

# **Addressing the dilemma of widened participation in higher education and successful student transition: Learnings from a Vocational / University partnership model**

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Under the irresistible forces of democratisation and liberalisation within education in Australia and New Zealand the division between place of delivery of tertiary programmes has become blurred. Where once ‘training ‘ was provided within the vocational sector and more general ‘ higher education’ (in the form of degree programmes) was the domain of Universities, this distinction is now not so clear cut. Defying their elitist traditions, Universities now offer a wide range of vocational programmes, and the vocational sector institutions have broadened educational offerings to include undergraduate degrees. To facilitate this process new models of higher education enablement have been crafted and new partnerships have been forged. One such initiative is the partnership arrangement between the multi-sectored University of Ballarat and a number of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institutions within the Business programme area. This research project investigates the influence of a non-traditional place of higher education delivery (vocationally orientated institutions) on student transition and learning using a qualitative exploratory approach. Given their unique perspective on both student progress and organisational enablement, we present findings derived from comprehensive interviews with eight coordinators responsible for higher education programme implementation within vocational institutions. These findings are significant in that they address the learning needs of the new wave of non-elite students who are representative of an inclusive higher education system. Secondly, this research provides insight into how a vocational institution/University partnership may assist student transition into higher education. Thirdly, the success of these partnerships in terms of retention within a higher education programme provides valuable clues in addressing academic progress concerns for non-traditional students.