RESPONSE

Skills and Workforce Development Agreement Productivity Commission Report November 2019

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Background

CQUniversity Australia is a comprehensive university offering vocational and higher education programs to more than 30 000 students. It has established itself as one of the largest regional universities with campuses and study centres in 25 locations across five States and is recognised amongst the world's top 150 young universities (under 50 years old) by Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019.

In 2014, CQUniversity merged with CQ TAFE bringing together more than 175 years of combined experience in the delivery of education and training and establishing Queensland's first comprehensive, dual sector university. As a result, CQUniversity now delivers more than 300 education and training offerings, from short courses and certificates, through to undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees. Study areas include apprenticeships, trades and training, business, accounting and law, creative, performing and visual arts, education and humanities, engineering and built environment, health, information technology and digital media, psychology, social work and community services, science and environment, and work and study preparation. As a pioneer in the delivery of distance education, CQUniversity also continues to be a leader in this area with almost half of the current student cohort made up of students studying off-campus, many of whom are based in rural and remote areas.

After more than half a century working with stakeholders in regional Australia, CQUniversity is now a renowned research institution in several key disciplines and the benchmark leader for how universities should engage and collaborate with communities and industry. Its applied research focus is oriented towards real-world outcomes, with the purpose of providing solutions to challenges and identifying new opportunities for advancement in our regions and beyond.

Issues Paper topic: Increasing efficiency through new models of education service delivery

There is a suggestion made within the Issues Paper, that efficiency may be increased by developing new models of education service delivery, specifically citing online learning. CQUniversity's view that increasing online learning as a new model of education service delivery should only be considered as a means of increasing participation, flexibility and access to education, *not* as an efficiency or cost saving measure. Without additional, appropriate support, online students experience higher non-completion rates. In practice, high quality online learning and teaching practice is not less costly. It is vital though to provide access to education and training that may otherwise be not achievable for those in rural, regional and remote communities.

Advice on regulatory model and functions

CQUniversity supports a move towards an educative regulatory approach, rather than a punitive one, and in addition, suggests that the potential for one regulatory body (for both HE and VET) be investigated.

Issues Paper topic: Funding

There are disparate funding and student loan models between HE and VET, which disadvantage VET students, reduces the appeal of VET qualifications, and creates additional barriers for low SES groups who wish to access VET. A more equitable model of funding would recognise the additional support often required by VET students (and expected by the training system), given that there is an expectation that other skills and knowledge (e.g. LLN) will be acquired in addition to the vocational skills outlined in the Training Package. VET often assumes a role as a 'second chance' pathway, and a 'foundational' entry to further educational experiences in addition to its instrumental 'skills for jobs' purpose. To ensure these outcomes, funding should more adequately reflect the additional resources required to fulfil them.

Funding should be standardised, so that competition between providers is based upon factors other than price, such as educational quality and education service delivery models. This would need to coincide with the development of appropriate indicators of quality which are not solely based upon interactions with the regulator (the notion of quality is often confused with compliance) but on other factors such as (for example) student satisfaction, resource provision, completion rates, and employment outcomes.

Issues Paper topic: Quality, VET teaching, and VET teacher capabilities

Increasing VET quality is an important topic, however such a focus must emphasise VET teaching and the capabilities of VET teachers. VET teachers should be supported (financially and through industrial instruments) to gain higher level qualifications (i.e. above the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment), and to access appropriate, high quality continuing professional development which addresses educational topics beyond compliance and regulatory topics.

Increasing the capabilities of VET teachers should ideally coincide with the development of a more flexible and responsive curriculum model which allows teachers greater autonomy and 'trust' to make professional judgements based upon their own industry knowledge, industry engagement and teaching expertise.

It is also important to increase the research capabilities of VET teachers and a corresponding increase in commissioned research in order to develop the body of knowledge around the sector, its students, its teachers and its interactions with stakeholders.