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Chapter 9

Filling the Skills Gap in Australia – VET Pathways



Alan Beckley, Clare Netherton, and Tracy Barber

Abstract In 2008 the authoritative Bradley Report into education in Australia identified a skills gap in the overall workforce in the country which, if not addressed, would disadvantage the nation in terms of international trade and technological innovation and development. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set targets for investment in potential students who would not traditionally enter tertiary education; that is, mainly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. The Australian federal government administered grants for states and territories to fulfil education targets through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships (HEPPP) funds. The subject of this paper is the Bridges to Higher Education (Bridges) program, a collaborative initiative provided by five Sydney universities working in partnership to deliver widening participation projects in New South Wales. As part of the Bridges program, two universities- University of Technology Sydney and Western Sydney University- worked together on the Pathways/VET projects which developed several hundred pathways and many workshops for potential students. Two case studies are included to illustrate that significant outcomes were achieved through the project which was externally evaluated by Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG).

In 2015, University of Western Sydney changed its name to Western Sydney University.

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1 Introduction

This chapter describes an innovative widening participation program that focused on vocational education and training (VET) and the construction of pathways for VET learners to progress to higher education (HE). The program involved two universities – the University of Technology Sydney and Western Sydney University – working in partnership with their local, public VET organisations, known as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes. The aims of the program were to develop and implement processes and activities to facilitate the successful transition of TAFE students to university and to give them the support they needed to succeed in their university studies.

The TAFE Pathways program was a key element of a broader collaboration with three other Sydney universities – Macquarie University, Australian Catholic University and the University of Sydney – aiming to increase participation, retention and academic outcomes of students from target equity groups in HE, with a particular focus on students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds. Known as *Bridges to Higher Education*, this overarching five-university partnership received \$21.2 million of funding through the Australian Government's *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* (HEPPP), to effect change in university enrolment patterns (Department of Education n.d.). HEPPP funds a variety of widening participation programs involving partnerships across the school, VET and HE sectors (Beckley 2014; Beckley et al. 2015; Munns et al. 2013; Peel and Beckley 2015) to attract and retain students from communities under-represented in HE (Department of Education 2014). The specified objectives of Bridges were: improving academic outcomes; increasing awareness, confidence and motivation towards HE; building teacher and community capacity, and increasing capacity to access HE (Bridges to Higher Education 2015). The program was externally evaluated by management consultancy KPMG (2015).

The chapter begins by describing the societal context which provided the impetus and also the capacity to undertake the TAFE Pathways approach to widening participation. It outlines the attractions for building and strengthening pathways, the limitations and challenges of this strategy, both in terms of achieving wider participation and in supporting students to make a successful transition between VET and university as well as the experiences of students who undertake these pathways. Two case studies of initiatives within the UTS and WSU TAFE-university programs are provided. These case studies illustrate the broader objectives and strategies within this context.

2 The Imperative for VET Pathways to Widen Participation in University Education

VET and HE in Australia are separate sectors in the education field (O’Shea et al. 2012). Pathways provide for movement between these two distinct sectors and, while this chapter is focussed on the potential widening participation benefits of the VET-university transition, it is important to also note the flow of student traffic in the opposite direction, with university graduates undertaking VET qualifications to strengthen specific vocational skills and potential employability. Between 2010–2013, at UTS on average 11% of commencing students entered through a VET pathway (University of Technology Sydney 2015, p. 56), while at WSU the number of such students reached 18% (Ellis 2014, p. 6). Entry is usually provided by diploma or advanced diploma qualifications, though a small number of courses also accept the lower Certificate IV qualification. In addition to those qualifications providing access to university, students may receive credit for their VET studies towards their degree. The credit received varies according to the ‘fit’ between the two qualifications, from credit for a particular subject, through to a full year of credit with students entering the second year of a university course.

VET entry pathways provide a valuable route for people who for a variety of reasons are unable to access university education. This includes those who have experienced disrupted education, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and from families who have not traditionally participated in HE. Research has also established that low participation rates in university by people from LSES backgrounds do not necessarily stem from barriers to enrolment but could be linked to poor achievement at secondary school (Chowdry et al. 2013). VET pathways are a valuable access route to higher education for young people who completed year 12 of their high school education and have the ability to study at HE level but did not receive a high enough ATAR¹ score in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) to either gain entry or access their particular choice of course. Many people regard the use of ATAR scores to select the future for a young person as a far too simplistic process (Faruqi 2016, February 3). A practical example of using a structured personal portfolio to enable entry to university rather than rely solely on the ATAR score is the introduction of the Big Picture Education Australia program (<http://www.bigpicture.org.au/>).

There has, however, been a relationship of distrust and misunderstanding between the VET and university sectors (Weadon and Baker 2014). In more recent years, relationships between the two sectors have increasingly improved and the divisions have become blurred through organisational collaboration and the proliferation of institutions that offer both VET and higher education qualifications (Cram 2008; O’Shea et al. 2012; Weadon and Baker 2014).

¹ Australian Tertiary Admission Rank – see: <http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/atar/>

These positive developments can be understood within the context of political, economic and social impetus in more recent years to increase educational participation and attainment across the population through greater ease of movement and collaboration across the VET and HE sectors. While the Australian government has advocated for nearly 30 years a ‘seamless movement’ between the sectors (Smith and Kemmis 2014), the recommendations and objectives of the authoritative Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008) catapulted Australian universities into a new era of equity targets that also impacted upon VET-university transition. Key to this were the objectives specified in the Bradley Review and adopted by the Australian Government that by 2020, 40% of 25–34 year old people are to have at least a bachelor-level qualification, and 20% of higher education enrolments are to be students from low socio-economic status backgrounds (p. xviii); this is a combination of what Brink (2009, p. 4) identified as *increasing* participation and *widening* participation. In terms of widening participation, the objectives were justified because demographic data showed that only 15% of HE students were from LSES localities, whereas this group comprised 25% of the Australian population.

The Bradley Review identified “clearer and stronger pathways between the sectors in both directions” as one of the key characteristics of an effective tertiary education and training system (2008, p. 179). The report panel specified that, although distinct sectors are important, ‘it is also vital that there should be better connections across tertiary education and training to meet economic and social needs which are dynamic and not readily defined by sectoral boundaries’ (2008, p. 180). Bradley urged the Australian government to act because in the acquisition of business skills, “Australia is losing ground” resulting in a “great competitive disadvantage unless immediate action is [to be] taken” (2008, p. xi). Growing the pathways between VET and HE is a strategy for upgrading skills and qualifications and supporting lifelong learning. This strategy is also evident in the Australian Qualifications Framework (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013), with its emphasis upon greater movement between the two sectors, and maximising advanced standing as recognition of prior learning.

Most education practitioners accept that the identification of pathways and advanced standing/accreditation agreements is beneficial certainly for students but also for VET and HE institutions (Smith and Kemmis 2014). Well-recognised pathways are a useful tool to illustrate study progression routes both for domestic and international students. The availability of these pathways can assist recruitment and enrolment procedures and aid understanding of the complex entry requirements (Bandias et al. 2011). In addition, Smith and Kemmis (2014) identified that pathways can reduce the cost of education to the public purse by avoiding duplication of costs.

The development of VET-university pathways as a strategy for widening participation was affirmed by research into other approaches under consideration at the time, such as providing access through developing new enabling or foundation programs. The Lomax-Smith Base Funding Review (Lomax-Smith et al. 2011) queried the benefits of enabling courses as pathways to HE. The review suggests enabling courses as *remedial courses* are effective in retaining students, but that the role filled

by pathway *enabling courses* ‘may be diminishing or provided more effectively by other models’ and notes the benefits of a VET pathway in providing an exit qualification for students and counting as credit towards university study. There are a number of risks in terms of effectively targeting and recruiting low SES students through enabling programs: they typically have high course attrition rates of around 40–50%, and the more an enabling program eases up entry requirements in order to facilitate entry for a wider range of potential students, the higher the base rate of attrition is likely to be (Hodges et al. 2013, p. 25, p. 52). The 2014 Kemp Norton report similarly states there are ‘more risks and fewer benefits with enabling programs than other courses’ (Kemp and Norton 2014, p. 75).

3 Issues with Widening Participation Through VET to University Pathways

While the benefits are acknowledged, there are significant challenges in creating pathways between VET and university that contribute to both widening participation of students from LSES backgrounds, and facilitating effective transition. An over-representation of students from LSES backgrounds and other equity groups in VET and an under-representation of these groups in HE is often linked to the equity aspect of entry pathways from VET to HE (Bandias et al. 2011; Griffin 2014; McNaught 2013). However, research demonstrates that VET students from LSES backgrounds are more likely to complete lower level certificates (Certificate III) while students from medium or high socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to complete the higher Certificate IV, Diplomas or Advanced Diplomas, thus enabling greater access to VET-HE pathways (Catterall et al. 2014; Griffin 2014; Wheelahan 2009). Also, where LSES VET students do enter HE with a lower certificate their retention and success rates are significantly lower than those of VET students with higher level certificates (Catterall et al. 2014). These are issues that universities need to address if pursuing the TAFE pathways option for widening participation. One approach recently adopted at UTS as part of the TAFE Pathways program (see [Case Study 2](#)) is the awarding of bonus points towards final ATAR scores to year 12 students who complete a TAFE delivered Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) Health Services Certificate III. Other options that could be explored include expanding university outreach aimed at building aspiration for university study to the lower level qualifications.

Another issue is addressing the perennial argument around “dropping standards” by accepting students into HE courses with lower entry requirements. This has largely been de-bunked; widening participation programs should be viewed as “optimising talent and tapping potential” (Brink 2009, p. 5) rather than lowering standards. Brink (2009) who was (among many other distinguished roles) the vice-chancellor of a large city university in England said it is necessary to differentiate entry standards from exit standards. If the university is providing adequate support for all students and a high quality program, Brink found there were equal exit

standards for all students from whatever background by advocating a process to turn ‘weak starters into strong finishers’, and that there is “now strong evidence for the claim that sufficient value-add measures can result in students with lesser entry standards attaining perfectly acceptable exit standards” (Brink 2009, p. 7). Therefore, to establish greater equity, multiple transition processes must be considered for entry thresholds for example, from school or work to VET, from lower to higher VET qualifications and from VET to HE (Griffin 2014).

UTS and WSU student data indicates that, while there are some gaps in levels of performance between students entering university via a VET pathway and all students, overall VET students are performing well. At UTS the success rate² for VET pathways students in 2014 was 80.4% compared with 90.8% for all students (University of Technology Sydney 2015, p. 62) and at WSU in 2013, 77.5% compared with 76.88%. The attrition rate³ for VET pathways students at UTS in 2014 was 11.1% compared with 6.9% for all students (University of Technology Sydney 2015, p. 60), and at WSU in 2013, 28.3% for VET students (Ellis 2014, p. 10) compared with 12.48% for all commencing bachelor students (Source: DIICSRTE 2013). Providing greater support to VET students in their transition and ongoing learning can further reduce these gaps in performance between VET and other students, as demonstrated in the case studies reported here.

4 VET Students’ Experiences of Transitioning to University Study

Developing pathways between VET and universities requires understanding the experiences of students who follow these pathways, in order for these pathways to be effective and to provide the appropriate types of support. The *Bridges to Higher Education* program devised a carefully constructed and comprehensive approach to evaluating all its projects, which included all individual project holders undertaking evaluation with the support and guidance of a centralised team comprised of evaluation specialists, and in conjunction with an external evaluator (KPMG). In addition, further research was undertaken for certain projects, including TAFE pathways.

Findings from the evaluation and research at both UTS and WSU indicate that TAFE students overall have a positive experience of their transition to university. WSU research found that transitioning students saw the new learning context as a positive factor and responded to challenges with enthusiasm and resilience (Catterall et al. 2014). UTS undertook survey research of students who had entered through a

² Success is defined as the Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) passed by students in a given year, calculated as a proportion of all EFTSLs attempted (University of Technology Sydney 2015, p. 46).

³ Attrition is defined as the headcount of students who do not return to study after being enrolled in the previous year, expressed as a percentage of total headcount in the previous year (University of Technology Sydney 2015, p. 46).

TAFE background and similarly found that TAFE students reported positive experiences in relation to adjustment and expectations (Barber et al. 2015). The UTS research affirmed that TAFE pathways provide students with the confidence and capability to progress to university, with one student commenting that “I attribute my success to the base they gave me and I will be forever grateful for their belief in me”, and another stating that:

With the skills provided to me at TAFE, I am able to confidently ask questions and publicly discuss my thoughts on a certain topic in class with little to no problems, also I have made a lot of close friends. Overall TAFE heavily influenced my university experience positively.
(Barber et al. 2015, p. 8)

Their VET experience “gave them the encouragement, motivation and confidence to continue studying”, a sense of direction for their future and provided familiarity with the university course content (Barber et al. 2015, p. 7). In particular those students who most strongly identified with their TAFE background reported significantly higher levels of adjustment and fulfilled expectations.

While these self-reported experiences are encouraging, the research, however, also identifies difficulties for TAFE students in the process of transitioning and undertaking university study, and that there is a need to provide more support (Ambrose et al. 2013). Factors affecting students’ experience of transitioning from VET to university studies and their capacity to succeed have been well documented, and include personal, pedagogic, relational and cultural elements.

On a personal level, TAFE pathways students are more likely to be older, working full-time and have family responsibilities (Watson 2008). These factors are linked with greater risk of attrition, as students struggle to cope with the demands of managing and meeting their commitments while adjusting to the complexities of the new university learning environment.

The receipt of credit for previous study, while heralded as an advantage of the TAFE pathway to university study as it reduces study time, load and cost, also comes with potential pitfalls. Students who receive credit that enables them to transition into the second year of their degree may be missing orientation, social immersion and induction into their disciplinary culture (Ambrose et al. 2013; Cameron 2004).

Another key factor are the differences in aims, learning and assessment approaches between the VET and HE sectors, specifically the vocational focus and competency-based training and assessment processes in the VET sector compared with the theoretically focussed curriculum model in HE (Watson 2008; Wheelahan 2007). Wheelahan (2007) suggests that the competency-based approach of VET actually prevents students from accessing styles of reasoning represented in the disciplinary knowledges of university education. Academic literacies issues also impact on some students’ capacity for success at university (Watson 2008), including skills in information locating, referencing, interpreting and usage; high level writing skills; note taking; volume and complexity of reading material; and comprehension of discipline-specific technical prose.

A greater focus on student autonomy and self-regulation at university can be a further challenge for TAFE students who are accustomed to a more individual and supportive TAFE environment (Weadon and Baker 2014; Wheelahan and Ovens

2005, as cited in Aird et al. 2010). Transitioning TAFE students describe their TAFE teachers as “more involved with the students than lecturers and tutors at university, they take more responsibility for student performance” which “leads to feeling respected” (Barber et al. 2015, p. 8). WSU students similarly noted the “perceived superior support for learning at TAFE through more face-to-face contact with teachers, teacher-prepared notes and general educational and personal assistance” (Catterall et al. 2014, p. 247). This difference in support is exacerbated by the larger classes at university and greater difficulty in connecting with both staff and with other students, “a lack of relationship, causing fear, anxiety and loneliness, which negatively affects performance and engagement” (Barber et al. 2015, p. 8).

Contributing to the challenge of transition for many TAFE students are perceived higher academic standards and levels of expectations at university (Cameron 2004). There is a perceived hierarchical social stratification with university education seen as more rigorous than vocational, and university students possessing higher intelligence and academic abilities. These perceptions impact upon transitioning TAFE students’ identity with many feeling inferior to the mainstream student coming straight from high school, and many experiencing a “feeling of social dislocation and alienation, resulting in loneliness and a failure to thrive” (Goldingay et al. 2013, p. 173).

5 Pathways Projects – Case Studies

The two case studies below collectively demonstrate strategies and activities for effectively addressing the issues outlined above in making the transition to university study. The shared objectives of the Western Sydney University and UTS Pathways Projects were: building new and strengthening existing pathways and relationships between VET training providers and Universities, increasing students’ awareness, confidence and motivation towards pursuing these pathways and providing academic support to enable students to successfully transition from VET to university while remaining in education to the successful conclusion of their studies.

5.1 Case Study 1: Western Sydney University Pathways/VET Project

5.1.1 Project Aim

This project was intended to increase students’ knowledge, build aspirations, prepare students and expedite opportunities through accepted and recognised channels for students to access and succeed at university. The target audience for the project

was students studying at VET institutions such as TAFEs and UWS College⁴ and also high school students in locations that have LSES backgrounds.

5.1.2 Project Objectives and Activities

The project comprised of presentations, seminars and campus tours providing information, advice and guidance for prospective VET students and those with the ability to continue or move on to higher education studies at university. According to research carried out at Western Sydney University (Ellis 2014), a large percentage of students entering the university progress through the VET route. Having studied and passed a VET Diploma, they apply for and are offered a place at university, in many disciplines commencing at the second year of study.

Much of the Pathways work at Western Sydney University was building and negotiating agreements for a framework of articulation and accreditation routes; this was pioneering work between the VET and HE sectors. The Pathways project also developed and disseminated information resources about pathways to university and how to complete an application for advanced standing. Information was produced in hard copy, presentations and the Western Sydney University's Tertiary Education Pathways and Partnership webpage.

Further innovative work in the Pathways project was completed in 2014 with the two projects of *Diploma Plus*, and *Let's Talk Uni*. The former is an enhanced student learning program incorporating university learning methods and graduate attributes as part of a TAFE Diploma. Launched in 2014, *Diploma Plus* combines vocational and academic elements as part of a TAFE Diploma of Community Services Work. Students gain a broader skill set designed to serve them well in aspects of their career, and facilitate a smoother transition to university. The latter project, *Let's Talk Uni*, was delivered at university campuses to VET students. It consisted of a 1 day seminar that was designed to support students with their transition to university by increasing academic preparedness, managing expectations and creating a sense of belonging for students in a seminar setting.

5.1.3 Project Outcomes

During 2014, 172 students attended the WSU Pathways project *Let's talk Uni* university preparation seminar for VET students. This presentation is designed to engage and prepare students for university, and student feedback shows that participation impacts positively on student confidence and sense of belonging at university. One student commented that "I am less nervous about uni now and hope I am accepted into UWS more than ever" (TAFE student, WSU Pathways/VET project, 2014) and another stated:

⁴Renamed in 2015 'The College'

Thank you for all the helpful tips I got on the day. And thanks to all the staff for being so welcoming and easy to talk to. It made me walk away from this event and think I would really love to come to uni. (TAFE student, WSU Pathways/VET project, 2014).

Students also described feeling less anxious about their prospective transition from the VET to university environment following on campus experiences:

I am now less fearful and insecure about going to university. I still have concerns around the transition to a different learning environment and different assessments, but since I was at the open day I know that there is support available for me to access (TAFE student, WSU Pathways/VET project, Bridges 2015, p. 26).

Effective dissemination of resources to promote TAFE to university pathways is also a critical outcome of the UWS Pathways/VET Project. The project was responsible for authoring, maintaining and promoting the WSU Tertiary Education Pathways and Partnership webpage, a valuable student resource that received 164,000 views in 2014.

5.1.4 Project Impact

Significant progress in relation to academic outcomes has been made with *Diploma Plus*. In its first year, *Diploma Plus* has engaged 130 students, with 30% (n = 39) submitting an application to university. Evaluation showed that 80% (n = 104) of students surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed that attending the lectures associated with the year-long university style research unit had encouraged them to consider university as their next step. One student highlighted the academic writing and study skills gained during the program and shared that “*Diploma Plus* has opened my eyes to the opportunities out there” and “definitely made me aspire towards university” (Bridges 2015, p. 27).

5.2 Case Study 2: TAFE to UTS Pathways in the Faculty of Health

5.2.1 Project Aim

The TAFE Pathways Project in the UTS Faculty of Health aims to increase awareness and potential of current TAFE students to study at university, to support processes around enrolment of TAFE pathways students at UTS, and to continue to support these students once they have enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing and have commenced their studies at UTS.

5.2.2 Project Objectives and Activities

The project's activities are aligned with UTS Widening Participation Strategy themes:

- *Building Educational Aspiration and Attainment* by providing TAFE outreach sessions in TAFE classrooms, facilitating on campus visits and learning experiences for TAFE students and teachers, and sharing learning and teaching resources with TAFE teachers to improve awareness of and preparedness for university study.
- *Widening access* to university by promoting an established pathway between the TAFE Certificate IV, Diploma, or Advanced Diploma of Nursing (Enrolled Nursing) and the UTS Accelerated Entry Bachelor of Nursing course. This pathway awards advanced standing for previous TAFE studies and enables students to complete the course in 2 years of full time study at UTS. Access has been further widened through a scheme awarding bonus points towards final ATAR scores to year 12 students who complete a TAFE delivered Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) Health Services Certificate III.
- *Providing support for transition, retention and success* through targeted orientation week activities, a first year student representative initiative designed to improve student-staff communication and a range of academic support initiatives for students and teaching staff.

5.2.3 Project Outcomes

The TAFE outreach aspect of this project has increased students' awareness, confidence and motivation towards higher education. Between 2013 and 2015, over 400 TAFE students participated in Faculty of Health TAFE outreach sessions. Nearly all students surveyed (97%, n = 288) agreed that the sessions increased their awareness of what university offers and diverse pathways to university. TAFE students commented that these sessions "definitely encouraged [them] to look into uni" and left them feeling "excited" and "inspired". Students found the sessions "useful and helped [them] understand what opportunities are open and what road to take" and helped them to "feel more confident that [the course] is the right thing for me". TAFE teachers also reported benefits of the "hopeful journey to university" presented by the outreach program, and positive outcomes of the on campus professional development opportunities, including "learning several new approaches and strategies that will be very useful".

The project has also increased student capacity to access higher education. The enhanced promotion of the pathway between VET qualifications and the Accelerated Entry Bachelor of Nursing course has increased student numbers. The second year of the project witnessed a 46% increase in student enrolment into the course, from 69 students in 2013 to 101 students in 2014, accompanied by a 5% increase in the student retention rate, from 78% to 83%. These increases reflect both enhanced

awareness of opportunities to TAFE students to transition to university, and support available for these students once they commence their university study at UTS.

Improved awareness of academic support available to students once enrolled at UTS has been achieved through a range of initiatives including additional workshops and assignment support sessions. Students expressed the benefits of increased awareness of support services, suggesting the project “played a massive role in helping with our transition from work/TAFE to university”. All commencing students underwent academic language screening, involving an online assessment, and resulting in feedback including recommendations about how to access support appropriate for their ability and learning needs. A Written English Language Framework guidelines tool for assessment grading was also developed and implemented, with teachers describing it as “easy to use”, leading to “better consistency within marking” and allowing for better access to “timely and clear feedback to students” about their writing.

The First Year Representative (FYR) Initiative implemented by this project has improved dialogue between staff and students. The growth of student leaders within this strategy has built student capacity and attributes, particularly in relation to communication and collaboration. Students commented on the benefits of “seeing tangible change from the Faculty in response to student concerns, networking with staff and other students, and being informed and guided on the best way to tackle issues or concerns”. The FYR initiative showed students “how to raise issues in a productive way” and have ongoing dialogue about issues faced in their transition year from TAFE into university.

5.2.4 Project Impact

Academic staff members are increasingly aware of the unique attributes and strengths of students with a VET background, are becoming mindful of the challenges of transitioning to university from TAFE, and as a consequence are integrating support into their learning and teaching practices. Within the broader curriculum, transitional activities to support these students have been embedded into core subjects and are therefore not reliant on future project funding.

6 Conclusions

As demonstrated above, there are social, educational and economic benefits of widening participation through the construction of effective pathways from VET to university; pathways that both widen access, and set students up to succeed once they undertake university study. VET pathways are a second chance opportunity for learners with disrupted education, including those from LSES backgrounds and other under-represented groups, and serve a valuable role in diversifying the university population beyond the traditional middle-high socioeconomic status

background school leaver cohort. Developing these pathways is acknowledged as a strategy for simultaneously achieving both social and economic outcomes, providing a strategy for upgrading the population's skills and a structure for supporting continuous education. Both university and VET sectors benefit, with well-recognised pathways to university also strengthening the appeal of VET as a study option by providing a useful tool for illustrating study progression routes. VET pathways compare favourably with other non-school access pathways such as enabling programs, both economically and in terms of transition to university and success rates.

VET pathways function most effectively when there is a close fit between the VET and university qualifications, information provision and confidence building prior to commencement of university study, intentional design to facilitate student transition and ongoing learning support for students. Both UTS and WSU case studies demonstrate the effectiveness of VET pathways when these strategies and processes are put in place, in terms of students' levels of adjustment, fulfilled expectations, learning outcomes and overall quality of their university experience.

The development and maintenance of VET pathways does however require high degrees of resourcing and collaboration within and between the VET and university sectors. The additional resourcing provided to UTS and WSU through Australian government HEPPP funding was integral to this work taking place. Both organisations recognise that sustaining the initiatives will require an independence from this external funding and hence the embedding of VET pathways into mainstream core business.

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