

Supporting Flexible Learning Opportunities

Based on the knowledge generated from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework projects and selected external literature, the Quick Guides series provides an introduction to key issues related to flexible and online delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

**Globalisation/Internationalisation of
Online Content and Teaching**

Australian Flexible Learning Quick Guide Series

Scope of this guide

The purpose of this Quick Guide is to explore what is currently known about globalisation and internationalisation in relation to online content and online teaching and synthesise findings and issues that have particular relevance to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) community within Australia. Cultural aspects on internationalising content and teaching are dealt with in a separate Quick Guide *Cross-cultural Issues in Content Development and Teaching Online*.

This Guide looks at the meaning and imperatives of globalisation/internationalisation and what it means to VET in relation to:

- learning content and teaching processes, and
- catering for diverse and different market segments, for example catering for overseas student studying online here in Australia, and overseas students studying offshore through program arrangements in overseas markets.

This guide will be of particular interest to practitioners, course designers and developers, and managers who are designing, developing, marketing, or delivering courses or learning content through online mediums.

Defining the terms

Globalisation and internationalisation are terms used interchangeably by many. Globalisation is well described by Laxer (in Hobart 1999):

‘Globalisation’ is a short form for a cluster of related changes. (1) Economic changes that include the internationalisation of production, the harmonisation of tastes and standards and the greatly increased mobility of capital and of transnational corporations. (2) Ideological changes that emphasise investment and trade liberalisation, deregulation and private enterprise. (3) New information and communication technologies that shrink the globe and signal a shift from goods to services. (4) Finally, cultural changes that involve trends toward a universal world culture and the erosion of the nation-state.

Smith and Smith (1999) note the differences, however by describing:

‘Globalisation [as] the integration of economies worldwide through trade, trade agreements, finance, information networks and the movement of people and knowledge between nations. Internationalisation represents those same activities occurring between two or more nation states but does not necessarily involve a whole-world view.’ (p. 1 Executive Summary)

Within VET this could be taken to mean:

- the inclusion of world/global views and practice in both general and specific ways within content and teaching design
- exploring and adapting content and courses for appropriateness in a global context of a changing world
- putting greater emphasis on transferable and required skills to equip students for work in modern day industry and enterprises
- exploring opportunities for partnerships and collaborative development to extend market opportunities internationally
- identifying the critical success factors, barriers, and issues associated with globalisation/internationalisation of training and the implications for VET providers.

Why is it important?

In addition to the economic imperatives to tap into world markets, and the arguments of efficiencies and economies of delivering online (a debatable point), countries are now very interdependent on each other for many things – policies, trade, cultures, and practices are intertwined in almost all walks of daily life. Education and training (especially VET) must respond and keep pace with these changes.

The importance of 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' is reflected in the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's Goal 3 to maintain and expand VET's share of the training market within Australia and internationally and produce world-class product and services. And Goal 1 that aims to develop expertise and build capabilities in pedagogy and delivery.

Advances in technologies and communication have contributed in significant ways to globalisation. Similarly, online learning (both the content and teaching methods) afforded by those same advances will increasingly be in demand as a solution to present day needs for global content and delivery. For example online learning is used:

- to provide greater reach for education and training (for equity reasons and market advantage for individual institutions but also collectively as a nation)
- to raise skill levels in electronic communication techniques to equip people with essential skills for the 21st century, i.e. to effectively use email, web, online collaborative tools, video and advanced communication tools (see Aspin 2000)
- as a means to augment traditional courses and improve content provision – i.e. by enabling global content and innovative teaching approaches to be explored, to advance students' understanding of different cultures and work and learning practices in this now global society
- as a means to develop business and learning communities and relationships with others.

Hence it is becoming increasingly important for 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' to form part of the discussions when training providers consider course delivery and design.

Strategic approaches

In Australia both higher education and VET are addressing globalisation at the strategic, as well as the operational, level.

The *Graduate Qualities Framework* implemented within universities requires that curriculum and teaching processes be structured to provide students with skills, values, and knowledge to operate in a global environment, and to appreciate diversity within and between different cultures. Using a matrix of required skills tabulated against possible strategies, planning is usually done at university and department level to ensure required skills are attained. As well, targeted programming incorporates internationalisation through programs aimed at specific international markets, international content, or combinations.

Within VET *internationalisation* and *globalisation* strategies are less formal, however the imperatives are recognised at all levels of VET and strategic activities are occurring on a number of fronts. For example each State has developed an international marketing function (Smith & Smith 1999); Institutions and providers are responding to market need and market opportunity by developing courses and content to meet overseas and local needs; and an increasing number are now investing in professional development and resources to improve capabilities in this regard.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework has initiated a number of research projects to position VET in the international marketplace and advance our ability to deliver high quality and relevant online products and services both here and overseas.

Internationalising learning material and teaching processes

In what way can learning material and teaching processes be internationalised?

Reported strategies include:

- Undertaking research to identify specific needs, i.e. looking at course content, learning material construction and teaching method and delivery to ensure it is appropriate and relevant to the audience and context it is meant to serve (Aspin 2000; also Mitchell 2000a; Mitchell 2000b; IDP 2001).
- Working more closely with industry to ensure teaching approaches meet the learning objectives and changing operational needs of industry both locally and internationally, also to ensure courses and learning resources are relevant to diverse groups here, and for overseas consumption (Aspin 2000).
- Providing comprehensive career guidance for students informing them of changing needs for work and to guide and promote incentives for learning (Hobart 1999, p. 52).
- Investigating and responding to the need for different packaging and articulation of units/courses (Farrell 1999, 2001).
- Designing and adopting pedagogy that encourages global views (Hart, Bowden and Watters 1998; Smith & Smith 1999; Farrell 1999; Hobart 1999).
- Designing and adopting pedagogy that raises awareness of one's own culture and its perspective (Goodear 2001).
- Initiating professional development activities that encourages global exchange of standards, practice, and broader research, and raises awareness of global issues, views and experiences of others (Hobart 1999, p. 44).
- Initiating professional development activities that focus on learning process as well as content and the transmission of knowledge. This requires a knowledge of different teaching and learning styles, and understanding "that procedures and standards for assessing student performance are to a large extent culturally and nationally defined"; having knowledge of the relevant cultures one is teaching about or within; and having "a flexible attitude towards various styles of student behaviour" (Leask 2000).
- Placing emphasis on skills transferability – not a job for life approach. In addition to base skills required for specific vocations, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate and practice flexibility, problem solving, decision making, adaptability, creativity, self-motivation – but within a context that acknowledges also the realities of globalisation/internationalisation and appreciates different cultures and work practices. Plus an emphasis on building human capacity, not just satisfying job markets. For 'high skilled' pathways 'strategic knowledge' will be increasingly important (Hobart 1999, pp. 42-43).

It is recognised that there are both positives and negatives to globalisation. Risks are that globalisation can alter social constructs, change wealth, the balance of power, and make unprecedented changes in the way people work, live, and operate, and that individuals and even some nations can be disadvantaged. The positives are that online learning and flexible delivery programs have the potential to broaden access and buffer transitional adverse effects (Hobart 1999, p. 13).

Internationalisation and equipping people to operate in a 'global' world requires more than the transmission of knowledge "it requires a focus on teaching and learning processes as well as content". Although many have moved away from 'transmission' models of teaching to more student-centred approaches this presents a continuing challenge within VET for online content development and for online teaching. Internationalisation within teaching and learning is as much about changing attitudes and developing an appreciation for different cultural perspectives as it is about the content (Leask 2000).

In designing courses and learning material, care needs to be taken to preserve cultural identity and integrity, keeping biases in check, and presenting learning opportunities in equitable ways.

Not all subjects need to be 'globalised'. Adopting a framework approach in constructing or delivering courses or learning content enables the mapping of strategies across one or more units of study and the identification of best and essential places for 'globalising' content or process and ensuring students obtain necessary skills.

International markets – delivering products and services offshore

Are our products appropriate for world markets and of appropriate standard?

There is no definitive measure. A number of studies have identified that many VET providers have the capability, and some indeed are, delivering quality content and courses successfully offshore to individuals and enterprises (Smith & Smith; Hobart; Mitchell, 2000a, 2000b; IDP). “With a nationally driven agenda focused on technology, content and people Australia has the benefit of consistency of both product and policy” which places us well above our strongest competitors (Goodear 2001, p. 23). Our ability to take advantage of global and international markets will depend in large part on our ability to deliver quality, appropriate products and services. We also need to learn how to ‘market’ ourselves and our products.

Quality and appropriateness are determined by the market and context in which they are delivered. Each market segment is unique in that it requires both analysis and negotiation to determine local need; what structures and resources are in place to support delivery; provider capability, and many other factors.

Appropriateness can relate to curriculum content, curriculum form (i.e. teaching and learning strategies employed), mobility, and choice and use of specific technologies (Alexander & Blight 1996; Farrell 1999; Aspin 2000). Aspin found, for example, through discussions with companies visited in her overseas tour as part of her Flexible Learning Leaders research, that training needs to be ‘bite’ size, modular; attend to the ‘soft skills’ and attributes companies are particularly looking for; and that content needs to be built on global work practice and modern day communications (Aspin 2000).

Farrell (1999, p. 10), in his substantive report on trends in virtual delivery of education through a global perspective concluded by saying that the “importance of the concept of appropriateness when making decisions about information and communications technology applications” could not be over-stressed. He stressed also that the use of information and communication technology should be in the context of clearly stated educational outcomes accompanied by practical strategies for achieving them.

Aspin (2000) warns of the need to be aware of differences in the use and adoption of technologies and interfaces in other countries. It should not be assumed that materials developed for one country are viewed or accessed in the same in another – the use of webTV in Europe was given as an example. WebTV uses a set top box which plugs into a phone jack and connects to an ISP enabling web pages and communications via a television set.

The e-VET Marketing International Project identified appropriateness in relation to different policy and political level requirements as well, and the need to be clear about, and sometime specifically address, the needs of government as well as the needs of the entity or market with which one is negotiating.

What recommendations and key themes came out of projects and the literature with regard to international delivery to overseas markets?

- Institutions need to do their own research – highlighted by uniqueness of provision and the need for ‘market driven’ approaches (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b).
- The importance of research – analysis of student/teacher needs, market information etc. (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b; Aspin 2000; Farrell 1999, 2001; Smith & Smith 1999).
- Benefits in adopting a strategic focus (IDP 2001; Mitchell 2000a; Goodear 2001; Leask 2000; Smith & Smith 1999).
- It is essential to collaborate with others to achieve effective outcomes (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b; Aspin 2000).
- There are many benefits in having local involvement if delivering overseas (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b).
- Collaboration requires careful management (see the Quick Guide on Collaborative Product Development).
- Much of the research reinforces the need to consider packaging and the specific use of content (Aspin 2000; Farrell 1999, 2001).
- Providers would do well to consider all available articulation options – Asian countries in particular want training that leads to degrees (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b).
- Translating materials and teaching approaches to fit with local context and culture is essential (particularly in Asia) (Mitchell 2000a).
- The significance of ‘branding’ – many overseas markets prefer to deal with known brands and reputations (Mitchell 2000a; Aspin 2000).
- Marketing to international markets should be pitched at ‘working adult students’, not described as for VET or higher education students (Mitchell 2000b).
- Online rarely works in pure form. It needs to be mixed with face-to-face for success in most markets (Mitchell 2000a).

Catering for needs of overseas students studying in Australia

At the policy level guidelines exist to govern the responsibilities providers have when accepting international students. These guidelines are pitched at a fairly broad level and serve to protect students when studying in Australia (DEST 2001).

The Student Services Project partially addresses support needs of international students by recognising that all students – whether they be overseas students studying in Australia, or in courses delivered internationally – can have unique and individual needs as well as common ones. Highlighting the diversity of needs, the report warns:

- not to fall into trap of categorising students by race or language – all students are unique and student populations diverse, and
- learning options and learning and learner support services should recognise different cultural expectations, values, and learning preferences.

Catering for needs of overseas students studying offshore

There are no guidelines or research that we could locate that address specific support needs of overseas students studying online.

On catering for students in off-shore programs, The e-VET Consortium Project found strong favour for partnership models where VET providers teamed with local providers or support agencies that had on-the-ground knowledge of local needs and customs and could provide local tutoring and support assistance. Mixed-mode delivery involving a mix of online with traditional face-to-face delivery was strongly suggested as the most successful. Not only was it more in keeping with students’ preferred learning patterns and fitted with what they were most accustomed to but it provided greater contact with teachers and peers and support networks necessary for successful learning (Mitchell 2000a, 2000b).

Resources from Australian Flexible Learning Framework projects

Strategy 2000 Flexible Learning Leaders Project undertaken by Margaret Aspin

Aspin, M 2000, *Online Learning and the Needs of Companies: A Focus on the International Market for Australian Educators*, Strategy 2000 Flexible Learning Leaders Project. Paper presented NET*Working 2000.

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2000/talkback/p60.htm>

Based on visits to overseas corporations investigating VET marketing potential, this report gives an overview of emerging business practice and current and future training need requirements of industry, in particular multi-national companies and companies with international presence or connections.

Strategy 2000 – e-VET Marketing Consortium Project, and Strategy 2001 – e-VET International Market Research Project

Both projects looked at marketing internationally and issues of globalisation and internationalisation. The projects produced a series of reports over the two year period (the most pertinent listed in the references below). The website also contains useful tools to assist RTOs improve their marketing capabilities and understanding of issues associated with marketing internationally. <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/nationalmarketresearch.htm>

- Mitchell, J 2000, *International e-VET Market Research Report: A Report on International Market Research for Australian Online Products and Services*.

http://flexiblelearning.net.au/evetmarketing/research_2000.pdf

This report summarises the findings of the research conducted as part of the feasibility study for a national e-VET Marketing Consortium. It is one of four reports produced by that project. This report was based on literature reviews, analysis of company information, and consultations with project partners in Asia. It summarises and discusses market opportunities and marketing strategies for Australian VET products and services and provides commentary on key issues associated with meeting needs of specific market segments overseas.

- Mitchell J 2000, *Market Driven e-VET: A Feasibility Study for a National VET Consortium to Market, Distribute, and Support Australian Online Learning Products and Services Overseas*.

http://flexiblelearning.net.au/evetmarketing/research_2000.pdf

Another of the four reports, it discusses features of the international marketplace, trends in the USA and Asian market place, financial size of markets, issues associated with delivery in specific markets, and attitudes of corporate customers.

- IDP Education Australia 2001, *International Education Markets for Vocational Education and Training Online Products and Services: A Research Audit*.

http://flexiblelearning.net.au/international/documents/Prelim_res_Report.PDF

Building upon the research undertaken in the Strategy 2000 project, this reports the findings of an audit of available market research on international markets for Australian VET products and services. It examines the nature and scope of current and potential markets and provides insights into some of the issues associated with off-shore delivery.

Strategy 2000 – Student Services Project

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/onlinestudentservices.htm>

The Online Student Services Literature Review.

http://flexiblelearning.net.au/practice/studentservices/casestudy/litreview_rtf.rtf

and

McNickle, C 2001, *Online Student Support: What's Happening?* Conference paper NET*Working 2001

http://flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2001/01_attending/papers/1_7McNickle.doc

The literature review and conference paper both identify unique as well as common support requirements for students studying online. Though they do not address online support needs of international students or students from different cultures specifically they provide a framework for assessing adequacy of support for successful learning experiences for all students regardless of their circumstance or place of participation.

Other resources

In addition to the reports already described in the text other useful resources are:

- Quick Guide on *Cross-cultural Issues in Content Development and Teaching Online* <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/crosscultural.pdf>
- Farrell, G 1999, *The Development of Virtual Education: A Global Perspective*, Commonwealth of Learning, Canada. Unable to provide electronic reference – URL is no longer active.

A major international report on Virtual Education. The report provides a detailed look at the differences in online developments around the world. Although written more from a provider perspective it provides insights on issues of online delivery, and both unique and common needs of each country.

- Farrell, G (ed.) 2001. *The Changing Faces of Virtual Education*. The Commonwealth of Learning. Unable to provide electronic reference – URL is no longer active.

Follows on from the earlier landmark study.

- Hobart, B 1999, *Globalisation and its impact on VET: Review of Research*. NCVET.

This review of research on vocational education and training is one of a series of reports commissioned to guide the development of future national research and evaluation priorities. It provides a general account of internationalisation, or globalisation, and its impact on conventional education and training (VET) in Australia.

Only available in hard copy it can be ordered online at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/> Or via ph: +61 8 8331 9211 or email: orderit@ncver.edu.au

- Leask, B 2000. 'Internationalisation – Changing Contexts and their Implications for Teaching, Learning and Assessment' in *Flexible Learning for a Flexible Society*, Proceedings of ASET-HERDSA 2000 Conference, Toowoomba Qld, ASET and HERDSA.

This paper describes some of the professional development programs and resources developed at the University of South Australia to support the internationalisation of teaching and learning. Written for higher education, it has much in it that is also applicable to VET.

- Smith, PJ & Smith, SN 1999. *The Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training. Review of Research*. NCVET. ISBN 0 87397 533 2.

This NCVET report presents a review and analysis of research on internationalisation of vocational education and training. Issues associated with the internationalisation of Australian VET provision, and design of appropriate learning programs and learning content are discussed in the context of current operations in a global education market.

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<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2000/talkback/p60.htm>
- [DEST] Department of Education Science and Training 2001, *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education And Training to Overseas Students (The National Code)*, Commonwealth of Australia. ISBN 0 642 45706 9
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- Goodear, L 2001, Cultural Diversity and Flexible Learning, Presentation of Findings 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders Professional Development Activity.
http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/leaders/events/pastevents/2001/statepres01/papers/l_goodear.pdf
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Reference as:

Backroad Connections Pty Ltd 2002, *Globalisation/Internationalisation of Online Content and Teaching* (Version 2.01), Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides series, Australian National Training Authority.

PDF versions available at:

<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/sharingknowledge.htm#guides>

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