



# Competency-based training Australian-style: How it exposes VET to risk

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# CBT in Australia: From fervent hopes to Ferraris

.... Or What happens when the 'flexibility' of CBT collides with a marketised VET system.

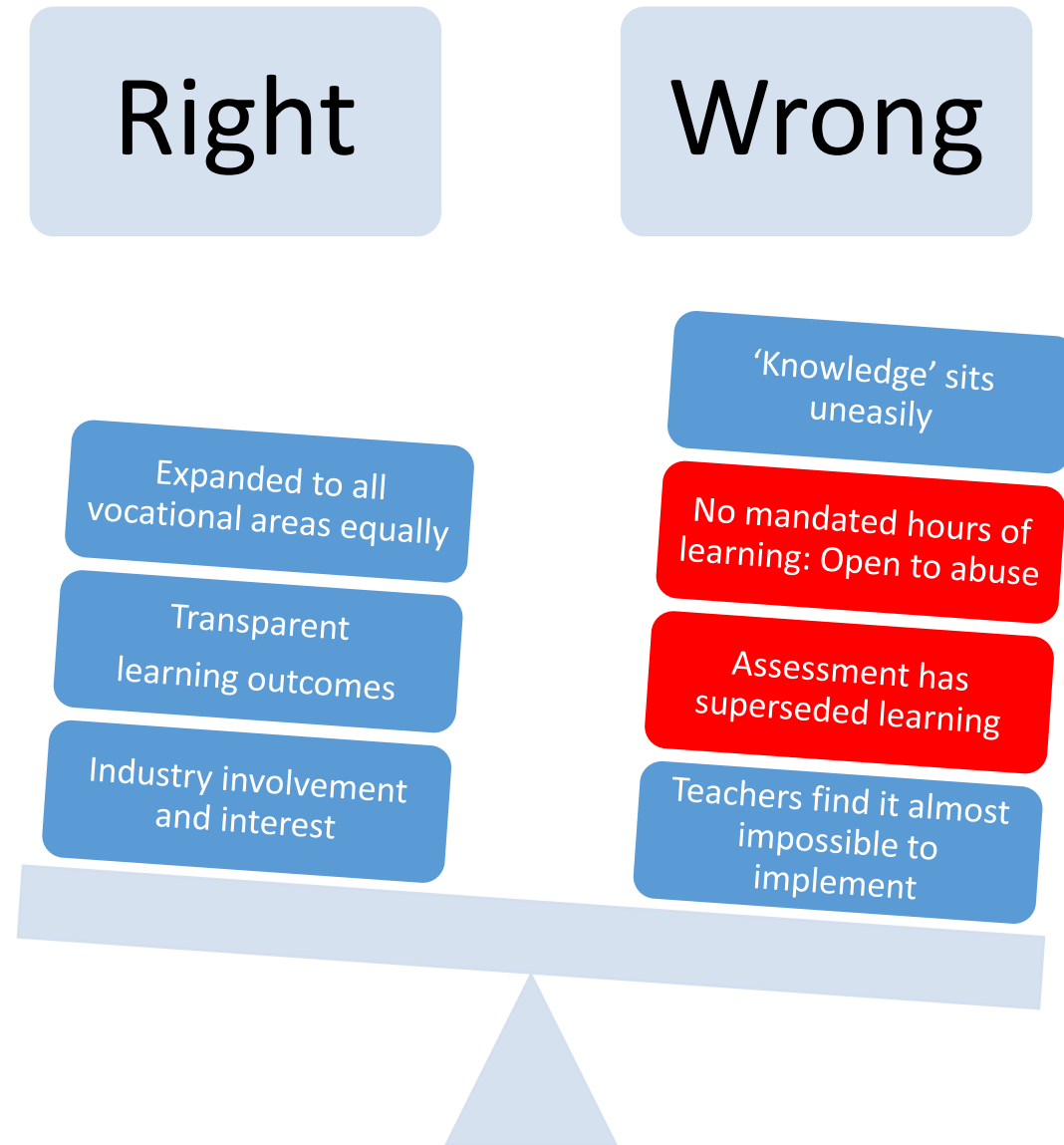
The paper is based on

- A theoretical analysis of the risky features of CBT
- Expert evidence provided for an Australian Federal Police case

# Pros and cons of CBT: Smith, AVETRA conference 2017

Harris & Hodge (2009): 'A propensity to polarise'

Smith & Keating (2003): **Philosophical, educational and practical objections.**



West (2004): **Technical, moral and market critiques.**

Edwards (2017): **'Out of steam' critiques**

# Marketisation in VET in Australia

- Pre-1997, (the small number of) private providers funded themselves through fees and/or employer contributions and had their own qualifications;
- Training Packages 1997 – everyone began to offer the same qualifications;
- User choice 1997 – funds to private providers for apprenticeships/traineeships only;
- ‘Training guarantee’ 2012 – national entitlement requiring States to fund private providers for other courses;
- VET FEE-HELP 1.0 2008 – HECS type scheme – only for students in courses which had credit transfer to higher education;
- VET FEE-HELP 2.0 2012 – no credit transfer required.

# What is VET FEE-HELP and what was the problem?

- HECS-style student-loan system; in higher ed, HECS is for government-funded places and there is a FEE-HELP scheme for fee-paying courses;
- Expansion from higher ed to VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas;
- Original VET version required pre-arranged credit pathway agreement to university;
- This was lifted nationally after Victoria had so helpfully paved the way in 2009 via the 'Victorian Amendment' to the HESA Act;
- Entry of 'rogue' providers into the market.

# 1. What about CBT lays it open to exploitation? – C, R and A below

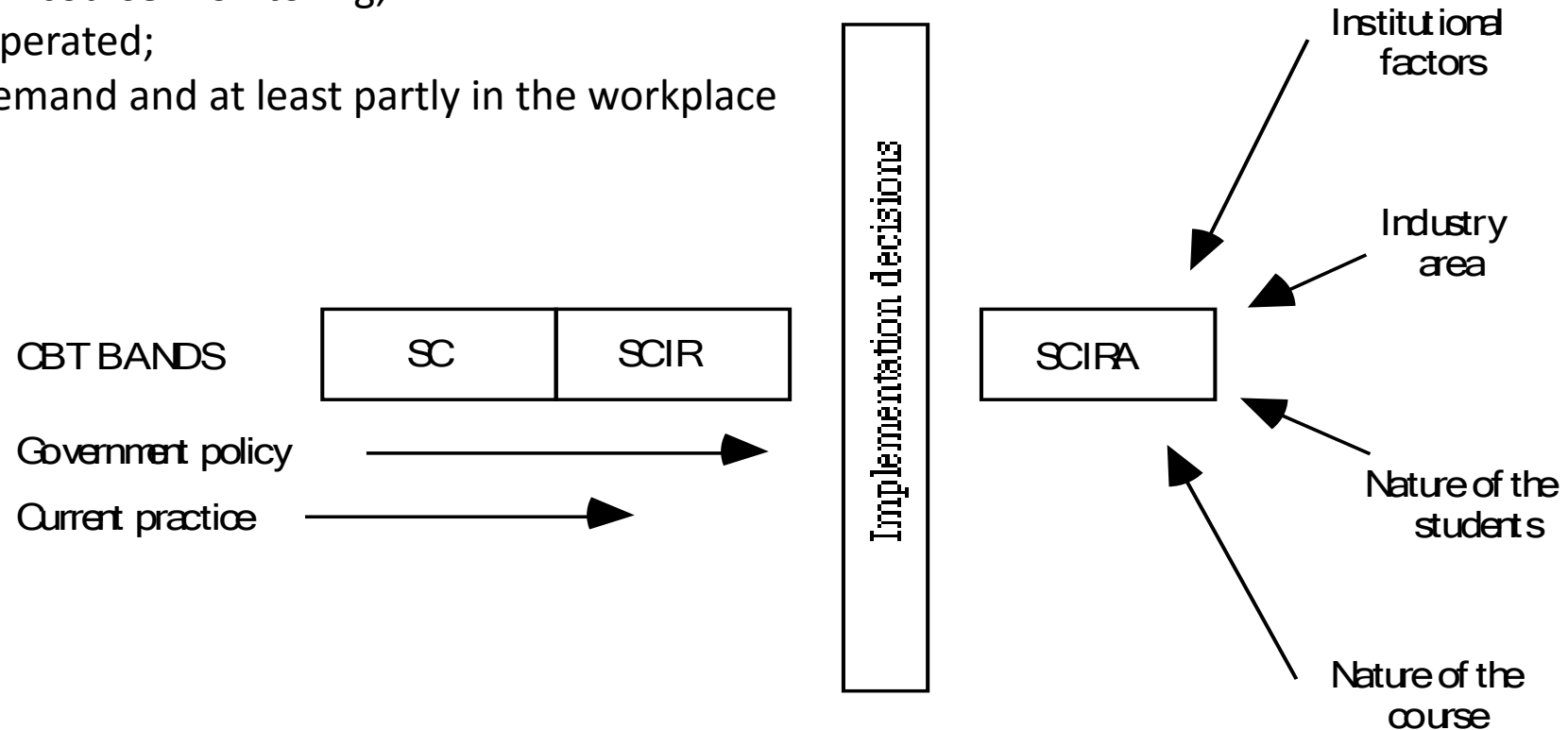
S: Based on competency standards or with formal industry consultation;

C: Written in CBT format

I: Industry Involved in course monitoring;

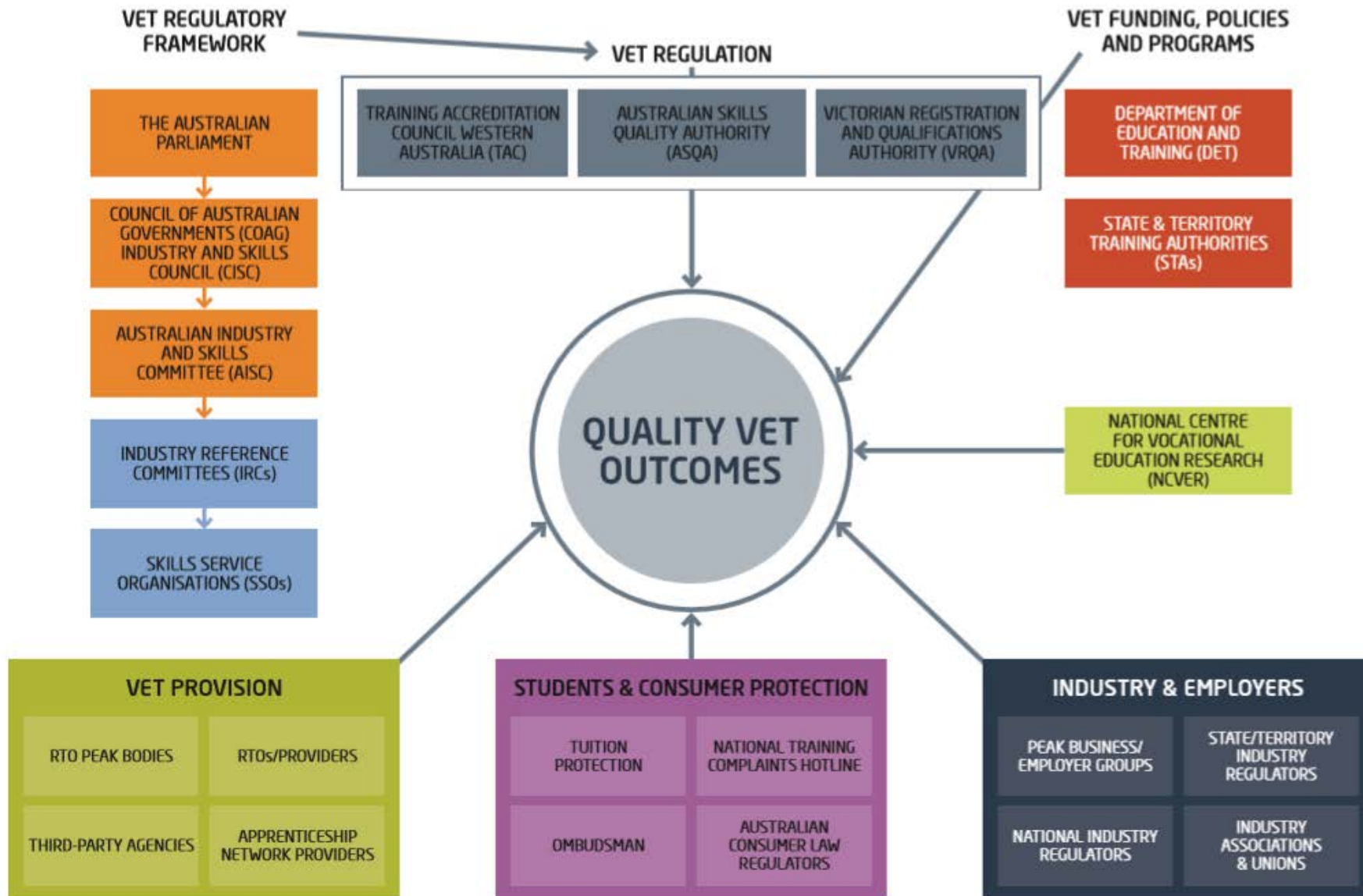
R: RPL procedures operated;

A: Assessment on demand and at least partly in the workplace  
(Smith et al, 1996)



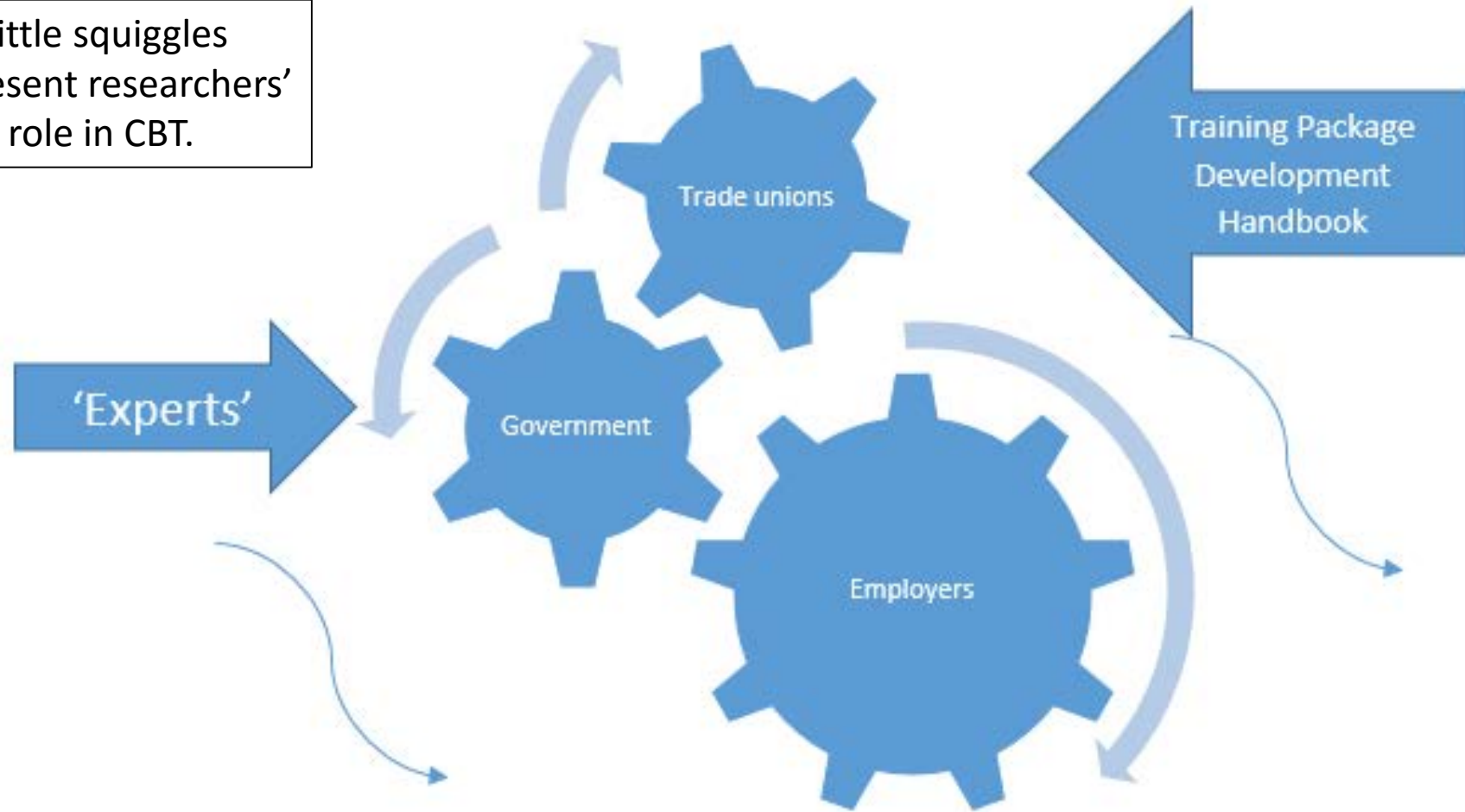
# Where's the teacher? Where's the teaching?

“Quality in the VET system – A shared responsibility” (ASQA document)



# Foucault wasn't the problem. Or 'Whose hegemony was it anyway?'

The little squiggles represent researchers' puny role in CBT.





## 2. Why does VET FEE-HELP relate to CBT?

Background: My own experience with VET FEE-HELP:

- Early involvement with the original scheme, via the credit pathway angle (with Ros Brennan Kemmis);
- ‘Revisited’ the topic in 2011 shortly after the Victorian ‘amendment’ with some additional research and analysis, published 2014\*;
- Involved in the attempted ‘rescue’ of the scheme in 2015 via the VET FEE-HELP ministerial reform working group. But VFH was shut down in 2016 and replaced by VET Student Loans (VSL);
- Expert witness for the prosecution in a court case 2016-18.

\* Smith, E. & Brennan Kemmis, R. (2014) Credit transfer from VET to Higher Education: A pathways policy meets a roadblock. *Research in Post Compulsory Education*. 19(2), 230-244.

# VET FEE-HELP 2014-2015: The perfect scam!

- People signed up via brokers (engaged by TAFEs as well as private RTOs) and got free I-Pads and laptops;
  - Government sent millions upon millions of dollars to providers (TAFE and private) to pay the student contributions ;
  - Students acquired a tax debt – some cared but some didn't. Many didn't even know.
- Immediate cause:** Removal of the credit transfer brake (which wasn't even intended as a brake) – like the shift from 'user choice' funding which had the brake of employers needed for the apprentices/trainees;
  - Root cause:** Providers did it because they could - and they could, because of CBT.

# These issues are what I was asked to comment on in my expert witness statement

- Competency-based training and lack of prescription of delivery mode;
- On-line versus in-class training;
- The 'nominal hours/volume of learning' rules or guidelines set by the AQF;
- 'Assessments (normal practice)';
- A copy of the 'assessment tool' and 'training package' document for one particular course and unit of competency.

*..... Provided clear clues to the defence's arguments - and a shameful exposure of our system. Try explaining the above to a jury of ordinary people.*

How did it come to this? Or 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.'

- How did CBT enable corruption to flourish?
- How did it lead to me sitting in the County Court in Melbourne? - Without any firm ground on which to counter the defence lawyers?
- Why don't things like this happen in other education sectors?
- How did we all allow manifestly ridiculous behaviour to take place?

# An explanation? Mr Popularity and Mr Profit

**‘When Mr Popularity hands over the controls to Mr Profit, you’ve got chaos.’**

Jock Serong’s novel, ‘On the Java Ridge’, Melbourne: Text Publishing, p. 44

*Context: Spoken by a Department Secretary in Canberra to a Minister, warning of the consequences of privatising the turning back of refugee boats.*



The judge in the court case said: “As the prosecutor put it in his final address to the jury **the regulatory environment in which these schools operated was ripe for exploitation** – the education and training packages were not prescriptive, there were no hard-and-fast rules as to how those packages were to be delivered.”

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/three-men-jailed-for-rorting-2-million-in-education-subsidies-20181001-p5075y.html>

**Ultimately, the  
CBT emperor  
has no clothes ...**

