

# Submission to the Review of the Higher Education Provider Category Standards

Submitted by  
William Angliss Institute, Melbourne  
April, 2019

## **Introduction**

William Angliss Institute (WAI) is a TAFE and Non-University Higher Education Provider (NU-HEP) based in Melbourne but delivering training in every state and territory in Australia and internationally. All Higher Education delivery takes place on the Melbourne campus. While WAI has already made a contribution to the review under the aegis of the Victorian TAFE Association, it now wishes to make an additional organisational submission because WAI has unique characteristics and aspirations that shape its view of the HEPCS in somewhat different ways from the other Victorian TAFE institutes. These comments can be read on conjunction with personal comments made by our Chair of the Higher Education Academic Board (Dr. David Foster) and Associate Director Higher Education and Quality (Paul Whitelaw) who attended separate sessions with Professor Coaldrake in Melbourne in early April 2019.

## **Background**

WAI was founded in 1939 by the Victorian State Government at the urging of politician, entrepreneur and philanthropist William Angliss as an educational school for the food trades and has continued in this role since that date. It is the Victorian State Government's designated Specialist Centre for Foods, Tourism, Hospitality and Events education and training. In 2007 WAI commenced delivery of higher education qualifications, growing from an initial cohort of 37 higher education students to approximately 720 in 2019.

Currently WAI's HE course portfolio comprises more than 20 qualifications across our four key areas of specialisation, namely: foods, tourism, hospitality, and events. These qualifications include nested sub-bachelors that progress to a bachelor degree as well as nested post graduate qualifications that progress to a masters degree. We have variations in the portfolio of degree programs to reinforce our specialisation, level of industry engagement and international orientation. We are the only TAFE offering a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) which we offer in two formats: Master of Philosophy by Research and Major

Thesis and Master of Philosophy by Praxis and Exegesis. It is our understanding that we are the only non-university in the country offering the MPhil. in praxis and exegesis mode.

Since 2010 WAI has been working towards a long term strategy of becoming a University of Specialisation. Thus, the combination of the narrow focus of discipline/industry sector, the delivery of both vocational and higher education qualifications and its aspirations of becoming a university give WAI a unique perspective in the context of the complexities of VET and HE provision.

#### **A: Minimum Requirements for all institutions offering Higher Education:**

- I. All institutions must offer a range of Higher Education programs from at least AQF 5 - 7.
- II. All institutions must sustain a vibrant and robust community of reflective staff engaged in scholarly practices that actively and demonstrably seek to improve teaching and learning.

#### **B: Differentiating Characteristics between categories:**

- I. The first differentiating characteristic is self-governance. Institutions can range from having weak governance structures and a nascent culture of self-governance to strong and rigorous governance structures and a robust culture of self-governance.
- II. Research activity is the second characteristic that can be used to differentiate between Provider Categories. At the very least, the existence of research needs to be driven by a vibrant and engaged community of scholars. However, institutions can have a broad portfolio of research activity that is deemed world's best or, at the other end of the spectrum, they can have little research activity, of marginal quality and exhibits very limited engagement and no impact and which does not register a score with the ARC's metrics.

#### **C: Commentary on Existing Categories:**

- I. The current classification for "Higher Education Provider" is adequate as currently specified, but can be improved upon. In particular, this very large category needs to be sub-divided in a manner that identifies real differences in their governance structures, level of commitment to scholarship and research activity.
- II. The categories for University of Specialisation, Overseas University and Overseas University of Specialisation can be readily folded into the broader University category. The number of fields of education offered by a Higher Education Provider seems to be less relevant than the level of scholarship, academic governance processes and research activity.

Whilst knowing that an institution is a branch of an international institution or a specialist institution is helpful, we are not sure it provides additional critical information that give better protection for prospective students.

- III. University College is currently unhelpful, especially given its transitory nature and we make suggestions on how to better use this category.
- IV. The current classification for "University" is adequate as currently specified, but can be improved upon.

#### **D: Improving the Categories:**

- I. We acknowledge that there needs to be an entry level category, one that is fundamentally probationary in nature. The key characteristic of these organisations is that they offer a limited range of coursework programs up to AQF 9 and operate under the relatively close supervision of TEQSA in terms of academic governance and quality assurance of student outcomes. For the most part, they produce small volumes of research of varying quality and little consequence. If anything, they should be directing their efforts towards improving the scholarship of their teachers and their governance systems, not research. Our view is that those in this category which we call "Higher Education Provider" should be given a timeframe of say seven years to establish stable achievement of a "low risk" rating in all categories in the TEQSA PIR or face de-registration. At the same time, those that secure low risk on all categories for say three to five years in a row should automatically be granted self-accrediting status in their extant fields of delivery.
- II. Those Higher Education Providers that have passed their probationary period by being granted self-accrediting status across their full range of offerings should be placed in a category which reflects their maturity and the stability and robustness of their governance. A classification such as "Institute of Advanced Education" is a step back to the future, but conveys a message upon which the sector can build a clear identity that can be readily communicated to the consumer. The institute would need to retain a high quality risk profile in the TEQSA PIR or else face relegation.
- III. The next category is "University College". This category should be for those institutions that have all of the characteristics of a university: robust self-governance, scholarly practice and some research of reasonable quality. The number of fields of education on offer is not relevant. The research activity is of such quality and quantity as to warrant a status different to a research intensive university.
- IV. Finally, the University, needs to be seen as a scholarly-enriched, research intensive institution. Critically, to hold "university status" an institution must consistently produce research that is well above a

threshold as per the ARC's ERA and Research Impact metrics. For example, well above world standard in at least 25% of its discipline areas and at world standard in the remainder of its discipline areas. Those that don't meet this standard can elect to become a teaching intensive / research active (rather than research intensive) University College wherein they can still undertake research but without the pressure to achieve the requisite threshold.

The critical point in having these four categories for the 160 or so institutions ensure that there is a reasonable population of institutions in each category. The descriptors will ensure a high level of internal homogeneity within each category – thus providing appropriate benchmarks for all stakeholders, including prospective and existing students. As well, they will provide a high level of external heterogeneity across the four categories so that prospective students can assess what type of institution best serves their educational aspirations.