Department of Education, Science and Training

National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education

Stage 1 Report
February 2006

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1 Introduction

In November 2005, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) acting on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) commissioned PhillipsKPA to undertake a national study to improve outcomes in credit transfer and articulation from vocational and technical education (VTE) to higher education (HE). That study was undertaken by a project team comprising:

- Dr Sue Johnston – PhillipsKPA
- David Phillips KPA – Director of PhillipsKPA
- Peter Noonan – Peter Noonan Consulting
- Jane Carnegie – Jane Carnegie Consulting
- Associate Professor Barry Golding – University of Ballarat.

The aims of the study are to:

- describe current credit transfer and articulation practices from VTE to higher education and map the major existing approaches by which credit transfer and articulation occur
- evaluate the approaches to credit transfer and articulation against the Good Practice Principles adopted by MCEETYA in May 2005 and identify gaps and anomalies
- identify the current approaches which achieve the most appropriate outcomes in credit transfer and articulation for students and institutions as well as factors which contribute to an approach’s success and the barriers to its wider adoption
- make recommendations for change by institutions, providers and governments on ways to improve credit transfer and articulation.

The study was guided by the Working Party on Credit Transfer and Articulation established by the Joint Committee on Higher Education (JCHE). Membership of the Working Party is as follows:

- Lois Sparkes (Chair) – DEST
- Paul White – DEST
- Jill Vardy – DEST
- Judy Forsyth - AQFAB
- Dr Terry Stokes – Victoria DET
- Chris Whitton – ACT DEYFS
- Laurence Money – WA DES
- Andrew Rolfe (replacing Lynda Boland) – NSW DET
- Susan Young – SA DFEEST
- Bruce McCallum (replacing Ray Morley) – QUT
- Dr Josie Misko – NCVER
- Judy Petch – VTE Group DEST
• Martha Kinsman – TAFE Directors Australia
• Professor Peter Booth – AVCC
• Jenny Hayes – ACPET.

The study comprised a number of stages and interim reports leading to a Final Report. Background information, discussion of issues and case studies are contained in the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Reports which can be read as separate documents or in conjunction with the Final Report.

This **Stage 1 Report** provides useful background reading and an overview of the field. It includes:

- definitions
- a typology of credit transfer and articulation
- drivers for enhanced credit transfer
- an analysis of levels of credit transfer
- factors affecting credit transfer
- a literature review
- an overview of national and international developments.

An invitational workshop was held in February 2006 to provide input to the typology and to the analysis of issues as they were emerging for the first report.

The **Stage 2 Report** provides detailed insights into the practical implementation of credit transfer arrangements in a variety of settings. It contains seven major case studies and a series of shorter vignettes, together with an analysis of the key themes emerging from the case studies. The case studies were selected to illustrate a range of approaches to credit transfer. The major case studies in the Stage 2 Report are:

- Southbank Institute of TAFE with Griffith University and the Queensland University of Technology
- Edith Cowan University
- South Australia TAFE and the three SA universities
- University of Newcastle
- Swinburne University of Technology
- Blue Mountains Hotel Management School
- nursing pathways at the University of Wollongong, James Cook University and the University of Melbourne.

The **Final Report** draws together findings from the study and makes recommendations to improve credit transfer and articulation. It is based on a synthesis of all aspects of the study, including the literature review, case studies and overview of national and international developments, and also draws on the experience and prior research of the project team.
A consultation draft of the final report provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to comment on the findings and recommendations before they were finalised.
2 Setting the Scene – Definitions and Typology of Arrangements for Credit Transfer and Articulation

2.1 Introduction

As with most complex educational concepts, the terms associated with credit transfer and articulation have different meanings for different individuals and groups. In some cases, the terms and their meanings have also been changed or refined over time. This looseness of terminology and confusion of definition have hampered progress in describing, researching and understanding credit transfer and articulation.

Because of the confusion within terminology, it is necessary at the outset to define the manner in which significant terms are used in this study and, at the same time, convey clearly the focus of the study. Within the literature review in Appendix B, there is further discussion of these terms and the issues related to their use, which varies quite widely in the work relating to credit transfer and articulation. The definitions below are adapted from those provided by Carnegie (2000).

2.2 Focus and definitions

As determined by its terms of reference, the study is focused on credit transfer and articulation from vocational and technical education (VTE) to higher education (HE). Although there has been interest in the significant movement of students from higher education to VTE, this so-called ‘reverse transfer’ is not addressed in this study. In addition, given its terms of reference, the study will not focus on movement of students between higher education courses or between VTE programs although, again, this comprises a significant component of total credit transfer.

Even the terms ‘vocational and technical education’ and ‘higher education’, which are fundamental to this study, are understood in a variety of ways. Furthermore, the new term ‘vocational and technical education’ (VTE) officially replaced the term ‘vocational education and training’ (VET) during the course of this study and thus there is a mixture of these two terms used in the policies and documents on which the study draws.

The focus of this study is the improvement of outcomes in credit transfer and articulation when students move from awards accredited or endorsed in the VTE sector to awards accredited in the higher education sector, and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) will be used as the basis of these distinctions. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) distinguishes qualifications according to the sector responsible for accrediting or endorsing the qualification, although a small number of qualifications (diploma and advanced diploma) are accredited or endorsed by both higher education and VTE sectors. The sector accrediting or endorsing the qualification determines the standards and other quality requirements.
VTE sector qualifications are predominantly authorised through national endorsement of Training Packages by the National Quality Council (previously known as the National Training Quality Council). Each Training Package reflects industry-specified competency standards packaged into VTE qualifications. VTE qualifications may also be authorised through accreditation of competency-based courses by state/territory accreditation agencies and powers delegated to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Higher education qualifications are accredited predominantly on an institution-by-institution basis (either by the institutions themselves in the case of universities or by state/territory accreditation authorities in the case of non-self-accrediting providers) according to a mix of academic and professional requirements. The AQF lists the qualifications accredited or endorsed in each sector and provides descriptors of each qualification.

### AQF Qualification by Sector of Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Secondary Certificate of Education</th>
<th>Vocational Education and Training Sector Accreditation</th>
<th>Higher Education Sector Accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td>Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate II</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: AQF)

Although most VTE awards are delivered within the VTE sector and most higher education awards are delivered within the higher education sector, the boundaries between the two sectors are becoming increasingly blurred, with some VTE providers seeking higher education approval to offer higher education awards and some universities and other higher education providers seeking RTO registration. The inclusion in the AQF of diplomas and advanced diplomas that may be accredited in both sectors, and the recent addition to the AQF of vocational graduate certificates and diplomas, also blurs the specific boundaries and focus of each sector. In addition, some universities are dual sector institutions delivering both VTE and higher education awards and containing both VTE and higher education elements such as staff, students and administrative processes. VTE qualifications, or components of them, are also delivered in schools and may form part of senior secondary school certificates.

**Pathways and movement from VTE to higher education**

The terms *pathways* and *movement* are used in this study in the broader sense of all students moving from VTE to higher education. It should be noted that the term ‘articulation’ is sometimes used in this broader sense of pathways or movement but,
as indicated below, that is not the meaning ascribed to articulation in this study. When students move from VTE to higher education, credit may or may not be a component of that pathway. The main focus of this study is on situations in which students are granted credit on the basis of their VTE studies when moving to higher education. It is acknowledged, however, that by developing pathways and facilitating movement between VTE and higher education that do not include credit, opportunities for credit arrangements may be enhanced indirectly.

Given the diversity of both the VTE and higher education sectors and given the blurring of their boundaries among providers, it should be recognised that the concept of movement between VTE and higher education is not simple or singular. It may involve movement of students within a single provider or between providers, and these providers may be public or private, large or small, mainly VTE or mainly higher education or dual sector. It may involve concurrent study in both sectors or it may involve sequential movement from one sector to the other. Movement from VTE to higher education may take place during, immediately following or some considerable time after VTE studies.

Cross-sectoral or cross-institutional collaboration

Some of the previous studies related to credit transfer and articulation have focused on cross-sectoral or cross-institutional collaboration. These studies have therefore had a broader focus than this current study whose main focus is credit transfer and articulation arrangements – only one aspect of cross-sectoral or cross-institutional collaboration. It is acknowledged that one form of collaboration is likely to be associated with others and indeed may lead to others. Therefore it is difficult to separate credit transfer and articulation arrangements from other forms of collaboration.

What is admission?

Admission refers to the decision about whether to admit a student to a particular course. Admission is based in part on an assumption about the readiness of the student to commence and succeed in the course, but this usually forms only the minimum eligibility requirement and, depending on demand for the course, cut-off scores for entry to higher education may be higher than this minimum. Admission to higher education is a competitive process in which students are selected on the basis of their academic performance ranked against other applicants. In some cases, other criteria are used as well as or instead of this ranking. For undergraduate admissions, applications are administered on behalf of universities and some larger higher education providers by state-based Tertiary Admissions Centres which calculate rankings so that students who have completed Year 12 can be assessed and selected into courses on the basis of relative performance. VTE students apply in a category along with all other applicants who are not completing Year 12 in the year of their application. While the aim is to compare academic performance of these students against Year 12 applicants, Tertiary Admissions Centres in each state and individual institutions vary considerably in how they do this. Applicants may also be admitted to higher education on the basis of alternative criteria and assessment, usually on equity grounds, and most institutions assess these on a case-by-case basis.
The study does not include a separate focus on admission to higher education, although it is acknowledged that credit offered through any arrangement cannot be formally granted unless a student is admitted and therefore the processes of admission and credit are inter-related. In high demand and therefore very competitive courses and institutions, the main barrier to entry is the cut-off score required, and credit tends to take on a secondary level of importance and relevance.

A student may be admitted with an agreement that a certain amount of credit will be granted or a student may be admitted and then granted credit for a component of the course at some time after admission.

2.3 **Typology of credit transfer and articulation arrangements**

In this section, further definitions and clarification of key terms are provided and their inter-relationships are discussed. To attempt to overcome some of the confusion of terminology associated with credit and articulation, a typology is developed that is based on these definitions, identifies the main arrangements for credit transfer and articulation, and demonstrates their inter-relationships. Various aspects of each arrangement, including strengths and weaknesses, are presented. Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1 summarise the discussion in this section.

*What is credit?*

Credit involves granting students some level of exemption, status or advanced standing (these three terms are used interchangeably) in the course they are entering, in recognition of relevant prior studies and/or work experience and/or life experience. When granted credit, a student is not required to study the unit or units for which exemption, status or advanced standing is granted. Sometimes, students may be granted exemption from a component of a unit but this does not meet the normal definition of credit, as the student is still required to enrol in that unit and pay the required fees. Similarly, situations in which other units are substituted instead of those for which credit is granted do not meet the normal definition of credit.

Credit may be in the form of:

- block credit for a component or stage of the course (such as granting credit for first year so the student enters second year)

- specified credit for nominated units of study

- unspecified credit for a certain number of credit points that may be applied to different units for different students.

Sometimes, credit is granted with conditions that must be met by the students. These may include meeting certain achievement levels in the first year or first semester of their studies, or undertaking additional bridging courses that are designed to cover specific gaps identified in prerequisite knowledge.

Institutions may grant credit through credit transfer arrangements, articulation arrangements or the Recognition of Prior Learning. These terms are defined below.
What are credit transfer arrangements?

Credit transfer arrangements are the processes used by institutions or faculties/schools/departments to determine the type and amount of credit to be granted to a student on the basis of relevant prior or concurrent formal studies. Credit transfer from VTE to higher education involves establishing and recognising an equivalence of learning outcomes between parts of the VTE qualification and parts of the higher education qualification and granting credit to the student in the higher education qualification on the basis of satisfactory completion of the relevant VTE studies. Credit transfer arrangements may be carried out through an individual or unstructured process in which a student negotiates credit for prior studies on a case-by-case basis. Alternatively credit transfer arrangements may be structured between one or more institutions and made available generally to students who follow particular pathways.

In individual or unstructured credit transfer arrangements, individual students are required to negotiate credit on a case-by-case basis, either through central admission or credit offices of institutions or often within schools/departments or faculties and sometimes even with individual academics. The student initiates this arrangement. Decisions are based either on credit precedents (a formal or informal register of previous credit decisions) or on an exercise of mapping the outcomes of VTE studies the student has undertaken against the higher education course to which the student is applying, to determine what has already been covered in that prior study.

Structured credit transfer arrangements involve participating institutions determining agreed amounts of credit from a VTE qualification to a higher education qualification in advance, with universal application to all students who have undertaken the VTE qualification. In this case, decisions are either based on curriculum or content mapping to determine equivalences of learning outcomes between the VTE qualification and the higher education qualification, or on general institutional policies that specify amounts of credit for particular levels of VTE award. For example, some higher education institutions have policies that specify all advanced diploma courses will lead to credit of at least one year into a bachelor degree.

Structured credit transfer, because the arrangements are advertised in some way – usually in enrolment guides or on institutional websites – is typically a more public process and could therefore be considered a more accountable process than individual or unstructured credit transfer which is negotiated individually, and could be considered to take place ‘behind closed doors’. Sometimes, but not always, individual or unstructured arrangements involve scrutiny or oversight by committees.

Credit transfer decisions are often delegated to administrative staff who apply credit precedents. If there are no precedents, academic input may be sought such as from a head of school/department or a course co-ordinator.

Credit transfer decisions may or may not be guided by institutional or faculty/department policies or guidelines on maximum or minimum levels of credit granted under certain circumstances. For example, some institutions have a policy that specifies a minimum amount of credit that will be granted for a particular level...
of VTE award or a policy that credit may not be granted for final year units. Others specify the maximum proportion of a course for which credit may be granted. The reason given for this latter type of policy is protection of the integrity of the institution’s awards.

**What is articulation?**

Articulation arrangements can be seen as a continuum of structured credit transfer arrangements but are differentiated by both process and outcome. Although there are various definitions of this term, the approach taken below defines articulation as arrangements that involve designing new or modifying existing qualifications to create an integrated or defined qualification pathway in which one qualification builds on, or is linked directly to the other, and in which credit is built into the related awards. Articulation arrangements involve a collaborative curriculum development process between both the VTE and higher education partners in the arrangement. By contrast, structured credit transfer arrangements focus on determining credit between existing awards developed in each sector.

Articulation arrangements may lead to:

- a dual award in which the students complete both a VTE and higher education award. A dual award may be designed to be studied through:
  - sequential movement from VTE to higher education in which the student completes the VTE component of the course and then moves to the higher education component
  - concurrent studies of VTE and higher education components in which the student completes both VTE and higher education components concurrently either in equal proportions or through a graded continuum in which the early stages of the course comprise mainly or all VTE studies and the later stages of the course comprise mainly or all higher education studies

- a single higher education award into which standard components of VTE studies are designed and credit is then granted for these studies within the higher education award

- nested awards in which a sequence of more than two awards is designed so that students can enter and exit at different points. This is an extension of the concept of sequential dual awards into multiple awards. Students gain different qualifications depending on their exit point and may enter at different points depending on their prior studies and experience. For example, after completing one year, the student may be granted a diploma, after two years an advanced diploma and, after three or four years, a bachelor degree. A student who already has a diploma would enter the second year of the three- or four-year sequence, in effect obtaining one year of block credit for the first award while a student with an advanced diploma would enter the third year of the bachelor award, obtaining two years of block credit.
While credit transfer is largely an administrative process, albeit one based on academic judgement, articulation is a collaborative curriculum design process that involves designing new courses or modifying existing ones.

While articulation arrangements provide a less complex and more standardised pathway for students in terms of admission and gaining credit, it is clear there is much more work required in terms of the design and negotiation of new curriculum and the administrative and academic processes of course approval in both institutions prior to implementation of these pathways.

What is RPL?

While credit transfer and articulation arrangements, in the context of this study, involve granting of credit for formal award studies, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment process which focuses on judging evidence provided by a student of less formal learning to determine admission or to grant credit for a component of the course. The evidence supplied may relate to a combination of life experience, work experience and various courses of study which demonstrate that the student has already achieved the learning outcomes required. The nature of RPL means that it is generally assessed on an individual or case-by-case basis.

Inter-relationships among terms and pathways

Figure 2.1 shows the inter-relationships among the terms and represents the possible pathways from VTE to higher education using the above definitions.

Figure 2.1: Pathways from VTE to higher education

![Diagram](image)

However, as mentioned earlier, the definitions and descriptions used above are far from universally accepted within either the VTE or higher education sectors or within the research literature.

The most contested aspect of the representation in Figure 2.1, and the definitions that underlie it, is how articulation arrangements should be defined and related to
other terms and processes. Common usage of the term ‘articulation’ varies widely and one alternative way of representing its relationship with other terms is to see articulation arrangements as a sub-set of credit transfer arrangements. This alternative view is presented in Figure 2.2. Such a representation makes the term ‘articulation’ somewhat redundant in the commonly used term of ‘credit transfer and articulation’.

**Figure 2.2: An alternative representation of pathways from VTE to higher education**

As highlighted above and discussed further in the literature review in Appendix B, another common use of the term ‘articulation’ would have it describing all of the pathways between VTE and higher education represented in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, again making the commonly used term ‘credit transfer and articulation’ less meaningful.

Yet another area of contestation is whether articulation arrangements should be limited, as they are defined above, to situations in which new awards are developed or existing ones are modified through collaborative arrangements between VTE and higher education providers. An alternative view is to include under the definition of articulation those arrangements in which existing awards are linked, thus making articulation arrangements almost indistinguishable from structured credit transfer arrangements.

The discussion that follows uses the representation in Figure 2.1 as its basis, possibly as an interim position. The case studies and consultations that took place later in this project informed further thinking and clarification of the terms and their inter-relationships. This led to changes and refinement to the typology and underlying definitions that are presented in the Final Report.

Table 2.1 presents further details of the various arrangements for credit transfer and articulation from VTE to higher education. This representation expands on Figure 2.1 by including descriptions of the processes involved in implementing each of the arrangements, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.
As with any attempt to provide a simple representation of very complex processes, the typology does not capture every possible arrangement or combination of arrangements for credit transfer and articulation. It also does not capture the dynamic nature of the arrangements and nor does it convey that institutions will use one arrangement to move towards another. The typology is meant to provide a broad representation of typical and common arrangements, with the boundaries within the typology permeable and dynamic.

**Initiation and impact**

Articulation arrangements and structured arrangements for credit transfer may be initiated by a range of individuals and groups, including individual academics, faculties or schools/departments, institutions, regional consortia, industry and professional bodies or state governments.

Clearly, impact depends on how widely each arrangement applies. For example, a particular credit transfer or articulation arrangement advertised by a higher education provider may apply to VTE awards only within that same provider, to VTE awards from one or more other VTE providers or to VTE awards across a whole state or even nationally. A particular credit transfer or articulation arrangement may be confined to a small part of a higher education institution or it may be more widely applicable across the institution.

It is not possible to categorise institutions in terms of the arrangements outlined in the typology, as any single institution may use a combination of all arrangements across different parts of the institution. In fact, most if not all universities could provide examples of all arrangements, even if some are confined to a very small section of the institution.

It is also not possible to determine the numbers of students involved in each of these arrangements, for reasons which are discussed more fully in Section 4. However, an investigation of institutional websites suggests that there has been a recent trend towards more structured credit transfer arrangements and some new developments in articulation arrangements. A reasonable assumption would be that more students are involved in structured credit transfer than in the other arrangements because of the wider applicability of these structured arrangements. It is likely that the number of students involved in articulation arrangements is relatively low given the often very specialised and focused nature of these arrangements as defined above. The case studies are used to gather further information about the relative numbers of students involved in each arrangement.

**Advantages and disadvantages**

The typology includes a summary list of advantages and disadvantages of each arrangement. These advantages and disadvantages may relate to students, to institutions or to impact more generally. Some of the details will be discussed further in the sections that follow and in the case studies. Structured credit transfer arrangements offer more advantages to students than unstructured arrangements because of increased certainty about levels of credit to be granted and because it tends to integrate credit transfer within standard admission processes. Although articulation arrangements require more effort to implement, they present
advantages because of their tailored approach to graduate outcomes and their potential for broad applicability.

**Relationship with the Good Practice Principles**

It is important to note that, if they are carried out effectively, all arrangements in the typology could be considered to comply with the MCEETYA *Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education*. That is, the MCEETYA *Good Practice Principles* do not assume or require a particular arrangement for credit transfer or articulation. Compliance with the Principles is more dependent on how effectively each arrangement is implemented. The unstructured arrangement for credit transfer is the one most at risk of not complying with the *Good Practice Principles*, mainly because decision-making may be more devolved and less regulated by policy, and therefore less likely to be consistent and transparent. To comply with the *Good Practice Principles*, the case-by-case decisions about credit need to be based on transparent guidelines and on publicly available registers of credit precedents. Structured credit transfer and articulation arrangements are more likely to comply with the *Good Practice Principles* because they usually take place within standard institutional policies and procedures for admission and course approval, thus making them more open and transparent. However, if these arrangements are poorly implemented or poorly administered, they too may not comply with the *Good Practice Principles*.

**2.4 Concluding comments**

Because of confusion about terminology, it has been necessary to begin the study with a clear statement about the way in which terms are used. This has led to a typology of arrangements for credit transfer and articulation which is designed to clarify terms and processes. It is premature to argue for particular directions and preferences, but the typology does demonstrate the relative advantages of structured credit transfer and articulation arrangements over unstructured or individual arrangements for credit transfer, although all arrangements may be undermined by ineffective implementation. If implemented effectively, all arrangements can comply with the MCEETYA *Good Practice Principles*.

The typology is a simplified version of the diversity of arrangements that exist in practice, and there are many contextual and practical issues that must be taken into account. The literature review in Appendix B places the study within the broader context of the research literature in the field and highlights the many factors that impact on credit transfer and articulation. The case studies undertaken later in this project also elaborate on the typology and provide some examples of each of the arrangements in practical settings.
Table 2.1: Institutional Arrangements for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VTE to Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Credit Transfer Arrangements</th>
<th>Articulation Arrangements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual or Unstructured</td>
<td>Structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiated on a case-by-case basis</td>
<td>Standard credit pathway that can apply to all students who have completed a particular course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types</td>
<td>• Block – credit for a course component/stage</td>
<td>• Sequential dual award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Specified – credit for specified units</td>
<td>• Concurrent dual award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unspecified – credit for unspecified units</td>
<td>• Nested awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>• Individual student negotiates with central office of institution</td>
<td>• Students apply to central office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual student negotiates with faculty/school office</td>
<td>• Students apply to faculty/school office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual student negotiates with individual academic</td>
<td>• Students apply through normal admission process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of decision</td>
<td>• Precedents of previous decisions</td>
<td>• Mapping of course content/outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mapping of course content/outcomes</td>
<td>• General policy on credit granted for levels of award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval processes</td>
<td>• Case-by-case and usually delegated to central office, head of school or course co-ordinator</td>
<td>• Usually at level of head of school or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Usually requires formal approval through institutional course approval processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated by</td>
<td>• Individual student</td>
<td>• Individual academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students may be encouraged to apply</td>
<td>• Group of academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Faculty/department/HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Institution (VTE and/or HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Regional consortium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional or industry body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>• Limited to individual student although may create precedent for other students and may lead to more structured arrangements in future</td>
<td>• Applies to all students who follow same pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Applies to all students who follow pathway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 To be read in conjunction with the definitions and discussion within Section 2.

Stage 1 Report: Giving Credit Where Credit is Due
## Credit Transfer Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual or Unstructured</th>
<th>Structured</th>
<th>Articulation Arrangements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential to cater for all course combinations and individual student differences</td>
<td>• Students know in advance of credit</td>
<td>• Students know in advance of credit and advantages of pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not require cross-sectoral collaboration or co-operation</td>
<td>• More consistency in decisions and outcomes across time</td>
<td>• Length of course and outcomes clear in advance of enrolment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not require commitment or support across the whole institution</td>
<td>• Can be integrated into standard admissions processes</td>
<td>• Students have multiple exit and entry points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tailored to each student and therefore credit granted may be more appropriate</td>
<td>• Students do not have to negotiate their own level of credit</td>
<td>• Bridging programs can be built into course design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Less resource-intensive than other approaches</td>
<td>• Students experience a more gradual transition from VTE to HE learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional planning made easier because student load variations from credit are known in advance</td>
<td>• Often involves guaranteed entry into higher education component from VTE component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be daunting and confusing for students</td>
<td>• Caters for more limited course combinations</td>
<td>• No separate process required for students to apply for credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can lead to inconsistent decisions and outcomes within and across institutions</td>
<td>• Sometimes associated with conditions which students must meet before progressing</td>
<td>• Can be tailored to meet industry, profession or workforce needs in terms of graduate outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students do not know about credit in advance of applying</td>
<td>• Levels of credit granted may be low because of the need to provide general guidelines</td>
<td>• Can be extended across institutions to achieve broad impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sometimes associated with conditions which students must meet before progressing</td>
<td>• Admission criteria must be separately met</td>
<td>• Additional benefits for staff from cross-institutional collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Precedents registers difficult to maintain</td>
<td>• Extensive cross-sectoral collaboration and negotiation required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can involve only pockets of an institution</td>
<td>• Time-consuming in terms of curriculum design and approval processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Credit and admissions processes often separate and sometimes credit not granted until after admission</td>
<td>• Requires flexibility in curriculum design and requirements from both sectors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resource-intensive and not sustainable if there is growth in numbers of students seeking credit transfer</td>
<td>• Students and staff must cope with two sets of administrative processes often concurrently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be a private process with less accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 The Drivers for Improved Credit Transfer and Articulation

The overview of national and international developments in Appendices C and D demonstrates that there is significant national and international support for, as well as developments in, credit transfer and articulation from VTE to higher education. It is therefore important to clarify the specific drivers for these developments to indicate the basis of this support. This section examines the drivers separately for the various stakeholder groups involved in the process. It will be seen that the drivers are different in nature and impact for each of these groups of stakeholders.

3.1 At the system level

Much of the advocacy for improved outcomes in credit transfer and articulation comes from the system level through the lens which focuses on overall educational opportunities, efficiencies and outcomes for the community in general. Here, issues of improved educational participation, equity, access and efficiency are the key drivers. Through this lens, differences between the sectors are not a key concern and it is often easy to overlook the associated operational difficulties.

More specifically, at the system level credit transfer and articulation provide opportunities that:

- cater for a more flexible workforce and a broader range of skill needs within the workforce
- address skill shortages in some industries
- expand choices for students and employers
- give students a wider range of study options and pathways including those linked to a wider range of career structures
- encourage mature aged students to return to study and upgrade their qualifications by saving time spent on learning and opportunity costs
- enhance ‘second chance’ educational provision for early school leavers
- encourage students from equity groups to move to higher education
- encourage higher educational attainment within the community
- facilitate lifelong learning
- allow seamless movement for students between educational providers and education sectors
• provide economic benefits through sharing resources and reducing duplication.

3.2 For students

It is also relatively easy to see the advantages that credit transfer and articulation arrangements can provide for students, although these advantages are more important for some students than others. At very least, students are presented with a broader range of study options and pathways. Given that students are increasingly searching for additional choices and options, this is an important driver. However the options and pathways that are provided by credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education can also offer specific advantages to students, both because of the time and cost savings possible and because of the mix of skills and learning outcomes students attain.

For students, credit transfer and articulation arrangements:

• provide expanded and flexible study options and pathways
• provide expanded career pathways
• broaden the combination of skills, experience and understandings a student has on graduation
• increase employability of graduates
• reduce real costs and opportunity costs associated with gaining qualifications
• facilitate lifelong learning
• encourage ‘second chance’ opportunities.

3.3 For higher education institutions

Given that opportunities for credit transfer and articulation will not improve unless there is a serious commitment from the higher education institutions themselves, it is important that there are clear drivers and incentives operating at that level. In some respects, the incentives and drivers for higher education institutions are less obvious than those for the groups above. The main advantages of such arrangements for higher education institutions lie in attracting more students and diversifying the student intake. For those universities with regional campuses or centres where enrolments are likely to be relatively small, shared cross-sector facilities and programs assist in combining sustainability with breadth of options. Some regional universities also see the development of strong linkages with TAFE as an important part of their regional engagement strategy. For those universities with missions that include a strong commitment to equity, linkages with TAFE and enhanced pathways for students who do not enter higher education directly from school play an important strategic role.
For higher education institutions, credit and articulation arrangements:

- expand options and provide more flexibility for students
- attract additional students
- attract students from diverse backgrounds, including those who have succeeded in study at the tertiary level
- facilitate sharing of resources, facilities and expertise
- provide one form of flexible delivery of courses
- provide integrated responses to industry and enterprise needs when they span VTE and higher education sectors
- introduce new research opportunities and partnerships
- provide professional development opportunities for staff
- assist in fulfilling regional commitments.

Depending on their mission, location and level of student demand, some higher education institutions are more sensitive than others to the drivers for credit transfer and articulation arrangements. This raises the issue of whether there should be an imperative for all universities to be equally committed to and involved in credit transfer and articulation, or whether the desired approach should be to support variable uptake as is currently the case.

3.4 For VTE institutions

The drivers for involvement by VTE institutions in credit transfer and articulation are similar to those for higher education institutions. The key drivers relate to increasing the demand from students through offering a broader range of options and pathways that extend beyond VTE studies alone. Again, some VTE providers will be more sensitive to these drivers than others, depending on their mission, location and demand. For those mainly involved in certificate courses or in fields of study which do not lead naturally to higher education pathways, there are limited incentives. Here again, there is a question about whether all VTE providers should be facilitating pathways to higher education or whether these arrangements should be the focus of particular providers.

For VTE institutions, credit and articulation arrangements:

- expand options and provide more flexibility for students
- attract additional students
- facilitate sharing of resources, facilities and expertise
• provide one form of flexible delivery of courses
• provide integrated responses to industry and enterprise needs when they span VTE and higher education sectors
• introduce new research opportunities and partnerships
• provide professional development opportunities for staff
• assist in fulfilling regional commitments.

Some of the drivers for involvement of VTE providers in credit transfer and articulation may also act as disincentives for those providers who believe that VTE should be seen as an educational pathway in its own right. There is an argument that promoting VTE as a pathway to higher education detracts from the status of the VTE sector, undermines its integrity and subverts its unique mission into one of a lower status feeder for higher education. On the other hand, there is also an argument that by forming close links and pathways with higher education providers, VTE providers will enhance their status.

3.5 Concluding comments

There are compelling drivers for credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education, although these operate most strongly at the system level. The drivers also act strongly in some institutions but less so in others – an important consideration given that the institutional level is where the main impetus for credit transfer arrangements must originate. The drivers of access, equity and efficiency that operate at the system level are important for raising educational participation and educational attainment of the community. Given their importance, there is a need to ensure that the drivers at the more local institutional level are clarified and strengthened wherever possible to provide the impetus for the practical investment and commitment that must be made for credit transfer and articulation arrangements to be implemented effectively.

An understanding of the drivers is essential to improving opportunities for credit transfer and articulation, because these drivers are the keys to providing incentives and motivation for action. There has been a tendency for some proponents of credit transfer and articulation to approach the task with an almost missionary zeal, expecting all to embrace it as a ‘good thing’, without recognising that individuals and institutions need to have incentives and see some tangible benefits in making it a priority and committing to it. The question of ‘What is in it for the institution?’ is a real one that must be answered before there can be significant progress on this issue.
4 Current Levels of Credit Transfer and Articulation in Australia

4.1 Introduction

As demonstrated in Appendix D, there is evidence of growing support by the Australian and state/territory governments, including through MCEETYA, to improve the outcomes in credit transfer and articulation across the country. There is also evidence of growing support among many institutions. Implicit in the brief for this project is an assumption that the current levels of credit transfer and articulation are inadequate. Such an assumption needs to be explored. Unfortunately, determining the current level of articulation and credit transfer between VTE and higher education within Australia and determining the adequacy of this level are not possible, given the available data. As indicated in the literature review in Appendix B, there is a general acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the data available to analyse national trends as well as state/territory and institutional trends and differences in credit transfer and articulation arrangements. For this reason JCHE has established a working group of data experts to explore ways of capturing more accurately the numbers and trends of students moving from VTE to higher education as well as the various levels of credit they are given. This working group has now released a consultation paper that recommends new data collection arrangements that will address some of the issues discussed below. Such work is important and urgent given the lack of accurate or systematic analysis currently possible. No current data set comes close to providing that information in any way that allows a reliable level of comparison or analysis.

4.2 Basis of admission to higher education

The two relevant data sets published by DEST in their annual student statistics collection provide institutional and state data on the numbers of students entering university to a bachelor degree or below whose highest prior qualification is a TAFE award and the numbers of students whose basis for gaining entry to university is a complete or incomplete TAFE award. Although both of these data sets are used within the research literature to support various conclusions, neither captures information about credit transfer and articulation. The former includes students who have entered higher education by a variety of pathways not necessarily related to their TAFE studies. The latter provides some indication of trends in numbers of applicants to university who use TAFE study to gain admission whether or not they are granted credit.

Table 4.1 shows that, in 2004, 9.4% of domestic, commencing undergraduate students were admitted to university on the basis of prior TAFE studies and that there is significant variation among the states and territories in these figures. Further breakdown of the figures by institution also shows significant variations among individual institutions, although the figures are not sufficiently robust to allow meaningful conclusions to be drawn about specific institutions. To illustrate
the diversity, in 2004 the Group of Eight universities admitted 3.5% of their
commencing students on the basis of TAFE studies, while the ATN (Australian
Technology Network) universities admitted 11.9% on this basis.

Table 4.1: Domestic students commencing a course at bachelor level or below
by State with TAFE as basis for admission to current course, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Students with Complete or Incomplete TAFE as Basis of Admission (other than a secondary education course)</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Admitted in that State and Nationally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>5,759</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>4,516</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>2,707</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-State</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 2004</td>
<td>16,903</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 2003</td>
<td>15,859</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change on 2003</td>
<td>+6.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: DEST HE Student Statistics Collection)

Table 4.2: Students commencing a course at bachelor level or below admitted on the basis of prior TAFE study, 1994 to 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9,111</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>11,763</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>11,819</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>14,320</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>14,374</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>15,667</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>14,599</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>15,316</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>16,013</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>15,859</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>16,903</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: DEST HE Student Statistics Collection)

Importantly, Table 4.2 shows there has been a gradual overall trend over the decade
towards increasing university entry on the basis of prior TAFE study, with 5.5% of
students admitted on this basis in 1994 compared with 9.4% in 2004. If it can be
assumed that at least some of these applicants receive some credit for their TAFE
studies, there may be grounds for a tentative claim that efforts to increase credit
transfer and articulation have had a gradual impact. Of course, an alternative
explanation might be that such trends have been affected by other factors such as employment rates and a general shift towards more diversity in university enrolments. The implications to be drawn from the information are also further confused by use of TAFE in the descriptor rather than VTE more generally, so it becomes unclear whether the data relate only to TAFE prior studies or to VTE prior studies more generally. It is likely that there is a mix of responses within the data.

4.3 Levels of credit

The Higher Education Student Statistics Collection of DEST also seeks information about the numbers of students commencing bachelor degrees who receive exemptions for prior TAFE studies. Again, TAFE is the term used, not VTE more generally, with the same confused mix of responses likely within the data. In the 2003 collection, students receiving such exemptions comprised 3.4% of commencing undergraduate students. This figure increased in 2003 after a period of relative stability from 1994 (it was 1.6% in 1993) – see Table 4.3. It appears that the majority (over three-quarters) of students applying for exemptions gained them for a third of their course or less. There are serious issues with the reliability of this data given its collection through different processes at the institutional level. This is one of the areas being addressed by the JCHE data experts group. In spite of the limitations of the data, it is possible to conclude that students receiving credit for their prior TAFE studies represent a relatively small proportion of commencing students and that this has been the case for over a decade.

Table 4.3: Percentage of students commencing a course at bachelor level or below receiving exemptions for prior TAFE studies, 1993 to 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2,617</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3,860</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4,690</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4,828</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5,227</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5,061</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5,730</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,974</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5,181</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4,629</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>5,694</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: DEST HE Student Statistics Collection)

When examining data about levels of credit granted in courses, it is important to look at this information in the context of the appropriateness of these levels of credit. While proponents for increased levels of credit transfer argue that there should be standard levels of credit associated with each level of VTE qualification, there is a need to weigh up whether these levels of credit are the most appropriate in every case to maximise the chances of success for the students granted the credit.
If students are granted too much credit, this is likely to impact negatively on their chances for success. On the other hand, too little credit wastes resources and does not sufficiently acknowledge prior studies. Arguments to increase the level of credit students are granted, or to have standard levels of credit for each level of award, need to be tempered by an analysis of data about success rates of students when granted various levels of credit (similar to the approaches of Dobson, Sharma and Haydon 1996; Lewis 1991, 1992 and 1993). Optimal levels of credit are also very course-specific because of the need to ensure students have prerequisite understandings before being given advanced standing in a course. Obviously, maximum credit levels of credit are possible only when there is a close match between the relevance of studies in the two sectors.

4.4 Student demand

One significant omission in terms of the data available is the level of demand by VTE students for credit transfer and articulation to higher education. Much of the work to improve levels of credit transfer and articulation is based on an assumption that there is a substantial level of unmet demand for these pathways. However, there is little available evidence to support or refute this assumption. Clearly, further investigation is warranted to determine levels of demand and the factors that affect these levels. If there are low levels of demand, such investigation needs to explore whether there is potential for growth in demand. The low levels may merely reflect a lack of awareness of existing pathways or may be indicative of a lack of opportunities currently available.

A survey undertaken by NCVER has shown that not all TAFE graduates who move to higher education are interested in seeking credit but, of those who do apply for exemptions, the majority are successful. NCVER data collected in 2001 showed that 52.6% of TAFE graduates who subsequently enrolled in bachelor degrees applied for and received some credit. Only 9.4% applied for, but did not get, credit and 30.2% did not apply and did not intend to apply for credit. This may be evidence that some students prefer to take the complete course without seeking credit or it may be interpreted as students being unaware that they are able to apply for credit.

As one indication of demand, the ACER Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth throw some light on the pathways students take when they miss out on university entry (Marks 2005). Of the cohort in this longitudinal study, 5% were students who applied to university after completing Year 12 in 2001 but were not offered a university place. When these students were followed up in 2003, 24% were enrolled in diploma courses and 6% were enrolled in certificate courses. Although their actual numbers are relatively small, this group of students who turned to other tertiary studies after missing out on university could be considered likely...
candidates for seeking credit when using their tertiary studies to gain subsequent entry to higher education.

An understanding of demand also will influence interpretations made of the data provided above about levels of credit transfer and articulation. Low demand is one possible interpretation of a lower than expected level of credit transfer and articulation. In other words, the relatively low proportions of students admitted on the basis of TAFE qualifications and granted credit may be an indication of the low student demand for these pathways rather than barriers or disincentives at the institutional or system levels. On the other hand, it could be the case that paucity of opportunities for credit transfer and articulation is deterring students from applying for or even considering higher education. The work of Cooper and O'Keefe (2005) is interesting in this context as it suggests that the availability of credit is an important factor in decisions to take up postgraduate study. Such research needs to be applied to decision-making related to movement from VTE to higher education to determine the role of credit transfer in this context. Further work is needed not only to ascertain levels of credit transfer and articulation but also to ascertain how these relate to levels of demand.

4.5 **Private VTE and higher education providers**

Another significant omission in the data available on credit transfer and articulation is the role played by private VTE and higher education providers. None of the data currently reported clearly relates to these providers, thus we know little about the credit transfer and articulation arrangements in place through either VTE or higher education private providers. Given the growing numbers of private providers within both sectors, levels of credit transfer and articulation are likely to be greater than the current data sets indicate because these capture only a proportion of existing practice.

4.6 **Student success**

Early work on credit transfer and articulation included a major focus on the success rates and outcomes of students who were admitted to higher education on the basis of VTE studies. Questions about how the quality of these students compared with traditional school leavers provided the context for such studies. The more recent expansion of higher education and the associated broadening of entry pathways and diversity of student intakes into higher education have moved the focus away from such questions. In an environment in which only 44% of domestic students commencing at university are admitted on the basis of their secondary school results alone, there is much more acceptance within higher education of student diversity and the fact that non-school leavers perform well in relation to recent school leavers.

The Higher Education Student Statistics Collection of DEST can be analysed to ascertain the success of students granted exemptions for prior TAFE studies. Students who are granted exemptions perform as well as school leavers in terms of progress rates and attrition rates. Students granted exemptions from prior TAFE...
studies outperform other students with similar age profiles and study patterns. Some universities have conducted their own evaluations of student outcomes after admission on the basis of specific pathways and criteria. Examples of these are reported in the case studies.

4.7 Concluding comments

In determining current levels of credit transfer and articulation, one needs to bear in mind Moodie’s (2005b) claim about the inadequacy of the national data for supporting any conclusions about the prevalence of such transfer. Clearly, much more work is needed to attain a comprehensive and reliable picture of credit transfer at the national, state and institutional levels. Problems of consistency of definition as well as consistency of the source and timing of the data collection will need to be addressed. Furthermore, current databases leave out entirely the private VTE and higher education providers, thus presenting an incomplete picture of pathways between VTE and higher education.

All of the developments to increase levels of credit transfer and articulation are based on an assumption that students are seeking the expansion of such arrangements. However, this assumption has not necessarily been tested. Studies to ascertain the experiences and subsequent success of VTE students applying for credit in their entry to higher education are also warranted, as are studies that determine the level of student demand for and interest in credit transfer and articulation.

Once a more comprehensive and reliable picture of credit transfer is attained, only then will it be possible to determine the adequacy of this level and set targets for improvement if needed. Such targets should be set after considering whether there should be similar levels of credit transfer across all states, regions and institutions or whether efforts should be directed towards those disciplines, regions and institutions where there is most need or most chance of success.

If targets are to be set, it will be important that these are realistic and based on empirical evidence of current and desirable levels of credit transfer. It is likely that such targets will make more sense if set at the national and/or state level rather than at the level of institution where diversity is being deliberately sought. Consideration should also be given to measures of success that extend beyond numbers of students moving between VTE and higher education. Success must also be measured by the likelihood of students gaining appropriate credit for the VTE studies – this means not too much credit or too little credit. The experiences of students who are granted credit must also be considered when measuring success. This would involve analysing progress and attrition rates, levels of satisfaction and graduate outcomes for these students in comparison with other students.
5 Factors Affecting Credit Transfer and Articulation

5.1 Introduction

This section provides an analysis of the factors affecting credit transfer and articulation from VTE to higher education as they are emerging at this stage of the study. They are based on an analysis of the literature, the research undertaken to date and the consultants’ own experience and expertise. These factors are tested and further developed through the case studies which are reported in a later stage, leading to the final conclusions and recommendations. Through the review of the literature, the overview of international and Australian developments and the workshop, some clear themes and issues have emerged. They include a sense that credit transfer and articulation arrangements are being given a higher priority in many areas and that some worthwhile developments are occurring in spite of a number of barriers. On the other hand, the levels of support for and implementation of credit transfer and articulation are variable across states/territories, across institutions and within institutions. There is potential for improvement and it is now a matter of seeking ways in which that improvement may be facilitated.

The factors discussed below are either barriers or enablers to credit transfer and articulation, and sometimes they act as both an enabler and a barrier, depending on the circumstances and the complex interplay within factors. While some of the factors affecting credit transfer and articulation have been raised in several previous studies, there are others that reflect more recent developments in policy and practice. This section will also relate the factors affecting credit transfer and articulation to the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education where relevant.

5.2 The wider context

5.2.1 Government policy and support

As highlighted in Appendix D, there have been recent developments at both the Commonwealth and state/territory government levels that have impacted positively on credit transfer and articulation arrangements.

Although universities are self-accrediting and therefore determine their own admission policies, criteria and procedures, the Commonwealth as a key funding agent for higher education has influenced new developments in credit transfer and articulation within universities. The former Minister for Education, Science and Training took a strong stance on the issue, advocating TAFE as an alternative for and a pathway to higher education, and there was extensive publicity associated with this stance (for example, Nelson 2002). Credit transfer and articulation arrangements have been a topic in discussions between DEST and institutions as
part of the annual Institution Assessment Framework process and the requirement to have such arrangements in place has been included within university funding agreements. Earlier in 2005, DEST requested information from all higher education providers about their policies and procedures for credit transfer and articulation as part of the expansion of the *Going to Uni* website. Although these moves do not directly impose practices on universities, they have raised awareness and stimulated action in many institutions. All universities appear to be aware of the need to do more, even if this has not yet translated into action.

VTE national policies and priorities have also signalled the importance of credit transfer and articulation. The Framework for the New National Training System highlights the importance of improved pathways between VTE and higher education, building on an existing priority in the National VTE Strategy for 2004-2010.

Several states/territories have indicated that pathways between VTE and higher education and improved credit transfer are being given a higher priority. Pathways between VTE and higher education have been recognised as one component of a whole-of-government approach to address skill shortages and raise levels of educational participation and attainment within particular regions, across states/territories and nationally. Some state/territory governments have taken an active role in developing and implementing initiatives aimed at co-ordinating and promoting credit transfer and articulation at the state-level.

There is evidence that the work of MCEETYA has had some impact too. The Commonwealth and a number of state Ministers have continued to identify articulation and credit transfer as a high priority. Dissemination of the *Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher Education* has generated awareness across both sectors, as has the invitation to respond to the draft principles for good information provision. MCEETYA’s leadership and co-ordination of developments in credit transfer and articulation have been important because of the disparate players and responsibilities associated with this issue.

In some jurisdictions, there is evidence that the structural separation of responsibilities for policy development for VTE and higher education impedes developments to improve credit transfer and articulation between the sectors. Although placing responsibility for VTE and higher education policies within a single or closely related structure does not guarantee improved pathways in practice, there is evidence that the separation of responsibilities in some state/territories is associated with barriers to co-ordination and communication unless specific efforts are made to ensure such co-ordination and communication occur. It is very difficult to develop policy in credit transfer and articulation arrangements between VTE and higher education when the officers responsible for policy development in one sector have little contact with those in the other sector or little understanding of policies, issues and context of the other sector. For this reason, the whole-of-government approach taken in some state/territories has provided an important impetus to work across boundaries.
If there is to be significant improvement in credit transfer and articulation, it will be essential for the various jurisdictions to continue to work together and use the range of legislative, funding and policy levers they have within their powers to bring about these changes.

5.2.2 Australia’s skill needs

Some of the government support for credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education comes from the recognition that such pathways may assist in addressing skill shortages in particular industries and in providing the mix of vocational, generic and academic skills needed in some industries. Recent interest has focused on the potential for such pathways to address shortages in the health sector, including nursing, aged care and mental health. Pathways in child care have also been a recent focus. The 2003 Senate inquiry on Bridging the Skills Divide placed a strong emphasis on the role of pathways between VTE and higher education in meeting the need for specific skill sets in various industries such as engineering, transport and paramedical fields. This inquiry also concluded that there was evidence that limited articulation arrangements between VTE and higher education were affecting interest in traditional trades because of concern among students that future higher education options would be closed to them if they chose a vocational pathway.

Given this focus on the role of credit transfer and articulation in addressing skill shortages, there is potential for government and industry groups to work with higher education and VTE providers to facilitate the pathways most needed. While this should act as a strong enabler of such pathways, there is limited evidence that this potential is being fully realised, apart from in a few small-scale and isolated examples. The difficulties reported by those attempting to broker such arrangements are the long timelines for course development and approval, and confusion about the way to approach VTE and higher education institutions so that action will be taken.

5.2.3 National frameworks

The different responsibilities for governance, regulation and funding of VTE and higher education make it difficult to take a truly national approach to co-ordinating credit transfer and articulation. A national credit transfer agency or scheme has been suggested on a number of occasions but seems unlikely, given it would require support from the Commonwealth and all state/territory governments as well as from individual institutions. It is also difficult to see how a national agency would be compatible with the autonomy of individual universities to accredit their own courses and set their own admission criteria and processes. Administration of credit transfer and articulation processes at the state/territory level through Tertiary Admissions Centres or equivalent is perhaps a more feasible aim, and would be a major breakthrough, but would also be a difficult undertaking.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national approach to qualifications that has implications for credit transfer and articulation. The AQF
ensures consistency of nomenclature in titles for qualifications, limits the number of standard qualifications recognised in each sector and facilitates a level of shared understanding of what each of these qualifications entails. The AQF provides a clear framework in which development of qualifications and courses takes place in each sector, and broadly suggests relationships and pathways between qualifications as well as providing credit transfer guidelines.

It has been argued that the AQF could be further strengthened to support more significant outcomes in terms of improving credit transfer and articulation. The High Level Review of the National Training Packages highlighted the benefits of a stronger stance in comparing qualifications between the sectors and in ensuring consistency in the level of award (ANTA 2004). The AQF guidelines are premised on acceptance of different authorities for defining qualifications and consequently recognise the different terminology and basic approaches to qualifications that each sector uses. A framework that uses descriptors based on a common language spanning learning outcomes at increasing levels of complexity may lead to more obvious pathways and relationships between qualifications. Some of the emerging international models are using this type of framework. However, it must be recognised that the extent to which such frameworks have made or will make a difference in the countries that have adopted them is yet to be tested and evaluated. Furthermore, changes to the AQF alone are not likely to impact significantly on credit transfer and articulation outcomes. As will be seen below, there are also many other factors that will need to be addressed.

5.2.4 Data collection

Problems with data relating to credit transfer and articulation have been discussed in Section 4. Not only does this act as a barrier to developing an accurate picture of credit transfer and articulation, but it also directly inhibits developments in credit transfer and articulation at the institutional level and more broadly. The lack of accurate data prevents mapping of existing credit transfer and articulation arrangements on which to base policy decisions. It also acts as a barrier to monitoring and evaluation of policy developments and new initiatives. The call for improved credit transfer and articulation is weakened by a lack of clarity about what the current levels are, what affects those levels and what the desired level should be. The lack of reliable data also leads to some widely-held misconceptions and claims about credit transfer and articulation that may not be supported by evidence.

The MCEETYA Good Practice Principles require institutions to employ agreed measures to evaluate the effectiveness of their credit transfer and articulation arrangements, but these measures have not been agreed and there is not yet the capacity to undertake this evaluation in a systematic way. Instead, some institutions have developed their own methodologies for measuring levels and outcomes, most often using different definitions and approaches. While of value to the individual institutions, this will not allow comparison across institutions, benchmarking to identify good practice or the analysis of trends over time. It will also not assist in the identification of broader factors that impact on credit transfer
levels and success. Instead, it may lead to inaccuracies or misconceptions in the claims made by some institutions about their level of credit transfer.

5.3 **Characteristics of the VTE and higher education sectors**

5.3.1 **Funding and administration**

Funding and administrative differences between the VTE and higher education sectors act as significant barriers to credit transfer and articulation arrangements, especially those more innovative ones which involve sharing facilities, staff or programs, or which involve students studying concurrently in both sectors. In these situations, two different sets of funding sources, administrative arrangements, employment conditions, governance and regulatory requirements and reporting/data collection must be negotiated concurrently. The difficulties are experienced in the first instance by the staff negotiating these pathways, as they must work across two cultures, two languages, two sets of descriptors for qualifications and two sets of approval procedures and requirements. Once the arrangements are approved, there are two sets of very different administrative procedures to negotiate. Course loads and students are counted and recorded differently in each sector, thus requiring different student and other academic administrative systems.

Some of the seemingly simple sectoral differences give rise to almost insurmountable barriers even for those most committed to implementing such pathways. Some universities have reported that rulings they have been given under the *Higher Education Support Act* actually prevent arrangements in which students enrolled in Commonwealth-supported places are also required to undertake VTE studies as part of their course. This is an example of the type of policy barrier that can be very frustrating and off-putting for those attempting to implement innovative pathways. Although it may be possible to resolve such policy inconsistencies, they sometimes do not come to the attention of those in a position to make the necessary changes.

Students enrolled concurrently in both sectors also face serious difficulties. They are forced to cope with different administrative arrangements, additional costs, different fee regimes, different forms of financial support and different rules and regulations. In an effort to overcome some of these issues, special ‘work-around’ arrangements may be made so that the students are enrolled in only one sector while participating in activities in the other. This can present its own set of difficulties, as it limits the range of support services and other benefits the students may receive because these are conditional on enrolment in the other sector. It can also present a range of administrative problems such as being ineligible to receive official transcripts of results and qualifying for graduation in the sector for which the students are not formally enrolled.

Case studies of successful credit transfer and articulation arrangements should be used to develop standard administrative procedures that assist in eliminating at least some of these difficulties that seem to be experienced every time a new
arrangement is negotiated. Issues arising from differences in data collection, reporting and funding need to be resolved at the level of state/territory and Commonwealth governments rather than expecting each institution to solve the problems every time a new collaborative arrangement is put in place. There should also be an on-going effort to remove structural or administrative barriers that might inhibit collaboration across the sectors.

5.3.2 Sectoral purposes and culture

The fundamental purpose and focus of the VTE and higher education sectors are different, as are their histories and traditions. These differences between the sectors are sometimes used as an argument against credit transfer and articulation arrangements or given as a reason why such arrangements are so difficult to implement.

However, along the continuum of educational activity in VTE and higher education, there is a relatively large amount of common ground. Within this common ground, both the VTE and higher education sectors undertake activities that are barely distinguishable in their basic approach and assumptions. Higher education is concerned about preparing its graduates for employment and many of its fields of study have strong employer, industry or professional links. Many higher education teachers are not involved in research, while some VTE teachers are involved in research and scholarship. The more advanced VTE courses are similar in difficulty, content and approach to the more basic higher education courses and some VTE providers offer bachelor level degrees that are approved through higher education approval processes. There is growing emphasis on the importance of higher levels of VTE qualifications and the High Level Review of National Training Packages identified the need for definitions of competence to include higher order skills.

Even where differences in purpose and culture do exist, there is no reason why these cannot be used to strengthen the partnership between VTE and higher education rather than detract from it. Successful collaboration between VTE and higher education is built on respect for the differences in educational focus between the sectors and an acknowledgement of the benefits to be gained from capitalising on those differences.

5.3.3 Attitudes

Perhaps even more important than the differences in purpose and culture are the attitudinal barriers in each sector. These attitudinal barriers exist in pockets in both the VTE and higher education sectors and they exist at all levels - among individuals, institutions, peak bodies and government departments.

A mindset held by some in the VTE sector accuses universities of being elitist and blames them for not implementing appropriate pathways for VTE students. There is little understanding of, or sympathy for, the autonomy of universities to set their own admission criteria, policies and processes. In other words, ‘It is all the universities’ fault’. For many within the VTE sector, there is concern that the
inclusion of university requirements and articulation and credit transfer outcomes in National Training Packages and some other VTE qualifications will be inconsistent with industry needs.

On the other hand, the mindset held by some in the higher education sector is that the VTE sector does not teach students to think, deals with low level skills only and is unwilling to devote the effort or resources needed to implement effective bridges between VTE and higher education, either for staff or students. For some academics in universities, collaboration with VTE and credit transfer arrangements for VTE students are seen as somehow placing higher education standards at risk. Each party is only too willing to blame the other for perceived shortcomings.

Obviously both sets of attitudes are counter-productive to any moves to develop and implement credit transfer and articulation arrangements. Changing one set of attitudes without changing the other will also not bring about the desired changes. For credit transfer and articulation arrangements to be implemented, a true partnership is needed between VTE and higher education – a partnership in which both parties are committed to achieving improved outcomes and each is respectful of the other. Unfortunately it is not possible to legislate or force such changes in attitude.

The stereotypes described above do not give adequate acknowledgement to many individuals and groups, within both the VTE and higher education sectors, who are committed to and actively engaged in forging collaborative links between the sectors. These ‘boundary spanners’ work, in spite of often seemingly insurmountable barriers, to facilitate links and implement arrangements that provide beneficial pathways to students. As with any change process, it is a matter of identifying these change agents and providing whatever support is needed to assist them in their endeavours and ensure they are appropriately rewarded.

5.3.4 Terminology

As highlighted in Section 2, the terminology associated with credit transfer and articulation is confusing and used differently by different sectors and by different groups and individuals within those sectors. While this is not an insurmountable barrier, it does cause communication problems and misunderstandings that bring about frustration and delays as people talk at cross-purposes. There is certainly much to be gained by further work on embedding common definitions within the sectors or, at very least, preceding specific partnership arrangements with discussion and agreement on the meaning of terminology to be used.

5.3.5 Curriculum and assessment

Issues associated with curriculum and pedagogy have been raised as potential barriers to credit transfer and articulation arrangements. One issue often raised is the competency-based curriculum approach used in the VTE sector that contrasts with the content-based curriculum approach of the higher education sector. These differences become most apparent when mapping a VTE curriculum against a
higher education curriculum in order to grant credit. When assessing an application for credit or developing articulation arrangements, higher education providers look for equivalence in learning outcomes in the prior studies before granting credit. They find this more difficult when VTE providers do not describe student outcomes in a way that they readily understand and can map against the higher education curriculum. The barriers relate both to different approaches to describing the curriculum and to the different terminology used, reflecting the different conceptual basis of the qualifications in each sector. Guidance and support in translating and mapping the relevant components of competency standards against the higher education curriculum are crucial.

The practice of using non-graded assessment reporting (competent/not yet competent) within VTE programs adds to the difficulties experienced, as it does not allow higher education admission processes to determine the level of attainment of VTE students. This is particularly important in high demand courses for which entry is competitive. Work undertaken within Queensland suggests that there is growing demand for graded assessment in VTE courses and already a range of practices in this regard (DET Qld 2005). The High Level Review of National Training Packages identified strong demand for graded assessment and called for the development of a model that would provide for graded assessment in VTE by way of supplementary reports (ANTA 2004). This is resisted strongly by some in the VTE sector who see graded assessment as incompatible with their competency-based approach.

5.3.6 Admissions processes

The relationship between admission and credit transfer is described in Section 2. Particularly for the more sought-after higher education courses and institutions, admission is an important barrier to credit transfer and articulation because VTE students are less likely to be admitted in the very competitive selection processes that are applied. Tertiary Admissions Centres and higher education institutions vary in the approaches used for the category of non-Year 12 applicants that includes those with prior VTE studies. In Queensland, for example, the Tertiary Admissions Centre publishes schedules that demonstrate how VTE students are ranked through a scaling process related to the course/s they have taken. The Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre also provides institutions with points of comparison that allow non-Year 12 applicant rankings to be compared with Year 12 applicants, although it is up to individual institutions how these are used. In some other states, institutions are merely provided with details of academic records for non-Year 12 applicants and each application is assessed at the institutional level on a case-by-case basis. This is likely to lead to variation across and within institutions in terms of the consideration given to applicants with prior VTE studies. There is evidence that sometimes admission decisions are based on the Year 12 results of applicants and ignore subsequent VTE studies because these do not provide information that allows relative performance to be judged. While not directly within the terms of reference for this study, there is a case for examining in more detail the ranking and decision-making processes used, both within Tertiary Admissions Centres and
within institutions, when students with prior VTE studies apply for entry into higher education.

5.4 **Institutional context**

5.4.1 **Increased competition**

There is little doubt that there is increasing competition among providers in both the VTE and higher education sectors. This increased competition impacts on credit transfer and articulation arrangements in a number of ways. One unfortunate outcome of increased competition is that VTE and higher education providers sometimes see themselves as competitors with each other and this can detract from a willingness to collaborate. This is more likely to be the case when the VTE and higher education providers are both offering similar courses and are vying with each other for student enrolments. Even when not offering similar courses, VTE and higher education providers may see themselves as competitors within the same student market.

However, the increasingly competitive education market can also work towards enhancing prospects for credit transfer and articulation arrangements, as providers seek a market advantage and promote credit transfer and articulation arrangements as a component of that market advantage. As highlighted in Section 3, one of the drivers for implementing credit transfer and articulation arrangements is the enhanced pathways this can offer prospective students and the increased demand so generated. Such market advantage can be experienced by both VTE and higher education providers involved in credit transfer and articulation arrangements.

The drop in demand for university places in 2005 and 2006 from the high levels of demand in 2003 and 2004, especially among regional universities, has increased awareness of the need for diversifying the student intake particularly within those universities most affected. This has meant that regional universities and others experiencing a drop in demand are most likely to turn to improved credit transfer and articulation arrangements as a way of attracting additional students through diversifying their intakes.

While demand has dropped in some universities, this is not the case for all universities. The most prestigious, metropolitan universities continue to have strong demand from very able students across the majority of their courses. This leads to a very competitive admission environment with high cut-off entry levels required. Here the main emphasis for all prospective students is gaining entry, and credit tends to take on a secondary level of importance. Students applying at these universities via a VTE pathway must compete against the top school leavers and often also against other students who have already successfully completed some higher education studies. This is a highly competitive environment where decisions must stand up to external scrutiny and potential legal challenge.

The increased competition has another possible impact on credit transfer and articulation through the likelihood it will also bring increased differentiation to the
VTE and higher education sectors. Increased differentiation will mean that some providers are more likely to move towards credit transfer and articulation to bring a market advantage. Others may see their market advantage coming through other, possibly quite different, strategies.

5.4.2 International activities

It is interesting to observe that the rapid expansion of Australian VTE and higher education providers into international markets is yet to impact significantly on local credit transfer and articulation arrangements, although there is potential for this to happen. A major and growing component of each university’s transnational education strategy is the development of relationships with offshore education providers, including those operating at the VTE level. Students who undertake courses in these partner institutions are then given credit into the higher education courses of the Australian provider through arrangements either in which these higher education courses are taught in conjunction with the offshore provider or in which the students move to Australia to complete their higher education course. Whatever particular arrangement is in place, it will most often include credit for the VTE component.

There are a number of reasons that these arrangements have been taken up with such enthusiasm by Australian higher education providers. One is that they are seen to generate revenue for the institution because the international students are fee-paying. Another reason is that most often the arrangement involves quality assurance oversight by the Australian provider through input or oversight of the VTE curriculum and through moderation of assessment. Even when there is no direct quality assurance oversight, it is important to consider what factors are leading to the success of credit transfer and articulation arrangements with offshore providers, and whether some of these policies and practices can be extended to arrangements with onshore VTE providers. Another issue to explore is whether there is consistency between the credit being granted in these offshore arrangements and that being granted to local VTE students.

The expanding international developments of Australian education providers also provide another opportunity for collaboration and the development of pathways between VTE and higher education. There is potential for collaboration between VTE and higher education providers in joint international marketing of their Australian courses. Pathways that involve credit transfer and articulation between the VTE and higher education provider are likely to be particularly attractive in the international market. A number of private providers have been very successful in this regard through marketing courses to international students that involve pathways from VTE to higher education either within their own institution or in conjunction with a public higher education provider.

5.4.3 Proximity

Although there cannot be an expectation for all VTE and higher education providers to be co-located, proximity can facilitate credit transfer and articulation pathways
because of ease of movement between the providers and ease of communication by staff and students. On the other hand, proximity is no guarantee of collaboration or effective pathways and there are many examples in which co-located groups do not capitalise on their proximity.

In regional areas, shared and co-located facilities offer particular benefits as they allow a broader range of educational options and pathways than would be possible through stand-alone providers because of the smaller population being served. These regional centres, because of their importance to the communities they serve, often have substantial support from the local businesses and local government. There is recognition that the presence of an educational facility supports the social and economic development of the community and raises levels of educational participation. If students must move away from home to undertake their studies, this adds a psychological as well as financial barrier. For this reason, the shared TAFE/higher education facilities and campuses in some regional centres have been a particular success even if they must offer a more limited range of courses than their metropolitan counterparts.

5.4.4 Field of study

There are a number of issues associated with field of study that may act as either barriers or as enablers for credit transfer and articulation. Some fields of study lend themselves to credit transfer and articulation arrangements because they are taught and labelled in similar ways within VTE and higher education. In these cases, the pathways between the sectors are much more obvious and therefore easier for students and staff to negotiate. In some fields, pathways between the sectors are not facilitated because there are either few VTE courses or fewer VTE enrolments at the upper levels of qualification such as diploma and advanced diploma. In other cases, there may be VTE courses producing students with potential to move to higher education but no relevant higher education courses to take them.

It is worth emphasising that effective pathways require action on both the supply side as well as the receiving side. In those areas of identified skill shortage where combined VTE and higher education pathways offer some advantages, it is important to ensure that the courses at the VTE levels are designed to lead to higher education pathways both in terms of emphasis and nature of qualification offered. In addition, the courses at the higher education level should be designed with these pathways in mind. The ideal curriculum development process involves VTE and higher education staff working together to design courses that facilitate pathways between the sectors and this is the principle that has been enunciated in the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles. Unfortunately, such coincidence in timing and intention for course design does not always occur. The situation is further complicated in that local VTE curriculum must meet the requirements of the National Training Packages in many fields. There is sometimes a perception by VTE providers that they have limited discretion and flexibility in developing local curriculum while also meeting competency standards and assessment requirements. Collaborative curriculum design requires flexibility from both parties, each of which must enter the negotiations with a willingness to make compromises.
This is also an area where professional and industry groups can play an important role in encouraging credit transfer and articulation pathways, especially in those areas for which there are industry or professional accreditation requirements. Given that many higher education courses have formal professional accreditation and that industry or employer input is sought for many others, it appears that there is more scope for a co-ordinated and concerted approach from industry, employer and professional bodies to encourage credit transfer and articulation pathways and possibly make these a condition of accreditation when such intervention is warranted. There is limited evidence of industry and professional groups playing this role in a co-ordinated way. In some cases, professional accrediting bodies may actually place limitations on the amount of credit that is granted within a course.

### 5.5 Institutional policies and practices

#### 5.5.1 Mission and priorities

There are many differences in the way that institutions approach credit transfer and articulation and clearly these differences impact on the outcomes. Some institutions signal the high priority given to credit transfer and pathways between sectors through their mission and strategic planning. The institutions that take credit transfer and articulation most seriously have missions that place an emphasis on access and equity, collaboration with other education providers, regional engagement or enhanced pathways and options for students. The most active institutions in credit transfer and articulation have missions that combine an emphasis on all of these outcomes. Even then, a mission on its own is unlikely to have an impact on outcomes unless that mission is translated into explicit strategies with measurable outcomes or performance indicators. In those institutions most actively pursuing credit transfer and articulation arrangements, it is possible to see this priority reflected in explicit links between mission, strategic plans, operational planning, organisational structures, policies and procedures.

#### 5.5.2 Leadership

Those institutions most effective in credit transfer and articulation have senior staff with clear responsibility for providing leadership in this area and ensuring that plans related to these outcomes are translated into practice, that resources are made available and that staff involved in implementation are encouraged, supported and rewarded appropriately. There has been a recent development for some institutions to have a specific portfolio and a senior appointment to provide leadership in cross-sectoral pathways or community engagement.

There is also evidence that, as well as leadership from senior levels of the institution, there is a need for champions throughout the institution to ensure that approaches to credit transfer and articulation are effectively implemented and maintained. These champions are needed in both administrative and academic positions.
5.5.3 Commitment of resources

There is no doubt that credit transfer and articulation arrangements require additional resources at least for their initial development and implementation. These resources are needed to provide people with the time to undertake negotiations across institutions, develop new relationships, design and implement new administrative procedures, develop new communication strategies to inform VTE students and staff about the new arrangements and opportunities, and support students during their transition.

In institutions where budgets are tight, there is reluctance to commit these additional resources and staff are often expected to undertake development and implementation tasks on top of existing workloads. This devalues the importance of the process and slows down or even halts progress. Under these circumstances, the outcome not only is often disappointing but also provides ammunition for those who argue that the barriers to credit transfer and articulation are insurmountable. Fortunately there is recent evidence of a growing trend towards making specific institutional appointments both to deal with the development and implementation tasks of new credit transfer and articulation pathways and to handle the administrative tasks and student liaison associated with such pathways once they are in place.

There is an argument that institutions granting credit for students are forgoing some income because the students are enrolled for a shorter period than if enrolled without credit and that this acts as a disincentive for credit transfer arrangements. This is not an accurate interpretation of the way students are funded in higher education where student load is the basis for funding. Credit transfer and articulation arrangements could only impact negatively on funding if a decision were made by a provider to move out of teaching a group of students and thus lose that load from the institutional funding. Even then, this would only be a short-term impact if that load were replaced by other student enrolments. However, although funding associated directly with load might not be affected by credit transfer arrangements, there are other less tangible costs associated with dealing with additional student numbers, the complexities of planning and the different requirements of students who do not enter and exit with the traditional student cohorts.

5.5.4 Administrative structures and approaches

One of the barriers to effective credit transfer is the practice of expecting individual students to negotiate credit on a case-by-case basis often through having to make contact with a range of personnel located in different schools/departments and faculties within an institution. Not only is this unnecessarily daunting for the prospective student, but it can also lead to inconsistencies in interpretation and outcomes unless formal registers of credit precedents are maintained and applied. Such an approach is most at risk of not complying with the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles that require consistent and transparent approaches to credit transfer and articulation.
At the other more positive extreme and in keeping with the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles are those institutions with readily accessible information on standard credit arrangements that are administered through a single, centrally located admissions office. Such an approach allows students to determine their credit in advance of applying for admission and then deal with a single point of contact as part of normal admission procedures. The aim should be to normalise and integrate credit transfer arrangements into standard processes as much as possible. When situations arise that are out of the ordinary and therefore must be considered on a case-by-case basis, the applicants should not be referred to multiple contact points within schools/departments or faculties but rather the application should be handled and co-ordinated through the single central admissions office. The move in some institutions towards ‘one stop shops’ or ‘call centres’ as the single point of entry or contact from prospective students is a promising development as long as credit transfer and articulation arrangements are included as part of this centralised service provision.

One issue which may emerge over time is where higher education providers grant credit only to students from specified Registered Training Organisations. As VTE outcomes are meant to be nationally recognised and consistent, particularly in relation to qualifications from National Training Packages, it is not clear on what basis distinctions between students from different RTOs are made, and the practice may not comply with fair and equitable admission policies.

5.5.5 Promotion of pathways to students

The MCEETYA Good Practice Principles require the pathways between VTE and higher education to be widely publicised to existing students and potential applicants, but this is one area where practice is highly variable even within those institutions considered to be committed to building better pathways. When credit transfer and articulation arrangements between VTE and higher education are in place, students must be informed about their existence and encouraged to take advantage of them, otherwise they cannot be deemed a success. This information must extend to easily understood explanations of the arrangements, the implications of taking them, the advantages they offer and the administrative processes involved. There are many examples where credit transfer may be available but where information about that availability is non-existent, not easily accessible or not user-friendly in terms of its format or approach.

There has been an increase in the use of websites as an information source at both the institutional and state-wide levels. While some are clearly dynamic and informative, often including searchable databases, others have serious shortcomings in terms of the accuracy, currency and scope of the information they provide. Some are merely links to files of print brochures which are often difficult for prospective students to access and print, and are not updated regularly. The more effective websites are:

- readily accessible from the webpage specifically for prospective students, which in turn is accessible from the institution home page
designed to be attractive and user-friendly to students
free of jargon, with clear definitions and consistent use of terminology
clear about the nature of credit which will be granted for various courses based on a range of VTE qualifications
searchable using either a VTE course or higher education course or discipline area as a starting point
linked to application forms and details of application and admission procedures
specific about a single contact point for further information and assistance
current, with an explicit mechanism to maintain the website.

At this stage, there are few websites that comply with the MCEETYA Good Practice Principles with respect to having a register of credit precedents publicly available other than at the more general course level, although some universities are currently working on implementing this.

Although websites can be a powerful tool for information provision, no website can stand alone as a strategy to improve credit transfer and articulation. The website must be maintained and it must be promoted to students as an information source. It must also be supplemented by and supported by other information strategies such as promotion of pathways through careers advisors, VTE and school teachers and administrative staff in VTE and higher education institutions. Given that students will most often be undertaking a VTE course when they are considering pathways to higher education, it is essential that the VTE providers assume some responsibility for working with the higher education providers to promote these pathways to students. There is also a need for information on pathways between VTE and higher education to be provided within schools, to raise general awareness and to assist students in their longer-term planning.

5.5.6 Transition support

There has been increasing awareness in universities of the need to provide additional support for first year students to ease their transition to a new learning environment and approach, and so maximise their chances of success. For practical reasons, much of this support is organised within first year subjects and for students who enter the first year of a course. It is very easy for students who are granted credit or who are involved in an articulated program to miss out on such support because they are not part of the ‘normal’ first year cohort. Students making the transition from VTE to higher education studies require transition support because of all of the same reasons that school leavers and mature aged students require such support – the different learning environment and teaching approaches to which they are moving. VTE students who are not given transition support may struggle and their chances of success will be jeopardised. This may lead to an unfortunate
outcome for the students, and also tends to reinforce stereotypes and entrenched attitudes among VTE and higher education sectors. The VTE sector will see it as evidence of the poor teaching approaches in higher education, while the higher education sector will see it as evidence of the poor preparation the students received in their VTE courses.

A commitment to the provision of transition support for students is a definite requirement for success of credit transfer and articulation arrangements and this commitment must be made by both VTE and higher education providers. Support for students making the transition from VTE to higher education should begin in the final stages of their VTE studies and continue as they move into their higher education courses.

5.6 Concluding comments

This section has brought together the range of factors that affect credit transfer and articulation. Clearly there are factors that act as barriers and others that act as enabling factors, while some can act in either way depending on the particular circumstances and context. The factors interact in complex ways, demonstrating that there is no simple answer to the question of how to improve credit transfer and articulation. It will be important to test out these factors further and explore them in a variety of real situations. The case studies were designed with this purpose in mind. The case studies provide further insights on these issues and lead to the framework for recommendations to improve outcomes in credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education.
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Wheelahan, L (2000) *Bridging the divide: developing the institutional structures that most effectively deliver cross-sectoral education and training*, NCVER, Adelaide.

## Appendix A – List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACPET</td>
<td>Australian Council for Private Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQFAB</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQTF</td>
<td>Australian Quality Training Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATN</td>
<td>Australian Technology Network (of Universities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUQA</td>
<td>Australian Universities Quality Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVCC</td>
<td>Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Charles Darwin University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Canberra Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETYA</td>
<td>Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEYFS</td>
<td>Department of Education, Youth and Family Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFEEST</td>
<td>Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Diploma Supplement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECTS</td>
<td>European Credit Transfer System</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCHE</td>
<td>Joint Committee on Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBEET</td>
<td>National Board for Employment, Education and Training</td>
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<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre Vocational Education Research</td>
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<td>NQC</td>
<td>National Quality Council</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>QUT</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQA</td>
<td>Tasmanian Qualifications Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>UC</td>
<td>University of Canberra</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UniSA</td>
<td>University of South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTE</td>
<td>Vocational and Technical Education (formerly VET)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VQA</td>
<td>Victorian Qualifications Authority</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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Appendix B - Literature Review

1 Introduction

This brief literature review provides an overview of issues that are taken up further in other sections of the report and places those issues in the broader context of the Australian and international research literature of the field. It concentrates on recent (post 2000) literature since the Pathways to Partnerships report by Carnegie (2000) including Wheelahan’s (2000) comprehensive study, Bridging the Divide. Coverage of the most recent international developments in credit transfer and articulation is included in Appendix C. The most relevant national and state papers and policy documents are covered in Appendix D. The purpose of this section is to identify issues and present theoretical perspectives in the Australian and overseas research literature used to describe, measure, theorise and analyse the related phenomena of credit transfer and articulation from vocational and technical education (VTE) to higher education.

2 Researching credit transfer and articulation

Rationales for research in the field

Serious interest in credit transfer and articulation in Australia as a policy-related research topic dates back at least 20 years. Since that time the bulk of the research has been commissioned by national and state governments. Strategic intervention through commissioned research (Golding, Marginson and Pascoe 1996; Golding, Bluer and Keating 1996) was used on a number of occasions in the decade to 2000 to tease out and address perceived issues of access, equity and efficiency that were seen to be wholly or partially associated with the phenomenon of credit transfer and articulation. Though credit transfer policies are now recognised as a significant area of government policy and intervention, there has been relatively little independent research of the issue.

Carnegie’s (2000) Pathways to Partnerships report comprehensively covered the field to that time, including the complex (and arguably contested) relationships between VTE and higher education, affected by the trend to lifelong learning, the Australian Qualifications Framework, sector convergence, student mobility between sectors and considerable intra-sectoral change in both sectors. A close read of the report including the extensive set of ‘drivers’ and ‘barriers’ associated with cross-sector qualification linkages (pp. 159–180) pours considerable cold water on arguments about the prospects for increased seamlessness. As Carnegie (2000, p. 180) concluded, attempts to improve credit transfer and articulation are complicated by ‘a differentiated post-compulsory education market’ very different from the highly regulated dual government sectors when attempts to intervene through policy and regulation to improve credit transfer were first suggested in the mid-1980s (see Parkinson 1985). As Carnegie (p. 180) observed, there are now many different producers, products (qualifications) and clients in the education and training markets. It is therefore difficult to monitor or measure, let alone intervene or
Recent increased complexity aside, the recognition area has always been very
difficult to research nationally mainly because of the complexity and diversity of the
inter-sectoral arrangements across states and territories in Australia as well as
difficulties in consistently defining terms and difficulties with measurement as
discussed below in section 4 below. These difficulties have been exacerbated in the
last decade by what Chappell, Hawke, Rhodes and Solomon (2003, pp. 32–38) have
comprehensively reviewed and called ‘the changing complexity and inter-
relationships of education and training sectors’. This complexity is further
exacerbated by a recognition of the complexity of the nature of post-compulsory
movement within and in both directions between sectors (Golding 1999), in a
society where lifelong and lifewide learning (OECD 1996) has become increasingly
common and an important part of international and national government education
and training policy. In summary, the field is considerably more complex in 2005
than when the Kangan report launched TAFE in 1974.

Movement between VTE and higher education is further complicated practically, as
well as in the minds of students reporting on and claiming credit for their prior
tertiary backgrounds, by a number of factors. These include: the increasing levels of
commercial and fee-for-service work and the opening up of education markets in
both sectors; identification of significant and complex two-way inter-sectoral
movement (Golding and Vallence 1999; Harris, Sumner and Rainey 2005); a huge
growth in VTE-in-schools over the past decade (NCVER 1998); a growth in the
number of multi-sectoral institutions particularly in Victoria (listed in Robinson and
Misko 2003); sequential and concurrent enrolment (referred to as ‘swirling’ by
Moodie 2005b); as well as a significant (and relatively recent) increase in the number
of students not only crossing sectors, but also coming from other sectors overseas
(Haas 1999).

In turn, Australian research into credit transfer and articulation has, as Moodie
(2005b) observed, been difficult to compare and contrast directly with research in
very different policy contexts in other countries for some of the same reasons –
including finding comparable definitions of credit transfer and articulation, and
measurement of the complex movement and recognition between unlike systems
and sectors.

One fundamental problem for critical research in the area is that the very ground on
which much of the research takes place, including the current study, is politically
charged. While several attempts have been made to make meaning objectively by
mapping and measuring the field quantitatively, few attempts have been made to
draw back and recognise or analyse the field as one in which meaning, knowledge
and power about movement and recognition are contested, tightly connected and in
a constant state of flux. Apart from Wheelahan (2000) and Carnegie (2000), few
researchers in Australia have engaged with or addressed the significant practical
issues students and staff actually face when they are involved in credit transfer
arrangements, applications and approvals. Given that most of the research in the area is commissioned and funded by governments with policy imperatives, findings and recommendations are often intrinsically tied up with the presuppositions in the research briefs as well as in the values and sectoral locations of researchers. The emphasis in much research in the field is sometimes biased towards looking for small exemplars of transferable good practice rather than looking at actual practice.

A dispassionate critique of the articulation and credit transfer literature in Australia and the research generated to date identifies a number of underlying assumptions that are difficult to separate from the institutional structures and practices that both define and create the phenomenon of credit transfer and articulation. Commissioned research itself is a strategic and powerful intervention in policy and practice rather than an objective analysis of static administrative or mechanistic phenomena. The current nationally commissioned study, as an example, presupposes in its brief the desirability of improving outcomes in credit transfer and articulation from vocational and technical education to higher education.

This is not to say that the existing literature about articulation and credit transfer cannot be summarised, analysed or critiqued from a particular perspective at a particular time, as attempted in this brief literature review. It is about recognising that no one piece of research (or in this case, a synthesis of existing research) can objectively, definitively or ‘truthfully’ simplify the many complexities in the relationships between VTE and higher education in Australia.

**Types of research in the field**

There is a tendency (Wheelahan 2000, Bateman and Knight 2003, Harris, Sumner and Rainey 2005, and Moodie 2005a/b being notable exceptions) for much of the Australian research in the area to be conducted without reviewing or taking proper account of previous, often extensive Australian literature and research in the area. The available Australian research since 2000 is directed mainly at issues that connect directly or indirectly with contemporary government policies but falls into three broad categories. The first category includes academic research strongly inclusive of perspectives and presuppositions from national or state VTE policy (e.g. Wheelahan 2000; Robinson and Misko 2003; Harris, Sumner and Rainey 2005), typically inclusive of a formal literature review but often including recommendations. The second category includes strategic research in report format, commissioned (and sometimes directed) by governments that focus on the detailed practical implications of government policies on credit transfer and articulation and includes recommendations (e.g. Carnegie 2000; VQA 2004; Gillis, Bateman, Foster and Griffin 2005). The third category includes a relatively small amount of independent research sometimes with a critical edge (e.g. Moodie 2003, 2005b).

There is a tendency – in the face of significant and real difficulties in studying the complex field – for researchers to revert to case studies as a means of encapsulating and describing that complexity. They range from studies that consist primarily of cases (e.g. Gillis, Bateman, Foster and Griffin 2005), to studies that consist of illustrative cases aimed at deducing models (e.g. Robinson and Misko 2003) to
studies that use them as real, powerful (and at times apocryphal) illustrations (Wheelahan 2000, Appendix A and pp. 6–12) in otherwise solid academic studies. Other studies use carefully selected ‘good practice’ case studies to argue a case for improved inter-sectoral co-operation (e.g. DET 2005) with minimal reference to the wider literature or consideration of illustrative examples of ‘bad’ practice.

There are few studies that attempt to compare or locate the Australian research on VTE to higher education movement in an international context. Moodie (2003, p. 1), a notable exception, concluded that ‘the so-called unified national system of higher education in Australia’ has higher transfer rates that are more indicative of less well differentiated institutions and sectors, than the transfer rates observed within the relatively formally segmented, Californian system and the less segmented systems in other US states.

3 Background to interest in credit transfer and articulation

Research interest in credit transfer and articulation arrangements has arisen from a number of inter-related sources. These include concerns about equity and access, concerns about efficiency, concerns about providing pathways and concerns about seamlessness.

Concerns about equity and access

Early research in TAFE to higher education articulation and credit transfer in Australia was driven by perceptions more about inequity, associated with not recognising credit for previous study in VTE than about system efficiency. In the 1980s TAFE was sometimes perceived as a relatively less well-known poor cousin of universities, VTE as an acronym was not known and the notion of credit transfer between what were then called TAFE and university sectors was less well accepted. Research into credit transfer during the decade from 1989 (NBEET 1989, 1990, 1992) emanated mainly from NBEET whose national policy concerns were mainly about system efficiency as well as access and equity for TAFE students – who were at that time seen as making relatively straightforward and direct transitions from TAFE to university. The small amount of independent (though typically commissioned) research during the early 1990s (Lewis 1992, 1993, 1994; Dobson, Sharma and Haydon 1996) focused more on whether university results of former TAFE students actually justified their selection and advancement. These debates are rarely revisited in this decade in the light of research from the higher education sector, that mature age students from backgrounds other than school – including VTE and/or work – typically do as well as and sometimes better than school leavers.

Broader concerns about inter-sectoral equity came into sharper focus a decade ago with the advancement of policies for lifelong learning, including identification by the OECD (1996, pp. 135–140) of models, as Watson, Kearns, Cameron and Grant (2000, p. 41) noted, that would enable ‘fragmented structures [to] become systemic – with a rich array of pathways, bridges and supported transitions to assist individuals accessing education and training on a whole of life basis’.
Other recent research has been motivated in part by the desirability of VTE to play 'a significant role in providing short cycle higher education', as Moodie (2003, p. 2) noted, and at the same time to provide '... strong provisions for students to transfer to long cycle and higher level programs lest they be trapped in the sector in which they first enrol'. This concern arises from the observation that school students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to move into the VTE sector than the higher education sector. This attraction to VTE from students with lower socio-economic backgrounds can be attributed to both ease of access to VTE studies (financially and geographically) and community attitudes that place a higher value on education that is shorter-term and is perceived to be more vocationally oriented and linked directly with employment. Credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education are seen to play an important role in 'second chance' provision for these students to advance in their education beyond their initial career and life choices.

**Concerns about efficiency**

Many attempts in the two decades since Parkinson's (1985) work to increase recognition in universities for previous VTE study have been motivated in part by government concerns about system efficiency by avoiding unnecessary repeat learning of knowledge, skills or competencies by students. The *National Guidelines on Cross-Sectoral Linkages*, based on the Carnegie report (2000), adopted by the AVCC and then endorsed by the Advisory Board of the AQF to replace its 1995 guidelines, steer away from prescription and use the term 'cross-sectoral qualifications' rather than 'credit transfer and articulation' (AQF 2002). Rather than emphasising notions of equity or fairness, they stress that such linkages are ‘critical to the achievement of a more efficient, open, integrated and relevant post-compulsory education system’ (AQF 2002, p. 1; AVCC 2001, p. 2).

Some industry bodies (e.g. IT Skills Hub 2002) have attempted to put pressure on governments to intervene and improve inter-sectoral credit transfer and articulation arrangements, using what is also essentially an efficiency case by arguing that ‘more effective skills formation is essential for Australia to remain globally competitive’ (p. 1), and arguing that such strategic intervention is smarter, healthier and safer. Unions have supported government intervention to improve tertiary pathways for workers and regularly express their concerns in formal submissions to government inquiries. Fardon’s (2005) submission to the Queensland Green Paper *Skills for Jobs and Growth* on behalf of the Queensland Council of Unions, for example, argues a case for development of ‘a wider range of integrated degree and diploma programs in conjunction with universities’ (p. 11) as part of a wider raft of reforms to ‘Encourage all Professional Workers to be Appropriately Tertiary Qualified’.

There is an irony in such claims for government intervention on the grounds of efficiency in what is widely recognised and promoted as an increasingly privatised education and training market. The nub of the problem is that efficiency in that market, including maximised credit transfer, while attractive for students, is not necessarily economically rational for devolved and partly privatised providers of education and training. In the absence of public policy intervention such as through
government purchasing decisions (see Wheelahan 2000, p. 26), there may be few incentives in devolved education and training systems for an institution or faculty to maximise the levels of credit granted to students once they are enrolled, in part because it is perceived as cutting down on the revenue generated by teaching. The main institutional incentive for maximised credit lies in the desire for higher education providers in a competitive market to encourage students to come to and enrol in particular organisations or courses by crossing sectors.

**Concerns about providing pathways**

Movement from VTE to university has been regarded in public policy terms as desirable to provide what are widely described as ‘pathways’ from vocational to ‘higher’ levels of education (Parkinson 1985). The idea of pathways was comprehensively critiqued in Golding (1999). Wheelahan (2000) identified a set of learning pathways that facilitated increased credit transfer and articulation, along with descriptions of how arrangements associated with these pathways have been established.

There is a presupposition that an increased number of people crossing this sectoral boundary along a greater number of credit transfer pathways would be an indication of the desirable increased overlap between sectors and, arguably, increased ‘seamlessness’ as outlined in the section that follows. What is generally missing in the literature is a critical account of factors other than government policy and inter-sectoral credit transfer arrangements that affect such inter-sectoral flows (and also significant backward flows: see Golding and Vallence 1999; Moodie 2005a). These particularly include economic and job cycles that dampen or increase demand for both VTE and higher education both as preparation for and an alternative to work (Golding 1999).

**Concerns about seamlessness**

One very persistent theme in the literature (ANTA 1998; Player 2000; Robinson and Misko 2003, pp. 10–11; Teese, Gulec and O’Brien 1999) is the idea that it is possible – despite the sectoral differences – to create a ‘seamless’ framework between all sectors of education and training, including from VTE to university. This is easier to achieve in particular courses or fields of study where there is reasonably good sectoral overlap. After comprehensively researching the field parallel to Carnegie in 2000, Wheelahan (2000, p. 49) concluded that, ‘Current sectoral arrangements are not conducive to true ‘seamlessness’’. Opportunities for formalising structural seamlessness were rejected by governments in the preparation of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) in the 1990s when the framework was built around existing sectoral differences. As Carnegie (2000, p. 14) noted, approaches that systematically rate one qualification against another were rejected because they were seen to impose ‘an artificial precision upon the sheer diversity of programs required in a well-developed education and training system’.
Despite the rhetoric, there is little evidence in the literature of practical seamlessness. Wheelahan (2000, p. xii) succinctly identified a number of key obstacles to the cross-sectoral collaboration necessary for seamlessness that still remain relevant. These included the ‘lack of a coherent national lifelong learning policy’, ‘two systems, accountable to, and funded by different levels of government’, different sectoral cultures, competition for students, ‘incompatible assessment practices in each sector’ and the lack of a coherent student system inclusive of both sectors. A recent study of inter-sectoral co-operation in Queensland by Robinson and Misko (2003) identified ‘different funding, accountability and administrative arrangements within each of the different sectors’ (p. 11) as the main barriers to true seamlessness.

4 Measuring and comparing articulation and credit transfer in Australia

Data available within the VTE (mainly TAFE) sector, about the number of people moving to higher education from VTE, are collected in a very different way from data collected in universities about the same people moving from VTE to higher education. Once considerable delays in movement, as well as concurrent enrolment are factored in, and account is taken of people moving with (or without) completing one or more TAFE/VTE awards, the simple picture of direct and deliberate movement becomes blurred. The credit that students may (or may not) achieve on entry to higher education on the basis of VTE/TAFE becomes similarly complex to measure and therefore research. Moodie (2005b, pp. 20–36) recently attempted to measure and compare Australian student and selected overseas student transfers. After attempting international comparisons using a wide range of different data sources, Moodie (2005b) concluded that ‘the national data on student transfer in all the jurisdictions studied isn’t good enough to support many conclusions about the direction or even prevalence of student transfer’ (p. 36).

As Moodie (2005b p. 46) also observed, whether significant upward (VTE to higher education) transfer is a system strength or a system weakness depends on one’s perspective about the division of sectoral roles or functions. As an illustration, Moodie notes that high student transfer might be ‘evidence not of the strength of the system, but of its failure to differentiate the roles of its parts sufficiently clearly, at least to prospective students’. Moodie (2005b, p. 3) cites Gelin (1999, p. 11) who regards effective transfer as:

... a function of both sending and receiving institutional policies, practices and culture. Using transfer rates to measure the effectiveness of the sending institution leaves out half of the equation.

Our starting definitions of credit transfer and articulation in Section 2 are far from universally accepted either by governments or within research circles. Hermann (1971, p. 2) called articulation the ‘connectedness between the disparate or partially disparate courses or sectors of a comprehensive education system’. Vermilye (1976, p. 589) called it ‘a process of putting the piece we call the individual to the puzzle we call the system’. Haas (1999) saw articulation as being related to opportunity or
status, in that it allows people to move, primarily ‘upwards’, on pathways to further study opportunities.

The diversity of definitions and slippage between definitions of credit transfer and articulation in the literature makes for considerable confusion and creates particular problems for a brief synthesis of research including this one. These problems extend to misunderstandings by students who self-report on their prior sectoral backgrounds on admission to another sector, including transfer implied by previous study backgrounds (complete and incomplete, sometimes multiple) and only sometimes with credit transfer potential. These misunderstandings contribute to significant problems with credit transfer and articulation data quality.

As a recent example, TAFE Queensland’s (2005) Pathways to university: getting credit for your TAFE study notes that, ‘TAFE graduates can continue their studies by articulation to university’ (italics added). This broad use in the literature of the noun ‘articulation’ (and the verb ‘articulate’) is widespread and not restricted to activity or recognition associated with the deliberately linked qualifications arrangements themselves.

After an extensive review of the literature Golding (1999, p. 10) noted that:

The terms transfer and articulation are often used interchangeably and without precision within the Australian education and training literature, as well as in policy and practice. Transfer is a term often implying intention to move in a reasonably direct manner from one program to a related program. The term is also widely used in association with the term credit to refer to credit transfer (in Australian literature) or transfer credits (particularly in United States and United Kingdom literature), implying that intention to transfer, an intention to seek recognition for prior learning, and the course content, assessment or competencies, are in some way associated. ….

In Australia, movement between sectors is usually referred to as articulation. In US literature it is usually referred to as transfer. In Australia, processes for recognising prior learning associated with movement are usually referred to as credit transfer or recognition of prior learning (RPL), though RPL tends to refer specifically to recognition of prior informal learning.

To avoid confusion and to accommodate the added complexity of known two-way inter-sectoral sectoral flows, some researchers (e.g. Harris, Sumner and Rainey 2005) have taken Golding’s (1999) lead and used the term ‘movement’ to include transfer, with or without credit, and the term ‘recognition’ to include all previous learning recognised as credit transfer on a sectoral transition as well as RPL.

It is important to stress that, though credit transfer is not consistently defined in the literature, it is usually regarded, as Batman and Knight (2003) observe, to be different from RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning – that typically involves an assessment process) and essentially an administrative process. Comprehensive recent reviews of the nature and extent of RPL are available in Bateman and Knight (2003) as well as Wheelahan, Dennis, Firth et al. (2002). Learning Australia (2005) contains a succinct and more recent scan of national and international developments in recognition of informal learning. A careful reading of these reports reveals
continuing confusion (and often conflation) between definitions and measures of credit transfer and RPL. In its relatively narrow definition, credit transfer allows ‘… status or credit to be given for satisfactory completion of equivalent subjects at another education or training institution’. Other researchers (e.g. Bateman and Knight 2003) enlarge the scope of credit transfer to include RPL. The developments in the past decade of articulated pathways, as Wheelahan (2000, p. 19) observes, increasingly ‘… incorporate work-based learning as well as formal study, or combinations of work-based learning and formal study totally or partially delivered in the workplace’. This development of work-based learning further breaks down the hard and fast definitions of credit based on standardised units of ‘curriculum’ ‘taught’ in ‘sectors’, and makes accurate and systematic measurement and comparison of credit transferred almost impossible.

Given that much credit transfer is self-reported and/or involves application via an administrative process, the data on credit transfer are even less dependable than movement or transfer data. Though we distinguish between block credit, specified credit and unspecified credit in our definitions in Section 2, these categories are only recognised administratively and are not reported in credit transfer data. Recognition data often comprise both credit transfer and RPL data but do not include the credit embedded in the dual, nested, integrated or inter-sectoral awards identified in Wheelahan (2000). A lack of consistency of definitions and a lumping of all forms of credit transferred (if recorded) into one measure within and between both VTE and higher education makes the available VTE to higher education credit transfer data even more problematic as a basis for quantitative (including comparative) research.

These problems magnify difficulties when attempting to measure the size of the movement (see Golding and Vallence 1999) and lead to critiques of such attempts such as those by Moodie (2005a, 2005b). This difficulty exacerbates simple numeric comparisons of VTE to higher education movement with reverse transfer (higher education to VTE) and also with the very high (but very poorly documented or researched) levels of intra-sectoral movement and recognition noted by Golding, Bluer and Keating (1996).

5 Barriers and enablers to credit transfer

International literature in credit transfer and articulation confirms that the Australian difficulties and complexities are not home-grown. Watson (2003) in a comprehensive review and analysis of the UK tertiary system identified three fundamental cultural problems to a more inclusive system, which apply also in Australia. These are the reputation of VTE in relation to higher education, the ‘moving carpet’ problem of constant organisation and re-organisation of systems and sectors and the need to extend publicly funded education and training well beyond the compulsory school age. Duke (2005) placed the issue of credit transfer in the UK within the debate about wider participation in all forms of education and training and presented a case for diminished barriers between vocational and higher education. The difference in the UK context – unlike in Australia – is that there are real and widely expressed recognition and concern about a widening ‘gap’ in
participation between those in higher and lower social classes’ (Office of Fair Access 2003, p. 7) and a concern about a further widening as universities gain more freedom to vary tuition fees from September 2006 (ibid p. 2).

Some attempts were made during the 1990s to standardise nationally what Wheelahan (2000) calls ‘systemic and generic credit transfer and articulation arrangements’ in a small number of areas with relatively high credit transfer potential. The AVCC piloted what are essentially advisory national credit transfer arrangements in 13 different fields of study in the decade to 2000. With government funding, the AVCC also established a national credit transfer agency with the intention of providing assessments of credit on a fee-for-service basis, but this was found unsuited to the Australian context. Some Australian states have also negotiated a large number of very specific credit arrangements (e.g. TAFESA 2005; DET 2005). DET (2005, p. 3), for example, noted that by the end of 2003 ‘… TAFE NSW had negotiated around 1,500 separate credit transfer arrangements with universities, some of which guarantee admission to relevant degrees for qualified TAFE graduates’.

Wheelahan (2000, p. 18) noted that while many universities have specific recognition arrangements with particular TAFE institutes on ‘standardised pathways’, the specifics of such arrangements ‘are generally dealt with at the faculty or school level’ (p. 17). Despite all the formal arrangements, beyond what Wheelahan (p. 19) describes as ‘guaranteed entry pathways’, decisions in universities whether or not to recommend the awarding of credit have often involved individual academics or committees making judgements on an individual student’s merit based on evidence presented by the student.

Teese, Gulec and O’Brien (1999, p. 5) succinctly summarise the many significant disadvantages when the main vehicle for student mobility is localised credit transfer negotiated by individual students often at a faculty level. These include a dependence on individual leadership, dependence on decisions by committees and contingency on entry.

Teese, Gulec and O’Brien (1999, p. 5) also identified the several advantages of ‘a more systematic approach to credit transfer through their articulated courses and dual award programs’ (p. 5), including minimal overlap in content, no need to negotiate admission, pedagogical benefits, a succession of entry points, marketability, ability to be replicated across disciplines and institutions and the ability to provide enhanced industry input to training.

Robinson and Misko (2003) recently explored the extent of inter-sectoral co-operation in Queensland TAFE and concluded that successful inter-sectoral arrangements ‘were especially contingent upon the support of those in senior management positions’ (p. 4). They also found that, ‘The centralised arrangements for credit transfer, negotiated in Queensland on a state-wide basis … provided an effective mechanism for ensuring that certain qualifications from TAFE institutes would receive a certain amount of advanced standing in universities’ (p. 4).
Wheelahan (2000) was one of the first researchers to look beyond numeric and policy analysis and identify significant problems faced by students and staff involved in the actual process of transfer – sometimes unrealistically promoted by state and national governments as seamless. Wheelahan (p. 48) concluded that:

*It is not realistic to expect that students will be able to create and sustain seamless movement between sectors. Staff find it extremely difficult to understand how the two sectors function.*

Wheelahan (2000, p. 49) concluded that ‘boundary spanners’, Sommerlad, Duke and McDonald’s (1998) term to identify staff who manage the relationships and information exchanges between institutions, are critical to – but rarely acknowledged in – the process of smoothing out currently ‘lumpy’, often ad hoc, inequitable and complex arrangements experienced by students and handled by staff involved in inter-sectoral transition. As Bateman and Knight (2003, p. 4) noted recently, ‘… credit transfer is still seen as much as it always was – an administrative process…’.

6 Implications of observed levels of credit transfer and articulation

For lifelong learning

Recurrent learning throughout life and work, generally called ‘lifelong learning’ has become central in recent decades to educational policy and practice in Australia and internationally. Opportunities to accumulate or transfer learning from one sector or context to another have led to the related ideas of both ‘pathways’ and ‘articulation’ that, as Haas (1999, p. 4) observed in his study of trends in credit transfer and articulation in the South East Asian region, typically involve upward pathways and movement. Haas (1999, p. 5) stressed the importance of such movement:

*… because it is linked to opportunity. Articulation is related to status because ‘dead end’ courses that do not have pathways to further study opportunities have less status than programs which provide further options.*

For inter-sectoral relations in Australia

Moodie (2003, pp. 5–7) laid out three options for increasing the role of vocational education in providing short cycle higher education and improving VTE to higher education transfer: ‘curriculum mapping; expanding VTE’s role, say in associate degrees; and establishing a core curriculum’. Moodie (2003, p. 5) noted that though the first option ‘comes naturally’ to higher education practice, it is not only labour intensive and patchy, but inhibited by implementation of Training Packages in VTE. Further, Moodie (2003) suggested that VTE, by being competency and workplace-based, was not well placed to develop the essential knowledge that underpins skills.

Moodie (2003, p. 6) identified three barriers to the options he identified for broadening VTE’s role – including difficulties with accrediting associate degrees,
the danger of weakening VTE’s critical commitment to skills development and resolving the perennial cost shifting question between the states and the Commonwealth about ‘who pays?’. In quickly dismissing the common curriculum option, Moodie (2003, p. 7) stressed the critical importance of improving the likely inaccuracy of current data on Australian transfer rates, noting that this widespread problem has been encountered and solved in many states of the USA by requiring institutions to link and report data against a social security number. Moodie (2003, p. 8) cites literature that identifies Queensland, Australian VTE, New Zealand and Scotland as places where similar techniques had been recommended in 2001–2002.

For particular fields of study

Research confirms that VTE to higher education recognition is, as one might anticipate, higher in fields of study – such as business, engineering and welfare studies – which have most potential for curriculum matching, including considerable overlap in terms of content, knowledge and competencies. Direct transfer from a vocational field in VTE to a professional field in higher education is also enhanced in situations where the professional body for that field encourages and formally sanctions the transfer.

For Australian businesses and enterprises

Haas (1999) regards credit transfer and articulation as ‘significant in the broader scale, and at the national level’. Haas regards nations with structured credit transfer and articulation arrangements as being:

… better placed to capitalise on opportunities that advance economic growth, particularly when technological change or other forces demand a response. A workforce educated in an open-ended system will more easily make the transition to new types of employment as they emerge. (p. 5)

For international students

Haas (1999, p. 8) predicted in 1999 that:

\[\text{As the quality of education improves in some South East Asian countries, it is probable that the intercontinental nature of articulation arrangements will expand to include significant inter-country movement of students in further education.}\]

Six years hence, the predicted expansion of students has occurred but there have been few studies of intercontinental credit transfer or articulation arrangements. Watson (2003, p. 1) observes that ‘Overseas students comprise a small but significant source of income for Australian TAFE Institutes, representing three per cent of total course delivery’. Watson (2003) concluded that a new visa system for overseas tertiary students (introduced in 2001) ‘appears to be encouraging the transfer of VTE students to higher education providers’. Given the significant number of overseas full fee-paying higher education students in 2005, it will be
important in planning future changes to arrangements to anticipate the likely effects on articulation and credit transfer arrangements for overseas students.

7 Summary points

The literature review raises a number of issues and themes that are developed further in other sections of the study. It is clear from this preliminary review that credit transfer and articulation arrangements between VTE and higher education take place in a context of complexity and that there is no simple solution to improving credit transfer and articulation. Although many factors impact on credit transfer and articulation, no single factor or driver emerges as the key to bring about a significant change.

The following points summarise the main issues and themes from the literature review.

- Much of the research on credit transfer and articulation has been commissioned rather than forming a field of independent or critical research.

- Equity concerns were a driver for early work, followed by concerns for efficiency. The provision of pathways and seamlessness between sectors is a continuing theme in the literature. Support for lifelong learning has been a more recent driver.

- Strategies to develop collaboration between sectors are complicated by the context of upheaval and constant change in both VTE and higher education sectors and the increasing complexity of both sectors.

- Policies to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration must bridge the gap between sectors that are funded, administered, governed and regulated in different ways. Both sectors are also subject to increased levels of privatisation and competition.

- Much of the literature highlights the complexity, barriers and difficulties associated with credit transfer and articulation.

- The complexity of movement between sectors, lack of precision in terminology and practical problems with data collection all contribute to the inadequacy of data about credit transfer.

- The uptake of credit transfer arrangements is greater in some fields of study than others.

Although the review of the literature presents a somewhat gloomy outlook for improving credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education, it is also clear that there have been developments internationally, nationally and within institutions in both sectors that suggest recent changes in the context have impacted positively on this form of cross-sectoral collaboration. While not ignoring the
barriers, it is also important to look to these examples of good practice to provide guidance on how broader impact can be achieved. Appendix C looks at trends and practices in the international context of credit transfer and articulation.
Appendix C – International Developments in Credit Transfer and Articulation

1 Introduction

The importance placed on credit transfer and articulation between VTE and higher education is not unique to Australia. There have been significant developments in a number of countries. The following overview covers those in Europe, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States and Canada as a sample of the relevant developments taking place internationally. Because of the inadequacy of the data to determine current levels of credit transfer in Australia and also because of international differences in data collection, it is not possible to compare Australian levels of credit transfer with those of other countries. The main purpose of this section is to analyse the broad policy context in selected countries and look for general trends. National qualifications frameworks are being developed in many countries with the objective of clarifying the types of qualifications available and the linkages between them to promote and support learning pathways.

2 Europe

The Bologna Declaration, which promotes student mobility and program consistency across Europe, has given significant support to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS). Both the ECTS and the DS assist in the transfer of students within and between institutions as well as between different educational systems and sectors. The European Credit Transfer System was originally established as a pilot project in 1989 within the Erasmus program and the more recent Bologna Declaration has given further impetus to this system.

The aim of ECTS is to facilitate the mobility of students by a common language of academic recognition and through the transfer of credits for prior studies as they move from one institution or system to another among the participating countries. ECTS has now expanded to more than 30 countries and is implemented in more than 1,000 higher education institutions. An ECTS label is used to denote those higher education institutions approved as using the ECTS system. In some countries ECTS has become a requirement of accreditation. ECTS will also form the basis of the European Qualifications Framework (see below).

A detailed users’ guide spells out the ECTS processes. ECTS involves allocating a common currency for each course or program based on 60 credits representing a

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full-time study load for one academic year. The credits are calculated from the load for an average student to achieve the course outcomes successfully in a year, and are not based on level of difficulty or contact hours. The focus on course outcomes in the ECTS process is designed to provide clear information about student achievements on which to grant credit. There is also a common grading scale incorporated into ECTS, to supplement national systems of grading and provide common terminology and currency. The grading scale is highly recommended but not obligatory for use of the ECTS label. The package of materials associated with ECTS includes standard approaches to course information and catalogues, application forms for students, learning agreements and transcripts of results. The ECTS processes have been supported by significant resources that have been used for grants to implement the process, to conduct regional workshops, to establish networks that capitalise on the expertise of the more experienced institutions and to provide ECTS Counsellors who offer advice and assist institutions in their implementation of the approach.

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a parallel development to ECTS and involves standardised information about the nature and outcomes of awards. It includes detailed descriptions of the nature, context, level, content and status of the studies undertaken and is an attempt for more transparency and consistency among the wide range of awards and systems across European countries. As with ECTS, institutions submit applications and are approved to use the DS label if they can demonstrate effective implementation of the process.

The draft European Qualifications Framework is set out in a discussion paper Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. The Framework comprises three elements:

- common reference points comprising eight levels of learning outcomes spanning knowledge, skills and wider personal and professional competencies;
- a set of tools and instruments including the ECTS referred to above; and
- common principles and procedures to underpin quality assurance, validation, guidance and key competencies.

The framework is referred to as a meta-framework – in effect a common measure against which different countries can align their qualifications.

The framework is a draft and significant issues must be addressed before it can be agreed and implemented. The draft framework reflects the approach to outcomes and competency-based training adopted in a number of countries influenced by the approach in the UK as opposed to the institution and process-based frameworks

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more evident in continental Europe where national qualifications frameworks may not even exist. The relationship with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework is also not clear and the extent to which higher education institutions will be fully involved in a cross-sectoral framework is not clear at this stage. Finally, the reliance on a credit rating system seems ambitious at best given the significant differences in the structure and composition of qualifications across Europe.

3 United Kingdom

In Wales and Scotland, there are credit transfer and accumulation systems in place that are integrated with qualifications frameworks. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales specifies a common credit point system for higher education and further education based on contact hours that also uses descriptors to take into account the level of the qualification being undertaken. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework operates in a similar way and provides a searchable database for anyone seeking information on credit transfer and other pathways between Scottish universities and colleges. Drawing on the frameworks in Scotland and Wales, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England has now proposed a set of principles for a credit framework in England that relate to progression through VTE sector qualifications. The higher education sector in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has its own qualifications framework that remains separate from the VTE sector. In addition to work being undertaken at the national level, many institutions have their own agreements and credit transfer arrangements. Some are also adopting the ECTS processes.

5 New Zealand

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework also reflects a system using both levels and volume or amount of learning so that learners are able to accumulate credit towards qualifications at different levels. The New Zealand framework is one of the most developed of its kind. The Framework is supported by a Credit Transfer and Recognition Policy Supporting Learning Pathways. The policy sets out definitions, principles, objectives and outcomes for credit transfer. The policy also emphasises the importance of information and communication strategies and the recording of information on learner outcomes at both the individual and institutional levels.

However the New Zealand Qualifications Authority does not accredit degrees offered by universities and few bachelor and postgraduate programs have been developed and accredited under this framework, so the impact on the framework

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6 The Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access <http://www.scqf.org.uk/college2uni/index.asp>


on pathways between VTE and higher education is difficult to establish (although universities are required to meet the requirements of the register by August 2006).

5 United States

Credit transfer has long been a topic of investigation and policy in the US. The main focus of this interest is the transfer of students from community colleges which offer two-year awards to those more selective higher education institutions offering four-year baccalaureate degrees. Most states have specific policies and incentives in place to assist this transfer, largely to ensure access to higher education for students from equity groups who are more likely to enrol in community colleges because of their proximity to where the students live and because they are the more usual pathway for students with lower educational aspirations. As Moodie (2005b) highlights, encouraging broad participation in community colleges followed by easy transfer to four-year degree-granting institutions for the more able students is a cost-effective way of maximising educational access and success. State education systems can direct more funds to the selective four-year degree-granting institutions on the assumption that high ability students from lower socio-economic backgrounds will gain entry through transfer from the lower cost community colleges. Wellman (2002)9 presents this tiered structure as a sensible option for mass tertiary education systems. There can be broad access to the low cost, lower level tiers while funding to the higher cost tiers can be managed by limiting access to those tiers. Equity concerns are overcome by the compensatory mechanism of student transfer.

Given the importance of student transfer in the US, it is not surprising that the policies and practices of each state are monitored and compared. A report of the Education Commission of the States noted that while some states have programs that mandate collaborative arrangements, others are less well organised.10 The report describes the following range of strategies across the states and provides an overview of each state’s approach:

- legislation – some states have written transfer and articulation policy into legislation
- co-operative agreements – state-wide co-operative agreements
- transfer data reporting – the collection of data at the state level to monitor progress and success of articulation programs

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incentives and rewards – some states provide incentive funding to guarantee places and/or to give priority admission to transfer students

state-wide articulation guide – students are given assistance through one easy access guide

common core – specification of a common core in both community colleges and the degree-granting higher education institution can make transfer easier

common course numbering – a common course numbering system across the levels helps student identify pathways.

Clearly, the US approaches are facilitated by the presence of state education systems that span across the sectors. In this regard, the work of the California Postsecondary Education Commission has been particularly successful in identifying specific institutional practices that facilitate student transfer.\textsuperscript{11}

Although strongly supported within some state education systems, credit transfer in the US is not without its detractors and divergent viewpoints. On the one hand, there is an argument that by taking on the role of preparing students for transfer to higher-level institutions, community colleges will enhance their educational standing and be perceived as scholarly institutions. On the other hand, some community colleges argue that this approach reinforces an educational hierarchy, subverts their true function and diverts them from their own missions of providing vocational education as an end of its own. Efforts by Congress during 2005 to strengthen transfer provision have raised concerns in some large state university systems about being forced to grant credit for students from for-profit private providers.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities sums up the current situation in the US:

\textit{The nation has moved a long way from a time when transfer decisions occurred behind closed doors at the sole discretion of institutions, but many obstacles and inefficiencies remain. States can and do play important roles in affecting transfer success, but no state is fully utilizing all available policy options that promote seamless transfer.}\textsuperscript{12}


6 Canada

In Canada, credit transfer fulfils a similar role as in the United States. In 2002, the Council of Education Ministers in Canada published a Ministerial Statement on Credit Transfer\textsuperscript{13} on which the Good Practice Principles developed by MCEETYA in Australia are based. In turn, each Canadian province or territory has its own system of credit transfer and articulation. An overview of each province shows that the system is more developed in some provinces than in others.\textsuperscript{14} Some provide prospective students with a single website from which they can access all relevant information and search for particular courses including advice on the credit they will be granted for each course.

7 Concluding comments

There is international interest in improving credit transfer between educational sectors, although the approaches and relative emphases vary depending on the nature, history and governance of the educational systems in each country. No single country has solved the range of problems associated with credit transfer between sectors and all are grappling with similar issues to those experienced within Australia. The most promising developments highlighted by a scan of international practice are those that take a national or system-level approach to credit transfer and develop combined national qualifications and credit transfer frameworks. These approaches allow qualifications from different sectors to be mapped against each other to facilitate standardised and co-ordinated approaches to credit transfer. Most are in the early stages of development or implementation and therefore their effectiveness in terms of credit transfer is not yet known and they do not yet offer a working model on which to base conclusions. It will therefore be important for Australia to maintain a watching brief on these developments and monitor their effectiveness and adaptability to the Australian context. It will be particularly important to determine if any of these international developments suggest refinements that can be made to the Australian Qualifications Framework or whether they are merely working towards achieving outcomes already in place within Australia through the AQF and related initiatives.


Appendix D – Overview of Australian and State/Territory Developments

1 Introduction

The section that follows provides an overview of credit transfer and articulation from VTE to higher education nationally and across Australian states and territories. The main focus is on the policies and initiatives supported at the Commonwealth and state or territory level and, where relevant, illustrating these through examples of regional or institutional developments. The aim is to give a broad flavour of what is happening across Australia in each state and territory. The overview is not intended to be an institution-by-institution analysis of credit transfer and articulation mainly because these details change so quickly.

2 National developments

Credit transfer and articulation arrangements are covered by a complex mix of responsibilities spread among the Commonwealth and state/territory governments and individual providers. Over an extended period, the Commonwealth Government has signalled its support of such developments and has worked with state/territory governments on a range of initiatives. During the early 1990s, the National Board for Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) made the improvement of credit transfer and articulation between TAFE and higher education a significant focus of its work, funding a number of studies and conducting national forums. During this same period, Commonwealth funding was provided for the AVCC Credit Transfer Project and the Government and the AVCC jointly investigated the establishment of a national credit transfer agency which did not proceed because of unresolved issues, largely relating to who would pay for the service.

A lasting and significant development of this period was the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), introduced in 1995 and fully implemented in 2002, with one of its aims the improvement of pathways between education sectors. The AQF is a national system of titles and descriptors for qualifications in the higher education, VTE and schools sectors. It describes qualifications and demonstrates the relationships among qualifications, so facilitating and guiding pathways and credit transfer at the national level. The AQF also includes National Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages that outline general principles as well as operational advice to facilitate arrangements for cross-sector pathways. These are the same as the AVCC policy guidelines that arose from the AVCC/ANTA project in 2000 (Carnegie 2000).

As the key forum that brings together Commonwealth and state/territory Ministers with responsibilities for education, MCEETYA has taken a keen interest in improving credit transfer and articulation. To provide Ministerial support for further improvements in institutional practice, MCEETYA adopted in May 2005 a set of Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation from VET to Higher
In addition, MCEETYA has noted a set of draft principles for good information provision and sought comment on those prior to their adoption. MCEETYA has also asked the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the new VTE quality agency, the National Quality Council (NQC), to take a more active role in auditing credit transfer and articulation practices within institutions against the *Good Practice Principles*. Several recent AUQA university audit reports have included reference to credit transfer and some have included related recommendations.

The AQF *National Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages* and the MCEETYA *Good Practice Principles* emphasise similar key points, although the former provides greater detail and specific guidance on appropriate levels of credit between qualifications based on agreed relativities while the latter places greater emphasis on evaluation and developing pathways in all qualifications. The key messages in each are: support for credit transfer and articulation; equivalence of learning outcomes as the basis of credit transfer; systematic approaches over individual arrangements; no guarantee of admission; transparency and provision of clear information; and diversity of arrangements.

One of the issues papers prepared by DEST in August 2002 for the Australian review *Higher Education at the Crossroads* focused on the interface between higher education and vocational and technical education. This paper canvassed a number of suggestions for improving credit transfer and articulation. In *Backing Australia’s Future*, the policy emanating from the Crossroads review, the issue of VTE/HE linkages was not particularly prominent. However, the Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund was introduced within the package of reforms to foster collaboration among various providers and groups including between VTE providers and higher education providers in course provision or in teaching and learning. *Backing Australia’s Future* argued that cross-sectoral collaboration ‘can respond to labour market demand for new and flexible skill sets, and result in more efficient delivery of education, for example through shared facilities, and seamless pathways for students’.

The Commonwealth’s Capital Development Pool funding program that has been in place for a number of years also provides support for collaboration between higher education institutions and TAFE in the area of capital development and infrastructure for flexible delivery of educational services. Annual reports of the projects funded through that program show a proportion are funded on the basis of shared facilities and other collaborative arrangements.

To signal to universities the importance of credit transfer and articulation arrangements, DEST has included a clause in university funding agreements that requires each institution to have such arrangements in place. Early in 2005, DEST also requested information from each higher education provider about its credit

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transfer arrangements so that these could be linked to the national GoingtoUni website which contains course information from all providers as well as other information for students.

In the VTE sector, Moving On: The High Level Review of National Training Packages emphasised the importance of the improving pathways between higher education and VTE. The report indicated that the reluctance of some universities to grant credit was not a reason to re-think the Training Package model, but identified developments such as graded assessment, the introduction of associate degrees and improved understanding in universities of the Training Package model as contributing to a turning of the tide in relation to university attitudes. The report also flagged the need for leadership responsibility from the Commonwealth (and, at the time, ANTA) and for more proactive approaches to universities by Training Package developers.

3 Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Government is currently developing a strategic policy around higher education provision following a Strategic Review of Higher Education Delivery carried out by Allen Consulting. The report was sent to the Minister in April 2005 and, at the time of preparing this report, was not yet publicly available.

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) has a very strong focus on developing pathways to university and has three strategies to achieve this end:

- MoUs with the University of Canberra and the Australian National University
- negotiated agreements with a range of universities
- expansion of provision of higher education within CIT.

The HE/VTE credit interface in the ACT is mainly focused on a partnership agreement between the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and the University of Canberra (UC). Arrangements between CIT and UC cover a large number of credit agreements. These are governed by the MoU, between the two providers, which has established standard credit arrangements for related courses of study.

Information on the policies and the CIT Agreement is clearly displayed on the UC website. This includes details of all the current arrangements across 53 different fields identified in a specific publication Pathways Guide 2006. The credit initiatives and MoU between CIT and UC are managed and monitored by a joint Status Committee comprising high-level representation of both providers. Other initiatives include a joint CIT/UC project funded by DEST under the Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund to further develop the CIT partnership through

establishment of a UC/CIT Cross-Sectoral Office which will be responsible for
developing and managing a Resource Sharing and Collaboration Program as well as
a Pathways Facilitation Program.

CIT also has an agreement with the Australian National University which is
currently under redevelopment. The number of credit transfer arrangements with
ANU is limited but developing. A key initiative is the development of a jointly
delivered associate degree/bachelor program in three fields - Music, Engineering
and Science. The associate degree is delivered by CIT with ANU issuing the award.
Students can progress on to the bachelor degree receiving two years of credit for the
three-year degree.

CIT is also developing a national focus through negotiating credit arrangements
with a range of universities across Australia. The Pathways Guide produced by CIT
lists a number of negotiated credit arrangements with eleven other universities.

CIT has been offering higher education programs since 1995 but the offerings are
limited to six programs - three bachelor and three postgraduate programs. CIT’s
policy is to expand its current higher education provision as a means of offering
greater diversity in higher education through relevant courses based on VTE
pedagogy. This strategy is seen as a means of creating articulation between VTE
and higher education alongside its negotiated agreements with other higher
education providers. The further development of CIT offerings in higher education
forms one of the issues addressed by the recent Allen Review.

4 New South Wales

In its submission to the higher education review in 2003, the NSW Government
highlighted the value it places on seamless pathways between the educational
sectors of the state.

Universities are part of a wider education continuum, comprising schools, vocational
education and training and adult and community education. Development of links
between the sectors assists in creating pathways to higher education for traditionally
under-represented groups and facilitates lifelong learning. For this reason, the NSW
Government supports the establishment of a policy and planning framework in the
sector that recognises and promotes a ‘seamless’ education system. This system
should acknowledge not only the abilities and achievement of students across all
sectors (school, TAFE and university) but also should establish formal procedures that
allow flexible progression to become standard practice.

The 2005 Priorities Statement for the Department of Education and Training
includes a strategy to increase articulation and credit transfer arrangements between
schools, TAFE Institutes, Adult and Community Education and universities. Similarly, the 2006 Corporate Plan includes a strategy to increase cross-sectoral
partnerships in education and training.

TAFE NSW was one of the early adopters of formal credit transfer arrangements
with universities at the state-level and, by the end of 2002, TAFE NSW had
negotiated around 1,500 separate credit transfer arrangements with universities (DET NSW 2005). At the end of September 2005, NSW TAFE launched a new website on credit transfer and articulation between TAFE NSW and universities in the ACT and NSW. The aim is to list all credit transfer and articulation arrangements for TAFE-to-university as well as university-to-TAFE pathways. Currently there are only links to the very comprehensive credit transfer websites of the University of Newcastle and the University of Wollongong. The main TAFE/Universities website also includes case studies and a set of responses to frequently asked questions.

In June 2005, the Department of Education and Training published a guide to good practice on co-operation between schools, TAFE and universities (Department of Education and Training 2005). The various learning pathways in the booklet are presented as maximising career options and employment opportunities as well as supporting the principle of lifelong learning.

There is a range of VTE/HE agreements and practices in place across the state, including the following examples.

- Charles Sturt University is the nation’s leader in admitting students on the basis of TAFE qualifications, with over 15% of its commencing bachelor level students entering through this pathway in 2004.

- Collaboration between the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Institute is monitored by a joint Pathways Co-ordination Committee and now 62 out of 74 bachelor degree programs at the University provide extensive credit for TAFE studies.

- The DegreeLink Program at the University of Western Sydney guarantees entry upon satisfactory completion of a TAFE award with appropriate credit provision.

- The Western Riverina Higher Education Project is an example of a regional initiative to promote education and cross-sectoral links. It involves Charles Sturt University, the Riverina Institute, the Riverina Regional Development Board and the Griffith City Council.

- There are several shared TAFE and university campuses in NSW – for example Southern Cross University at Coffs Harbour and the University of Newcastle at Ourimbah.

- TAFE NSW and the University of Wollongong jointly provide access centres on the south coast of NSW.

- The University of New England has a number of regional access centres with TAFE in central NSW.

5 Northern Territory

The Northern Territory has only one university, Charles Darwin University, a dual sector institution formed in 2003 through an amalgamation that incorporated TAFE provision in the Territory. Other VTE providers in the Northern Territory include Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education and some 30 private VTE RTOs.

In June 2003, before the Northern Territory University became the Charles Darwin University (CDU), it signed a partnership agreement with the Northern Territory Government based on recognition of the importance of each party to the other – the University as a vehicle in building the capacity of the Territory and the Government in building the viability and relevance of the University. The agreement has a number of objectives to support growing resident capacity. The seventh objective encompasses ‘increasing opportunities for students to move between VET, senior secondary and university sectors’.

CDU has a strong focus on establishing a fully integrated dual sector university. The current CDU Strategic Plan sets out the drivers for the CDU model which aims to develop a range of practical and automatic pathways between VET and higher education maximising articulation between the University’s 115 higher education courses and 254 VTE programs. The Strategic Plan identifies integration of VTE and higher education as a key theme involving ‘expanding opportunities for articulation, credit transfer and progression and promoting cross-sectoral multiple awards’.

Information about credit is clearly set out on the University’s website with separate sections for prospective students and policy information for staff. The website contains the course guide for 2006 which sets out the basis of admission, including certificate IV or higher and the standard credit available for each VTE qualification level into a related bachelor degree.

CDU is also reaching out to other RTOs and the secondary school sector with the aim of establishing MoUs on co-operation and partnership. These include MoUs with 40 high schools covering VTE-in-schools and various pathways. A new MoU has just been signed with Batchelor Institute and the mapping of its courses is being undertaken. Another MoU is planned with the newly establish NT Technical College.

6 Queensland

State-wide arrangements between TAFE Queensland and most of the universities in Queensland are set out in a TAFE Queensland publication: Pathways to university: getting credit for your TAFE study.18 Universities participating in the arrangements are the Australian Catholic University, Central Queensland University, Griffith

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18 TAFE Queensland (undated) Pathways to university: getting credit for your TAFE study
University, James Cook University, Queensland University of Technology, University of the Sunshine Coast and the University of Southern Queensland.

The publication sets out the unit or study point equivalent for one year’s full-time study at each university, and then sets out the level of credit available by TAFE qualification for relevant university degrees for each participating university.

The agreements cover the following broad study areas:

- Access to Education, English Language and Literacy
- Arts and Entertainment
- Building Construction and Transport and Distribution
- Business and Financial Services
- Community Services, Health and Beauty
- Engineering and Mining
- Hospitality Travel and Tourism
- Information and Communication Technology.

The publication also makes it clear that the granting of credit does not automatically result in a place in the university degree and that individual institutions have negotiated arrangements in addition to those set out in the state-wide agreements.

For example, Southbank Institute of TAFE has negotiated credit agreements for over 25 programs, including programs resulting in dual qualifications such as the Southbank Diploma of International Business and QUT Bachelor of Business (International Business) and the Southbank Diploma and Advanced Diploma of Hospitality Management with the Griffith University Bachelor of Hospitality Management. Southbank Institute has set the objective of having in place credit transfer arrangements for its entire diploma and advanced diploma programs. Southbank Institute has recently received accreditation as a higher education provider in Queensland and been accredited to offer an Associate Degree in Civil Engineering and Diploma of Computer Aided Design. These articulate directly into a bachelor degree program at Queensland University of Technology.

While all Queensland Universities have developed and published credit transfer policies, James Cook University has also developed and published a comprehensive guide to credit transfer and learning pathways beyond those covered in the agreement with TAFE Queensland. The guide maps an extensive range of VTE programs, including those derived from National Training Packages, against university degrees (and to its Masters in Education). The guide also outlines further
agreements with individual RTOs, both TAFE and private providers.\textsuperscript{19} The Guide includes an application form for credit recognition for prospective students.

These current arrangements need to be seen in context of the Queensland Government's Green Paper \textit{Queensland's proposed responses to the challenges of skills for jobs and growth} which places significant emphasis on the growth in middle level, professional and para-professional occupations and on the need for a new suite of VTE diplomas and advanced diplomas to meet higher skill needs. The Green Paper proposes:

\begin{quote}
\textit{… to redevelop the Southbank Institute of TAFE into a high-technology campus – a vocational education and training Institute of Technology. The institute would have strong links to the university sector and be capable of providing high-level training in specific professional and associate professional fields across the state.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Over the past 20 years, the former colleges of advanced education have been transformed into universities. This change has resulted in a gap in the para-professional training market. Selected TAFE institutes, commencing with Southbank, can bridge that gap by focusing on higher-level vocational education and training qualifications.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{A new Southbank Institute of Technology would provide a pathway to university, offering advanced diploma and diploma courses, and integrated degree and diploma programs in partnerships with universities.}\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

It is expected that this emphasis in the Green Paper (and in the final White Paper) together with the provision of associate degrees will further develop articulation and credit transfer arrangements in Queensland.

\section{South Australia}

The current approach to pathways between VTE and higher education in South Australia is set against the background of a whole of government ten-year strategic plan agreed in 2004 with the aim of growing South Australia’s prosperity. The plan has goals and targets which include developing innovative education that ‘improves the connections between education institutions’.\textsuperscript{21} In turn, the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) has developed its own strategic plan that includes strategies to increase qualification levels, re-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[19] James Cook University (2005) \textit{Credit Transfer and Learning Pathways} \hfill\texttt{http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/entry/credit/}
\item[21] url: \texttt{http://www.stateplan.sa.gov.au}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
engage a higher proportion of the workforce in education and training and ensure collaboration and inclusion.

The approach to credit transfer and articulation adopted in South Australia is a state-wide approach encompassing all three universities (the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia), DFEEST and TAFE SA which comprises three Institutes and Education and Services Programs providing shared education services.

Credit transfer and articulation arrangements between TAFESA and South Australia’s three universities are formed on the basis of a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), or similar, between each university and DFEEST. The agreement between TAFESA and the University of South Australia is longstanding, while agreements with the other two universities have been framed more recently. The MoUs provide a framework for co-operation between TAFESA and the signing higher education provider. For example, the MoU with the University of Adelaide, which is in place from 2003–2006, covers a range of areas of co-operative activities including: admission processes, articulation, credit transfer and RPL, collaborative curriculum development, resource-sharing, professional development, research, marketing and information exchange. The section on articulation and credit refers to developing pathways in both directions which maximise student movement, particularly by block credit. The arrangements are based on the AVCC principles and include strategies that encourage adoption, including the establishment of a management group to further develop the policy and oversee working groups for implementation.

In addition to these formal agreements, each university has a set of internal policies addressing credit transfer and articulation and all participate in a web-based common credit transfer directory which is administered by TAFESA and sets out details of specific credit arrangements in place. All three institutions provide readily accessible and easy to follow information on their own websites for prospective students about these credit arrangements including weblinks to the directory.

The South Australia-wide directory is a comprehensive database of specific credit agreements covering courses delivered by TAFESA and related university qualifications. It is regularly updated by TAFESA and, at the time of preparing this report, the database included 461 agreements. By far the largest number involves the University of South Australia – 293, with 143 agreements with Flinders University and 18 with the University of Adelaide. Whilst the figures for the University of Adelaide are significantly lower, this is primarily because of its more recent participation in the SA model. All three universities have allocated specific staff resources to the development and implementation of credit transfer arrangements.

In addition to supporting the state-wide directory, all three universities have a number of initiatives in this area. UniSA separately publishes its credit transfer arrangements in a student-focused publication entitled *Pathways from TAFESA to*
UniSA 2006: *Experience the difference*. UniSA has also undertaken self-funded projects to support credit transfer initiatives. On-going initiatives at Flinders University include a project to consolidate and review every faculty-based credit arrangement developed over the last five years and the University of Adelaide has recently appointed a project officer to investigate credit transfer and articulation arrangements.

8 Tasmania

Tasmania is in the unusual situation of having one university and one TAFE institute within the state. The other major higher education provider is the Australian Maritime College that also includes a large proportion of VTE enrolments. In recent years, the Tasmanian Government and the Department of Education have moved to facilitate closer links between VTE and higher education developments in the state. A Partnership Agreement between University of Tasmania and the State Government in 2001 signalled the intention for the University and the Government to work together on improving co-operation and developing new pathways for students that would benefit the state and improve educational participation.

The Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training within the Department of Education brings together policy advice, regulation and co-ordination of all elements of the post-compulsory education system within Tasmania, including VTE, higher education and senior secondary colleges. In December 2003, the Minister for Education launched *Tasmania: A State of Learning* as the state’s strategy for post-Year 10 education and training. The strategy evolved from an extensive consultative process involving a series of discussion papers and forums. The backdrop for this strategy and much of the development within Tasmania is a history of low educational participation and low educational attainment more generally across the state, thus bringing a strong focus on retaining students in education or training after Year 10. The aims of the strategy emphasise this context.

*Overall, the strategy aims to improve young people’s participation in education and training beyond compulsory schooling; to enable second chance learning opportunities for people of all ages; to build a skilled workforce with the capacity to support business and industry in a growing economy; and to create communities that value lifelong learning.*

*Importantly, the strategy aims to strengthen relationships between learners, providers, business and industry, governments, and communities, as well as to build bridges across all fields of learning – including school, senior secondary education, vocational education and training, adult and community education, higher education and informal learning.*

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A specific initiative arising from the strategy that is relevant to this project includes the creation of the Tasmanian Learning and Skills Authority, a new peak body for post-year 10 education and training. The Learning and Skills Authority replaced the Tasmanian State Training Authority and represented an attempt to establish a single group with a broader remit than VTE only. The new Authority is responsible for policy and planning relating to adult and community education, VTE, higher education and senior secondary education in Tasmania.

In parallel to the above developments has been the establishment of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (TQA) which began operation in 2004 and brought together the relevant functions of the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board, the Universities Registration Council and the Tasmanian Accreditation and Recognition Committee into a single, statutory authority accountable directly to the Minister. It accredits VTE courses not covered by National Training Packages, and registers VTE and higher education providers and higher education courses. It also accredits courses, determines assessment and provides certification for the Tasmanian Certificate of Education for all Year 11–12 students in Tasmania. The TQA website states:

*The TQA provides, for the first time, a single body that is capable of providing a strong leadership role in qualifications-related policy and planning across all major areas of education and training in Tasmania.*

*The development of a much closer relationship between schools, VET providers and Higher Education, in particular the University of Tasmania, means that the pathways available for young people moving from compulsory schooling will become clearer, allowing greater flexibility in the movement between the three sectors.*

While all of these developments are aimed directly or indirectly towards facilitating closer links between VTE and higher education within Tasmania in the hope of stronger pathways for students, the relationship between TAFE Tasmania and the University of Tasmania has also been formalised and strengthened through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two institutions in 2003. Specific initiatives arising from that agreement include prominent web-based information about credit for TAFE students within the University of Tasmania’s admissions site and new articulated awards in computing, business, information systems, design and adult education. TAFE Tasmania and the University also share facilities at the Cradle Coast Campus in Burnie and at the Academy of the Arts site at Inveresk in Launceston.

### 9 Victoria

There are no state-wide agreements governing the provision of credit transfer between VTE and higher education in Victoria. All universities in Victoria have developed and published credit transfer policies and as TAFE in Victoria is a devolved system, each institute negotiates its own specific credit transfer arrangements. TAFE institutes in Victoria are now able to offer degrees on a full fee
basis and this may influence the approach adopted by institutes in relation to articulation and credit transfer arrangements with universities.

Credit transfer arrangements in Victoria are also unique in that there are five dual sector universities providing the potential for the development of articulated pathways and dual qualifications. Of these institutions, Swinburne University of Technology has developed the most detailed interactive web-based map of credit transfer agreements from the TAFE Division to the Higher Education Division of the University (and with other providers). The University of Ballarat also provides comprehensive information on learner pathways including pathways between VTE qualifications and between VTE and higher education, although specific arrangements for a number of qualifications indicate that they are yet to be confirmed. RMIT also provides a map showing negotiated credit transfer pathways between TAFE and higher education.

Although there are no state-wide policies or agreements, the issue of credit transfer and articulation has been the subject of major policy statements and initiatives in Victoria. In 2002, the Victorian Minister for Education and Training set out the Victorian Government’s position on credit transfer in a Ministerial Statement on Higher Education in Victoria. The Statement highlighted the importance of credit transfer arrangements and noted that, while the AVCC had adopted credit transfer principles, the implementation of the principles remained a matter for individual institutions.

The Statement also highlighted the role of the five dual sector universities in Victoria and the unique opportunity these institutions could play in maximising credit transfer and articulation. The Government indicated that it would take steps to improve significantly credit transfer and articulation arrangements and that it saw the dual sector institutions as playing a leading role in that process.

The Statement identified the deficiency in credit transfer arrangements which depended on ad hoc and post hoc negotiations for credit transfer, after higher education and TAFE course content had already been established. It indicated that complementary pathways between the sectors were clearly under-utilised, particularly in courses taught in both sectors such as nursing, information technology and business. The Statement favoured an approach involving nested qualifications – that is, qualifications with clear outcomes in both sectors.

The Government indicated that:

In order to support the development of complementary higher education and TAFE programs and credit transfer arrangements in skills and knowledge areas the State Government will:

However the University of Melbourne is in the process of phasing out and transferring VTE programs to other providers
• Encourage the development and provision of qualifications that provide both VET and higher education outcomes, through related ‘nested’ qualifications with full credit for study across the sectors.

• Establish a panel of senior higher education and TAFE representatives to promote a uniform approach to credit transfer.

It is understood that the Minister for Education and Training has subsequently written to Victorian universities, drawing attention to the number of students transferring to higher education programs with credit from TAFE.

The Ministerial Statement also drew attention to the Credit Matrix, an initiative of the Victorian Qualifications Authority, which was under development at the time the Statement was released.

The Credit Matrix is a major initiative of the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA). Based on a system of agreed levels and points, the credit matrix provides a common measure for comparing and describing achievement in different qualifications. The Credit Matrix is based on similar initiatives in New Zealand and the model under development in Scotland and the United Kingdom. A key feature of the Credit Matrix is that it uses a series of levels of increasing complexity spanning the major areas of learning and skills outcomes – based on common taxonomies of knowledge, autonomy and application. Individual units or modules are assigned a level and a points value based on the amount or volume of learning.

Qualifications can also be aligned against the levels, and in that sense the Credit Matrix is seen as complementary to the Australian Qualifications Framework. The use of common taxonomies should lead to greater consistency in the way in which qualifications are developed. The points system enables learners to better understand the cumulative value of their learning and should also provide for greater consistency in the amount of learning involved in particular units, modules and whole qualifications. The VQA has developed a model for the Credit Matrix which is currently being trialled in four sites, and with joint projects with the New Zealand and Tasmanian Qualifications Authorities.

However, the VQA does not have statutory responsibility for accreditation of higher education qualifications and use of the Credit Matrix by universities to assist in credit transfer and articulation will have to be on a voluntary basis. One of the trial sites – the Gippsland Education Precinct – has involved the Gippsland campus of Monash University.

10 Western Australia

The WA Department of Education and Training, in association with all of the universities in Western Australia, has produced a Guide to University Options for TAFEWA Graduates. In addition to general advice on university entrance requirements, the guide sets out each university’s general policies on credit transfer with links to each university website. Examples of degree programs are also mapped to TAFEWA diploma and advanced diploma courses.
As examples, the guide also sets out possible pathways in arts and science from certificate II to degrees, together with some individual case study examples of students who have used credit transfer pathways.

Curtin University of Technology and Edith Cowan University provide detailed information on possible credit transfer levels across a wide range of TAFEWA courses matched with specific university programs. In effect, this provides a state-wide rather than institution-to-institution framework for the two largest universities. Murdoch University also provides a website facility to enable students to match courses from other providers with Murdoch programs to assess entitlement for advanced standing and credit transfer.

There has been a strong focus on collaborative provision between universities and TAFE in WA including:

- provision of VTE programs in the eastern goldfields by Curtin University of Technology
- co-location and sharing of facilities and infrastructure between Challenger TAFE and Murdoch University on the University’s Rockingham campus
- a co-operative centre for marine studies and aquaculture between Murdoch University and Challenger TAFE on the Challenger site in Fremantle
- co-operation between Edith Cowan University and West Coast College of TAFE in the Joondalup precinct
- arrangements between Edith Cowan and South West Regional College of TAFE in Bunbury.

These co-operative arrangements should provide a basis to strengthen and increase credit transfer arrangements between TAFE and universities in the future and this objective is highlighted in the TAFEWA Strategic Plan released by the Minister for Education and Training earlier in 2005.

In addition to institution-to-institution agreements negotiated between individual TAFE colleges and universities, some universities have agreements with a range of other parties. For example, Edith Cowan University also has agreements in place with Perth Institute of Business and Technology and the Alexander Technology Institute, and private VTE and higher education providers.

11 Concluding comments

In every Australian state/territory as well as at the national level, there is significant support for improving credit transfer and articulation opportunities, although this support is manifested in a range of ways and is a higher priority in some jurisdictions than others. At the national level, the AQF provides a strong basis for credit transfer and articulation given that it is an agreed framework that describes
qualifications and responsibilities for their accreditation or authorisation and provides guidelines to facilitate credit transfer and articulation.

In some states/territories, there is a state-wide approach to credit transfer and articulation initiated through either the state/territory government or through a state-wide TAFE presence – and in some cases through both working together. The development of state-wide websites to provide a single source of information and database of credit arrangements to prospective students is a positive move as long as these websites can be maintained with up-to-date information. Likewise, there is some evidence that universities are paying more attention to their own websites as sources of information on credit transfer opportunities. These vary in terms of their accessibility to prospective students, user-friendliness, accuracy and currency.

There is evidence that pathways between VTE and higher education are being given priority through explicit goals and strategic plans of state departments and individual institutions. While this is an important signal of priority, it will not achieve improved outcomes unless these goals and plans are supported by the allocation of resources and their outcomes assessed. It is most likely that pathways between VTE and higher education will succeed if such developments form a significant component of the state and institutional missions.

There is also evidence that the uptake of credit transfer is still variable across states and across institutions. While this variability may be quite legitimate due to differing state and institutional circumstances, missions, demographics, structures, needs and priorities, there is a need to explore and ascertain if further action could overcome barriers and exploit potential opportunities.