounds to analyse and navigate the host country's VET and labour market contexts, particularly opportunities aligned with their aspirations. The data in Table 17 in particular can also be used to explain why a large proportion of international students was sharing accommodation with other students in Melbourne, Australia (Figure 17).

These data are also supported by earlier findings reported in Chapter 5 showing that 33 per cent of international students in the study relied on family and friends when they made their choices to study abroad. Hence it can be argued that fellow international students form an important support network that can help them to easily transition and settle in Melbourne. Whilst their training managers are conversant with their social circumstances and the impact this has on their learning, it seems that international students' wellbeing and upkeep in host countries, which is reflected in the high prevalence of accommodation sharing, is not understood by commercial for profit providers in this study. Instead it reflects that fellow international students

constitute the social milieus that determine the contexts of reception for new international students and influence their future perceptions about Melbourne and Australia in general. It can also be argued that international students in the study's wellbeing is reflected in how they funded their education and stay in Melbourne (Table 18).

Table 18 How international students in the study fund their education in Melbourne.

Response category		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female			
		N	%	N	%	N	%
How are you paying for your educational expenses?	Part time job	76	63	44	64	120	63
	Parents home	37	30	16	23	53	28
	Relatives	6	5	8	12	14	7
	Other	2	2	1	1	3	2
Total		121	100	69	100	190	100

No response was recorded for 4 respondents N-194

Table 18 shows how international students pay for their upkeep and tuition fees. It shows (baseline survey data, n=194) that most international students (63 per cent) were paying for their education through part-time work whilst a smaller proportion was funded from home through parents (28 per cent) and relatives (7 per cent). There were no major differences in financial support from parents and relatives between gender groups. Notably, some of these students (34 per cent) came from farming and working class families. Hence this can be used to explain the large incidence of international students in the study who were sharing accommodation, working and studying and who held the view that accommodation in Melbourne is expensive (Figure 17).

Table 18 also shows that out of 190 international students, 120 were working part-time to fund their education and stay in Melbourne. This large proportion of international students working and studying can be one way (not the only way) of explaining the consequences of the competitive market environment where 'the ability to pay' is emphasised. Another explanation could be based on the students' socioeconomic backgrounds. There is also the possibility that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to work and study in order to supplement family support than students from more affluent backgrounds.

In addition, the survey data in Table 18 above show that male international students were more likely to be sponsored by their parents than female students, although female students were more likely to be sponsored by other relatives. However, it can be argued that the data in Table 18 suggest that international students in this study have to juggle work and study. Hence these social experiences, particularly the work and study experiences in Melbourne have the potential to influence international students' educational experiences and employment outcomes. These potential influences are discussed in the next section.

Implications for international students' chosen pathways, experiences and the external environment influences

In Chapter 4, it was shown that commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study focus on the 'ability to pay' criteria to recruit international students into their training programmes. This recruitment focus suggests that most international students are wealthy or at least their parents, as full-fee funders, are wealthy and can spend this wealth to further their children's educational and employment aspirations. Whilst the study data do not show whether international students came from wealthy family backgrounds, what we know is that international students in this study come from different countries and a variety of family backgrounds. The data in Table 18 show that family and relatives sponsored some international students whilst most of them paid their tuition fees and sustenance through part-time work in Melbourne, Australia.

However, it is also possible that some students supplemented family support through work and study. The data in Table 18 suggest that study and work are an important part of the students' external environment. This shows that international students were balancing a full-time academic load along with a part-time job. It can be argued that this work-study combination, as suggested by their training managers is likely to affect their attendance and possibly make them suffer from stress due to overworking. In addition, a combination of studying full-time and working part-time can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of the students, and the common method of addressing paying fees and their livelihood expenses – increased hours

working – can influence academic performance.

If we consider international students' various dreams, expectations, fears, concerns, frustrations, disappointments, and successes, as reported earlier in Chapters 5 and 6, it can be argued that their experiences in commercial for profit private VET RTOs and communities in Melbourne, particularly in the employment markets, were complex and sometimes difficult. Drawing from the evidence presented in Chapter 6, particularly international students' aspirations, it can be argued that they are in transit – towards their career aspirations and a better future. They arrived in Melbourne, Australia with a variety of expectations from a variety of sources. They came from complex and diverse socio-economic backgrounds pursuing a broad set of priorities and desires for the future. Their aspirations and expectations did not change over time; they remained focused on employment, educational and migration outcomes (Chapter 6).

The preceding section has demonstrated that international students' diverse backgrounds were influential in shaping the students' divergent priorities and pathways and how they evaluated their learning contexts in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study. However the same data also show that the external environmental experiences can be used as a basis for analysing factors that influence international students' education and training outcomes in host countries. In this instance, the contexts of reception and the realities international students face in host countries may compel them to alter their aspirations and plans. Their experiences can also be used as a basis to argue that students from different backgrounds confront constraints and analyse their experiences in different ways. This implies that in the competitive neoliberal market, uncertain future settlement and difficult labour market circumstances bear heavily on those from less affluent circumstances especially when the opportunities for social and economic mobility remain at best precarious, if not permanently blocked.

Overall, the preceding sections have demonstrated that although international students from poorer families are more at risk of not achieving their goals than their affluent counterparts, the social capital international students bring is inextricably intertwined

with their aspirations, schooling, community expectations and the choices they make, including educational outcomes. Hence, these circumstances can influence the learning approaches students choose and their learning outcomes.

International students' aspirations and outcomes: the opportunity myth

The baseline survey at the beginning of the study asked international students to describe their aspirations. This question was further reframed and repeated for the outcomes survey to establish whether or not the students had changed their priorities and aspirations between the surveys. The evidence presented in Chapter 6 shows that most international students who participated in the last student survey did not change their aspirational goals. They emphasised further education and training, Australian permanent residency status, employment in the field of training and most importantly to achieve a better future. A small but an equally important proportion also emphasised returning to their home countries after graduation. This shows that international students' aspirations were also partly influenced by the perceptions they held about opportunities available in the Australian economy and the circumstances in which they found themselves. It also suggests that there are expectations placed upon them by their families and funders to return home with a qualification.

In written responses to a question in the outcomes survey about what the graduate international students hoped to gain by studying VET courses in Australia, the data showed that there was a shift in aspirational emphases. There was a shift from the residency visa outcomes to further education and employment pathways by some students – a consequence of their lived experiences. It can be argued that the contexts of reception and the realities students face in host countries (external and internal environmental pressures) may alter their aspirations and plans. This shows that whilst social actors tend to act in their own interests; they may choose to act against them in favour of other considerations. This perspective helps to explain why the priorities of international students in this study shifted in line with the anticipated and existing changes in their immediate environments – particularly visa regulation changes – they shifted their focuses in response to the material circumstances built around them.

The preceding sections have also demonstrated that the external environment and the roles these students play shape their behaviours in different settings. Hence international students may experience role conflict because of competing interests. Perhaps they may spend more time studying without paying attention to part-time work demands and vice versa. Thus every element of the environment can be affected by the demands from other elements. This suggests that education systems have many environmental pressures to contend with.

These competing demands are demonstrated in Chapter 6, which shows that besides focusing on employment and further education and training pathways, a small number of international students (2) were interested in establishing businesses in Australia. These two respondents who were interested in establishing businesses had this to say about their expectations. *'I wanted to start my own business,'* one student said. *'I hope to set up my own business,'* the other student suggested. At the time of writing this report, neither of these two international students had yet opened businesses; suffice to say they are still pursuing this entrepreneurial goal. In addition, one group of the students in the outcomes survey was interested in employment pathways related to their areas of training whilst another group was interested in further education and training.

Whilst the match between VET and jobs is very loose in Australia, this has particular implications for international students who have come here to study, many of whom wish to work in the industry for which they are training. The misalignment between training and work are illustrated below in some of the international students' written experiences in the labour market.

'I wanted to make career in the automotive industry,' one of the graduate said. *'I wanted to gain enough experience to get me employment,'* the unemployed graduate suggested. *'I hoped to gain more knowledge and skills.'* *'I hoped to gain sufficient skills to find full time employment in the relevant field,'* said the graduate who was casually employed. *'I wanted to gain knowledge and experience of different cooking aspects,'* the graduate working as a chef said. *'We need more work skills,'* another

graduate said. These views reflect individual aspirations relative to the graduates' situated environmental circumstances but most importantly they represent considerable mismatches between their training, aspirations and work requirements.

Further, there was another group that chose to emphasise: '*a better future*'; '*a good life*'; '*better life in Australia*'; '*better life*'; '*a good future.*' These expressions were repeated by most international students in the baseline and outcomes surveys with only two in the outcomes survey expressing uncertainty about the future. International students in the study who expressed the most extreme dissatisfaction with their learning experiences and outcomes were those students whose aspirations and goals had not yet been met or who were uncertain about the future. It can be inferred that the mismatch between international students' aspirational goals and outcomes led to negative views about their entire learning experiences. The opportunities to get better skills, skilled employment and a better life appeared elusive for most of them (Chapter 6).

It was also not uncommon to find international students expressing satisfaction with their teachers' performance whilst at the same time expressing dissatisfaction with their overall training experiences, as if training experiences could be divorced from their teachers' work and the commercial for profit private VET provider learning contexts. One of the ways we can explain this contradiction is by acknowledging that some teachers, because of their daily contact with the students, were likely to offer counsel on what can and cannot be achieved in the current Australian competitive VET market climate and the labour markets. Another way to explain the international students' different experiences with their teachers is to accept that VET teachers represent a diversity of skills and capabilities. Yet another possibility is that students had an appreciation of the constraints their teachers worked under and could appreciate the effort teachers put in, despite these constraints. Hence some teachers were able to deliver to international students' expectations and others could not.

However, as reported in Chapter 6, graduates from these commercial for profit private VET providers in the study working in fields associated with their training also emphasised negative experiences – their newly acquired skills and knowledge were

not readily accepted for employment or for work. For example, Deepal's (international student) analysis of his post-training employment circumstances shows how some international students felt inadequately prepared for work and employment in Australian industry.

I want to be a proper motor mechanic. I am working in a workshop but not working on cars. It does not make me a proper mechanic. So I am not satisfied with my job. I want to make my profile and proper career, for that I need a proper job role. IN SHORT AS A CAREER I WANT TO BE A MOTOR MECHANIC (Deepal, emphasis, his).

Whilst Deepal's employment is not necessarily his teachers' fault, nor indeed that of his institution, it illustrates the difficulties international VET graduates experience in the competitive labour markets in Melbourne, Australia, because of the weak link between VET and work.

The lack of preparation for work exemplified in Deepal's characterisation of the overall VET course experience is also demonstrated in how long it took most (13 out of 16) of the international student graduates in the study to get employment. A total of 13 out of 16 international students who responded to the question on how long it took them to find employment after their VET courses showed that it took three to more than six months to gain casual or full-time employment. This seems to suggest that there was a misalignment between international students' outcomes and their aspirations and local community expectations. Hence they ended up working in circumstances that were not consistent with their training – an illustration of the weak link between VET and work.

However, their teachers' evaluation of their students' work-readiness after graduation, reported in Chapter 7, provided useful insights. Their evaluation provided us with a useful assessment of the usefulness and quality of training in commercial for private VET providers in the study, particularly the influence of industry and employers on VET training quality debates and perceptions in general. Overall, the preceding section has argued that the external environment has the potential to influence international students' learning experiences and outcomes in the host country. Hence, international students' experiences and outcomes in this study cannot be fully

understood in isolation; they are context bound (community and economic market bound).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the external environment influenced international students' learning experiences in the study. It showed that international students in this study depended on this environment when making educational and employment choices. They found themselves in an international education market surrounded by two competing paradigms about its meanings: the focus on the economic market and the focus on learning and curricula. Hence their understanding of the nature of their participation was formed by the interactions (or the lack thereof) between the economic imperatives and their motives within the bounds of the external environment, classroom or campus.

The nexus between international education and migration policy, as well as the increasing interaction of students with the labour market, led to international student issues and discourses shifting outside the boundaries of the education sector. This is illustrated in the training managers, quality assurance auditors, VET teachers and international students' constructs as they responded to life around them, particularly to the demands of their immediate social, educational and labour market environments. Notably, international students constructed their learning approaches in response to community and family expectations. This indeed shows that our understanding of environmental factors (internal and external) influence our perceptions about what can and cannot be done in a competitive VET market structure.

The chapter has also shown that international students' experiences and knowledge of what can and cannot be done in a competitive market environment are an important input in the VET sector for international students. What international students did and how they responded to situated realities in their VET providers' internal and external environments show that their interaction with the market structure shaped and generated new choices and responses that could not be predicted in advance. This also

illustrates that ‘...social structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices’ (Archer, 2010, p. 227).

Overall, this chapter has shown that, in a competitive VET market the external environment has significant implications for the students’ learning experiences. In this instance, it shaped international students’ learning experiences and outcomes. It showed that these commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Melbourne are particularly vulnerable to environmental influences when expectations are constructed around employment or the individual’s socio-economic interests only. Indeed the diversity of expectations and interests from individuals, communities and pressure groups make it difficult for commercial for profit private RTOs to respond to all environmental needs, which can lead to mismatches between the students’ expectations and outcomes. Hence a holistic approach to the analyses of international students’ learning experiences and outcomes must not only include the host country’s economic and labour market expectations but must include the individual’s background, community expectations and their social environment.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: Situated realities influencing international students' outcomes

Introduction

This thesis has shown that the restructure of the VET sector in Australia, using the competitive market concept, impacted on the relationships amongst the VET institutions, managers, teachers, quality assurance auditors and international students in the study. The study used qualitative and quantitative data from quality assurance auditors, training managers, VET teachers and international students to explore core themes and subthemes related to factors that can influence international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs.

The thesis argues that the restructure of the VET sector has changed the values, priorities and motivations of commercial for profit private VET providers in significant ways, with potentially adverse consequences for the public interest. It also shed new light on the structure, composition and dynamics of private VET markets and commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. It is amongst a few emerging scholarly attempts to holistically explore and show that the situated factors influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study are interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation.

This chapter summarises the key findings and the resulting conclusions about the extent to which the restructure of the VET sector has influenced the way courses are delivered and assessed, and the way commercial for profit private VET providers and international students in this study are represented in the competitive training markets in Melbourne, Australia. Before reviewing the study's findings, it is necessary to briefly recapitulate some of the key observations emphasised by the study participants reported in the preceding chapters. This is followed by a critical review of the key themes emerging from the study, particularly the influences and limitations of the VET market concept, the contexts for course delivery and the performative sites for

teaching and learning for international students. International students' characteristics, aspirations, priorities and VET teachers' work and perceptions are also revisited to draw attention to the interconnectedness of teacher work to international students' outcomes. This is followed by a critique and comparison of international students' views and VET teachers' practices relative to their training managers' and quality assurance auditors' perceptions. In conclusion, international students' outcomes and the factors influencing them are conceptually framed and categorised. Lastly, the implications of the study are discussed and the case for further studies is made.

A summative analysis of the study findings

This study has provided one of the first in-depth analyses of situated realities influencing international students' experiences and outcomes in commercial for profit private VET providers in Australia. It has demonstrated, using the study data, that the relationships amongst social positions in society, particularly social institutions, might constitute the mechanisms influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET providers in Australia. It also acknowledges that indeed there are various complex factors that can influence international students' learning experiences and outcomes in host countries. But in this instance, the neoliberal economic views of both the Labor and Liberal Australian governments, which were used to restructure and influence the VET policy 'speak or discourses' about competition and training standards, are the processes by which an identity was constructed for international students and their commercial for profit providers with intended and unintended consequences.

The neoliberal emphasis of the restructure of the VET sector was based on the assumption that competitive VET markets would deliver a highly skilled flexible workforce through public and commercial for profit private VET providers (Anderson, 2006b). But, little empirical research was used to critically examine the consequent delivery contexts and the implications for international students' participation and outcomes. This study has shown that policy and contemporary community discourses were instead used to define and explain how VET is understood and delivered in commercial for profit providers in this study and possibly

in Australia more generally. Hence, as illustrated in Chapter 4, policy discourses and the internal commercial RTO imperatives influenced the ways in which commercial for profit private VET institutions in this study acted in their own and their customers' interests.

Through predominantly commercial business profit perspectives, these institutions fostered business-training relationships amongst the study participants, which led to varied interpretations of what constitutes an ideal training environment for international students in these learning spaces. As a result, this context dependent relationship also led to contestations and contradictions about what constitutes an ideal commercial for profit private VET provider's teaching and learning environment. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, there was no convergence of views about the effects of the competitive training markets and what constituted an ideal training environment for VET in these providers. But the study participants who occupy unique vantage-positions, which enables them to comment on the full spectrum of their organisations' activities and any significant changes in organisational priorities, directions and circumstances (training managers and quality assurance auditors), predominantly used the commercial motive to describe their operating contexts. As succinctly captured by auditor DW, '*profit and training are actually not strange bedfellows*'. This view was also illustrated by international students and teachers many of whom did not see commercial imperatives of their providers as an impediment to teaching and learning.

However, it can still be argued that because of these contestations, particularly about the meaning of VET for international students, two competing paradigms emerge: the focus on the economic market and its attendant drivers, and the focus on international students' motives and aspirations. Unavoidably, the education-migration policy nexus, as well as the increasing interaction of students with the labour market, led to international student issues and discourses shifting outside the boundaries of the education sector. Commercial for profit private VET provider managers and their teachers in the study tended to view their students in economic and migration terms only, without considering the important educational and the backpack of social characteristics international students carry (Chapters 4 and 5). This education-

migration policy nexus is illustrated in Chapter 4, which shows how international students are represented in this discourse. International students were considered firstly as consumers of VET programmes and services, and secondarily as VET students who want to train to gain employment skills or pursue a vocation. This presents a paradox, which positions international students in Australia as ‘cash cows’ whilst at the same time a big source of permanent skilled immigrants.

Yet in Chapter 5, the study shows that the demographic composition and characteristics of international VET students today have fundamentally changed. In fact, the composition and prior educational characteristics and experiences international students bring into these providers suggest that VET, which uses a neoliberal competitive market model, no longer reflects the traditional characteristics that applied for local students. Indeed Chapter 5 demonstrates that international students are not a homogeneous group with identical aspirations, prior educational experiences, motives and expectations. There is no single descriptor that can capture international students’ complexity of educational qualifications, expectations and diversity.

It can also be argued that the way international students are represented in these prevalent education-migration debates has led to the critical discourses about them, shifting the foci from important international students’ prior achievements and characteristics that are related to performance in education and training. This has led to debates about international students’ migration motives, which are unproblematically associated with disreputable private VET providers, remaining dominant. By implication, the structure of the discourses that are operating in the debate and the identities that are constructed through these processes both direct and limit critical discussions of the education and training issues involved – training context, pedagogy and skills quality issues.

These debates, which shift the focus from education and training, led to unhelpful omissions and characterisations of international students in the study. This is mostly illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, which show that international students’ social capital, prior educational qualifications and current educational qualifications were neither

considered nor used to their benefit. Instead, commercial for profit provider profit motives and international students' migration aspirations were emphasised and influenced the way they were perceived and represented. It can also be argued that increasingly interconnected in these debates are processes and constructions of identities ascribed to international students and commercial for profit private VET providers in the study and possibly elsewhere, which are persistently influenced by education-migration neoliberal conceptualisations of the VET market purposes.

The genuine and non-genuine international student characterisations mentioned in Chapter 4 and VET teacher explications of factors that limit their delivery of courses to international students reported in Chapter 7 are worth noting. They exemplify prevalent institutional discursive platforms in these providers, which have implications for the way training is understood and delivered. Whilst it is acknowledged that understanding students' learning characteristics, motivations and limitations is part of critical and reflective teaching, a narrow focus on the students' deficits only is unhelpful; it can negatively influence the teacher's attitude and disposition towards the students and this in turn can negatively influence the student's attitudes towards the teacher and learning. In this instance, although getting an Australian permanent residency visa was the concern of most international students in the study, the permanent residency choice formed a part of broader priorities, values and desires for their future; their occupational choices are multi-fold, personally distinct and shaped by experiences within their lives, family and situated realities in their VET providers (Chapter 6). However, international students' journeys and stories presented in Chapter 6 show that most of them did not achieve their goals; their outcomes were variously influenced by complex institutional structural factors, family expectations and individual life experiences in Melbourne.

In addition, international students' stories and experiences reported in Chapter 6 also offered useful insights into their experiences and dispositions towards their teachers and commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. The aspirations and expectations of international students in the study did not change over time. They were focused on gaining employment in their fields of training, pursuing further studies, returning to their home countries, getting Australian permanent residency

visas and achieving a better life (Chapter 5). Whilst it can be argued that, for most of them, their aspirations and expectations were not met, some of them chose pathways that were aligned with their aspirations and training.

It was also shown in Chapter 7 that teacher dispositions can influence the way VET in these providers is understood and practiced. A majority of teachers did not believe that there were any factors that limited the delivery of their courses whilst almost as many believed that there were factors that limited the delivery of courses in their providers. The majority of VET teachers' perspectives were consistent with international students' views expressed in Chapter 4 but were mostly at variance with the students' experiences and outcomes reported in Chapter 6. There was also a lack of coherence between the way quality assurance auditors, training managers and teachers understood skills training for work (Chapter 7). But, the teachers who were critical of their students and learning contexts were focused on what the students are and not what they do. It can be argued that this focus on international students' learning deficits can provide teachers with a convenient stereotypical way of interpreting their behaviour instead of the quality of their learning, which leads the debates away from critical evaluation of the teachers' pedagogic choices and practices. Alternatively it can be argued that a trend may be emerging, which is critical of the delivery contexts and international students' participation in these providers.

In addition, the critical reflections of teachers on their students can also be taken to suggest that their views were variously influenced by the contemporary discursive constructions about their provider contexts and international students' aspirations. If so, it can also be argued that these discursive constructions are aligned with the persistent 'other-ing' discourses in the international education markets in Australia. These discourses have led to international students being lumped together clumsily, resulting in varied and unhelpful analytical characterisations and overgeneralisations about their study motives and skills.

These negative characterisations are illustrated in VET teachers' perspectives about factors that influence their students' performance (Chapter 7). VET teachers in this

study viewed commercial for profit private VET RTO policies, English language proficiency, student attendance, teaching and learning hours, teacher working conditions, students' background, and the assessment of learning as important factors that influence international students' performance. In fact, VET teachers in this study used the education-migration nexus lens to analyse these factors and international students' aspirations, outcomes and skills levels. The VET teacher sentiments and perspectives, which can lead to a deficit view of teaching, were also focused on provider policies and international students' characteristics without critically reflecting on their pedagogic choices, practices and the commercial imperatives for these providers.

Yet according to training managers and quality assurance auditors in this study, training packages and the CBT model of delivery and assessment can influence VET practice and the learning contexts in these providers in profound ways. Auditor DB succinctly captured this perspective by suggesting that there are challenges in delivering training packages in VET institutional settings.

Besides the internal factors that can influence international students' learning experiences, the study has shown (Chapter 8) that the external environment can also influence international students' learning experiences. But the discursive constructions about international students and their providers' participation were largely limited to the interactions or the lack thereof between economic imperatives and international students' motives within the spaces of the external environment, classroom or campus. Yet international students in the study constructed their learning approaches not only in response to VET provider market dynamics, but also to labour markets, community and family expectations. This indeed suggests that the contemporary understanding of environmental factors (internal and external), which influence the way VET is understood and practised in these providers – what can and cannot be done in a competitive VET market structure – is limited and narrow.

Indeed international students' experiences and knowledge of what can and cannot be done in a competitive market environment are illustrated in the study by their reported journeys. Their interaction with the competitive market structure shaped and

generated new choices and responses that could not be predicted in advance. This shows that the competitive VET market's external environment has significant implications for the students' learning experiences. In this instance, it shaped international students' learning experiences and outcomes – their expectations were constructed around employment, education, migration and socio-economic interests.

Overall, the study has shown that the restructure of the VET sector in Australia – using the neoliberal economic market – led to long-term reorganisation of institutional relationships with intended and unintended consequences for pedagogy and learning. This illustrates that social practice is inescapably shaped by the unacknowledged conditions of action, which in turn generates unpredictable consequences (Archer, 2010; Porpora, 1989). The actions of commercial for profit private VET providers' participants in this study formed the contexts of subsequent interaction. International students' outcomes, stories and journeys are illustrative of this. This shows that whilst individuals are able to exercise agency, they do so within parameters that have been bequeathed to them by previous social actors. Hence it can be argued that using a single lens approach to explore and analyse these institutional relationships is not adequate.

Instead, a holistic approach (multiple lenses) to study these complex relationships in educational institutions can offer useful insights not only about the host country's economic and labour market expectations but also the individual's background (social and educational), community expectations and their social environment, particularly whether or not these support learning. Emerging themes from this study – situated realities influencing international students' outcomes – are revisited next, beginning with the commercial for profit private VET providers' internal dynamics.

The commercial for profit private VET RTOs' internal dynamics: factors influencing international students' outcomes in this study

The preceding chapters, particularly Chapter 4, have demonstrated that VET market reforms in Australia fundamentally influenced the relationships amongst its participants, which appear to be changing the form and character of VET provision,

the values, priorities and motivations of commercial for profit VET providers in this study in significant ways. From a business market perspective, those who occupied influential positions in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study – quality assurance auditors and training managers – believed that training provider profit motives took precedence in the recruitment and enrolment of international students into most of their vocational training programmes. For example, the *ability to pay* tuition fees was the most important criterion emphasised by all commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study.

This emphasis on international students' ability to pay tuition fees by commercial for profit private VET RTOs exemplifies competitive VET markets' tendencies to focus on business efficiency gains and profit. The consequences of this focus are not only illustrated in the study findings in VET teachers' views but also in international students' explicit views, experiences and outcomes. Wesley (2009) and Anderson (2006a, 2009) have made similar observations, arguing that hastily developed training packages and rapidly delivered courses using limited teaching resources are used by some commercial for profit private VET RTOs to maximise efficiencies.

The focus of providers on commercial imperatives is further illustrated in international students' and quality assurance auditors' sentiments about the diversity of teaching and learning resources. Whilst some commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study had limited teaching and learning resources, others had excellent facilities. Most international students emphasised the lack or absence of practical training resources, especially workplace training, which is regarded as an important element in hands-on vocational training processes. This observation is consistent with Harris et al.'s (2006) observations. In their study of the characteristics of private training providers in VET in Australia, they concluded that private RTOs predominantly use face-to-face delivery approaches, which require minimum resources to implement.

In addition, the findings show that the training packages specifications, particularly the emphases on industry-based standards, are factors which influence international students' outcomes. It can be argued that training packages were designed for work-

based training or students who are employed in their field of practice. Yet most international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study were not employed in their field of practice and were unable to get any form of work-based learning experience. Their training managers were also neither compelled nor motivated to offer work-based learning opportunities. This suggests that the profit focus of these commercial for profit private VET RTOs and the impact of training packages may be *exacerbating* the already weak relation between VET and work.

According to Ballantine (2001) and drawing from general systems theory, the greater the degree of congruence or fit amongst the education system's components, the more effective the system will be. In other words, when an organisation's strategy is supported by and congruent with each of the other components, the organisation's actual results will be similar to its expectations, meaning here that international students' educational and employment expectations would be met. Instead the study shows that commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study were firstly focused on business profitability and secondarily on the quality of international students' education and training expectations.

Quality assurance auditors in particular were critical of the training packages specifications and provider business profit imperatives. Training managers thought that training packages comprise some rigid sets of product specifications, which impose limitations on their providers regardless of the diverse markets in which they operate. It seems these managers' perspectives are valid because of the diversified nature of VET and the international students' varied demands and expectations reported earlier, which means that commercial for profit private VET RTOs have to contend with internally and externally driven contradictions. The commercial for profit private VET RTOs' contexts described by quality assurance auditors, training managers, VET teachers and international students illustrate considerable diversity in the operational problems they face on a daily basis, partly caused by the forces of supply and demand but also a range of international students' interests.

It seems the reorganisation of the VET market, using the competitive market model, has led to contestations about what constitutes an ideal training environment and the

quality of training for international students in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study and possibly more generally. This illustrates that when VET is set in a dynamic, complex and volatile competitive market environment, which is governed by national and regional specifications, its focuses and outcomes may not be congruent with students' aspirations and expectations. Hence, the one-size fits all approach to training international students manifested in the training packages model may not yield the intended educational and employment outcomes for international students.

External environmental influences: contexts of reception and international students' life in Melbourne

The analyses of the external environment factors influencing international students in Melbourne, Australia in this study in Chapter 8 suggest that there are several environmental factors that can influence the education system and vice versa. They suggest that the education system must respond to the needs of its clientele, particularly in addressing issues of access, equity, and efforts to achieve opportunities for all students to succeed. According to Ballantine and Hammack (2012), governments, communities, families and interest groups demand input into what their children are taught.

Similarly, international students' families and communities' expectations can influence international students' aspirations and expectations in host countries. Hence international students' immediate social environment in host countries can impose limitations on the students' learning experiences because they influence the purposes and focuses of training organisations. The education system's external environment variously influences students' learning experiences and cannot be ignored (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). These environmental pressures, in particular the home environment and family support, were shown in this study to have been important during the international students' time in Melbourne.

Indeed, some parts of the environment are more important than others in terms of influence (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). In this study, international students' socio-

economic status gave insights into what they felt was important, particularly accommodation, work and study choices. In Chapter 5, it was shown that international students' family backgrounds and friends influenced their choices. This is further illustrated in Chapter 8 where a large proportion of international students were likely to pay for their education through part-time work whilst a smaller proportion were funded from home. In addition, most shared accommodation with friends. Although the VET providers in this study emphasised the ability of students to pay fees, the proportions of international students working, studying and sharing accommodation not only exemplify their financial difficulties but also their family backgrounds and choices. This can be used to explain why a large proportion of international students were working part-time to fund their education and stay in Melbourne. Hence international students' learning experiences and outcomes cannot be understood in isolation – their socio-economic status and previous educational experiences can influence their study experiences.

It was shown in Chapter 8 that international students' decisions to work and study combined with shared accommodation impacted on their ability to attend lessons and ultimately their educational outcomes. The external environment factors described in Chapter 8 formed the contexts of reception of the students in this study. It can be argued that the context of reception in combination with VET teachers' negative views about the relevance of their students' courses to the Australian industry also negatively influenced international students' approaches to learning.

Nonetheless, whilst many factors can influence students' outcomes, the school or RTO's internal environment and the student's environment outside school can combine to influence international student' performances, experiences, opportunities and priorities as well. In addition, this study suggests that fellow international students, who constitute the local social milieu and a large part of the students' contexts of reception and stay, can also influence international students' future perceptions about their RTOs.

Learner factors: characteristics, aspirations and expectations

The study also sought to explore and understand international students' backgrounds, why they were doing VET courses abroad, what their aspirations were and if these changed over time. It was shown in Chapter 5 that international students in this study were more diverse than what is readily acknowledged. International students in this study did not fit our traditional notions of a VET student – one unable to meet university entry-level requirements (Anderson et al., 2004).

Instead, international students in the study came with additional tertiary-level qualifications, in some cases post-graduate qualifications to do entry-level certificate courses in VET. They were mostly educated beyond the minimum entry-level requirements for a standard VET course in Australia (certificate three level courses). This shows the richness and diversity in the students' backgrounds that exist in TAFE and the private VET sector.

Overall, the international students' prior educational qualifications and experiences demonstrate why the concept 'international or overseas students' has remained elusive in both academic and social usages. Many scholars recognise the extent of this slippage, especially the lack of conceptual clarity or knowledge about the learning characteristics and aspirations of international students in VET (Arkoudis, 2007; Biggs, 1999; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Morrison et al., 2005). These researchers, especially in higher education studies, have shown that international students have been viewed as a homogeneous group with similar aspirations, learning styles and possibly outcomes.

Similarly, this study has shown that the single lens approach (deficit approach) that has been used in commercial for profit private VET RTOs to define international students' learning characteristics and aspirations results in negative overgeneralisations about their social capital, motivation, educational capabilities, aspirations and outcomes. International students in this study are diverse, heterogeneous, mostly young but experienced and well-educated students participating in VET with multi-focused aspirations and expectations (see Chapter 5).

Hence, the participation of international students in VET in Australia has introduced highly educated mostly younger students with far more diverse aspirations and expectations than ever before. They bring into the Australian VET system, higher education qualifications and multi-focused aspirations and diverse cultural and social characteristics that constitute an important input into the VET system in these providers and in Melbourne, Australia. These individual learner characteristics, the study argues, play an important role in the overall learning experience for the student.

International students' educational characteristics seldom emphasised

One of the most important contributions of this study is the characterisation of international students in the commercial for profit private VET sector in comparison with the normalised description of students in the VET sector that train for the labour market entry-level qualifications. It shows that international students' prior educational characteristics and experiences are barely emphasised in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study. It was shown in Chapter 5 that there were few international students enrolled in the Australian VET courses with no tertiary-level qualifications. Most international students (177 – 91 per cent) in this study had either a year 12 secondary education level or previous vocational or university qualifications.

We know that positive prior educational experiences are intricately intertwined with further education and training. 'Training involves and continues from what was learned in full-time education' (Wolf, 2002, p. 149). But in Australia, non-licensed VET courses have no minimum entry-level secondary education requirements (see auditors' comments in Chapter 5). As a result, international students in this study were enrolled in entry-level VET courses regardless of their previous qualifications or work experiences, which shows that international students respond to the Australian competitive VET market structure in creative and unpredicted ways. This inevitably creates unpredicted challenges to teacher work and practices if teacher practices are still informed by the traditional characterisations of a VET student referred to earlier.

Nonetheless, besides high tertiary-level prior qualifications, international students in

this study had multi-focused aspirations and expectations for the future. They wanted to pursue careers in their fields of training, acquire credentials they needed for higher-level study, start their own businesses and in the process gain Australian permanent residency, which demonstrates that the prevalent permanent residence (PR) visa characterisation of international students' aspirations and expectations in the Australian VET discourse is overly simplistic. It can therefore be argued that this simplistic characterisation of international students in the study in particular and possibly in VET in general has led to conceptual slippages in the definition of the nature of international students who are participating in VET in Australia – the genuine and non-genuine student is a typical example.

Indeed it can also be argued that the VET sector reform and subsequent restructure, which attracted full-fee paying international students, led to the lack of focus on international students' educational characteristics and lack of appreciation of their expectations and aspirations. It is illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5 that international students' purchasing power was more emphasised than the educational and social capital they carried. The international student's ability to pay tuition fees was the most important criterion used for their selection to participate in the Australian VET system. Whilst the notion of 'ability to pay' and its focus are justifiable in a market-based environment, the study argues that as a consequence, international students' expectations, aspirations and non-economic goals were overlooked.

Paradoxically, the assumptions of the competitive market-training environment are principles of equity, access and choice (Anderson, 2005). Yet, international students' ability to pay tuition fees only was emphasised for their enrolment. This can be taken to mean that this enrolment criterion discriminated against international students from low socio-economic status, or was not sufficiently equitable and accessible to some international students with limited financial resources and endowments and interests in their fields of study. Alternatively, this focus can be explained by using the competitive VET market structure, which encouraged the use of a single economic enrolment criterion that did not encourage recruiting institutions and their agencies to broaden the selection of international students based on other important non-economic prerequisites.

Overall, it can be concluded that the commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students' activities in this study were constrained by conventions that formed the basis of what can be judged as either successful or unsuccessful in competitive market contexts (labour and VET market contexts). Hence, the choices international students in this study made were limited by the existing circumstances and structural relationship dynamics in the competitive VET market. These market-based structural circumstances formed the mechanisms and relationships through which the international students could participate.

Rethinking international students' characteristics, goals and expectations outside the 'PR' visa prism

It was also shown in the preceding chapters that there are discourses embedded in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study in the general behaviour, methods of communication, teaching and the way international students and their VET providers are represented. It can be argued that the lack of focus on international students' background and the subsequent focus on their PR motives is a function of these prevalent discourses in the commercial for profit private VET providers in this study.

Yet the study findings show that international students are heterogeneous with multiple aspirations and expectations, which cannot be described in simplistic ways that can fit neat categories. As a result of this narrowing of the regimes of truths, the study has shown that there were noticeable mismatches between international students' aspirations and outcomes. It was shown in the preceding chapters that although the permanent residency visa was an important aspirational goal emphasised by most students in the study, getting a job was at the centre of most students' priorities in the outcomes survey. International students in the study used the VET system to build their capacities and the credentials they needed for higher-level study and to enter the job market – a pathway to a better future.

Indeed, the negative narratives of international students and their post training negative perspectives as reported in Chapter 6 are a typical illustration of the implications of these narrowing discourses. The study shows that international students' goals were seemingly elusive, especially gaining employment in their field of training and even the likely prospects of getting a permanent residency visa in Australia. These observations are consistent with the Australian Education International (AEI, 2010a, p. 7, parentheses added) findings, which show that 'graduates [international students] who were working in Australia had a slightly higher level of unemployment than those who returned home...' For those unemployed, AEI (2010a) findings show that the lack of work experience, lack of jobs in the international student graduate's field of practice and one's Australian residency status were common barriers they faced. This shows that there is a nexus of connections amongst the commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students' participation in VET in Melbourne and the structured interests, resources, constraints and predicaments that are built into the competitive VET market systems of human relationships.

However, international students' backpack of educational and socio-economic characteristics are the most important inputs international students bring into the VET sector in Australia. Ignoring these students' characteristics can impact negatively on the learning experiences needed to realise their aspirations. Indeed if vocational education and training is characterised or defined in narrow terms, for example migration and employment outcomes only, then the individual's non-economic goals and aspirations for the future are missed creating a mismatch between students' aspirations, expectations and outcomes.

Overall, this study shows that the education-migration discourses, set within a market-based model for VET in Melbourne and indeed in Australia, have led to a narrow focus on profit in the commercial for profit private VET providers in this study. It suggests that the competitive VET market focus manifested in the 'one size fits all' approach in the training packages nomenclature, VET policy structures, and the commercial for profit private VET RTO business processes can constrain international students' learning in the sector.

International students' outcomes: credential to employment myth?

The study also sought to understand and explain international students' outcomes and perspectives after completing VET courses at these private RTOs in Melbourne. The study's outcomes survey was able to provide findings in relation to learners' journeys through vocational education and training. From the graduates' stories, the study was able to get an account of their experiences in relation to their expectations, which helped to offer useful insights into where the overseas student graduates were relative to where they started upon enrolment in VET courses in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study.

The study found that there were fewer international students with prior university-level qualifications from business family backgrounds that enrolled to do VET courses in Melbourne than from other family backgrounds. Most international students who participated in the outcomes survey who held a degree or better qualification at enrolment came from working-class and farming family backgrounds. This finding illustrates a complex interplay between the students' broad status, aspirational goals and possibilities constructed around socially acceptable choices.

In this study, international students' social statuses were identified and analysed relative to their study outcomes. It was shown in Chapter 6 that international students from a range of socio-economic categories participated in commercial for profit private providers in the study. This suggests that some international students and their families no longer perceive VET as a preserve for students from low socio-economic status only or families see this training as a stepping-stone in pursuit of other priorities.

Whilst status categorisations are important to track the consequences for international students' participation in VET, they are also important in giving us insights into the social influences mediating their choices. These insights are indeed helpful to VET providers and trainers in understanding international students' characteristics, aspirations and expectations. From these insights and knowledge, VET providers and

their trainers can re-examine their own perceptions and critically assess their pedagogic practices to ensure that they are relevant to the learning needs of all international students. However, the potential dangers or consequences for pursuing a VET career pathway in Melbourne, as illustrated in this study's outcomes survey findings, are manifested in the jobs and pathways international students chose.

Drawing from the international students' outcomes analysed in Chapter 6, it can be concluded that none of the graduates' significant characteristics and experiences were considered important for their enrolment into VET courses. Subsequently, most of them were employed in fields unrelated to their vocational training. The international students' outcomes, as the evidence tends to suggest, give merit to the argument that vocational education serves to select, differentiate and allocate basic practical skills to students from low socio-economic circumstances that tend to marginalise the student thus reproducing social inequalities.

To illustrate the above point, Jaspreet's journey and circumstances are revisited. Jaspreet came from a farming family background. He is unemployed and looking for work. Jaspreet felt that his training in Melbourne '*was a complete waste of time*'. He was strongly disappointed with his learning and training experiences. This example typifies one of the many unintended consequences for international students' participation in entry-level Australian VET courses in Melbourne. Jaspreet's circumstances, as were other similar circumstances illustrated in the study, are consistent with the observations made by Birrel and Healy (2008) and Hawthorne (2010). Their work shows that many international student graduates secure Australian work only at the cost of severe deskilling in low skilled jobs with large numbers in clerical, manufacturing or sales employment. This helps to explain the international students' dissatisfaction with their learning experiences and employment outcomes in this study.

Whilst it can be argued that international students did not have a choice, what we also learn from their actions is that when they failed to act in their own interests, they incurred costs by choosing to work in jobs that did not recognise their skills or related to their VET qualifications. Chapter 6 shows that most international students worked

in jobs where their skills were not sufficiently used or in areas that were not associated with their previously held qualifications. There were mismatches between their qualifications, skills levels and work requirements.

In addition, the evidence from the outcomes survey shows that more than half of the respondents chose the further education and training pathway. Out of 17 international students still studying, seven students were studying a university course whilst 10 were still studying another VET course. This shows that besides the focus on immediate utilitarian gains, there is a large pool of international students who are motivated to improve their academic standing – a positive outcome for some. This suggests that some of the international students in the study benefited from the existing VET-University pathways offered by some universities in Australia.

Learner support, instruction and interaction for international students

It was shown in Chapter 7 that teacher perceptions and dispositions towards their students are important in influencing the learning environment, particularly the students' attitudes towards the teacher and subsequent learning. This suggests that situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs cannot be fully understood outside teacher practices and work. This view is also acknowledged in the McKinsey and Company's 2007 report, which argues that 'the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (McKinsey and Company's 2007 report cited in Wheelahan, 2010, p. 3). In addition, good teaching can be undermined by poor quality systems (Wheelahan, 2010).

The VET teachers' professional judgements, intentions and perceptions in this study are captured in Chapters 4 and 7, particularly the perceptions they hold about international students' aspirations. The study suggests that these teacher professional judgements, intentions and perceptions have consequences for international students' outcomes. They influence teachers' choices and students' approaches to learning.

For example, the following teacher's comments - '*My students are not interested in*

the courses I teach; it's just an easy way to Permanent Residence (PR); there are a lot of employment opportunities but I think PR makes this course attractive' – suggest there may be limited appreciation of the pedagogic consequences amongst VET teachers of their views towards their teaching approaches and students' outcomes.

Alternatively, the example of the VET teacher's comments above may reflect the dynamics of the Australian VET market-based contexts, which show that teachers are now confronted with complex and invariably changing teaching and learning environments. It also suggests the existence of critical discourses in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study and helps explain their lack of confidence in the employability skills of their students. These VET teachers' perceptions and expectations about their students are important; they shape the lens through which complex pedagogic choices are made.

Moreover, this lack of confidence in the employability capacities of international students represents a deficit VET teacher perspective about them. These views are consistent with observations made by Biggs (1999, 2003) and others in higher education studies of international students. Their findings show that a deficit model is sometimes used to teach international students in the higher education sector.

However, according to Biggs (1999), the negative characteristics international students present, in higher education, are prevalent amongst all students and even those who use English as a first language. Other researchers also argue that indeed there are particular problems associated with second language learners that cannot be ignored and any pedagogy premised on the deficit of international students is the crudest of teaching approaches – it does not support learning (Arkoudis, 2007; Biggs, 1999; Carroll & Ryan, 2005).

In this study, the evidence shows that VET teachers' negative perceptions together with less than ideal learning contexts combined to influence negatively the learning environment in these private VET RTOs. It can be argued that VET teacher's perceptions and expectations about their students shape the lenses through which

complex pedagogic choices are made, impacting especially on international students, whose expectations and challenges are greater.

The consequences of teacher dispositions are illustrated in the analyses of international students' outcomes in Chapter 6, which shows that many felt their courses '*were a complete waste of time*'. They were also unhappy with their educational and employment outcomes. Despite their prior educational qualifications and experiences, most ended up working as taxi or truck drivers, assemblers, factory hands or assistants. A large proportion was either unemployed or looking for work. These students' outcomes suggest that there were considerable mismatches between international students' VET qualifications and the jobs they were employed to do, supporting the perspectives expressed by VET teachers about the adequacy of both context and content specific learning resources in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study.

Ballantine (2001, p. 224) argues,

Our beliefs about schools are affected by the teacher, by the atmosphere of the classroom, by events taking place outside the school and by our own perceptions and interpretations.

Therefore, there is merit in the argument that the VET market contexts of training delivery including teacher dispositions and perceptions about students in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study were important in influencing international students' learning contexts. It seems that VET teacher perceptions and dispositions in these contexts influenced their performative approaches to teaching and learning for international students.

It is therefore reasonable to argue that the structure of the courses, teachers' perceptions and the pedagogic choices VET teachers made were not sufficiently interactive to stimulate the learners to gain the skills they needed for employment and work. Although training packages, which are based on the CBT model of delivery and assessment insist on workplace simulation and practice, VET teachers used mostly traditional and face-to-face delivery methods to deliver VET courses in these VET providers. This shows that learner context-based support and encouragement relevant

for context-based learning activities were limited. Hence it can be argued that the VET teachers' positive or negative perceptions of what can and cannot be done in these providers influenced the availability of tools to deliver courses; tools relevant for skills acquisition. These teacher perceptions, dispositions and practices are also important inputs into the private VET market system in the delivery of entry-level courses to international students. In addition, the constraints that VET teachers in turn work within (private VET markets) are also important inputs into the delivery of courses to international students.

Implications for VET practices

This study has identified and analysed situated factors influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for private VET RTOs in the study in Melbourne, Australia. Whilst the outcomes survey sample was small, the study nonetheless offers rare insights into their experiences. It showed that policy imperatives (interpretation and reinterpretation of policy), training packages implementation, teacher quality and pedagogic choices, teaching and learning resources in a business environment influenced commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in the this study, particularly international students' aspirations, experiences and outcomes. It suggests there were limited benefits gained by the international VET students participating in this form of VET in commercial for profit private VET providers in this study.

It is also argued that what is taught through the training packages defines what valid knowledge is and how it is transmitted or taught (Wheelahan, 2008). At their inception, training packages were implemented when it was clear they could not adequately cater for students who were unemployed or not employed in areas related to their studies (Smith & Keating, 2003). All quality assurance auditors, all training managers, most trainers and most international students in this study acknowledged that workplace training and practical training activities were inadequate at most private VET RTOs included in this study. Whilst Smith and Keating (2003) are not against training packages, their observations are consistent with the observations made by most respondents in this study. Training packages cannot be adequately delivered when the student is unemployed or employed in areas not related to their

studies. Therefore, it can be concluded that training packages posed significant delivery limitations for these small commercial for profit private VET RTOs. It suggests a review of the training packages model is needed.

Overall, although commercial for profit private VET RTO environments differ in their focus and change over time, the importance of the environment does not change (Ballantine, 2001). The study showed that environmental factors – internal and external – were instrumental in influencing *what* and *how* international students' were learning. It also showed that the current market model for VET may be privileging profit over learning, significantly altering the relationships between commercial for profit private VET RTOs, training managers, VET teachers, quality assurance auditors and international students.

The thesis has also identified and defined key international students' characteristics, their multiple aspirations, expectations, and priorities and how these are related to their learning and outcomes. The factors identified challenge our normalised perceptions of VET students in general and international students in VET in particular. The study showed that the international students in this study are not a homogeneous group with similar aspirations, priorities and expectations. This finding illustrates that we may need to recast our conceptions about international VET students in order to encompass wider criteria for enrolment, delivery approaches, students' priorities and aspirations. It suggests that our notions of these students should move beyond a deficit model to include the most notable positive student characteristics highlighted in this study.

Drawing from the international students' demographic characteristics identified in this study, one can argue in support of enrolment criteria with differentiated entry-levels for specific VET courses. This approach has been used successfully in the schooling and university systems where students are enrolled after meeting certain minimum entry-level educational standards. At operational level, commercial for profit private VET RTOs and possibly public RTOs should be encouraged to diagnose their prospective students' characteristics and priorities prior to enrolment.

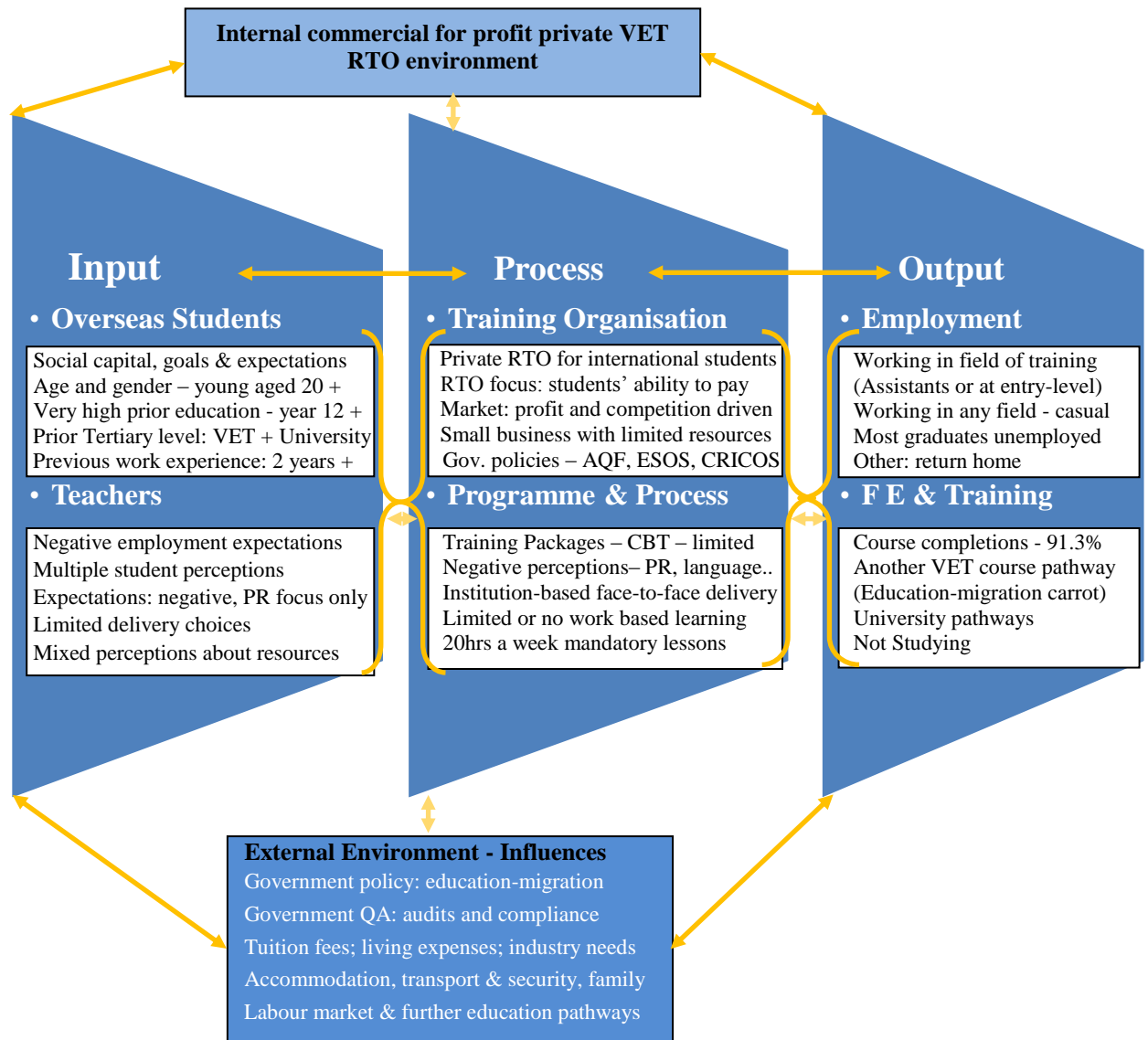
Categories of situated realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne

In summary, the illustration below (Figure 18), using the general systems model, offers a useful summative reflection of the situated realities influencing international students in the commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study in Melbourne, Australia. This classification, according to Ballantine (2001), offers us an opportunity to get a total picture of the whole system (education process – the school's internal systems, students, teachers and quality assurance based factors). It helps us to understand how complex factors influencing international students in commercial for profit private RTOs in this study fit together whilst allowing us to visualise the important but complex elements of the education system and its relationships.

In Figure 18, the categorisation of factors influencing international students' outcomes consists of elements interacting, that is, inputs feeding into the educational organisational process (teaching and learning, including other resources) from which outputs are derived and a feedback loop linking the input and the process. The revolving doors imagery has been used to emphasise the dynamic nature of the factors influencing international students' outcomes in a competitive VET market environment. The yellow coloured 'arrows represent a feedback loop, which enables constant adaptation and change of the processes of education and training' where this is practised (Ballantine, 2001, p. 18). This constant adaption ensures that the components of the education system remain aligned and relevant to the broad purposes of education and training. The revolving doors illustration also suggests that the factors emphasised now can change with changes in government policies, international students' participation and composition, private VET sector profitability and community expectations.

The situated factors that influenced international students' outcomes in this study are summarised in Figure 18 below. It shows the input, process and output factors implicated in influencing international students' outcomes in this study.

Figure 18 Categorisations of factors influencing overseas students' outcomes



N=194

Figure 18 shows that, in this study, the providers' input dimension is characterised by international students' prior educational characteristics and VET teachers' perspectives. It shows that most international students came from diverse social backgrounds; had shifting goals and expectations; were mostly young aged; most of them held very high prior education - year 12 to tertiary level; and had previous work experience. Yet, whilst international students in this study carried a backpack of prior educational and employment experiences, VET providers in this study emphasised the students' PR motives only; they did not emphasise the students' prior learning and employment experiences.

In addition, VET teachers mostly added mixed perspectives about their students to the input dimension of their private VET RTOs, which included negative employment expectations; negative multiple student perceptions about expectations – focused on PR motives only. Figure 18 also shows that VET teachers in this study expressed concerns about the availability of teaching and learning resources, which limited course delivery choices. Overall, their views about the teaching and learning environments in their providers were mostly negative.

Figure 18 also shows that the process dimension (teaching and learning process) in these providers was characterised by institutional focuses on the profit motive; limited teaching and learning resources; stringent regulatory requirements; training packages delivered on a fixed time frame; face-to-face delivery; and limited or no workplace training. In addition, government policy dimensions: education-migration nexus, government audits and compliance requirements also influenced the providers' external and internal environments. At the same time, international students' external environment was also characterised by tuition fees imposts; living expenses and accommodation; transport and security; and shifting labour market and further education pathways.

The commercial for profit private VET providers' outcomes (education system outcomes), which are also international students' outcomes, show that although 93 per cent of the students in this study (outcomes survey) completed their courses, most of them were working in fields of training as assistants or at entry-level. Some of them were working in any field as casual labour whilst others were unemployed and a few returning home after graduation. It can be argued that further education and training pathways and employment opportunities were important in influencing the students' choices.

Overall, Figure 18 shows that most of the situated factors in these private VET providers' education system are not interconnected and interrelated with international students' educational expectations and aspirations reported earlier in this study. Alternatively, this can be taken to mean that international students' outcomes cannot

be understood in isolation but in relation to the other components of the education system.

In addition, Figure 18 helps us to make a critical analysis of the degree of congruence or fit amongst the competitive VET market system components in this study. The evidence suggests that the relationships amongst these factors were not effective in producing positive student experiences and outcomes. Hence it can be argued that the competitive VET market system strategy may not be congruent with the other components of the system and that the other components of the system do not support each other. The VET market system's actual results manifested in these private VET RTOs' international students' outcomes, the contestations in the definition of quality training in VET and the interpretations of policy in this study all contrasted sharply with international students' expectations.

We started on the main assumption that the growth in international students' participation in the Australian VET system was not accompanied by sufficient empirical studies that could critically analyse overseas students' characteristics, experiences and outcomes, provider delivery contexts and contextual policy imperatives. This study has demonstrated that there may be limited understanding of the aspirations and characteristics of international students participating in commercial for profit private VET RTOs. It can be argued that this suggests that this lack of understanding of international students' characteristics and commercial for profit private RTO delivery contexts has led to unhelpful institutional relationships and perceptions.

In addition, the study shows that the current VET sector environment, particularly commercial for profit private VET providers, may not be adequately prepared to deliver quality training to international students. One would further argue that the restructure of the VET sector using the concept of a competitive training market has negatively altered the webs of relationships between and amongst international students, policy expectations and commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study. It can be suggested that this observation can be cautiously applied to other similar contexts across Australia.

The mixed methods approach

The mixed methods approach used in this study offered a strong empirical platform to generate five data sets – international students’ baseline and outcomes surveys, VET teacher surveys and commercial for profit private VET RTO training managers’ and quality assurance auditors’ interviews. These data sets were used in the analysis of the complex and diverse ways in which international students are perceived and perform in order to further their aspirations after studying VET courses in commercial for profit private VET providers in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing these international students’ outcomes.

To gather these data, the study used a longitudinal survey of international students, surveyed their teachers, and interviewed their training managers and quality assurance auditors. These data were analysed using both thematic and interpretive approaches. This data analysis approach offered the researcher comparative opportunities and tools to analyse different participant worldviews whilst capturing mobile and shifting realities in a market-based model for VET in Melbourne, Australia. Through the triangulation of the study findings from both qualitative and quantitative methods, complex and different situated dimensions influencing international students’ outcomes in seven commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study operating in a market model for VET in Melbourne, Australia were analysed.

At a methodological level, the mixed methods approach enabled the application of a wide-angle lens to holistically analyse the complexity of the study sites and the experiential and interpretive views prevalent in the commercial for profit private VET provider contexts in the study. Hence it allowed the researcher to grasp the interpretations and reinterpretation of policies, practices and consequences for international students’ participation in this form of VET.

The seven commercial for profit private VET providers involved in the study were typical of private vocational training spaces accessible to many international students

in Melbourne. Compared with the public vocational training space, the study shows that the commercial for profit private vocational training sphere for international students is a complex training market that is different from the normalised public VET system in Australia.

The mixed methods approach adopted thus offered the researcher opportunities and tools for delineating and drawing out different participant perspectives whilst capturing the core situated and invariably shifting perspectives of those holding influential positions in the system. It also allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences in the competitive private market environment. Complex narratives and perspectives about the important factors influencing international students' outcomes were exposed and analysed. In addition, the study identified and revealed that policy imperatives or tendencies and individual international students' expectations and perspectives are rooted not in one but many contextual levels; factors which a single lens methodological approach could not adequately canvas.

The empirical strength of this study lies in its use of a multi-sited approach to generate data and examine the diverse ways in which the delivery of training in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study is performed, constructed and contested. The mixed methods approach enabled the researcher to provide insights into and knowledge about situated realities influencing international students from different perspectives. It also provided insights into knowledge about overseas students in commercial for profit private RTOs in the study.

By using the longitudinal study of the international students in these commercial for profit private VET RTOs, the study was able to provide findings in relation to the learners' journeys through vocational education and training in Melbourne. As a consequence, the international students' characteristics, intentions, outcomes and the pathways they chose were made visible. It can be argued that without using the mixed methods approach, these student factors and other contextual factors in a market model for VET could not otherwise be thoroughly examined.

The study findings were finally categorised using the general systems theory categories of input, process and outputs in order to provide a holistic and integrated characterisation of the market-based structural factors influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in the study.

A case for further studies

In our exploration of definitional issues, we identified that there was no single consistent or commonly accepted definition of international students in use in the VET sector in Australia. Indeed there is no 'generic essentialised adult learner who can be accurately described....' (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 55). It is in fact difficult to have a generic description that can accurately portray adult international or overseas students in VET or in commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study or more generally. One would suggest that training organisations in Australia need to take greater care in analysing the characteristics of their prospective students and in offering clear categorisations that assist in recruiting and supporting international students.

Although the thesis provided data that were used to critically analyse situated factors influencing international students' outcomes in commercial for profit private registered vocational training organisation in the study, further research on overseas students' characteristics and the consequences of their participation more broadly in Australian VET is important. This would add further insights into and knowledge about how the VET sector can adequately deliver vocational education and training that can meet international students' aspirations and expectations whilst improving the private VET sector's contribution to the Australian skills training efforts. Indeed this will enhance the way educational and occupational pathways are conceptualised, which must be realistic and inclusive of the idea of the students' broad aspirations, values and goals.

As for the marketisation of the VET sector, it has generated mixed results for the training organisations and international students. It seems the fundamental problem with the education markets is that they are designed so that some providers and some

students fail (Lauder et al., 1999). It can be argued that as a consequence, our educational landscape is littered with winners and losers; a product of the provider profitability focuses; limited teaching and learning resources and possible misalignment between international students' Australian VET qualifications, labour market dictates and employer expectations.

Recent official reports show that in 2011-2012 approximately 10 per cent of all registered providers did not meet the required national standards. For the period 2012-2013, 'ASQA gave 134 written notices to cancel or suspend the registration of providers representing a 132 per cent increase from the previous year' (ASQA, 2013, p. 17). This shows, as this study does, that there are issues of policy compliance and quality training standards in the VET sector and some commercial for profit private VET RTOs in Australia. Some private VET RTOs in Australia have been closed for commercial reasons and non-compliance with the existing AQF regulatory frameworks (VRQA, 2010; ASQA, 2013). But, how much do we know about the outcomes of international students who are arguably highly vulnerable and possibly without the resources to exercise choice in a growing marketised model for VET? The commercial for profit private VET provider sector, in particular for international students, is presently under-researched. Borrowing Unwin's terminology they 'are 'the unseen world', '*a black box*' and 'their clients are even more invisible' (cited in Harris et al., 2006 p. 11).

This thesis has also shown that the tertiary education sector's structure has dramatically changed since the increased participation of private VET providers and international students. As a result, the demands confronting the VET teacher now are more complex than ever before. The complex market-based private VET sector today '...requires a full complement of teachers' knowledge and skills in order to be able to practice at an expert level in routine and non-routine situations' (Robertson, 2008, p. 18). Indeed more research is needed on the nature, qualifications and quality of today's VET teacher.

The commercial for profit private VET market for international students is economically and educationally significant to the students and to the Australian

economy. But, besides this study, there has been little empirical evaluation of the commercial for profit private VET sector for international students in Australia. This is the first study in Australia that has provided a strong and comprehensive empirical evaluation of the impact and outcomes of international students in a selection of commercial for profit private VET providers. It has demonstrated that there is an urgent need for a rethink of how we define international students in VET and how they can participate in the commercial for profit private VET sector in Australia so that we can produce a highly skilled, competitive and flexible global workforce.

In conclusion, the study provided evidence which demonstrated that the reorganisation of the Australian VET system using the neoliberal market concept of supply and demand altered the structure of institutional relationships between commercial for profit private VET RTOs and international students. It showed that the competitive VET market system structure does not support, or is not congruent with, the other components of the system and that the other components of the system do not support each other. The neoliberal competitive training market contexts; policy discourses; commercial for profit private VET RTO priorities and motives; international students' diversity, aspirations and experiences; VET teacher qualifications, perceptions and pedagogic choices; and the external environmental factors formed the most important dimensions or mechanisms that influenced international students' outcomes in the commercial for profit private VET RTOs in this study. One would suggest that unfortunately this may also be the case in these providers more generally across Australia.

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Appendix 1

Overseas students' baseline questionnaire

Please answer all questions

1. What is the name of your school/RTO?

.....

2. How did you hear about your VET course?

College advertisement	Immigration agent (Local)	Immigration agent (home country)	Newspaper advertisement	Internet	Friend or family

Other

.....

3. What is the country of your citizenship/residency?

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> India | <input type="checkbox"/> China | <input type="checkbox"/> Nepal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South Africa | <input type="checkbox"/> Sri Lanka | <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladesh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Republic of Korea | <input type="checkbox"/> Malaysia | <input type="checkbox"/> Thailand |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnam | <input type="checkbox"/> Indonesia | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brazil | | |

Other

.....

4. What is your gender?

Male	Female

5. What is your age?

.....

6. What is your highest secondary educational level? (put a cross in the box that best describes your high school level)

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Year 8 or below | <input type="checkbox"/> Year 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> Year 10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Year 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Year 12 | |

Other

.....

7. What is your highest Tertiary Education level?

None	VET certificate	VET Diploma	Trade certificate	Bachelor degree or higher

8. Have you ever been employed? If No go to question 10

Yes	No

9. Years of previous work experience

1-2years	3-5years	5 years +

10. What is the name and level of the course you are enrolled in? (include course code)

.....

.....

.....

11. How do you presently rate this course?

Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good

12. Regarding the course you are doing, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school/RTO?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My RTO is delivering what they promised in the advertisement				
There are adequate learning materials for all theory lessons				
There are adequate learning materials for practical lessons				
I expect government regulations to protect me from unfair RTO practices				
My RTO policies are clear and helpful				
My trainers display a thorough understanding of our needs				
Overall, my RTO is highly regarded for quality training				

13. a. Given a choice, in your country, would you have chosen to do the course you are currently doing?

Yes	No

b. If No, please explain

.....

.....

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.....

14. What do you expect to gain from this VET course?

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.....

15. Based on your educational experiences in Australia; how do you rate Australian vocational education and training?

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.....

.....

16. What do you want to do after this course? After completing this course I want to ..

a. Gain residency/return

Gain Australian permanent residency	Gain Australian citizenship	Go back to my home country

b. Work

Work in the field of my training	Work in a field associated with my training	Work in any field

c. Further education and training

Another VET course	Higher VET diploma	Bachelor's degree at University	Post graduate degree at University

Other (please specify)

.....

17. How are you meeting the costs of your educational expenses? (put a cross in the box that best describes how you pay for your education)

Part time job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents back home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scholarship	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other, please specify

.....

18. If you work to fund your education, select a statement/s which best describe/s your working situation (put a cross in the boxes/box that best describes your situation)

It was not easy to find a job in Melbourne	<input type="checkbox"/>
I work in the farms outside Melbourne	<input type="checkbox"/>
I always work night shifts and attend classes during the day	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it hard to keep up with my job and school at the same time	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have to work 2 jobs to support myself	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other, please specify

.....

19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following living conditions in Melbourne (put a cross in the box that best describes your opinion)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is difficult to find accommodation in Melbourne				
I find accommodation very expensive in Melbourne				
My accommodation is very far away from work and school				
It is very unsafe to travel at night				
I share accommodation with friends				
My RTO is helping us through student support services				
I travel every day for more than 2 hours to school or work				
I find public transport very expensive				
I find public transport very unreliable				
I am finding it difficult to settle in Melbourne				
I am expected to do too much for my education				
My course fees are extremely high for the course				
Overall life is very expensive in Melbourne				

20. We would like to ask you some more questions when you have finished your course. Are you willing to be contacted by the researcher?

Yes I agree	No I do not agree

21. If yes, please provide your details

Name:

.....

Home Telephone number

.....

Mobile number:

.....

Another mobile number

.....

Email address:

.....

.....

Postal address:

.....

.....

Thank you for your participation.

The end

Appendix 2

International students' outcomes questionnaire

1. Name:

2. What is the country of your citizenship/residency?

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> India | <input type="checkbox"/> China | <input type="checkbox"/> Nepal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South Africa | <input type="checkbox"/> Sri Lanka | <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladesh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Republic of Korea | <input type="checkbox"/> Malaysia | <input type="checkbox"/> Thailand |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnam | <input type="checkbox"/> Indonesia | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brazil | | |

Other

.....

3. Gender

Male	Female

4. Last year you told us you were doing a VET course (the course you are or were enrolled in) at an Australian private RTO (your college or institute). Did you complete it?

Yes	No

If Yes – GO TO Q9

If NO – GO TO Q5

5. What is the main reason you did not complete your VET course? Tick the box opposite the statement that best describes your reason.

My personal circumstance changed	
I got a job/ working now	
I could not cope with the study demands	
I deferred	
I could not afford it	
I did not like the course	
I continued with further studies	

Other

.....

6. Are you still enrolled in a VET course?

- Yes (Go to Q7)
- No (Go to Q9)

7. If yes, are you currently enrolled with the previous/same RTO?

- Yes
- No

8. What is the name of your current RTO?

.....
.....
.....

9. What is the name of your previous RTO?

.....
.....

10. What is the name/s of your previous VET course/s? (Include course code/s)

.....
.....

11. Have you completed all the training required to gain the qualification awarded as specified in your confirmation of enrolment at your last RTO?

- Yes
- No (Go to 13)

12. What is/are the level/s of VET qualification/s awarded to you after course completion?

- Certificate II
- Certificate III
- Certificate IV
- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma
- (Go to question 15)

13. What course/s are you currently enrolled in?

- Advanced Diploma
- Bachelors' Degree or Higher
- Another VET course
- None

14. If you changed your first RTO, why did you decide not to continue with your VET course at the last RTO?

- a. I changed my training goals
- b. I started a new course at another RTO
- c. The training was not what I expected
- d. I achieved my training goals
- e. I got a job
- f. Personal reasons

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your last VET course?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I developed the skills I needed from this VET course.				
I developed the knowledge expected from this VET course.				
The training developed me well for work.				
The training had a good mix of theory and practice.				
The training focused on relevant skills.				
The training helped me learn how to plan and manage my work.				
The training was flexible enough to meet my needs.				
The way I was assessed was a test of my skills and knowledge.				
Overall I am satisfied with the training I received.				

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your trainers during your last VET course?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My VET course trainers had an excellent knowledge of the subject/s.				
My VET course trainers explained things clearly.				
My VET course trainers made the course easy and possible.				
My VET course trainers made the subject as interesting as possible.				
My VET course trainers encouraged learners to ask questions.				
My VET course trainers made it clear from the start what was expected from me.				
My VET course trainers gave useful feedback on my assessments.				

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your RTO?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My RTO gave me recognition of my existing knowledge and skills.				
My RTO provided me necessary training resources when I needed them.				
My RTO gave me enough material to keep me interested.				
My RTO used up-to-date training equipment, facilities and materials.				
My RTO offered sufficient workplace training experience.				
My RTO had a variety of services to support learners.				
I looked for my own resources to help me learn.				
My RTO's training facilities and materials were in good working condition.				
My RTO staff respected my background and needs				
Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of training I received at my RTO.				

18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and your environment?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
As result of my VET course, my self-confidence increased.				
As a result of my VET course, I feel confident about the future.				
As a result of my VET course, I can readily relate to others.				
As result of my VET course, I am able to work well in teams.				
As a result of my VET course, my understanding of the community has improved.				
As a result of my VET course, my standing in my home country community has improved.				

19. Are you currently employed

- Yes (Go to Q20)
 No (Go to Q24)

20. What is your current occupation/job

.....

21. Is the type of job you have the type of job you would like as a career?

Yes	No

22. If you are employed, (question 24 for those unemployed) to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your current occupation?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am working in the field of my last VET course.				
My VET course was practical and relevant to my current job.				
My VET course made it easy for me to get this job.				
My VET course gave me skills and knowledge that are highly regarded at work.				
My VET course helped me develop my ability to work.				
My current income is consistent with my expectations.				
Overall, my VET course is relevant to my current job.				

23. How long did it take you to find a job after undertaking your VET course?

- Less than one month
- One to three months
- Four to six months
- Six months plus

24. If you are unemployed, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (put a cross in the box that best describes your opinion).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am still struggling to find a job relevant to my area of training.				
Doing this course has not helped improve my life situation.				
Continuously changing visa regulations are affecting my stay.				
I still find it difficult to find accommodation close to work and school.				
I am still sharing accommodation				
I am still struggling to cope with the demands of life.				
I travel every day for more than 2 hours to school.				
I find public transport very expensive.				
I find public transport very unreliable.				
My future career prospects are not looking bright.				

25. Did your VET course help you to achieve your main goals?

- Yes
- No
- Partly
- Don't know yet

26. Regarding the general learning environment during your VET course, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My RTO delivered what they promised us at enrolment.				
We were given adequate time to learn and practice.				
During my VET course, changing student visa regulations made me feel uncertain about the future.				
Government regulations helped to protect us.				
I was allowed to express my views about matters affecting my training.				
My RTO used satisfaction surveys to find out how we felt about training.				
My RTO policies helped to improve our learning environment.				
My educational agent was very helpful during my VET course.				
I had to work in order to financially support myself.				
I always worked night shifts and attended class during the day.				
My VET course training environment was appropriate for the course				

27. Would you recommend the VET course you have undertaken to others?

- Yes
 No

28. Would you recommend the RTO where you undertook the VET course to others?

- Yes
 No

29. As a guide to occupational changes over generations, please describe the main occupation of your parents or guardians. If currently not working, please indicate the main occupation when working. (Check one box only for each parent or guardian)

	Mother / female guardian	Father/male guardian
Small business owner		
Big business owner		
Farmer		
Skilled Trade		
Manager/Supervisor		
Office, clerical, administration		
Professional job (doctor, teacher, engineer)		
Home duties		

30. Which of the following job-related benefits do you think you have received as a result of undertaking your training?

- I was promoted
- Increase in earnings
- Easily change jobs
- Was able to set up my own business
- Got a job

31. If you are employed, on what basis are you employed in your current job?

- Wage/salary earner
- Conducting own business
- Nil or unemployed

32. What were the best aspects of your training?

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.....

33. What aspects of your training were MOST in need of improvement?

.....

.....

.....

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.....

.....

Thank you for your participation.

The End

Appendix 3

VET trainers' questionnaire

1. What is the name of your RTO?

.....
.....
.....

2. Name and level of the course/s you are delivering to international students:
(include course code)

a.

.....
.....

b.

.....
.....

c.

.....
.....

NB: From the courses you listed above, select one that is most popular with international students to answer the following questions.

3. If you teach more than one course, from the courses you listed in 2 above, name the course most popular with international students

.....
.....
.....

4. What makes this course popular with international students?

.....
.....
.....

5. Why are the rest of the courses unpopular with international students?

.....
.....
.....

6. Given your experience delivering this VET course you mention in 3 above, at the end of the course, how skilled and employment ready are your international students becoming?

Very ready	Ready	Not very ready	Not ready at all

7. If you have chosen Not Ready or Not Very Ready, could you please explain why this is the case?

.....

8. On average, what percentages of international students complete the VET course you teach?

20%-less	40-59%	60-79%	80-100%

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the VET course (you selected at 3 above) you teach international students

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The VET course I teach help international students get a job				
I have a thorough knowledge of the VET course I teach				
I always make the course easy and possible				
The way I assess international students in the VET courses I teach is a fair test of their skills				
There is sufficient workplace experience for international students				
The VET course I deliver gives my students confidence to get a job				
The VET course I teach helps international students get a job anywhere in the world				
The VET course I teach has kept international students' options of going to university open				
The VET course I teach helps international students develop problem solving skills				
The VET course I teach gives international students self-confidence				
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of VET course I teach international students at my RTO				

10. How do you rate the adequacy of your RTO's practical training resources for the delivery of the course you are responsible for?

Type of practical resource	Response			
	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
Demonstration kits				
Practice units				
Workplace Simulators				
Work -experience placements				
Workplace tools				

Other (specify)

.....

.....

.....

11. Are most of your VET students currently employed in the field of their VET course?

Yes	No	Don't know

12. How do you rate the adequacy of your RTO's theory learning resources?

Type of learning resource	Response			
	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
Books				
Information hand outs				
Workbooks				
Library				
E-learning laboratory				
Classrooms				
Assessment tools				
Demonstration manuals				

Other (specify)

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about employment outcomes for international students who complete the VET course you teach?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
International students who complete the VET course I teach are employed in the field of their VET course				
The VET course I teach is practical and relevant to industry jobs				
The VET course I teach makes it easy for international students to get jobs				
The skills and knowledge I deliver in my VET course are highly regarded at work				
The VET course I teach helps international students develop ability to work				
Overall, the VET course I teach is relevant to industry job expectations				

14. Do you think the following government and RTO initiatives are helping to improve the quality of your VET students' outcomes?

Initiatives	Response	
	YES	NO
Government audits		
Recruitment policy (guidelines for RTO student recruitments)		
Attendance policy		
Assessment policy		
Re-assessment policy		
Training Packages		
Trainer conditions of employment		
Teaching and learning hours per week		

15. Regarding the VET course you are teaching, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your private RTO for international students?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My RTO delivers what they promise international students				
International students are given adequate time to learn and practise				
There are adequate learning materials for all theory lessons				
There are adequate learning materials for practical lessons				
Government regulations help to protect international students from unfair RTO practices				
My RTO's policies are helping to improve the teaching and learning environment				
My RTO's trainers understand student needs				
Overall, my RTO is highly regarded for quality training				

16. What do you think motivates your students to do this course? (Place an 'X' against the statement/s that best describe your opinion/s)

Permanent Residency	
Jobs availability in Australia	
Jobs availability in their home countries	
Improved personal status	
Pathway to university	

Other, please specify

.....

17. What are the commonest delivery methods you use for your course at your RTO? (Place a tick next to the delivery method/s you regularly use)

Lecture	
Discussion	
Assignments	
Practical demonstrations	
Workshop	
Seminar	
Chalk and Talk	
Presentations	
Self-paced learning	
Videos	

Other, please specify

.....
.....
.....

18. a. Overall, are there any factors that limit your ability to deliver this course?

Yes	No

b. If your answer to 18a above is yes, what are the factors that limit you ability to deliver your course?

.....
.....
.....

19. There are factors that influence student performance. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the extent of influence of the following factors on student performance?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Language barriers				
Student educational background				
Course delivery time				
Commercial realities (costs and profits)				
Government regulations				
Student attendance				
Assessment methods				
Work commitments				
Teaching style				

Other (please specify)

.....
.....
.....

20. Would you recommend the VET course you are teaching to international students?

Yes	No

21. We would like to ask you some follow-up questions at a later date. Are you willing to be contacted by the researcher?

Yes I agree	No I do not agree

22. If yes you agree to be contacted by the researcher at a later date if necessary, please provide your details

Name:

.....
.....

Home Telephone number

.....

Mobile number

.....

Another mobile number

.....

Email address

.....

Postal address

.....

.....

Thank you for participating in this project.

The end

Appendix 4

Commercial for profit private VET RTO training manager interview guide

1. What are the internal organisational contextual realities influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne Victoria?
2. Briefly describe the role of your RTO in the existing Vocational Education and Training context in Melbourne Victoria and Australia broadly.
3. Your organisation (RTO) was rated highly by the students we surveyed at the beginning of this year, what do you attribute this high regard to?
4. A significant proportion of trainers surveyed during my last survey highly rated the training practices of private RTOs in Melbourne, but one third of them had no confidence in the employability skills of their students.

What is your opinion about these two contrasting views?
5. How do you recruit your students?
6. Which countries are your main sources of students?
7. What are the key characteristics you look for in the students you recruit from overseas?
8. What is behind your RTO's capacity to deliver quality student outcomes?
9. How do you ensure your organisation delivers to students' expectations?
10. What are the internal factors influencing student performance in this RTO?
11. What are the external factors influencing student performance in this RTO?
12. Overall, how do you rate your RTO?

Appendix 5

Quality assurance auditors interview guide

1. Briefly describe the role of the existing Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority (VRQA) or Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) in VET?
2. What is the role of the Australian Quality Assurance regulatory mechanisms in the VET market? Why regulate the quality of training in a market environment?
3. How are these regulatory mechanisms influencing private VET RTO
 - a) Registration particularly in Melbourne?
 - b) Recruitment of overseas students?
 - c) Overseas students' quality of learning?
4. What is your role as a Quality Assurance (QA) auditor/compliance advisor in Victoria and Melbourne in particular in relation to overseas students and private VET RTOs?
5. A significant proportion of training managers/coordinators we interviewed recently in private VET RTOs in Melbourne attributed most of their problems not only to a confusing policy environment but mostly to Quality assurance procedures and processes.

What are your views about their observations?
6. What are your views of private VET RTOs in the existing Vocational Education and Training context in Victoria and Australia? What are they trying to achieve by enrolling overseas students?
7. What do you think is the role if any played by government immigration policies in the choices made by overseas students and the participation of private VET RTOs in the Australian VET context?
8. Given your experience in this role, what do you think overseas students are trying to achieve by enrolling in these courses in private VET RTOs.
9. From a QA perspective, do you think there is conflict between AQTF quality standards and overseas students' expectations? If there is conflict, will this impact negatively on private RTOs and overseas students' experience?
10. How then do you ensure private VET RTOs have the capacity to deliver to AQTF standards while meeting overseas students' expectations?

11. A significant proportion of overseas students, their trainers and training managers think they are meeting AQTF quality standards and happy with private VET RTOs' performance in Melbourne.
What are your views about their observations?
12. What do you think are the situated realities (internal and external) influencing private VET RTO performance and ultimately the quality of training in this sector for overseas students?
13. Is there a uniqueness of these private RTOs that make them stand out in the VET sector? How do you rate their performance?
14. From a QA perspective, what are your views about the future of the VET market for international students in Melbourne and Australia? Where to from here/ what does the future hold for private RTOs and overseas students?

Appendix 6

Consent form for persons participating in a research project



Project Title: Looking into “A BLACK BOX” - Vocational Education and Training for international students in private registered training organisations in Melbourne Victoria

Name of participant: _____

Name of investigator(s): Professor John Polesel (principal researcher)
Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan (co-principal researcher)
Mr. Rinos Pasura (PhD candidate)

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form, the researcher will retain it.
3. I understand that my participation will involve *responding to a survey or an interview* and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) The possible effects of participating in the *survey or interview* have been explained to my satisfaction;
 - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
 - (c) The project is for the purpose of research;
 - (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
 - (e) I have been informed that with my consent the *interview will be audio-taped and I understand that audio-tapes* will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;
 - (f) My name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
 - (g) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I agree to this.

I consent to taking part in this survey

yes no
(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings

yes no
(please tick)

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 7



Plain language statement

Topic: Looking into “A BLACK BOX” - Vocational Education and Training for international students in private Registered Training Organisations in Melbourne Victoria

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Professor John Polesel (principal researcher), Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan (co-principal researcher) and Mr Rinos Pasura (PhD candidate) of the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. This project will form part of Mr Rinos Pasura’s PhD thesis and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The aim of this study is to investigate, examine, analyse and evaluate factors, which influence international students’ outcomes in private Vocational Education and Training (VET) Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in Melbourne Victoria. Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute to this by completing a questionnaire. This questionnaire would ask you to indicate your perceptions about educational and employment outcomes for international students enrolled at your RTO. We estimate that the time commitment required of you on the questionnaire would not exceed 45 minutes.

We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know where to send your responses for checking. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym or code. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity.

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be made available to you on application at the Faculty of Education. It is possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences.

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice. If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form, completing the questionnaire and returning it to the researchers or their representative/s.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers; Professor John Polesel: 8344 8293, Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan: 8344 0756 and Mr Rinos Pasura 0406513486.

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Yours Sincerely



Professor John Polesel
(Principal researcher)
Education Policy and Leadership Unit
The University of Melbourne



Rinos Pasura
(PhD candidate)

Appendix 8

Invitation letter

RTO Name

Mr/Mrs

Address

Date

Dear Mr/Mrs Blog



I am writing to inform you that we intend to approach your Registered Training Organisation (RTO) for the purposes of participating in a research study of private VET RTOs for international students. The project has received approval from the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (see attached letter).

Over the last decade international students enrolments in private VET courses in Australia have increased exponentially. In light of this, VET for international students in private VET RTOs has increasingly become significant in skilling Australia. The aim of this study is to investigate, examine, analyse and evaluate factors influencing international students' outcomes in private VET RTOs in Melbourne Victoria.

Should you agree to participate, your VET RTO would be asked to contribute to this by assisting and allowing researchers access to your students, students' data, trainers and training managers. Questionnaires will be used to ask your students and trainers to indicate their views and perceptions while interviews will be used to find out managers'/coordinators' perceptions and experiences about your VET courses and students' outcomes. We estimate that the time commitment required for the participants would not exceed 45 minutes for each process. The participation of your RTO will be arranged at a time convenient to both you and the researchers.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers; Professor John Polesel: 8344 8293, Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan: 8344 0756 and Mr Rinos Pasura 0406513486. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Yours Sincerely

Professor John Polesel

(Principal researcher)

Education Policy and Leadership Unit

The University of Melbourne

Rinos Pasura

(PhD candidate)

The End



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Pasura, Rinos

Title:

Looking into "A BLACK BOX" - vocational education and training for international students in private registered training organisations in Melbourne, Australia

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