

**Research, policy, and practice: how do they fit together?
A case study on pathways and articulation at Victoria University of Technology**

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The relationship between research, policy and practice in tertiary institutions is complex. It is not realistic to posit simple causal relationships between research, policy and practice, as all three are interlocked and interdependent. Policy-makers like linear relationships: first there is research, which develops policy, which in turn directs practice. The 'action research spiral', favoured by reflective practitioners, is similarly staged: reflection, planning, action, observation then reflection again. The reality is more incoherent, with research, policy and practice muddled together, and where the prominence of one or the other is just as often the outcome of institutional political imperatives as it is the need to develop grounded policy to underpin practice. Yet, it is possible over time to see the translation of research into policy and practice, and to observe how the latter acts as the impetus for further research.

In 1997 Victoria University of Technology, which contains a TAFE and higher education sector, initiated the ambitious Personalised Access and Study policy which aimed to make education available to, and meet the learning needs of, the University's students, and region comprising more than 615,000 people. The policy was (and is) predicated on learning pathways and student articulation, which in turn was predicated on transforming the relationship between its TAFE and higher education sectors. Refinements (or revisions) to the policy have occurred at several key points.

This paper has two themes. First, it examines the way in which access and pathways policies have changed within the University, particularly focusing on research undertaken in 2000 with teaching staff in TAFE and higher education and with articulating students. This paper is, in part, a report on that research. The second theme is an initial examination of the fluidity of the research, policy and practice relationship, from the perspective of the author, who has been at times involved in policy, practice, and research within the University.