Romancing Transnational Education and Training

Saraswathi Karthigesu
Education Services and Programs
Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology

Abstract

The *Transnational Quality Assurance of the VET Sector project* examined the need for establishing stronger quality assurance processes to ensure that the standard of delivery and outcomes of the courses/programs delivered in a transnational environment are equivalent to those determined under nationally recognised quality assurance arrangements, and delivered within Australia.

These quality assurance processes and functions must also ensure
   o that the Australian education and training delivered overseas/transnationally meet the accreditation standards of the students' home countries
   o that providers and consumers clearly understand the accountabilities in the delivery and quality assurance of transnational education and training
   o maintenance of the integrity of Australian education and training delivered overseas.

The research also examined the need for appropriate tools and training that will prepare staff of both TAFE South Australia (TAFE SA) and the private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in South Australia for the delivery of quality education and training overseas.

Information was gathered through a questionnaire sent to the Quality Managers of TAFE SA, and the three RTOs involved in the project; and through a workshop for all TAFE SA staff involved in transnational education and training, and the three participating RTOs.

A key recommendation from the research is that staff delivering overseas must be appropriately qualified, and be monitored and assessed regularly. This is to ensure
   o the validity, currency, and practicality of their teaching and delivery;
   o that the integrity of Australian education and training is maintained while within a transnational environment and is learner focused;
   o that there are appropriate delivery and assessment strategies to facilitate acquisition of knowledge and an Australian qualification by the overseas learner.

Introduction

Australia plays a major role in the education of international students, both onshore and transnationally. The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) figures for 2000 reflected that more than 150,000 overseas students enrol in Australian educational institutions and that there are more than 30,000 overseas students enrolled at offshore campuses of Australian education providers each year. International education numbers have continued to increase and in 2003, of the 73,300 students enrolled at offshore campuses, 18,300 were enrolled in Vocational Education

and Training (VET) courses (Nelson 2003). And in 2004, 23,300 students were enrolled in VET courses offshore (Fitt 2007; Havelock 2007).

The continued increase in demand for quality delivery of education and training in students' home countries (Nelson 2003, p.6) has led to the growth in the number of providers of overseas programs and courses. Nelson (2003), states that Australia's quality assurance processes need to be stronger, as more and more governments are concerned about the quality and standard of education and training offered in their countries by providers of education and training. These governments are seeking to ensure that education and training providers deliver quality education and training; meet accreditation standards; and award qualifications that are reputable and creditable.

Transnational education is indeed seen as a very lucrative business and there are more providers of education and training who now look at promoting their courses overseas; setting up offshore campuses; delivering offshore; and developing twinning, auspicing and/or licensing arrangements with international partners.

Why is transnational education and training such an attraction? What is the key motivator for providers of education and training to embark on a transnational education and training venture, without even thinking about the need to complete a due diligence and market intelligence? Nelson (2003, p.21) states that the government's objectives to diversify overseas include adoption of Australian expertise for the development of education and training systems in other countries; expansion of commercial services to students and providers overseas; and accessing expertise and infrastructure for high level research.

TAFE South Australia (TAFE SA) recognised the importance of awarding creditable and reputable Australian qualifications overseas, and the need to maintain quality assurance of transnational education and training. It therefore participated in the NCVER managed, DEST funded project for the VET sector.

The TAFE SA *Transnational Quality Assurance for VET Sector* project set out to ascertain, besides other objectives of the project, the reasons why transnational education and training is so attractive. A survey was administered and a workshop was conducted as part of the project. Participants at the *Transnational Education and Training Quality Assurance Workshop* were asked to complete a pre and a post workshop questionnaire. The aim was to gather their views on transnational education and training and to provide an insight into what 'drove' them to source for new transnational education and training opportunities.

The Government objectives that Nelson, 2003 had referred to, were mirrored in different ways in the pre and post-workshop questionnaires, and in the group discussions at the *Transnational Education and Training Quality Assurance Workshop*. The following were responses as to why one wished to embark on transnational education and training:

- o Develop joint training ventures linked to state and national strategic directions
- o Strategic intent of the program area and the organisation

- o Part of the business plan of the Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- o Promote national and state VET qualifications overseas
- o Introduce new/grow business opportunities
- o Create new links
- o Trade opportunity
- o Revenue generation – Fee for Service activity, extra funding for RTO
- o Sale of learning resources and software packages
- o Cultural learning
- o Building partnerships
- o Sharing and exchange of knowledge and expertise
- o Professional development opportunities for staff
- o Increase international student base
- o Part of the growth sustainability and development of TAFE SA and South Australia
- o To market TAFE SA and its programs internationally
- o Registered Training Organisation has the capability and capacity to deliver

If individuals are embarking on transnational education and training ventures for all or some of the reasons stated, then there must be a rigorous system that will ensure that only bona fide providers of quality education and training are allowed to provide these services overseas; and that these services are comparable to the quality-assured educational standards delivered in Australia.

There is also a need to emulate current good practices that have been tried, tested and have produced good results. Nelson (2003, p.31) states that good practices include compliance with legal requirements of the country providers are operating in; offering accredited courses and at commensurate standards for the award; undertaking due diligence and accreditation checks on potential partners; facilitating independent audits on themselves and conducting student satisfaction surveys and making the results public. Bearing this in mind, the *Transnational Quality Assurance for the VET Sector* project looked at the development of a *Tool Kit* (*Kit*) that will guide TAFE SA staff wishing to embark on a new Transnational Education and Training venture, to assess the commercial viability for TAFE SA and the South Australian Government and economy.

Participation of TAFE South Australia in transnational education and training
TAFE South Australia (TAFE SA) is the major public provider of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in South Australia, with 53 campuses and learning centres across the state. More than 90,000 students ranging from 15 years to 65 years of age study at TAFE SA each year in both award and short courses.

TAFE SA has been in the business of onshore international student education since 1989, as well as the off-shore delivery of education and training programs, provision of consulting services to international organisations, and auspicing and licensing arrangements (defined as transnational education and training, AEI 2005, p.1). TAFE South Australia participates in international education and transnational education and training in order to contribute to the South Australian Government's objectives (Karthigesu 2004; Ruse 2003).

Right up till 2004, TAFE SA functioned as eight autonomous Institutes, with each having its own scope of registration; own sets of guidelines, business processes, operating procedures and protocols; and promotional campaigns. By 2005, TAFE SA Institutes had been restructured from eight to three Institutes and began operating under one Scope of Registration for TAFE SA with three provider numbers.

Prior to the one scope of registration, TAFE SA conducted businesses, both domestic and offshore, based on a competitive framework (Kirby et al. 2002, p.17). The establishment of TAFE SA as a single Registered Training Organisation provided the opportunity to benchmark best practice throughout the institutes and establish Standard Operating Procedures for the whole organisation relating to offshore delivery.

Individual campus sites within the newly formed TAFE SA have extensive experience delivering flexible, customised, education and/or training services offshore and/or licensing agreements which lead to Australian qualifications (both award and non-award). Each institute has quality processes that support the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards. Each institute can identify priority markets within industry sectors associated to their scope of registration/delivery. Therefore each institute has its own risk assessment/minimisation and project management strategies, to monitor, moderate and audit, processes and procedures. All these business processes are in place to achieve the quality outcomes identified in the respective business plans associated with each offshore project.

Although each Institute of TAFE SA as a provider, has its own set of standard operating procedures; risk management and project management strategies and quality assurance methods, it was recognised that there was a need for one set of tools that are used by all three Institutes and only one set of standard operating procedures, protocols, risk management and project management strategies. Only then could TAFE SA remain a well-recognised, highly regarded Australian institution providing quality, credible and accredited courses leading to an Australian qualification with educational pathways and employability skills. And for South Australian Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to be recognised in a similar manner, there was a need for a similar set of tools for them to be working with and utilising.

Transnational quality assurance for the VET sector project
The *Transnational Quality Assurance for the VET Sector* project took both the Public and Private RTOs into consideration and consulted with members of both types of RTOs and stakeholders. This was done to ensure that the outcomes will be beneficial to both the Public and Private RTOs, and to facilitate their efficient functioning and provision of quality, AQTF compliant programs/courses.

As intended, the completion of the project, led to the
- o establishment and support for a standardised approach to international offshore business across TAFE SA;
- o consolidation of TAFE SA business processes to support quality assurance associated with all offshore activity and improve current and future trends;
- o development of standard operating procedures to consolidate quality business functions across the organisation; and the

o development and production of a *Tool Kit for Quality Assurance for Offshore Delivery*, suitable for public and private RTOs.

Research method

There were two parts to the research. The first part involved consultation with transnational education and training practitioners in TAFE SA; private RTOs that were involved in the project; and other stakeholders. The aim of the consultation was to develop a questionnaire to help identify best practice, to benchmark quality service that supports the AQTF and other quality standards for transnational business. Partnering organisations were also consulted with, to identify current standard operating procedures and to engage them within the consultation, development and trial phases of the project.

Consultation and development of questionnaire
The consultation with the various practitioners and stakeholders led to the establishment of a Transnational Quality Assurance Reference Group. The Reference Group comprised a member of the quality branch of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology; and individuals from both the public (TAFE SA) and private Registered Training Organisations (RTO) who are quality practitioners; are aware of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system; and have international experience. The main role of this group was to provide input into the development of a questionnaire on quality audits to ascertain current best practices in the delivery of transnational education and training programs in TAFE SA and in private RTOs.

Once the questionnaire was developed, the draft was sent to the following for review and feedback:
o TAFE SA Quality Managers
o TAFE SA Educational Managers
o Private Registered Training Organisations
o Departmental representatives from Marketing and International, and the Legislation and Delegation Units

The finalised questionnaire on quality assurances was divided into five sections, Sections A to E. Each section covered an aspect of the data that needed to be collected.
o Section A covered personal particulars, including name of the person managing the program; the organisation and campus.
o Section B asked for details of the program being delivered, including, the name of the program; country in which the program was being delivered; commencement and expiry dates of contracts and programs.
o Section C looked at current quality assurance practices for offshore delivery; collaborative, auspicing, and/or licensing arrangements; while
o Section D focused on site audits; and
o Section E addressed professional development opportunities.

The questionnaire was given to the Quality Managers of TAFE South Australia and the representatives of the participating private RTOs, requesting that they circulate the

questionnaire to the appropriate program areas/colleagues who deal with transnational education and training.

Workshop on Quality Assurance of Transnational Education and Training Programs
The Transnational Quality Assurance Workshop formed the second part of the research for the Project, and covered the following topics:
   o Definition of Transnational Education and Training
   o DEST Transnational Quality Strategy – Implications and Effective Use of the Strategy
   o Current models in transnational education and training – the issues and the risks
   o Understanding the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards and compliance with these standards
   o Application of AQTF Standards in transnational education and training
   o Decision for articulation/credit transfers

The aim of this part of the research was to develop a set of tools to facilitate the Commercial Viability Assessment (CVA) of a new transnational education and training opportunity, before embarking on it.

Workshop Participation
Representatives from the participating private RTOs, TAFE SA Senior Management, Educational Managers, Quality Managers, and Lecturing Staff; and Departmental staff dealing with transnational education and training attended the workshop.

Workshop Questionnaires
Pre-Workshop and Post-Workshop Questionnaires were administered prior to and at the end of the workshop respectively.

The Pre-Workshop Questionnaire was administered to ascertain the prior knowledge participants had, of Transnational Education and Training; how they defined and interpreted Transnational Education and Training; the AQTF standards and compliance with these standards.

The Post-Workshop Questionnaire (which had the same questions as the Pre-Workshop Questionnaire) was administered to ascertain whether the participants' views and perceptions of Transnational Education and Training had changed after listening to the presentations and participating in the workshop activities.

Findings and discussion

Analysis of Questionnaire on Quality Assurances
There are different quality assurance practices amongst the TAFE South Australia campuses; and different methods of assessing if the AQTF standards are met. A *Quality Assurance Policy* has been developed for the Diploma of Information Technology programs delivered in both India and Vietnam and the Diploma of Business Administration delivered in Vietnam.

Current Best Practice in TAFE South Australia includes annual site audits at all 20 offshore sites. The site audits include the following checks:

- List of qualifications issued at the institution/site
- Total number of students enrolled in each qualification for the past 12 months
- Current version of Delivery and Assessment Strategy and Training Package document for each qualification
- Document version control register and evidence of version control
- Sample copies of parchments issued to students upon graduation
- Parchments issued register
- Client survey/feedback mechanism (post induction/during study/post study/industry
- Information provided to students prior to enrolling in the qualification (e.g. prospectus, information kit, induction package)
- Sample session plans, assessment tools and assessment recording instruments for each qualification issued by the institution
- Examples of completed assessments of students' work
- List of lecturers – with summary of their relevant qualifications and industry experience relevant to the subject area for each qualification
- Job and person specifications for lecturers
- Copies of institutional policies and procedures covering the following areas:
  - Risk identification and management
  - Recognition of Prior Learning
  - Student complaints, grievance and appeals
  - Continuous improvement
  - Administration and records management
  - Student selection, enrolment and induction process
  - Staff recruitment, induction and professional development
- Results of any self audits conducted by the Institution
- Evidence of continuous improvement activities as highlighted by any previous audits
- Campus Tours visiting the following areas:
  - Practical demonstration/simulated work environment rooms
  - Theory rooms
  - Computer laboratories
  - Learning Resource Centre
  - Student Support Services Centre
  - Focus group of four to six students for each qualification to meet and discuss the program with the site auditor
- Examination of records of actual training conducted, e.g. scale of operation, extent of teaching activities, implementation schedules and student rosters
- Perusal of samples of work
- Verification of authenticity of documentation such as policies and procedures, student skills books/handbooks, business plans of the school in question, trainer/assessor qualifications
- Analysis of resources used in the delivery and assessment of the course(s), including the rationale for the assessment tools used
- Interviewing the Department Heads for further evidence of compliance with the standards
- Interviewing management, trainers, students, stakeholders and where possible, employers
- Assessment of facilities and their suitability for the education and training being delivered at the site/institution.

Analysis of Pre and Post Workshop questionnaires

The following questions were asked in both the Pre Workshop and Post Workshop Questionnaires:

1. What does Transnational Education and Training mean to you?
2. Why would you want to embark on a new Transnational Education and Training venture?
3. In your opinion, list at least 5 most important things you would need to consider before embarking on a new Transnational Education and Training venture.
4. What do you think the connection between the AQTF standards and transnational education and training is? Or is there any?
5. What procedures or protocols do you think need to be in place for a transnational education and training venture to succeed?

Comparing the Pre- and Post-Workshop Questionnaire responses highlighted that participants were aware of the need for quality assurance and AQTF compliance of any program delivered onshore or overseas.

Participants were also aware of the assistance/materials needed to facilitate their work in Transnational Education and Training. All were in agreement about the need for a set of tools to help them assess transnational education and training opportunities thoroughly, and have the capacity to say 'No' if their due diligence and market intelligence tells them that the proposed Transnational Education and Training venture could pose significant risks.

The following were seen as absolutely necessary when functioning in the transnational education and training environment (in order of priority):

1. Completing due diligence and conducting checks on prospective transnational education and training partners to ensure they are bona fide educators/operators;
2. Providing appropriate training to lecturing staff to make them more culturally aware and culturally sensitive, before they leave for the country in which they will deliver training;
3. Ensuring that student resources for students in transnational education and training programs are of the same high standards as those here in Australia;
4. Marketing on the part of the RTO must be honest: only AQF recognised education and training must be promoted and delivered. Promoting for example, part of a qualification with the claim that it will translate into an award is dishonest and unethical and will damage the reputation of Australian qualifications and Australia as a country; and
5. Monitoring and quality checking translated promotional materials to ensure that no false information that will mislead a prospective student is provided by the partnering organisation or overseas provider.

The responses to the workshop questionnaires, and comments made during the group activities highlighted the following needs:

o Staff were aware of the consequences of, and the risks associated with embarking on any transnational education and training activity without conducting market intelligence or following through with due diligence. However, there was confusion relating to how this is to be done.

- o Majority of staff dealing with transnational education and training programs do not have appropriate qualifications to support delivery and/or assessment in a transnational education and training scene. Where staff do not have the appropriate qualifications, training needs to be available and supported by management, to provide individuals with the knowledge and expertise to function in a transnational education and training environment.
- o There is a need for standardised tools to enable staff to make informed decisions on the commercial viability of a proposed transnational education and training opportunity.
- o A departmental policy on transnational education and training that complements the DEST Transnational Quality Strategy is required, to ensure consistency of practice.
- o Overseas delivery staff must have access to professional development opportunities regularly.
- o A communication Strategy/ Tool is required to inform all staff of National and State policies that relate to transnational education and training requirements; Training Packages; program areas and immigration matters associated with transnational education and training.

Conclusions

The *Transnational Quality Assurance for the VET Sector* Project was a great opportunity for TAFE SA to build on and expand all quality assurance processes and procedures relating to Transnational Education and Training Programs. The Project also provided the opportunity to consolidate the various quality assurance practices of TAFE SA and standardise procedures, protocols and business processes. It also facilitated the development of project management strategies to monitor and moderate processes and procedures, as well as to facilitate and ensure an AQTF compliant Transnational Education and Training Program for public and private RTOs.

More importantly, the intended outcome of this project, which was the development of a *Tool Kit for Transnational Education and Training* (*Kit*), was achieved. The *Kit* will enable staff to decide whether the proposed international activity will be of benefit to, or cost the RTO, and the South Australian Government and economy.

The *Tool Kit* provides staff with the necessary tools to develop and manage Transnational Education and Training activity on behalf of the RTO. These tools include guidelines for completing a commercial viability analysis of the proposed venture; developing a business plan; recommending risk management strategies; and commencing the activity and reporting against it, and appropriate protocols and procedures.

The *Tool Kit* comprises the following:
1. *Business Process Flow Chart for New Transnational Education and Training Opportunity*
2. *Getting Started in Transnational Education and Training Ventures – A Self Assessment Checklist*
3. *Go/No-Go Analysis*
4. *Business Plan*
5. *Auditing and Reporting Mechanism*

Each template starts with a definition of the terminology, followed by instructions on how to complete the template.

A customised Tool Kit for TAFE has also been developed.

References

Australian Education International. (November 2005). Transnational Quality Strategy, Department of Education Science and Training.

Department of Education Science and Training. (April 2005). A national quality strategy for Australian transnational education and training: A discussion paper.

Fitt, M. (2007). E-mail 24 January 2007.

Havelock, J. (2007). E-mail and telephone conversation, 24 January 2007.

Karthigesu, S. (2004). International Education interim policy statement for TAFE South Australia, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology.

Kirby, P., Ryan, R., Carter, D. (2002). Review of TAFE Governance in South Australia, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology.

Nelson, B. (Hon. Dr). (2003). Engaging the world through education, Ministerial statement on the internationalisation of Australian education and training, Department of Education, Science and Training.

Ruse, R. (2003). International Education Business Plan, TAFE SA International Education Business Taskforce.