

# **What does VET bring to higher education that is distinctive?**

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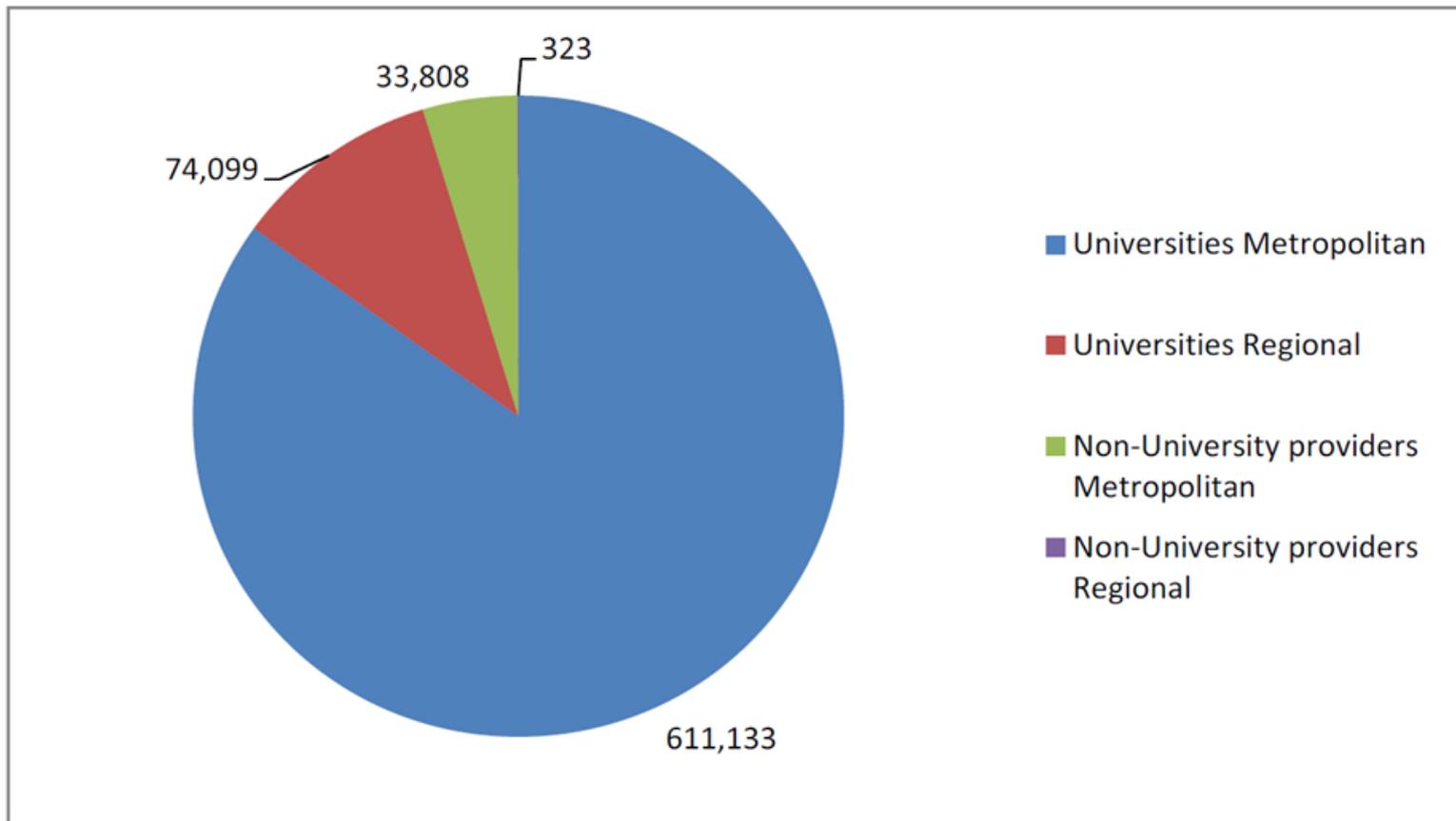
# Background: The Project

- This project aims to examine what new tertiary qualifications are being offered by Australia's TAFE institutions and the UK's FE colleges and explore how these awards are contributing to social equity and to a knowledge-based workforce.
- The project seeks to identify and understand the effect on social equity of the expansion of vocational institutions as providers of undergraduate degrees, particularly in terms of broadening opportunities for new types of students and their vocational outcomes.

# VET providers in Australian HE

- Today, there are 11 TAFE providers (includes individual institutes and state systems) offering over **100 higher education programs**
- Although representing only a small proportion of higher education enrolments, VET provider higher education is attractive to policy makers, employers, groups, families and students

# VET providers in Australian HE



Domestic students Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) by provider type and metro/regional, 2014 (Source: DET, 2015, p. 6)

# Literature

Brennan and Naidoo (2008):

- Is there equity & social justice in expanded HE?

Brennan et al. (2008):

- Agenda for research in HE

Graf (2013) and Powell et al. (2012):

- Hybridisation/convergence of VET and HE in European states

Wheelahan (2016); Bathmaker (2016); Avis & Orr (2016) on Australia and the UK:

- HE in VET – class inequality or social justice?

# Theoretical framework

- Pierre Bourdieu: Theory of distinction
- Basil Bernstein: Message systems and knowledge codes

# Theory of distinction

- Pierre Bourdieu analysed education (including higher education) in terms of **reproduction**
- He analysed the field of cultural production (arts) in terms of **distinction**
- We propose that contemporary conditions justify application of the theory of distinction to preferences for higher education due to **marketisation** of education and a more fluid social structure than Bourdieu envisaged

# Theory of distinction

- Bourdieu's theory of distinction critiques the idea that judgements of taste are **disinterested, universal and necessary**
- His researches suggested they reflect and reinforce social structure and position; they **reveal interests and aspirations**
- Likewise, we can view preferences for HE in terms of interests and aspirations

# Theory of distinction

- But TAFE providers (and some policy makers, employers, groups, families and students) are **not subscribing to the traditional mode of distinction** operating in higher education
- A separate mode of distinction appears to be emerging such that providers with track records in VET present a distinctive ('tasteful') alternative (rather than accepting relegation to the lower end of the traditional mode of distinction)

# Message systems and codes

- Basil Bernstein's idea of 'message systems' presents a way to analyse new modes of distinction in higher education
- **Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment** are message systems that foster social control
- Bernstein's analysis of message systems distinguishes **classification** and **framing**

# Message systems and codes

- ‘Strong’ classification and framing transmit a traditional **‘educational knowledge code’**:

Where knowledge is regulated by collection codes, social order arises out of the hierarchical nature of authority relationships, out of the systematic ordering of differentiated knowledge in time and space, out of an explicit, usually predictable, examining procedure. Order internal to the individual is created through the formation of specific identities. (1975, p. 106)

- Does traditional university higher education transmit the collection code and a corresponding mode of distinction?

# Message systems and codes

- ‘Weak’ classification and framing transmit a newer **‘integration code’**
- Bernstein suggests the integration code responds to:
  - Greater differentiation and integration of previously separate areas of higher knowledge
  - A new concept of skill as more flexible and more fluid with respect to work roles and identities
  - Less rigid, more egalitarian social structure
- Does VET provider higher education transmit the integration code and a corresponding mode of distinction?

# Bernstein's Educational Knowledge Codes

Collection Code	Integration Code
<p>Classification: Strong? Framing: Strong?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social order arises out of the hierarchical nature of authority relationships, out of the systematic ordering of differentiated knowledge in time and space, out of an explicit, usually predictable, examining procedure</li><li>• Order internal to the individual is created through the formation of specific identities.</li></ul> <p><b>Is this what university degrees represent in higher education?</b></p>	<p>Classification: Weak? Framing: Weak?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greater differentiation and integration of previously separate areas of higher knowledge</li><li>• A new concept of skill as more flexible and more fluid with respect to work roles and identities</li><li>• Less rigid, more egalitarian social structure</li></ul> <p><b>Is this what TAFE degrees represent in higher education?</b></p>