TVET
AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL QUALITY COUNCIL

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE
FOR OFFSHORE VET DELIVERY

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DISCLAIMER

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INTRODUCTION

Context

Offshore provision of accredited VET training is a growing area of activity for public and private providers. The rapid growth in offshore VET presents both opportunities and risks for individual providers and for the VET system more broadly. Developing capability in the VET system to manage the challenges and risks of offshore delivery is fundamental to maintaining a strong base for quality assurance of Australian VET qualifications.

Earlier research by the National Quality Council identified a set of eighteen challenges faced by providers in delivering Australian VET qualifications in offshore contexts. They are described in Figure 1 below. Not to adequately address these challenges constitutes potential exposure to risks. These risks include commercial and reputational issues which can adversely affect the providers and the Australian VET system as a whole. Effective management of these risks provides models of good practice that providers may draw on as they plan and execute quality delivery offshore.

Framework

The Challenges/Risks/Good Practices diagram outlined below (Figure 1) provides an overall framework for the multiplicity of tasks which Australian providers need to do when planning and delivering Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) programs offshore.

With the exception of the all important Objective/Go No-go analysis and the overall Project Management, the tasks are framed around four major 'boxes', which are consistent with the commonly used ADRI (Approach–Deployment–Results–Improve) quality framework. The detail within the boxes is a synthesis of those tasks described by many public and private VET providers who are currently involved in the delivery of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications offshore. It is acknowledged that some providers may label the tasks in different ways. Some providers may also sequence tasks within the boxes in different ways and it is inevitable that tasks are often undertaken in a more 'fluid' and less sequential way than that which can be described in the two dimensional diagrammatic representation. The diagram is not meant to be read in a rigid 'lock-step' way but it is hoped that it will be a useful guide to the major generic tasks that need to be undertaken in any offshore project if AQTF delivery is to be compliant, continuously monitored and improved, and if organisational risks are to be mitigated.

Summary

The guide is presented in two parts. The first section deals with the eighteen challenges faced by providers. In this part each challenge is presented around a common set of issues and questions:

- What is the issue?

- The key considerations (for individual providers)

- How are providers dealing with the issue?

- Resources available to assist providers.

The second section is in the form of a detailed set of appendices. These appendices include a comprehensive set of resources, either reproduced in full or in summary form. They also include a list of web based resources which are available in the public domain.

Using the Guide

The Guide is provided as a resource for all VET providers throughout Australia. It is important to note that the particular needs and level of experience of VET providers varies enormously.

Providers differ in the level of autonomy they have in relation to offshore delivery, with some state authorities having a strong role in the decision making process and a strong role in quality assurance and in monitoring delivery.

The size of the provider, the size and location of the proposed offshore project and the prior experience of the provider will influence the emphasis that the provider gives to each task in the diagram. An intending or new provider may wish to work through the challenges outlined in the Guide in a sequential way, covering each of the issues described and accessing and customising the resources provided in each section to meet their particular needs. Experienced providers may wish to use the Guide in a more selective way, using specific sections and resources to ascertain if there are any useful suggestions and tools to improve on what they are already doing.

Providers have also noted that many staff members, at various levels within their organisations, are involved at different stages in the planning and execution of offshore delivery. A fragmented approach is therefore a risk to be avoided. Figure 1 presents a total picture of the complex series of tasks that are often undertaken by many different people at different levels within an organisation. The availability of a 'total picture' will help to avoid a fragmentation of effort. The Project Management box at the centre of the diagram, while not directly part of the ADRI model for quality assurance, is the 'essential glue' which binds the offshore project tasks together.

Using the resources

This Guide draws on a wide range of resources that have been developed over the past five years. These include:

- A large number of policies, procedures, templates, guides, surveys, decision-making frameworks, auditing tools and advice developed by 15 public and private providers. The projects were commissioned by Australian Education International (AEI) and managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2008).

- Guides and toolkits funded by state authorities to address specific issues relating to quality assurance in transnational education (TNE 2008). While these are focussed on particular state issues and needs, they have the potential to be used more broadly.

- Policies and procedures developed by Victorian TAFE International Inc. (VTI 2009), a common interest group of 16 public VET providers. This policy and procedures document aims to ensure that quality assurance processes in TNE are comparable to those used onshore. While addressing the needs of public providers in Victoria, the quality assurance checklist contained in the document has the potential to be useful to public and private providers in other states.

- Guides, templates and advice provided by experienced public and private providers who have developed resources over time, usually in response to issues they have confronted and to their commitment to continuously improve their TNE delivery. Some of these resources have been adapted for inclusion in this Guide and others included in their original form. In both instances, it is intended that the resources have general application.

Resources need to be adapted to suit particular needs. It is not intended that they should be uniformly and slavishly applied by current or intending VET offshore providers. Factors which will influence how resources are used include:

- The size, internal capacity and offshore experience of the provider

- In some instances the resources refer to government policies (e.g. AQTF requirements) that may have changed since particular resources were developed. Providers should be alert to these changes

- The particular country and model of delivery influences the way in which resources need to be chosen and adapted

- In any application of guidelines and templates, the particular and varied roles of state authorities in relation to VET offshore delivery need to be taken into account.

- The size and nature of the TNE project will affect the way in which resources are used

- The regulatory environment both on and offshore.

In summary, providers need to read the resources carefully. They should assess their suitability, adapt and customise them freely to meet their particular needs.

Figure1. Challenges, risks and quality assurance for offshore VET delivery
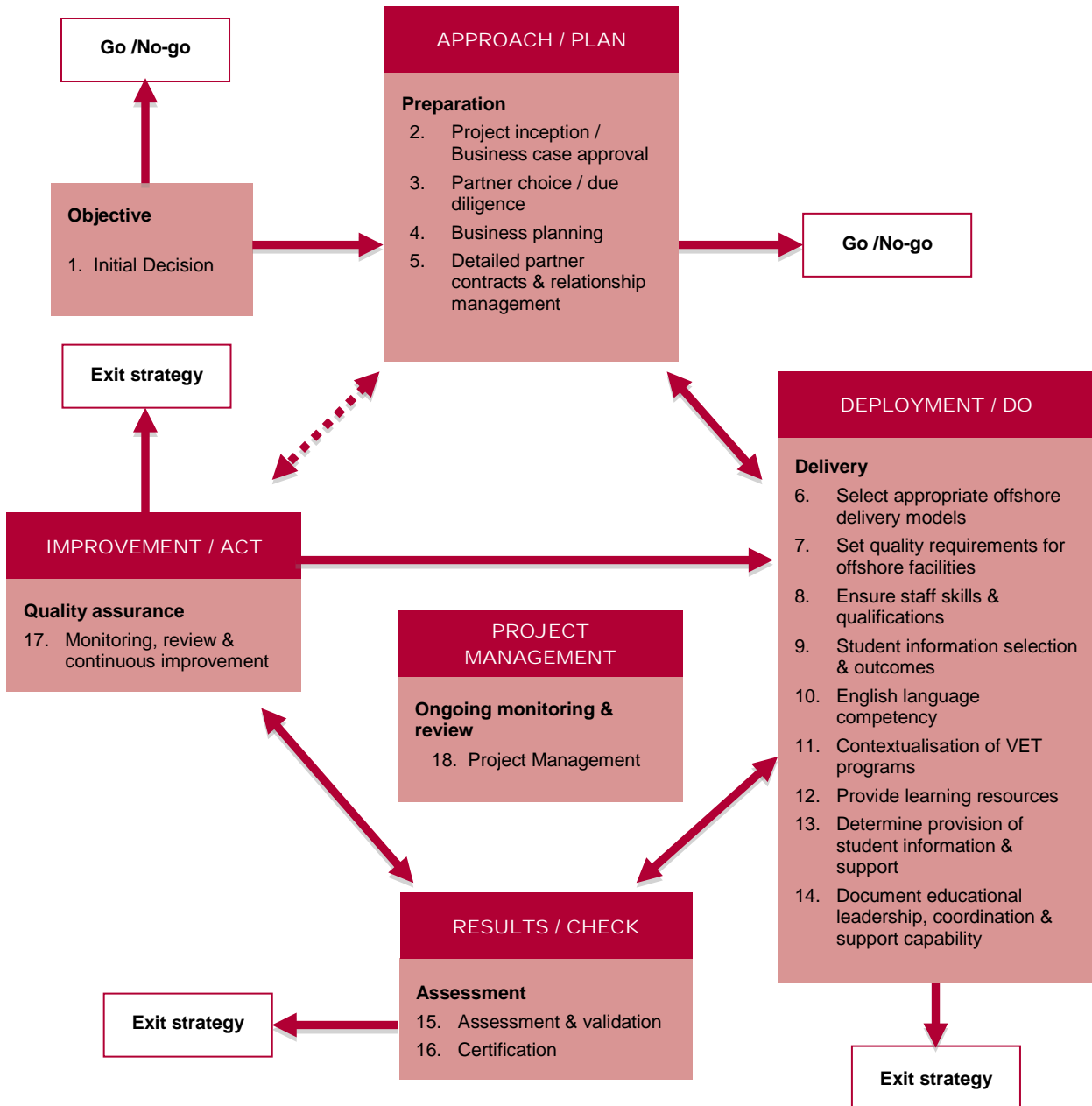
1. OBJECTIVE: INITIAL DECISION

'The provider should ask the basic question: why become involved in transnational education? Is it core business for commercial, academic or some other purpose? If the answer is 'no' involvement should probably be avoided. There are risks and opportunity costs in transnational activity and, unless the balance of motivations is clearly positive and agreed at a strategic level, it is probably better for an institution to pull back from the activity (IEAA 2008: 35).

What is the issue?

Provider motivation is often a complex issue. Should we be involved in offshore delivery? If so where should that take place? And if so, what programs should be delivered? In the initial stages VET providers, both public and private, have a variety of motivations for delivering offshore. A commercial return is at the heart of most projects being considered, but the timing and nature of that return varies widely. Provider motivations include seeing offshore delivery:

- As a commercial 'investment' or marketing initiative which they make with the aim of making a surplus when offshore students come onshore

- As providing a commercial return directly on their offshore delivery

- As establishing their presence/footprint in a country, to position themselves for gaining future lucrative offshore government, aid or industry contracts through undertaking small offshore 'seed projects'

- As a key strategic objective which is tied closely to their standing and reputation and profile, both in Australia and overseas

- As a crucial part of their revenue stream of their total operations, the benefits of the activity assisting in providing better opportunities for their onshore students and staff.

All providers who are experienced in offshore delivery are unanimous in their view that the issue of motivation needs to be carefully and extensively questioned from the outset. This is a lesson that some have learnt by painful experience. In the past, some providers admitted that they were too hasty in responding to offshore opportunities as they were presented to them. In some instances they 'delivered in haste and repented at leisure' because they had not fully considered the risks involved in delivering offshore. A much more careful and cautious approach to the question of motivation is now common amongst experienced providers.

Key considerations

Providers are now aware that it is not only their own motivations which need to be clear, but the motivations of their offshore partners also need to be clear. It has been observed that in many cases there are both converging and conflicting motivations. It is not always a simple and straightforward task to determine an offshore partner's motivations, which may change and expand over time. What is clear is that a gross mismatch of motivation between the Australian provider and the offshore partner can severely jeopardise successful offshore delivery.

Experienced providers also observed that in the early stages of their offshore activity they frequently underestimated the cost of establishing offshore delivery. This included an underestimation of the time and resources needed in all phases of the project, including: preparation; partner engagement; project management; course delivery; assessment; quality assurance; and, compliance with AQTF requirements. These costs were also often adversely affected by unforeseen changing regulatory environments offshore and onshore. A realistic estimation of costs should therefore underpin all Go/ No-go decisions.

A tension within organisations is often apparent when management and staff are considering whether to proceed with an offshore activity. Staff from one major offshore provider characterised this as a tension between 'the cowboys and the educationalists'. It was asserted that, in the past, decisions whether to go or not to go with a project were largely driven by commercial considerations and there was insufficient emphasis placed on the need to ensure educational quality. For many experienced providers, there has been a renewed emphasis on ensuring not only AQTF compliance but also that quality assurance and continuous improvement are key features of their delivery. This approach has cost implications that need to be factored into the initial assessment of the project. Providers are now increasingly aware that they are delivering offshore in a very competitive environment. Offshore providers are able to shop around the global market place for high quality VET programs and products. The quality of the Australian product must therefore be enhanced if offshore business is to continue and grow.

The decision as to whether a project should proceed or not is also influenced by the role that Australian state bureaucracies play in the decision-making process. This varies throughout the country, for example, NSW DET plays a stronger and more centralised role in decision making than that undertaken by Skills Victoria. When addressing the issue of motivation and deciding on Go or No-go, the roles of state authorities need to be taken into account.

Most projects are initiated by offshore institutions or commercial companies that make the initial approach to a provider in Australia. Some experienced providers assert that their profile and reputation is strong in selected overseas countries and so 'partners come to us'. A key part of the initial decision making process is therefore an assessment of the partner as much as it is an internal assessment. This of course is not universal. Some providers as a matter of policy do not now respond to partner requests. They prefer a more pro-active approach where they go into a marketplace and actively seek out partners they believe are compatible or complementary to their business goals.

How are providers dealing with the question of their motivation and initial decision making?

Figure 2. Providers dealing with initial decision making
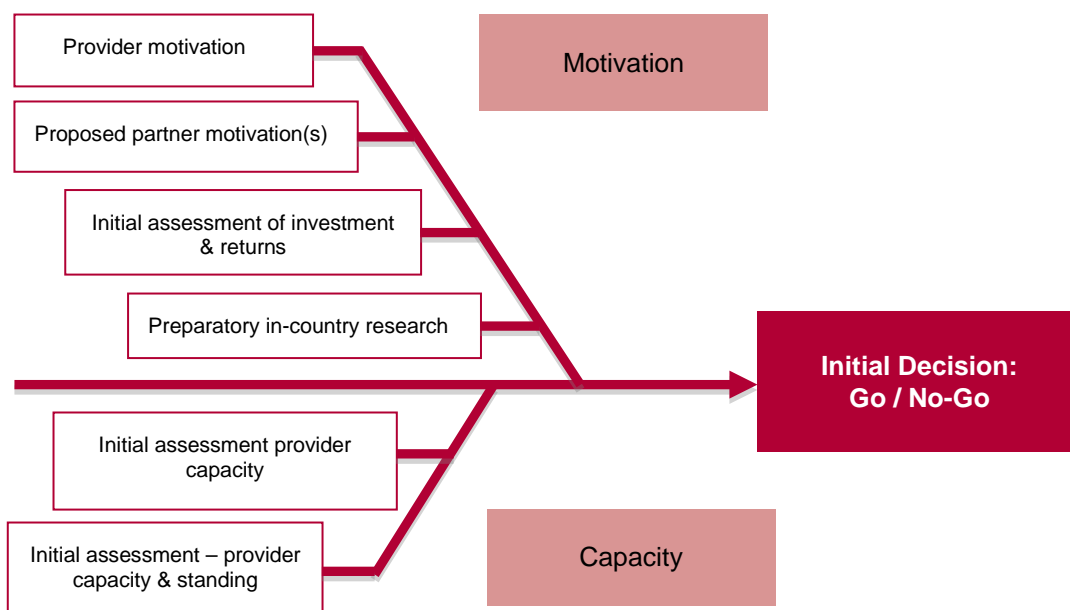
A considered approach: The key message from experienced providers is that they are taking much more time and care with this initial step. There is now far more discussion amongst management and staff at all levels of the organisation to address the issues outlined above.

One step at a time: Organisations view this step as a first step only that does not commit them to a project. This initial assessment is followed by a number of increasingly rigorous planning and assessment activities.

Range of approaches: Many organisations use a number of internal tools and processes to make the decision as to whether they will go to the next stage in the process.

Resources available to assist providers with initial decision making

The International Education Association of Australia (2008) *Good practice guide in offshore delivery: a guide for Australian providers* summarised projects that had been undertaken by providers to develop tools and checklists for all Australian education and training providers. The following tool will be particularly useful to public and private VET providers when they are considering whether to proceed with a transnational education opportunity:

TAFE SA (2006) *Getting started in transnational education and training ventures- A self assessment checklist.*, TAFE SA, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and is available at is available at: http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx

The three checklists are particularly useful for providers who are considering an overseas opportunity for the first time. They provide a preliminary self assessment check, an initial check of proposed partner bona fides and a Go/No-go analysis checklist. They are reproduced in Appendix 1 of this Guide.

2. PROJECT INCEPTION AND BUSINESS CASE APPROVAL

What is the issue?

Experience has taught many providers that this is a vital step to undertake prior to making a final decision. In the early stages of VET TNE it appears that some providers leapt from their initial Go/ No-go decision to business planning and subsequent delivery. This approach, while it enabled a quick response to TNE proposals, often did not give the provider the opportunity to identify and mitigate the considerable risks involved in offshore delivery.

An awareness of potential commercial and reputational risks is now suggesting to providers that a detailed investigation of the project is required before any final commitments are made to an offshore partner.

Some providers call this the 'business inception' stage; others refer to it as the development of a 'business case'. In either event, documentation is signed off and approved at the highest levels in the organisation before the project can proceed to the next stage.

This step inevitably involves detailed work by a number of staff in various roles and at various levels in the organisation. The consultation involved in preparing a business case/ project inception case has the capacity to work through some of the commercial versus educational tensions that are common within TNE activity. Resolving these tensions earlier rather than later can be very helpful to future project implementation.

Key considerations

The considerations outlined below draw on *A Toolkit for the selection and approval of VET offshore projects: project report* (Challenger TAFE WA 2006) and on consultations with public and private providers.

The process of approval of projects varies between states, with some providers having more autonomy than others. It is intended that the considerations, resources and tools provided in this section will be useful in both centralised and decentralised contexts.

Does the proposal have a good strategic fit with the provider's overall strategic directions? In the past, providers assert that this has not always been a key consideration. Is offshore delivery merely an opportunistic 'add-on' or does the provider have a vision, values and code of ethics, which are conducive to TNE? Strategic fit can take various forms. One large public provider that is very active in the delivery of VET offshore aspires to 'be recognised as Australia's No 1 global vocational education and training provider'. TNE is therefore central to its core purpose. Others have strongly integrated offshore activities into their organisational strategic and business plans.

Does the proposal take into account the relevant legal considerations in Australia, including state and federal laws, as well as international laws and regional/bilateral agreements?

Does the proposal take into account the Australian provider's capacity to deliver? This capacity should not be assumed but should be closely interrogated and should include financial resources available, technical (academic) expertise and general organisational (staffing) capacity.

Has the provider undertaken an analysis of global issues and trends, which may impact on the successful delivery of the project? While this analysis can never be conclusive, it should take into account global political, trade, social, environmental, energy and training market trends.

Does the provider know enough about the country in which the delivery is planned to take place? This should include consideration of the geography, political, economic, social and religious systems as well as

health and environmental issues. It also needs to include an understanding of where the country's education and training system sits within the country's institutional structures at national and regional/provincial levels. This would include a realistic understanding of in country training market and employment opportunities.

It is essential that providers have a comprehensive understanding of the legislative, regulatory and policy environment of the countries in which they intend to deliver training and assessment services. This can be a complex and time-consuming activity, but it is critical to the likely success of the project. The regulatory and structural environments vary greatly between countries. Some countries have highly centralised systems. In others there is little government involvement or requirements. Even where there are government requirements it is important to be aware of the appropriate level of government that regulates education and training. For example, in China some institutions are regulated through the central government, others through provincial authorities.

Some countries require providers to be registered on an approvals list or to fulfil the local authority's quality assurance requirements. For example, in the Middle East several countries have sophisticated regulatory regimes for educational quality assurance, which equal or surpass Australian requirements. A culturally respectful understanding of offshore requirements, in particular how they impact on AQTF requirements is essential.

Understanding the legislative and regulatory environment extends beyond that related to education and training to all areas of criminal and civil law to ensure that providers are aware of their legal responsibilities in the offshore jurisdiction. For example, in respect of governance, finance, fraud, and so on.

Has an initial analysis of the partner been undertaken? The *Challenger TAFE Toolkit* calls this a 'macro analysis' which at least offers assurance that the proposed partner is a 'legal entity of high reputation', has passed an initial due diligence/probity test and has a sound, documented business proposal (Challenger TAFE WA 2006 p.16).

Has the provider visited the proposed site of the TNE delivery and made an initial, 'close range' assessment of the host institution, its management, staff, facilities and its readiness to deliver AQTF qualifications?

Finally, it is acknowledged by all stakeholders that addressing the considerations described above is a necessary but time consuming and resource intensive task. The *Challenger TAFE Toolkit* raises the issue of how this work can be done in a cost effective efficient way. One suggestion is that providers utilise the services of organisations such as Austrade to gather local information (Challenger TAFE WA 2006 p.7).

How are providers dealing with project inception and business case approval?

Figure 3. Project proposal and business case approval
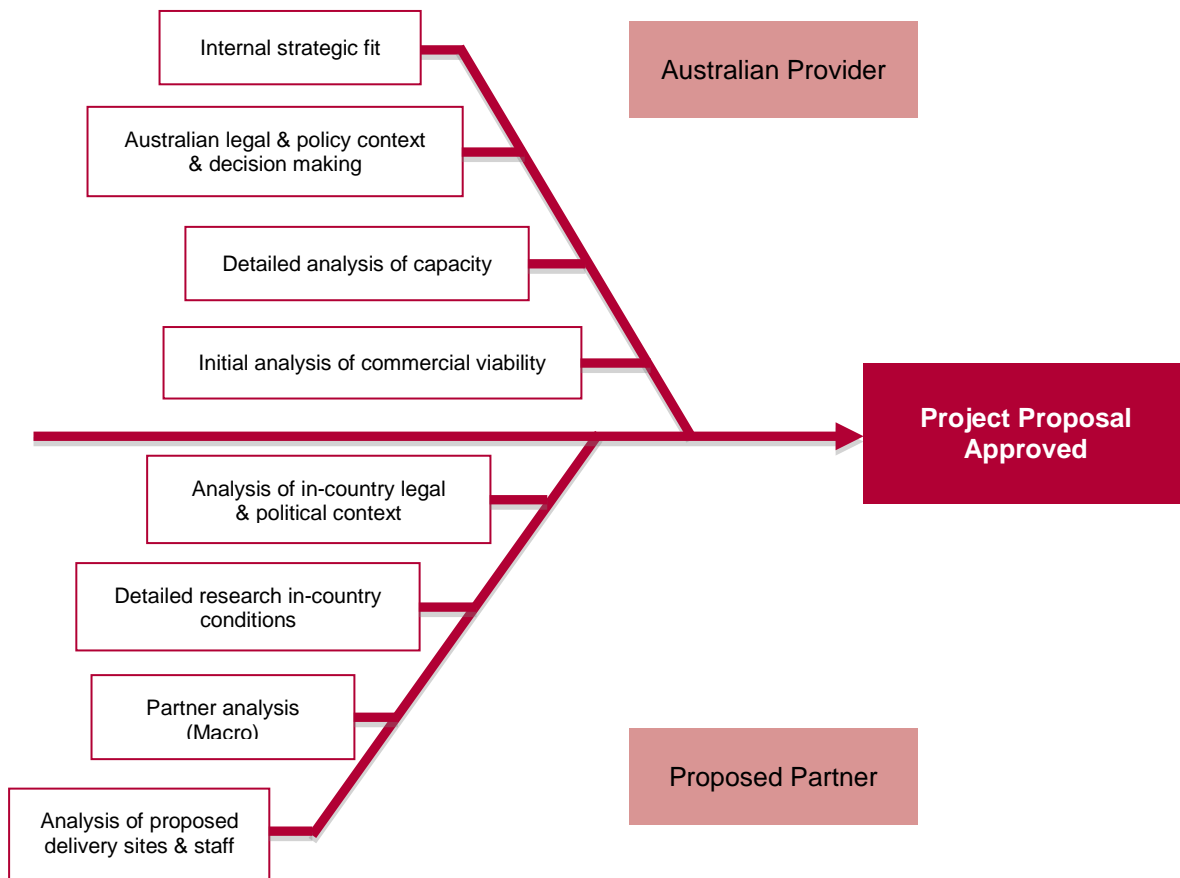
One large and successful offshore VET provider has been involved in TNE for a number of years. It does not now seek out opportunities but assesses and responds to offshore opportunities as they are presented to them. The issue for them is therefore which opportunities are rejected and which are to be pursued to the next stage. They have recently made improvements to the way in which they assess opportunities. Before preparing a business case the provider undertakes the following steps:

Desktop review: An initial desktop review of the proposer's documentation is made. Some projects are rejected at this point.

Partner analysis (macro): If the initial documentation is satisfactory an initial check of the proposer is undertaken, based on information available in the public domain. This includes a scan of the requirements for regulation and legislation in the host country. Providers liaise with agencies such as Austrade and access resources such as AEI country profiles. An important indicator of the potential partner's commitment to the project is if they have gained, or started the process of gaining, the necessary in country approvals and/or registrations prior to approaching the Australian provider.

Site visit: If the initial due diligence is satisfactory, and wherever it is cost effective, a visit is made to the proposer. This can be a manager or a teacher/coordinator who is already in the country on other business.

Assess proposal: The proposer is then assessed as to whether they are a 'good fit' with the Australian provider's mission, strategic directions and program strengths.

- The provider does not usually deliver a program offshore if it is not delivering it onshore. The provider believes that program expertise, resources and synergies/cost management between on and offshore delivery are difficult to achieve unless there are already skills and experience onshore, which can be exported.

- The location of the proposer is also considered. If the proposed delivery is close to another of the provider's offshore sites it is easier to contain costs related to things such as quality assurance, moderation and internal audits.

Prepare business case: If the above steps have positive outcomes then a team of staff within the provider develops a business case. This task often provokes robust discussion among staff in different roles within the organisation. This business case is then presented to the CEO and Board for approval to proceed. It is essential that before going to the next stage there is a 'whole of organisation' approach to the project.

A framework to assist providers to undertake project inception/approval tasks and to prepare an associated Business Case is in Appendix 2.2.

Resources available to assist providers with project inception/business approval

Appendix 2.1: – Project Inception Outline.
Source: International Education Association of Australia (2008) *Good practice guide in offshore delivery: a guide for Australian providers*. Canberra: DEEWR.

Appendix 2.2: – Business Case Development and Approval (Based on the model used by a large public provider).

A comprehensive toolkit from the Challenger TAFE project is available at:
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]
Source: Dollery, P. (2006) A toolkit for the selection and approval of VET offshore projects: Project report. Final report submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Perth: Challenger TAFE.

The *Challenger TAFE Toolkit* includes templates and guides for:

- Strategic and legal analysis

- Global analysis

- Country analysis

- RTO capacity analysis

- Partner macro analysis

- Partner onsite visitor analysis.

Austrade has contacts in offshore locations and can provide advice on the critical aspects of working in the various regulatory environments.

The AEI country profiles provide a valuable resource on the structural aspects of education and training in a range of countries.

The website at http://www.transparency.org.au provides information on aspects of legislation in other countries.

3. PARTNER CHOICE AND DUE DILIGENCE

Choice of overseas associate is the single most important decision affecting the outcome of a TNE program … The potential quality of the association will be critical and needs to be considered at the early stage of the project. (IEAA, 2008: 53).

What is the issue?

Previous research, together with current and extensive provider feedback, identifies partner choice and management as the most important issue in determining the success or failure of VET offshore delivery.

Proposed project partners will have already been subject to a 'macro' analysis and visit as part of the Project Approval stage (see Section 2 above). While some checking of the partner is conducted, particularly as to the alignment of the Australian and offshore partner related to strategic and business goals, a detailed due diligence is often not undertaken as a part of this check.

If a project receives management approval to proceed to the next stage then a high priority is to conduct a detailed due diligence check on the proposed partner/associate. This step should be undertaken prior to finalising a detailed business plan.

Key considerations

Due diligence commonly focuses on gathering publicly available and relevant information related to the proposed partner in order to make a judgement. While this is a requirement in the higher education sector, it is recommended, but not mandated, for the VET sector.

This can be a costly exercise; however, not to undertake a thorough due diligence can be more costly in the long run. The primary purpose of the due diligence is to identify risk, and if appropriate, to withdraw from the project or to (re)frame the project to mitigate/manage risk.

The Queensland VET Export Office established that VET providers are at various stages of maturity in regards to internationalisation (Colaso 2007). The size and types of offshore partners differ greatly. Colaso noted that often some guidance to providers is provided, but is not enforceable and due diligence processes and activities are inconsistent within the VET offshore industry. It is likely that these Queensland observations apply more broadly in other states.

It appears to be increasingly common for providers to use in-country agents as their representatives in establishing relationships with partners, assisting with due diligence and, at a later stage, with monitoring the quality of course delivery. Agents are undertaking key tasks on behalf of providers at important stages of the planning and delivery cycle. If agents are to be engaged, it is therefore vital that appropriate checks are undertaken to determine their suitability. It is also important that payment arrangements are structured to ensure that the agent is always acting clearly in the provider's interest.

A thorough due diligence requires investigation of a number of aspects of the proposed partner's operations, taking into account political, cultural, legal and bureaucratic arrangements in the country. It is not always easy and straightforward to gather the information required, particularly issues surrounding financial and business data.

Providers go about the due diligence check in a variety of ways, depending on their size, their own in-house capacity and the size of the project being considered. External assistance is available from AEI counsellors, from Austrade and from specialist financial institutions. Some providers augment this advice by using their own staff and agents who are already posted offshore.

How are providers dealing with partner choice and due diligence?

Figure 4. Partner choice & due diligence
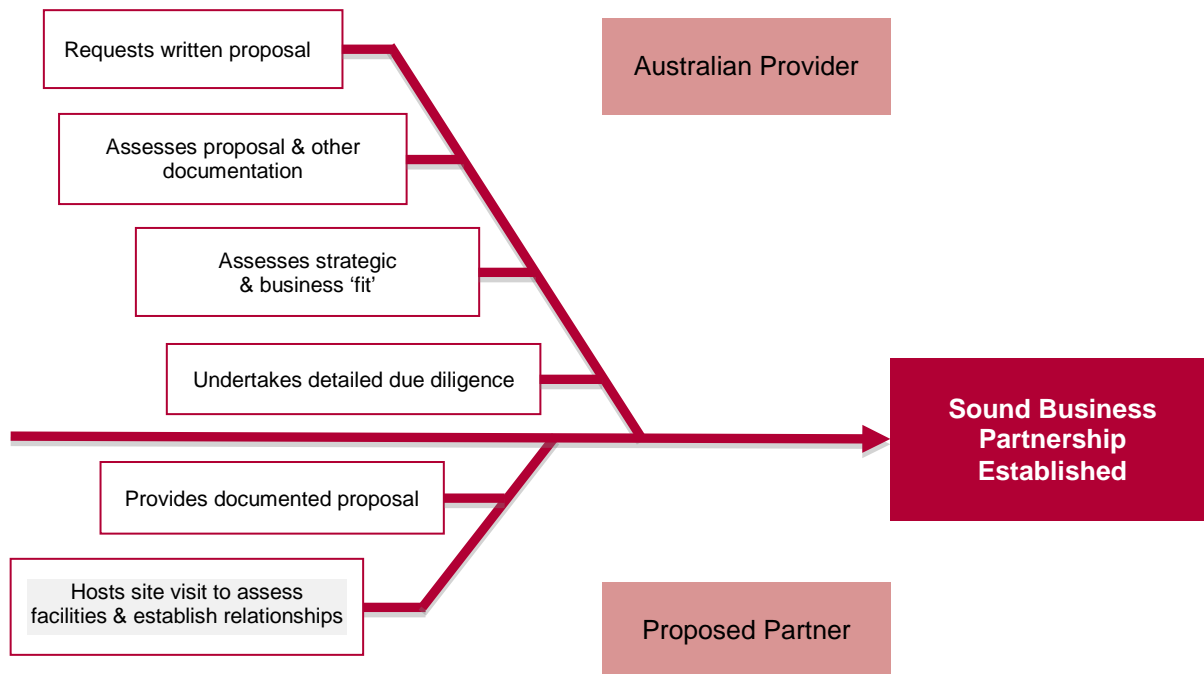
Relationship management: Providers emphasised that managing the offshore relationship is of the utmost importance. One CEO of a private provider who has delivered offshore for 17 years and who takes a very personal 'hands on' approach to partner choice observed that: *'Any partnership is only as good as the relationship between the top staff in both organisations'*. He also noted that it is important to be aware, not only of your project motives, but also those of your partner: *'two people sleeping in the same bed but dreaming different dreams'*.

Assess the proposal: Providers have quite different views on how partnerships are initiated. Some providers never initiate partnerships but wait until they are approached. The task then is to carefully examine all offers and select only those that best meet their criteria. Other providers have a more proactive approach. They actively seek out partners they know to be compatible and commercially viable, based on their background research.

> *'We get an offer of cooperation once a month. We decline 99%. It is our goal to seek out our own partner, not to have someone seek us out'*

In spite of this difference in approach all experienced providers are unanimous in the view that selecting the right partner and undertaking due diligence are critical planning activities.

Educational values: There is a general view that, in order to ensure compatibility, the overseas partner should be an educational institution (IEAA, 2008). Despite this view at least one major provider of TNE is now exploring overseas partnerships with companies, which are not in the business of education and training. In this kind of partnership the Australian provider would not only provide delivery but the total training infrastructure, just as it does in Australia.

Screening: Experienced providers undertake initial screening of partners and this is done in a variety of ways. All attest to the value of a site visit early in the process. If this can be combined with other offshore tasks, this helps to reduce costs.

Evidence of commitment: Most providers also now require that potential partners who approach them provide comprehensive documentation in regards to their business strategy, financials and steps they have taken to gain in-country government approvals. Unwillingness to provide this effectively identifies the potential partnership as not worth pursuing.

Resources available to assist with due diligence

There are two major resources available.

A comprehensive guide in: Colaso R (2007) *Partnership Due Diligence Best Practice Guide*. Prepared for the Queensland VET Export Office and the VET Working Party, Queensland Government
http://www.training.qld.gov.au/resources/information/pdf/due-diligence.pdf [accessed 9/2010]
This is framed around six principles for due diligence. It provides a thorough tool for undertaking due diligence. In this Guide pages 32–40 are particularly useful.

Principles for due diligence:

- Principle one: Establishing strategic framework

- Principle two: Know your target market

- Principle three: Corporate profile of potential partner

- Principle four: Legal considerations

- Principle five: Financial considerations

- Principle six: Organisational considerations

Appendix 3.1: – Due Diligence Checklist
Source: International Education Association of Australia (2008) *Good Practice in Offshore Delivery: A Guide for Australian Providers* Prepared by the International Education Association of Australia for the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Commonwealth of Australia.

4. BUSINESS PLANNING

'The business plan is the basis for contracting and for monitoring and review of the project. It is a crucial factor for managing risk and maximizing the likelihood of success.' (IEAA, 2008: 42)

What is the issue?

The business plan is the end result of a series of project inception and design tasks that should be undertaken prior to any binding contracts being entered into and prior to commencing any delivery.

The degree of detail that providers put into their Go/No-go analysis and their project proposal phase may vary according to the size of the provider and the project. The business plan needs to include more rather than less detail in order to minimise risk, particularly in relation to financial and delivery matters.

Key considerations

Prior to the development of the business plan it is important that the provider undertakes an initial analysis and outline of the major financial aspects of the project, a more detailed version of which should be a key part of the business plan. The initial financial plan should include a detailed analysis of costing, including investment required, to get the project started.

Costing should cover such matters as:
- The costs of teaching staff who will teach in the project, including the cost of their time, any 'backfill' costs to cover their teaching at the provider campus, travel, accommodation and allowances
- The costs of teaching staff who will contribute to program design, the adaptation of existing programs and materials to meet local needs, the development of assessment materials and models, and academic quality assurance matters and staff and student induction
- The costs of academic/teaching staff who contribute to professional development for associate teaching staff delivering the project
- The costs of library, IT and other resources supplied by the provider to students enrolled in the associate programs
- The costs of any student support services supplied by the provider to students enrolled in the associate programs
- The costs of graduation ceremonies, including the cost of attendance at such ceremonies by the senior executives and any other representatives of the provider beyond those involved directly with the TNE project
- The costs of staff more generally involved in broader 'associate management', including their time, travel, accommodation, allowances and other costs.

(IEAA 2008: 40)

Prior to developing the business plan providers need to give particular attention to their projected cash flow and planned return on investment. They need to be very clear as to when they will get a return on their investment, including the commencement of income stream, their break-even point and the commencement of their commercial return.

Particular financial risks associated with offshore business should also be identified at this point. The major risks typically relate to the provider's capacity to accurately estimate and repatriate revenue and under what currency business transactions should take place.

Costs relate not only to the direct delivery of programs. The establishment costs should be realistically calculated. In addition, the costs of meeting AQTF requirements should not be underestimated. Many offshore providers have learnt that it is advisable to conduct internal audits of the offshore program

delivery. This is an expensive task, the costs of which are increasingly being factored into the total delivery cost and passed onto the partner.

Financial matters requiring clarification:

Revenue

- Whether charges by the provider for the use of its academic programs and the contribution by staff are to be charged on a fixed fee basis, a cost plus basis, on a percentage of fee income basis, or a combination of any of these
- Local regulations covering tuition fees and refund policies that may be charged for TNE programs, and local education taxes and charges that may apply to the project
- Wider taxation issues, including withholding tax, local education taxes, payroll tax for local or provider supplied staff; independent in-country legal advice must be sought
- Whether minimum fees will be required to be paid to the provider even if enrolment projections are not reached
- Whether these charges are to be made in local currency or AUD
- Whether for the project's duration, or any other defined time, an agreed exchange rate should be set
- Whether, if payments are in local currency, the provider hedges its currency exposure. The cost of hedging the currency exposure will need to be allocated to the project. If no hedging is put in place, there will need to be an allowance in the costing for possible currency losses.

Repatriation of funds

- Proof that funds are able to be successfully transferred and verified by a trial transfer
- Whether there are any limits imposed by local regulations regarding fund transfers and any limits per transaction
- Whether there are secure arrangements in place to ensure that the provider's associate can remit payments at the agreed time in the agreed currency
- Whether official approvals are required and if there are any limits (e.g. amount per transaction) on remittances to the provider
- What taxes and charges apply on remission of funds
- Whether a contingency plan is needed to deal with problems regarding delays in payments.

(IEAA 2008: 41)

Once the key financial details/issues outlined above have been negotiated and clarified with the proposed partner, it is very important that the further development of the business plan occurs in a collaborative way, involving both partners in all steps of the process. It is highly desirable that a negotiating team, with members from both parties and with authority to make decisions, is established. Ideally all negotiations would occur in a common language in which all negotiators are fluent. If this in not possible and the Australian provider needs to use an interpreter, it is important that the Australian provider engages their own interpreter who understands and is able to clearly represent the provider's position in negotiations.

Once the negotiations are complete the format and status of the detailed business plan should be mutually understood and agreed before sign off at the highest levels of the partner organisations.

Decisions the provider may need to make about the negotiation process:

- The negotiation team and the lead negotiator
- All the parties from whom consent must be obtained
- A formal mandate to negotiate with any required boundaries
- The role of any agent, representative or third party involved in facilitating the negotiation
- Any needed letters of introduction or authorisation
- Engagement of an interpreter if required
- Documentation and file management protocols to record MOUs and any other in-principle decisions, plus all further project documentation
- Assurance that negotiations are conducted by representatives of the associate who have the appropriate authority to negotiate effectively.

Desirable outcomes of the negotiation phase:

- Confirmation of the project, respective roles and expected outcomes as described in the project design document and the business plan
- Clarification and resolution of any potential conflicts or issues or non-alignment, such as:
- the cultural fit of the provider and the associate
- academic standards (including selection and admission criteria) versus commercial targets
- competition with other associate-provided TNE programs sourced from other providers
- other TNE products offered by the provider with other associates in the same market, exclusivity issues, resource issues, etc.
- Exhaustive identification of the required in-country approvals or licences and confirmation that these are already held, or will be obtained
- Clarification of the award(s) to be offered to students, and the status of those awards in-country and internationally, and recognition by the host country
- Agreement regarding any exclusivity issues
- Agreement regarding any required provider approvals of, or responsibilities for, items such as marketing materials and recruitment activities
- agreement regarding any required provider involvement in the selection of associate teaching staff
- agreement regarding any other required provider approvals for other operational issues
- Confirmation of government approvals/program registration and the like (in-country and in Australia as need be)
- An agreed exit strategy.

(IEAA, 2008: 42)

How are providers dealing with business planning?

Figure 5. Business Planning
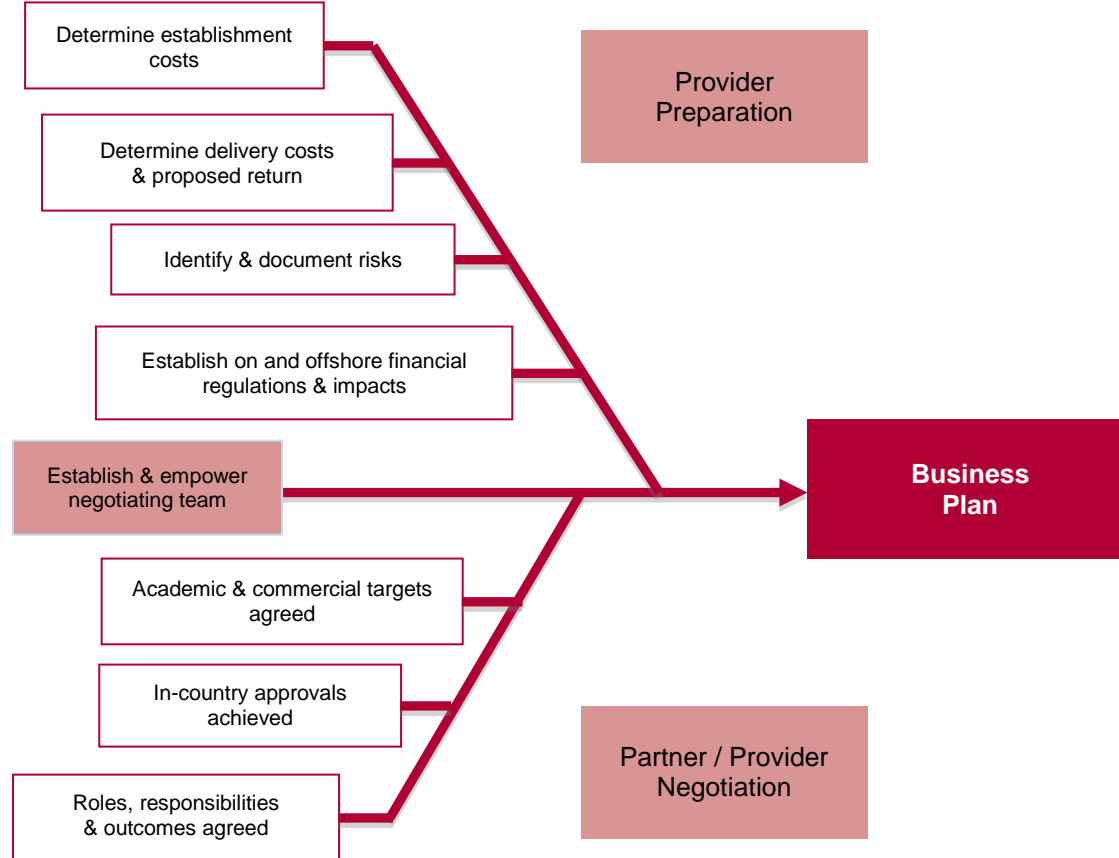
Business planning takes time: Providers have learned, through sometimes painful experience, that business planning for overseas ventures is often more time consuming and complex than the same task undertaken for local business activities.

Ensure mutual understanding: They have learned that merely to have their version of the business plan translated into the partner's home language is not enough to prevent costly and frustration misunderstandings. An experienced provider noted that one of their recent business plans included the word 'cooperation' several times throughout the document. The overseas partner understood 'cooperation', either through mistranslation or a cultural misunderstanding, that the provider would provide all delivery free of charge.

Collaborate with partners: Providers agree that the development of the business plan must be done in collaboration with the partner, even though this can be a long, 'back and forward, back and forward' process. To try to cut corners in negotiations will only increase the risks associated with contract development and/or program delivery.

Realistic expectations: The CEO of one specialist provider who has been delivering offshore for 17 years advised new providers to suspend their usual Australian business calculations as to when they would return a profit. It was his view that, from the outset, providers must have modest and realistic plans and longer timelines for achieving commercial returns. One provider's advice is to: 'anticipate half the income and double the costs'.

Cultural sensitivity: Another experienced provider noted that, while the business plan and related documentation have a certain status and importance within Australian business and VET environments, this status may not be shared in other countries and cultures. Common Australian assumptions about business planning must therefore be questioned. Due care, cultural sensitivity and the building of strong relationships in the negotiation phase are therefore seen to be very important if the business plan is to be a useful tool for project implementation for both parties.

Resources available for business planning

Appendix 4.1: – Components of a business plan

Source: International Education Association of Australia (2008) *Good Practice in Offshore Delivery: A Guide for Australian Providers*. Prepared by the International Education Association of Australia for the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Commonwealth of Australia.

5. DETAILED PARTNER CONTRACTS AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

This section draws on International Education Association of Australia (2008) *Good Practice in Offshore Delivery, A Guide for Australian providers*, prepared by the International Education Association of Australia for the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relation (DEEWR), Commonwealth of Australia, and consultations with providers.

> *'Building a relationship based on mutual respect and trust and identifying and achieving project success factors will help to avoid the need to contemplate litigation as a solution to a problem. The process will be assisted by effective formal agreement manifested in a legal contract. (IEAA 2008: 46)*

What is the issue?

The quality and usefulness of a formal written agreement/contract is influenced strongly by the quality and detail of the business plan. The contract should clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of the provider and partner in relationship to the deliverables in the business plan.

There are different types of contracts, depending on the nature of the project and the stage of negotiations:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is typically a brief document which states an in-principle agreement between the provider and partner to work together. It is not binding.

- A Primary Contract is a comprehensive document based on all aspects of the business plan. Increasingly this contract has a number of appendices which outline specific details of the project, especially those which are subject to change during the life of the contract.

- Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are also used as appendices to the core contract in cases where there are complex projects with complex roles and responsibilities.

Contract contents

The content of a contract will vary according to the circumstances, but the contact should contain:
- A statement of the responsibilities of the provider and of the associate.
- A statement of the financial aspects of the contract
- Timelines for deliverables as well as for review
- Contract default provisions
- Exit strategy arrangements
- Privacy/confidentiality arrangements

(IEAA 2008: 47)

Key considerations

The development of the contract requires extensive negotiation between the provider and partner. Some providers have developed their own forms and models of contract. Some refer to these as 'Agreements'. These are not always applicable in offshore environments where local forms of contract and legal jurisdiction may apply. The provider needs then to negotiate an agreed form and substance of contract which meets the needs of both provider and partner and which has legal status in both countries.

The value and usefulness of the contract is not just in the quality and content of the negotiated document, but in the way in which it is managed. Ongoing communication and relationship management is therefore essential.

The development of mutually respectful, trusting and open relationships between individuals responsible for contract development and management in each institution is crucial to the success of the project. To assist with this it is often helpful to have nominated 'project champions' in each institution who are the key points of contact and who can resolve minor unforeseen issues as they arise.

It is highly desirable that there is a formal face-to-face regular review of the progress of the project and thus the contractual arrangements. These, together with any unforeseen critical incidents, should be documented and should inform any mutually agreed changes to the business plan and/or contract.

Regular review, combined with open and effective personal communication, is intended to deal with issues prior to them escalating into major factors which compromise the contract and project. All contracts should contain explicit descriptions of the circumstances in which either partner can invoke an exit provision. This should be the strategy of last resort as it inevitably has negative consequences for both parties and perhaps enrolled students.

Circumstances likely to trigger activation of provider exit strategy

Associate default:

- Non-financial matters, involving failure to deliver the project to an appropriate level/standard, including such matters as default in relation to curriculum, teaching materials, teaching staff (including their qualifications), facilities, administrative systems or quality assurance/maintenance
- Financial matters, involving financial collapse, continuing or unrectified default on payments

Provider default:

- Inability or unwillingness to continue with the project for any reason

Changes in external circumstances which cannot be accommodated:

- Changes in the market, leading to reduced demand for the program(s) being delivered making them sub-viable
- Loss of or changes to in-country approvals (accreditation/licensing arrangements etc)
- Changes to currency/repatriation of funds arrangements
- Changes to the Australian regulatory framework (for example, AQTF)
- Changes in the ownership or strategic directions of the associate not acceptable to the provider or not compatible with the objectives of the project

(IEAA, 2008: 50)

Provider response to contracts and relationship management

Figure 6. Detailed partner contract & relationship management
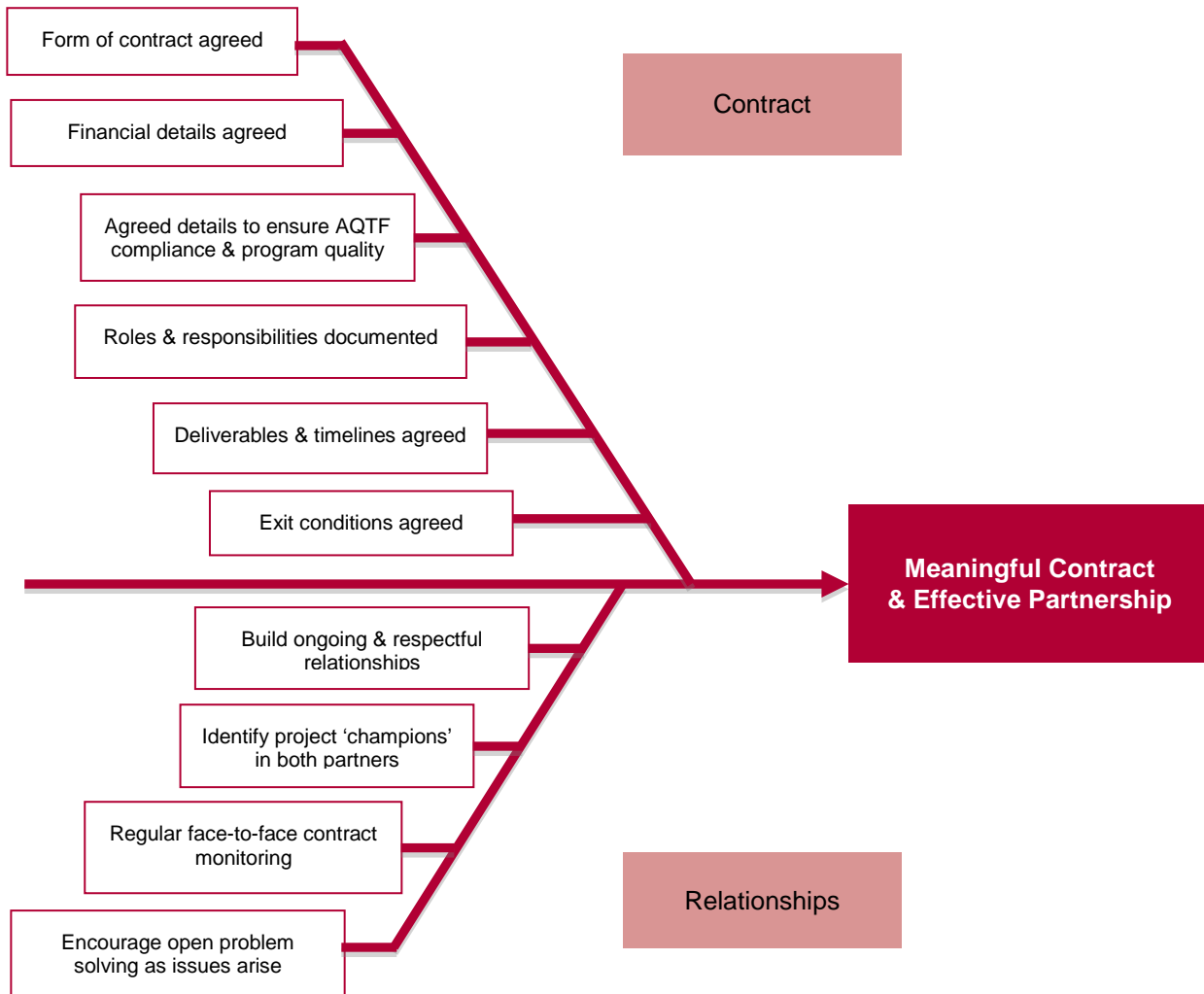
Ongoing process: Experienced providers unanimously agree that there is a very strong connection between successful project/contract delivery and the ongoing management of relationships between the provider and partner. The word 'trust' was frequently mentioned.

'Fit for purpose' test: Providers are responding to their past experience in different ways. The majority are moving towards much more detailed contracts than they formerly used. These contracts typically have a stem (primary contract) and appendices. The latter are usually very detailed and spell out what is required, not only in general operations, but in achieving AQTF compliance in the programs being delivered by the partner. These providers believe that the detail assists not only with compliance, but with ongoing quality assurance. They believe that this approach also minimises risks associated with misunderstandings and contract ambiguities, thus enhancing positive relationships with the partner. This in turn assists with AQTF compliance. In contrast a minority of providers believe that more detail is not helpful and the emphasis should be on relationships and the building of trust between the parties and the provision of resources to the partner to assist in AQTF compliance.

Clear responsibility for contract management: Whatever the approach taken, there is general agreement that, based on past experience, an increasingly 'hands on' contract/project management strategy is

necessary if risk is to be minimised and the project successfully delivered. To assist in this some providers now employ a staff member 'on the ground' to monitor and oversee the delivery of the contract in a day-to-day operational sense. This staff member is often a local person who understands the culture, language and work practices in the offshore location and also understands the Australian provider's requirements.

Contingency management: Most providers agree that they now take much more time and care in negotiating the financial details of the contract. Despite their best efforts, they have learnt that there are frequently unforeseen financial costs in project delivery. They are now much more likely to include provision for unspecified financial contingencies in the contract.

Agreement on intellectual property: Providers have noted that the issue of ownership of intellectual property is a complex and difficult issue that is usually included in contracts, but it is often difficult to monitor contractual compliance. This issue is becoming increasingly important where offshore partners are taking a larger role in delivery of Australian VET qualifications. An important strategy to ensure AQTF compliance, and to encourage and support program quality and consistency is the use of high quality Australian learning resources. The protection of ownership/copyright of these resources is an important contractual and relationship issue.

Dispute resolution: This is sometimes referred to as a 'contract default provision'. It is important that there is an agreed form of dispute resolution written into the contract. This is sometimes challenging to negotiate with the partner who may wish to employ their own jurisdictions or that of a third country for the mediation/arbitration of disputes. The United Nations Convention on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) may be a useful neutral and acceptable procedure to assist in the negotiations.

Defined exit strategy: Most providers that have engaged in offshore delivery for some time have formally exited from some contracts and partnerships. One commented that: 'everyone loses in exit'. However, it is vital that students do not lose in a significant way. Continuity plans for students which involve 'teach out' of the programs are therefore a key feature of an effective exit strategy. This step should be avoided if at all possible. A documented, staged set of processes outlining how to resolve issues as they arise is therefore highly desirable. These processes then need to be complemented by regular monitoring of offshore activity and implemented by representatives from each organisation who have a positive working relationship. Providers often need to carefully balance the commercial versus the reputational risks in executing an exit clause.

As much time as needed: Most providers noted that they had initially underestimated the time it takes to negotiate a mutually understood contract. Earlier efforts at contract negotiation often relied on providing the partner with a translated copy of the Australian contract. This proved to be inadequate, as there were often very basic misunderstandings in regard to particular contract terms and basic concepts related to the AQTF. Now there is a realisation that regardless of the seniority and professional expertise of the offshore partner, time needs to be spent in reaching shared contract understandings.

Resources available for partner contracts and relationship management

Appendix 5.1: – A sample agreement. Please note that this agreement is only a sample and does not include all of the clauses that Australian legal advice may want to include.

Harris, M., Kennington, K. and Hogg, S. (2006) *The TAFEWA auspicing and offshore delivery and resource package*. Final report submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Perth: It is available at:
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx

The United Nations Convention on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) at:
www.uncitral.org/en/index.html   [accessed 10/2010]. UNCITRAL has developed a set of Arbitration Rules (revised 2010) to enable parties from different countries to settle disputes. The Arbitration Rules can be applied in contractual and non contractual circumstances.

6.   SELECT APPROPRIATE OFFSHORE DELIVERY MODELS

Course/programs delivered within Australia and transnationally should be equivalent in the standard of delivery and outcomes of the course, as determined under nationally recognized quality assurance arrangements. (Australian Education International 2005:1)

What is the issue?

Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications delivered offshore need to meet the equivalence principle in the AEI's Transnational Quality Strategy (AEI 2005) by providing training and assessment services that address the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration requirements and are delivered to the standard specified in the relevant Training Packages or accredited course curriculum (Bateman 2007). The AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Continuing Registration will apply to the offshore delivery models with key considerations being that the training and assessment plan meets the Training Package requirements and is developed in consultation with industry; the staff members meet the vocational and trainer competence requirements; and, learning resources, assessment tools and infrastructure requirements are met.

The Australian provider working with offshore partners is responsible for ensuring that the AQTF Conditions and Standards are adhered to in the offshore context.

In order to meet these requirements, there are a range of factors which determine the appropriate delivery model for each provider. Intricately bound up with the aims reflected in each provider's strategic plan, the offshore delivery model will be configured according to the available infrastructure, the partnership or independent arrangements entered into and the available training and human resources. Furthermore, offshore opportunities for delivery models may be determined by public or private client requests from the offshore country, for a particular model.

Key considerations

As the provider, it is important to identify and know both your potential and your limitations, in what you can offer offshore. Experienced providers suggest that an important consideration is to only offer offshore, qualifications and delivery models in which providers have experience, staff and resources in delivery onshore. This will position the provider well to meet the challenges of the offshore environment and adapt their practice to the new context accordingly.

Providers have identified that one of the key challenges when delivering offshore is implementing the competency based requirements of Australian Training Packages or accredited curriculum and balancing this with client needs and expectations. Providers need to consider:

- How to keep the integrity of the Australian qualification when Training Packages are designed for the Australian market

- How to adapt the competency based approach to suit the needs of international students and the demands of the potential industry in the social context other than Australia

- How to incorporate a local industry context into the program.

Providers suggest that the choice of the program delivery model requires extensive negotiation and judgments about what can be conducted in the available facilities and with the available staff. Some small providers have certain areas of expertise and related qualifications that they specialize in and they want to offer in an offshore environment. At the other end of the spectrum, providers can be part of a consortium of TAFE Institutes offering vocational training to a new and emerging industry in a developing country.

A small private provider offers beauty courses in conjunction with the local personal services industry (Private Provider Manager)

A large TAFE Institute has a partnership arrangement with thirteen partner Electrical Vocational Colleges in China under the auspices of the China Electricity Council (CEC) (TAFE Manager)

Key determinants of the delivery model can be outside of the control of the provider and include such factors as foreign ownership restrictions (e.g. for a campus) or regulations about the student profile (e.g. must include international and local students); in-country regulations relevant to course approval; organisational requirements of delivering offshore (e.g. specialised equipment needs); or, the stipulation to use local teaching staff in the program.

In order to be able to deliver AQF qualifications as well as to satisfy the market and client needs, providers consider a range of options such as:

- Establishing a college offshore and delivering independently without a partner
- Establishing a campus offshore
- Establishing an industry based program by working with local enterprises or large national industries and satisfying employment demands
- Entering into a partnership model with a technical college or a higher education institution.

The overall choice of the delivery arrangements will also result in negotiating different configurations at the point of training delivery, such as:

- The partner college provides the theory component of the qualification and the Australian staff teach the practical and specialist units of competency
- An agreement to have dual program enrolment (e.g. Australian and Chinese qualifications) where two qualifications are delivered concurrently and two certificates are granted at the conclusion of the program
- Online delivery from Australia combined with offshore classes delivered by Australian instructors.

In selecting the delivery model to use offshore, providers are mindful that pathways for VET qualifications can be constructed in a number of ways. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Handbook provides examples of possible pathways to a qualification:

- Work based training and assessment
- Institution based education and training and assessment (including schools)
- Part institution based education and training and assessment (including schools)/part work based training and assessment
- Recognition of prior learning
- Recognition of prior learning combined with further training as required
- Accumulation of a variety of short courses/training programs

(Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Advisory Board, 2007:34)

How are providers dealing with the question of delivery models?

Figure 7. Providers dealing with the question of delivery models
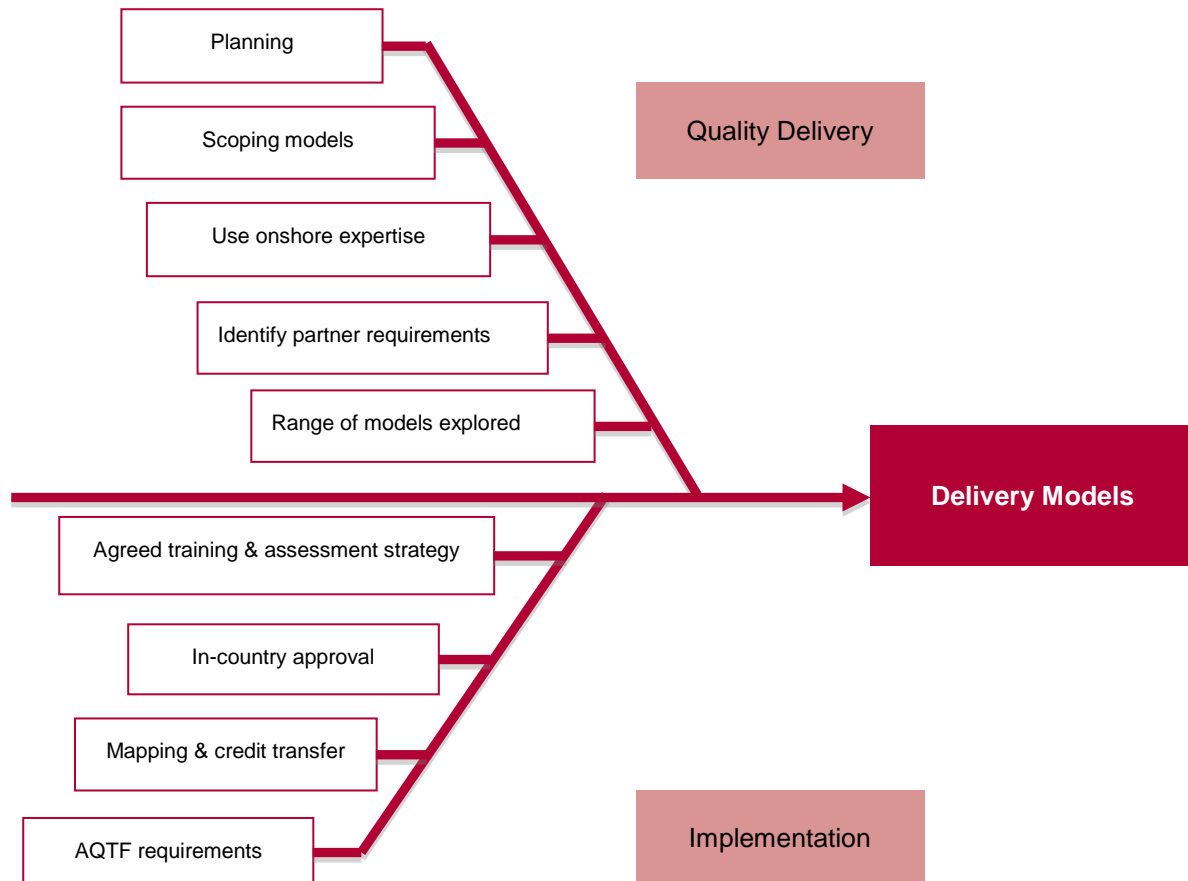
Balanced planning: A planning process is essential to identify the capability of the provider in offshore delivery. Ideally, this will be reflected in the provider's international marketing plan, the business case and the strategic plan. An important part of this planning is to consider the incorporation of the AQTF conditions and standards.

An AEI Project at Chisholm Institute of TAFE (2006) identified the following processes considered to be essential for providers and their offshore partner organizations to use to achieve AQTF quality compliance in the joint delivery of accredited VET qualifications:

- Process 1 Project Management

- Process 2 Teaching Staff Selection, Induction and Review

- Process 3 Student Recruitment, Selection and Enrolment

- Process 4 Course Delivery

- Process 5 Assessment and Moderation

- Process 6 Evaluation of Teaching and Learning.

Source: Burchell, B., De Zilwa, R. and Louey, C. (2006) *Offshore teaching and learning quality assurance guide for delivery of Australian accredited VET courses.* Final report submitted as part of a project managed

by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Adelaide: NCVER for Australian Education International in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Build on existing expertise: A preliminary scoping and information gathering strategy can assist in the planning process. Consider the experience both providers and partners have in the delivery of courses in terms of the field (e.g. business) and the level (e.g. Diploma). This will ensure that you build on the existing expertise. A principle used by experienced providers is to have a delivery model based on onshore experience. That is, don't deliver offshore, a qualification you have not delivered onshore.

Identify partner requirements: The partner requirements are important and may include: ensuring that the course approval process in the offshore country has been granted by the different tiers of government – national, regional and provincial; that any credit transfer arrangements have been identified and mapped; and, that cooperation with local industries or enterprises has been explored.

Refining the delivery model: Considering the range of delivery options is a good starting point for selecting the most suitable model. Some examples include:

- A specifically established training college which delivers the AQF qualifications and the head of the college is a staff member from the Australian College

- Industry based models set up with local industry and supplying the local labour market

- Dual delivery – the partner college provides the theory and the practicum is provided in Australia under Australian conditions, to Australian standards and by Australian staff with an understanding of competency based training

- Dual enrolment – enrol students into a dual program (e.g. the Australian qualification and equivalent offshore qualification). Training is undertaken by both the Australian and the offshore institution staff. Mapping of the offshore partner qualification to the Australian qualification is essential; identifying credit transfer is important and a dual qualification is awarded.

- Assessment only model – a provider assesses existing workers and identifies their skills for the recognition of prior learning using AQF qualifications as the benchmark.

- Online delivery – online delivery with a locally employed tutor who provides support. The model is predicated on English language competency.

- Fly in fly out – all staff are provided offshore to undertake all delivery – but this is an expensive option

- Local staff delivery combined with Australian staff delivery – the proportion of Australian versus local staff varies from project to project. Recent changes to regulations in China require that 30% of delivery is undertaken by Australian staff. This requirement does not apply in other countries.

- Train the trainer model – with a significant number of students, the trainers are brought over to Australia and trained, mentored and supervised by the Australian teachers

- Licensed 'schools' which deliver Australian VET qualifications through partnership arrangements. Partner examples are private universities, a foreign student university and a hotel chain which has entered into the training arena so they are assured of a constant supply of trained staff.

- A combination of the above.

A mutually agreed training and assessment strategy: The development of a mutually agreed training and assessment strategy (TAS) that guarantees the integrity of the Australian VET qualifications is essential. Providers suggest that face-to-face discussions and feedback sessions have proved a more reliable method for gathering useful information than surveys from offshore clients. In the strategy, identify the delivery model and any local consultation that is undertaken. Providers are doing this by:

- Gaining course approval and registration by the national and/or provincial government (e.g. China, Hong Kong, Vietnam)

- Identifying the relationship with a mapping exercise between delivering a dual qualification (e.g. a joint Australian and Chinese qualification)

- Identifying and describing delivery methods (e.g. face-to-face, online)

- Identifying components delivered by Australian and local teachers

- Identifying any reasonable adjustments – Training Package or curriculum may need to be contextualised to meet the needs of speakers of English as a second language. Case studies and other examples could be developed from a local context.

- Documenting industry links and consultation – meeting with local industry

- Documenting if the course is to be delivered in English

- Documenting assessment validation and moderation processes.

The international partner must be made aware of the Australian qualification and competency requirements prior to commencement of delivery. Any Australian onshore licensing or regulatory requirements associated with the qualifications to be delivered need to be clearly stipulated to the offshore partner. This can require extensive negotiations and discussions to ensure the offshore partner is aware of the Australian qualification requirements and the AQTF Conditions and Standards. The AQTF National Guideline for a Registering Body identifies offshore delivery and partner arrangements as risk indicators (DEEWR 2010d: 23).

Resources to assist providers with delivery models

Appendix 6.1: – Improving offshore teaching models
Source: Pannan, L., Gribble, C., & Barnes, D. (2005) *Improving offshore teaching models to promote offshore and onshore equivalence in learning outcomes*. Melbourne: RMIT
http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/CmsTemplates/DocumentTemplates/Document.asp...f&NRCACHEHINT=Modify Guest   [accessed 10/2010]

Burchell, B., De Zilwa, R. and Louey, C. (2006) *Offshore teaching and learning quality assurance guide for delivery of Australian accredited VET courses.* Final report submitted as part of a project managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Adelaide: NCVER for Australian Education International in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Training.com.au
This national website has access to a range of vocational education and training information, products and services in Australia. It has up to date information and publications on the AQTF.
http://www.training.com.au

Training Packages at Work
Training Packages @ Work has up-to-date information on the latest Training Packages.
http://www.tpatwork.com/

VETinfonet
Western Australian site with advice regarding delivery models of VET.
http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/home/default.aspx

Licensing Line News
Licensing Line News has the latest national and local news on occupational licensing within the vocational education and training system and a broad range of licence areas, including those with an occupational

health and safety focus, technical focus, consumer protection focus and environmental focus.
www.licensinglinenews.com

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
This website provides details on the Australian Qualifications Framework.
www.aqf.edu.au

Australian Education International (AEI)
Country regulatory fact sheets for information on country-specific accreditation requirements for a wide range of countries.
http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Default.htm

7. SET QUALITY REQUIREMENTS FOR OFFSHORE FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

What is the issue?

In order to meet the Training Package and AQTF requirements, providers have learned that a careful identification and evaluation of learning facilities and equipment is required prior to delivery. Training Packages are based on a competency based system where units of competency are used as the benchmark for training and assessment. Assessment of competency is not only based on knowledge but on the actual demonstration of the competency. This requires equipment, facilities or work placements that provide a suitable context for the demonstration of competence. Training Packages also outline requirements for simulated environments, if real work facilities are not available.

The type of equipment and facilities required are outlined in Training Packages and accredited curriculum. There are challenges in providing offshore facilities that are identical to those in Australia. This can be particularly true in trade areas such as building and hospitality.

On the other hand, some providers have reported excellent facilities in some offshore environments that have been purpose built to deliver a particular course. For example, a simulated stock exchange and banking facilities and a well set out hospitality facility.

Key considerations

Facilities, equipment and resources need to be part of the planning process and documented in the training and assessment strategies for each program. Checklists for the training and assessment equipment and infrastructure requirements can be devised at the qualification level for some programs (e.g. BSB50207 Diploma of Business) whereas more technical qualifications (e.g. SIT30807 Certificate III in Hospitality Commercial Cookery) would need to consider each unit of competency.

The assessment of the facilities and equipment and their suitability for the education and training being delivered at the institution need to be included in the quality arrangements and audited before there is agreement to the delivery model. In some situations, additional equipment or software may need to be purchased and set up for a particular program.

In institutional based delivery in the offshore environment, a simulated environment may need to be established.

The requirement for a unit of competency to be assessed in a simulated workplace environment may be identified either within the unit of competency itself or within the relevant Training Package Assessment Guidelines.

For the purposes of assessment, a simulated workplace may be described as one in which all of the required skills are performed with respect to the provision of paid services to an employer or the public can be demonstrated as though the business was actually operating. In order to be valid and reliable, the simulation must closely resemble what occurs in a real work environment. The simulated workplace should involve a range of activities that reflect real work experience. The simulated workplace should allow the performance of all of the required skills and demonstration of the required knowledge.

It is critical that when a simulated workplace is being set up, the assessor is thoroughly familiar with the competency standard/s as well as experienced in the current circumstances and environment of the workplace

(DEEWR 2010b:78)

Training packages require specific equipment, facilities and conditions to undertake assessment. Providers need to be familiar with these requirements of the qualifications in Training Packages and the related competency standards in order to evaluate the existing resources offshore. Provided below are two examples:

Business Services Training Package

Units of Competency in the Business Services Training Package BSB07 may be assessed in the workplace or in a simulated environment. Given that simulation may be used and is often indicated as an option for assessment within the Business Services Training Package, the following advice is provided:

In order to be valid and reliable, the simulation must closely represent what actually occurs in the workplace and should seek to replicate an actual work setting. It is critical that the designer of the simulation is thoroughly familiar with the application of the competency and is experienced in current and relevant workplace practices. In deciding whether a simulation or an assessment environment has been adequately designed, the following questions should be asked:

Are there opportunities to:

- Test the full range of equipment?
- Use up-to-date equipment and software?
- Reflect time pressures and deadlines?
- Show the complexity of dealing with multiple tasks?
- Involve prioritising among competing tasks?
- Deal with customers, including difficult ones?
- Work with others in a team?
- Communicate with diverse groups?
- Find, discuss and test solutions to problems?
- Explore health and safety issues?
- Answer practically oriented, applied knowledge questions?
- Show the level of written and verbal expression sufficient for, but not exceeding, the work requirements?

(BSB07, 2007:491)

Community Services and Health Training Package

Many qualifications and units of competency in the CHC08 Community Services Training Package have specific requirements relating to assessment involving observation in the workplace and acceptable simulation. Evidence of workplace application should be provided as detailed in the unit of competency. Where observation is undertaken in the workplace for assessment purposes, the assessor must ensure that safety of practice and duty of care requirements are addressed appropriately.

Assessors should clarify and address specific requirements, some of which are outlined and clarified below. Some units of competency specify as a critical aspect for assessment:

'Observation of workplace performance is essential for assessment of this unit'.

The intention of this statement is that:

- Assessment of the skills and knowledge described in the unit of competency should include observation of workplace performance
- Some aspects of 'workplace performance' may need to be demonstrated under simulated conditions, which approximate the workplace, in order to address safety requirements or in order to assess skills and knowledge which it may not be possible to assess in the workplace.

(CHC08, 2008:95)

How are providers dealing with the question of offshore facilities and equipment?

Figure 8. Providers dealing with offshore facilities and equipment
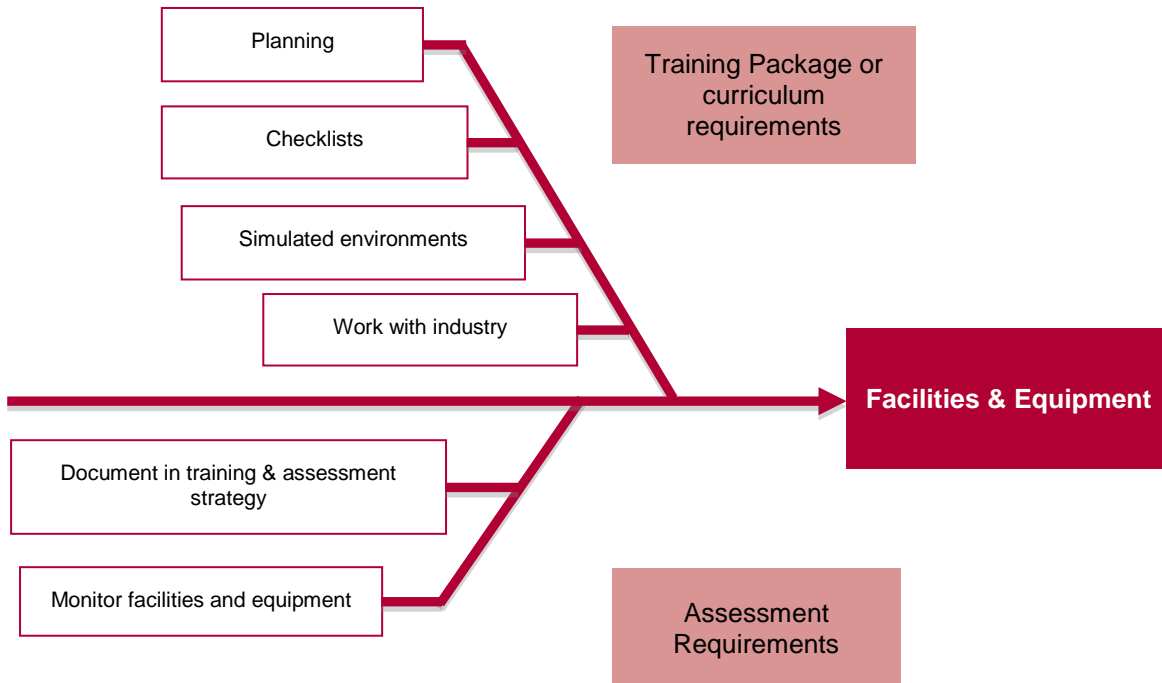
Planning: Facilities, equipment and resources need to be part of the planning process and documented in the Training and Assessment Strategy. Appendix 7.1 provides a checklist from Challenger TAFE in Western Australia. This checklist not only considers the training and assessment requirements for equipment and facilities but also assesses furniture, lighting and student facilities.

Checklists: The Victorian TAFE International group suggests that an inventory of facilities required to run the program needs to be undertaken and this includes facilities, library, materials and resources, audio visual equipment, office space and equipment, exam facilities and the like (Dempsey 2009:14).

Other providers develop venue checklists based on Training Packages to use when confirming training rooms are adequate and safe and fit for purpose. A hospitality example is found in the Appendix 7.2.

Simulated environments: Particular environments may need to be established to meet the Training Package or accredited curriculum requirements. An example could be the purchase of particular technology and software to set up an office environment. A purpose built example may be a simulated child care centre or a travel agency.

Working with industry: The majority of offshore delivery has been in business studies, primarily because of the ease of meeting the facilities requirements. In contrast, providers have found that tourism and hospitality present problems with equipment, but some are addressing this by undertaking arrangements with hotels.   There are also examples of purpose built facilities.

> *In China they have set up facilities of a high standard especially in hospitality. Australian teachers are required for the specialist subjects. (Public provider manager)*

One large TAFE College was able to source industry standard facilities in the three countries i.e. working tourist hotels. This has provided good quality facilities for delivery, so quality of delivery is not impacted by facilities. The Australian TAFE hospitality staff did an equipment audit of facilities prior to delivery and where there were shortfalls these were purchased without question. (Public provider manager)

Document the training and assessment strategy and monitor: All facilities and equipment requirements will be clearly stated in the training and assessment strategy and there will be ongoing monitoring of their suitability in relation to teaching and learning needs.

Resources relevant to facilities and equipment

Appendix 7.1: – RTO Checklist for Offshore from *A toolkit for the selection and approval of VET offshore projects: Project report* Final Report Challenger TAFE. Western Australia

Source: Dollery P (2006) *A toolkit for the selection and approval of VET offshore projects: Project report Final report* submitted as part of a project managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Adelaide: NCVER for Australian Education International in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Challenger TAFE Western Australia.

Appendix 7.2: – Example of a checklist that can be adapted for Hospitality environments based on the Training Package SIT07.

Other resources can be found at:

National Training Information Service (NTIS)
National site with Training Packages and other links.
http://www.ntis.gov.au/ [accessed 9/2010]

Training Packages @ Work
Training Packages @ Work is a collaborative project funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It is managed by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, with contributions from all state training authorities, Industry Training Australia and VETnetwork Australia.
http://www.tpatwork.com/ [accessed 9/2010]

Resource Generator
A support resource for the implementation of Training Packages. The Resource Generator provides trainers and assessors with access to information about units of competency, qualifications and learning resources across a range of industries.
http://www.resourcegenerator.gov.au [accessed 9/2010]

Vetinfonet Western Australian site with VET resources
Western Australian VET resources site.
http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/home/ [accessed 9/2010]

Industry Skills Councils
Lists all Australian Industry Skills Councils and links to various training resources
http://www.isc.org.au [accessed 9/2010]

Guides for Implementing Training Packages
South Australian site with various resources.
http://www.training.sa.gov.au/TrainingPackagesandGuides/Guidesforimplementingtrainingpackages/tabid/173/Default.aspx [accessed 9/2010]

Training Support
Victorian site with various resources.
http://trainingsupport.skills.vic.gov.au [accessed 9/2010]

Service Skills Industry Skills Council
Service Skills Australia has developed a series of Training Package User Guides to help registered training organisations (RTOs) effectively implement Training Packages, and deliver training that meets industry's needs.
http://www.serviceskills.com.au/training-package-user-guides [accessed 9/2010]

Hairdressing Training Package User Guide

Retail Services Training Package User Guide

Tourism, Hospitality and Events Training Package

NSW VETAB
The NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) has developed Guidelines for Delivery and Assessment of the Holistic Units in the SIT07 Tourism, Hospitality & Events Training Package.
http://www.vetab.nsw.gov.au/guidelines_hospitality.php [accessed 9/2010]

8. ENSURE STAFF SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

What is the issue?

Providers recognize that the quality of offshore VET provision will be significantly influenced by the skills and knowledge of the trainers and assessors. VET delivery offshore typically utilizes both Australian trainers and offshore provider staff to various degrees. Both categories of staff require different types of induction and ongoing professional development. Australian staff members need to understand the different cultural contexts and nuances in which they are working and the demands of the offshore environment. Offshore provider staff members are required to meet the AQTF trainer and assessor requirements as outlined by the National Quality Council (NQC). Consequently, the Australian provider is often responsible for delivering relevant units of competency from the TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to ensure the offshore/partner staff gain a sound understanding of competency based assessment. Supervision or co-assessment arrangements must be in place if staff delivering or assessing AQF qualifications do not meet these requirements. Ensuring that all teaching staff members involved in offshore delivery have the required skill sets involves considerable time and financial investment.

Providers delivering offshore do experience challenges, particularly in meeting the AQTF staffing requirements of trainer and assessor skills and current vocational competence. Meeting these requirements can present issues onshore for providers in new areas of training services and this is exacerbated when dealing with another country with different training expectations for their teachers.

The AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards for Registration specifies the trainer and assessor requirements to be met by providers throughout their period of registration. The National Quality Council or its successor is responsible for determining the training and assessment competencies to be held by trainers and assessors. Key indicators are specified in relation to trainer and assessor qualifications and vocational competencies, as well as ongoing professional development.

Standard 1 Element 1.4 Training and assessment are delivered by trainers and assessors who:

- have the necessary training and assessment competencies determined by the National Quality Council or its successors, and

- have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered or assessed, and

- can demonstrate current industry skills directly relevant to the training/assessment being undertaken, and

- continue to develop their Vocational Education and Training (VET) knowledge and skills as well as their industry currency and trainer/assessor competence.

(DEEWR, 2010b:84)

In the AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards, implemented in 2010, there is an increased emphasis on "current industry skills directly relevant to the training/assessment being undertaken" (DEEWR, 2010b: 84). This will mean that all staff, whether from Australia or from the offshore partner would need to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required by Australian industry and meet any additional competency requirements detailed in the Training Package.

Staff delivering overseas must be appropriately qualified, and be monitored and assessed regularly. This is to ensure that there are suitable training and assessment strategies to facilitate the delivery of an Australian qualification.

Key considerations

Providers report that an underlying theme in their transnational work is undertaking capacity building with offshore training providers and regional and national training systems. One of the main focuses of this capacity building is identifying and building the key skills and knowledge of teachers and assessors needed in the delivery of Australian programs offshore. This is undertaken formally by requiring trainers to meet the AQTF staffing requirements and becoming qualified in the nominated units of competency or the TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and informally through mentoring and staff exchanges. Supervision and co-assessment arrangements can also be used to meet the AQTF requirements.

The system of trainer and assessor requirements for the delivery of Australian qualifications is not easily understood by overseas partners. There are various approaches to pedagogy and different understandings about teacher qualifications between Australia and offshore partners. Many offshore colleges have staff with higher level university qualifications, such as Masters Degrees, and do not understand why a Certificate IV in TAE40110 or equivalent is required. These offshore teachers do not readily understand competency based training, the VET system in Australia and interactive methods of teaching. Assessment practices focus on traditional examinations rather than the demonstration of skills through competency based assessments. The lack of understanding about the AQTF staffing requirements in the offshore environment has also resulted in Australian providers finding an increasing demand for Australian trainers who work offshore in VET to be qualified with Masters Degrees as well as meeting the AQTF staff requirements.

> In China, teachers are expected and do have high level qualifications. There is huge reluctance to do the Certificate IV (Public provider teacher)
>
> Nearly all of these teachers have university based qualifications at a higher level than most Australian teacher/ trainers… It has been a struggle to get Vietnamese teachers/lecturers to undertake the TAA because it involves losing face, i.e. a questioning of their teaching ability. (Private Provider Manager)

The AQTF staffing provisions are difficult to meet for many providers because having the required TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or equivalent or a supervision arrangement for offshore staff is problematic and puts another whole level of complication on delivering jointly. Another major concern with offshore staff is their lack of industry experience as some offshore teachers go from university to work in education and have little industry experience. Consequently, many teachers from the offshore institution have insufficient industry experience and they also need professional development in teaching methodologies. Furthermore, in some countries such as China, teachers are rotated from year to year, which makes it difficult to maintain standards.

Meeting vocational competence requirements is not always straightforward for teachers from the offshore institution. Not only do they lack industry experience, but even if they have it, the employment context can be so different that they do not meet the required standard in the Training Package. This issue could increase in the future as Training Packages, especially those in trade and technical areas (e.g. SIT07, CPC08, WRH06) are more explicit in specifying the type of industry experience and industry currency required to deliver the Training Package. This strengthening of the requirements is reflected in the AQTF Standards released in 2010.

Vocational competency is defined as broad industry knowledge and experience, usually combined with a relevant industry qualification. A person who has vocational competency will be familiar with the content of the vocation and will have relevant current experience in the industry. Vocational competency must be considered on an industry-by-industry basis and with reference to the guidance provided in the Assessment Guidelines of the relevant Training Package. Training Packages include advice specific to the industry related to the vocational competencies of assessors. This may include advice on relevant industry qualifications and experience required for assessing against the Training Package or for specific qualifications within the Package. The Training Package will also provide specific industry advice outlining what it sees as acceptable forms of evidence to demonstrate the maintenance of currency of vocational competency.

(DEEWR,2010b: 87)

All providers reported that Australian staff members working offshore need upfront induction and ongoing professional development to be culturally competent. Behaviours that are acceptable in Australia may not translate offshore. Teaching staff need to be informed of cultural etiquette and religious protocols.

> *…cultural understanding is important. You need to be aware of the nuances of culture to be more sensitive to issues and interpretation. There was a briefing from the onsite partner before heading off, but some things were discovered while working in-country, e.g. the social hierarchies and protocols. (International teacher)*

> *Ensure that staff members are trained in culture to ensure that there is no offence. What is OK in India is not OK in Sri Lanka, e.g. South Africa – Cape Town – staff live in a compound, which requires that they get used to the security, e.g. having escorts in the compound, etc. (International teacher)*

There can be also be misconceptions and stereotyping by Australian trainers about 'learners' offshore and a simplification of the differences in education systems (Wang, 2006).

How are providers dealing with the question of staff skills and qualifications?

Figure 9. Providers dealing with the question of staff skills
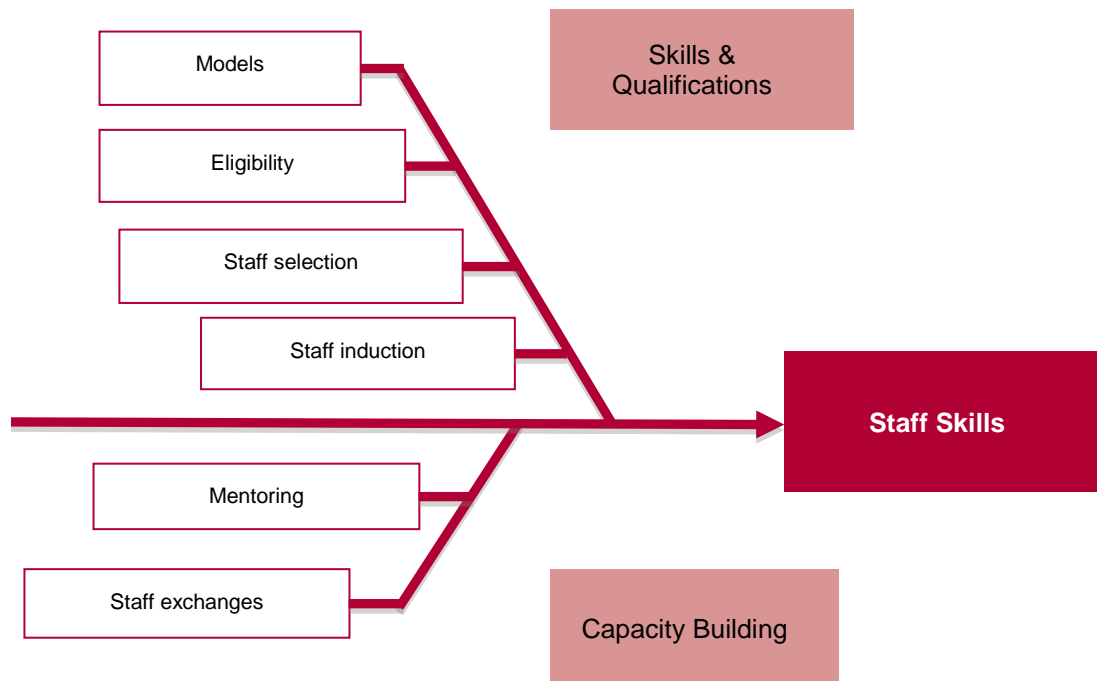
Models of staffing programs: There is a wide range of successful approaches used in recruiting and maintaining teachers in programs. Experienced providers are changing models of staffing programs over time. An important consideration is the cost which is pertinent to both the Australian and the offshore partner.

> *Initially many of the staff members were long term, experienced hospitality staff from the College in Australia. This of course is a very expensive delivery model but the funding allowed for it. Now this core of College staff is supplemented by TAA qualified hospitality trainers who are recruited in Australia and travel specifically for the offshore project. (Public provider)*

> *All of the teaching is done by Vietnamese staff employed by the partner universities. Some have now been teaching in the VET program for up to 10 years. Ongoing professional development is a costly aspect of employing Vietnamese teachers.   Australian teachers go over to introduce new units of work, to demonstrate*

> *what is required and to act as mentors due to costs this is kept to a minimum). The TAFE College tried to set up a blog to assist teachers but they did not use it so it has ceased. (Private provider)*

There is increasingly a move towards using local staff, but this is not without issues.

> *Where in-country staff members have a significant portion of delivery there are a number of issues, including staff English language level, staff understanding of the AQF, staff industrial currency, staff knowledge of AQTF assessment practices etc. All recognised the need to continuously build staff capacity and skills and they all appear to approach this in different ways. (Public provider)*

Eligibility of staff: All staff members need to be checked for their eligibility against the AQTF and specific Training Packages or accredited curriculum requirements. Refer Appendix 8.1 Staffing Evidence Chart.

Careful selection and induction of staff: Providers introduce selection methods to pick staff suitable for the overseas context. An induction process for both onshore and offshore staff is essential.

Many providers have VET-specific inductions for offshore partner staff and cover:

- Overview of the Australian VET system
- Understanding industry links with Australian VET and related competency standards
- Understanding Training Packages and unpacking units of competency
- Competency based training and assessment
- Planning processes from the Training Package to the delivery program
- Training and assessment strategies
- Locations of all Training Package materials (intranets, websites, etc.)
- Requirements for apprenticeships/traineeships (if relevant)
- Continuous improvement and evaluation
- Staff responsibilities for access and equity
- Client selection, enrolment and induction/orientation
- Occupational health and safety
- Any administrative or course-related issues not already covered by the offshore institution's induction and training process.

Mentoring of staff: Australian VET teachers often mentor their offshore counterparts by working collaboratively. This is achieved through setting up relationships, ongoing visits and email communication.

Capacity building: One large TAFE provider offers incentives to staff from the offshore institution to encourage involvement in their program,

> *Teachers come to Australia to our institution and we document in the contract that 2–4 lecturers will come for class room observation for one month. This ensures relationships develop and there is a better commitment to the program. In China, lecturers deliver for 14 hrs a week in a normal program so because they do more in a VET program they have to be given other opportunities to come over here and be encouraged for their participation in the program. Furthermore, there is a lot of movement of staff offshore so building up expertise in the whole institution is important. (Public provider)*

Staff exchanges, ongoing seminars and online support are other mechanisms used to build the capacity of both the Australian and in-country staff offshore.

Resources available for staff skills and qualifications

Appendix 8.1: – Staffing Evidence Chart
Source: adapted from Dempsey, K. *(2009) VTI Quality Assurance in Transnational Education*. Melbourne: Victorian TAFE International Inc.
www.vti.edu.au

Appendix 8.2: – Chisholm Institute (2006) *Offshore teaching and learning quality assurance guide for delivery of Australian accredited VET courses.* Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research: Melbourne Chisholm Institute. It is available at http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx

Dempsey, K. (2009) *VTI Quality Assurance in Transnational Education Melbourne*, Victorian TAFE International Inc. www.vti.edu.au

Walls, S. (2006) *Quality teaching for quality learning offshore*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: Box Hill Institute.

US-China Education Review
http://www.teacher.org.cn/edu201001.htm [accessed 9/2010]

Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning – Teaching Offshore
A higher education site from the University of Western Australia with some useful resources for teaching offshore
www.catl.uwa.edu.au/resources/teaching/teaching_offshore [accessed 9/2010]

VETinfoNeT
Western Australian site with VET professional development resources
http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/progDev/resources.aspx?menu=3&menuItem=4
[accessed 9/2010]

9. STUDENT INFORMATION, SELECTION AND OUTCOMES

What is the issue?

Presenting student information and adhering to selection policies and procedures can be problematic in the offshore environment unless agreed to at the contract development and agreement stage. The AQTF Standard 2 outlines the importance of communicating to students relevant information about course selection, content and pathways. Information on the Australian provider's policies and procedures should also be communicated. This is usually done through pre enrolment information, student handbooks and induction.

Training Packages and accredited VET qualifications outline pre-requisite requirements for entry into most VET programs. In onshore delivery, providers usually have a selection process to ensure that students meet the entry requirements. In almost all offshore delivery the partner organisations select the students and the Australian provider is not involved. Monitoring offshore adherence to student selection guidelines is more difficult, but it is nevertheless a crucial element in determining quality delivery and positive student outcomes. Providers have realised the need for clear, detailed documentation of entry requirements and the need to train offshore staff in their application.

Students' intentions are also an important consideration when designing course information, course content and delivery modes; that is, whether students are undertaking their VET qualification as a pathway to higher education or whether they are seeking an Australian VET qualification for local employment. Often this seems to emerge in a program rather than being clear at the beginning. Providers do report that training partnerships involving industry partners offshore are more explicit in their requirements and the expected outcomes.

Other students want to complete an AQF qualification for articulation to a higher qualification or for employment purposes in Australia. In these circumstances, it is important that sufficient and up-to-date information is available for the students. For articulation arrangements, available credit transfer arrangements could be communicated to students. In the case of employment, any licensing or regulatory requirements in addition to the qualification will need to be made clear in student information.

Key considerations

Consistent with onshore procedures, offshore students need to have clear information about selection processes and procedures into the course, including the potential benefits and the pathways from the course. Marketing material and course information can be provided to students offshore and be available on the Australian providers' website.

Marketing materials must provide students with a consistent message between the Australian institution and the partner provider and will therefore be approved by the Australian provider and could include:

- Requirements for acceptance into the course
- English language and other pre-requisites
- Information regarding course credit, course content and duration, qualification offered, modes of study and assessment methods, RPL, course related fees and refund policy
- Explanation of terms used (competency, assessment, plagiarism)
- Information on the offshore provider.

Information about the Australian institution can also be provided in marketing material to help students feel connected to the Australian institute.

(Dempsey, 2009:15)

Some Training Packages outline entry requirements. Entry requirements specify prior knowledge, skill, and experience, expressed in terms of competency, and may include licensing or industry recognized standards. Where entry requirements are identified, these are mandatory.

Entry requirements:

- Do not form part of a qualification for training and assessment purposes
- Must be completed prior to enrolling in a qualification
- Must be specific to the knowledge, skills or experience required to enter a qualification.

(DEEWR 2010b: 70)

In the offshore environment, the significance of entry requirements needs to be communicated to the student and the offshore provider. Entry requirements must be met by applicants for qualifications prior to enrolment. A provider is required to ensure the applicant meets the specified entry requirements prior to accepting an enrolment in the program. Entry requirements differ from defined pre-requisite and co-requisite units that are included in some Training Package qualification rules as a provider structures the training program to address pre-requisites and/or co-requisites, but this is clear before the applicant enrols. Providers need to have information that is provided to the applicants prior to enrolment that reflects the entry requirements defined in the Training Package – course leaflets, website content, student information packs, etc.

In some instances, providers have found issues in applying the same selection principles and processes in the offshore environment that they apply onshore. This is because selection is often undertaken by the partner institution.   Student selection methods are also not consistent according to providers.

Student selection processes differ. Some providers require 5.5 IELTS for all Diploma level qualifications (as for onshore O/S students). Others require intending students to complete a preparatory English program and allow students in on completion. In this case English Language levels are not formally measured. Other providers assert that they have little influence as to who is in the course as the in-country partner or Provincial authorities often selects students, and anyway, in the main there are no specified English language levels for Australian students. (Public provider consultation)

In some offshore provision, an industry or a government agency can undertake the selection.

Students were selected for the course by the government on the basis of their prior experience. The initial group was for those that were in the most senior positions. Later groups are moving more to middle management. (Public provider)

The RMIT, AEI project and the DEEWR/AEI Guide both advise on the importance of considering the language requirements and selection.

Australian institutions delivering transnational programs need to review whether established IELTS standards adequately indicate a student's ability to successfully tackle programs in English (RMIT).

The single most contentious aspect of student selection in any sector is English language proficiency, which becomes critical as students progress through AQF levels. Not all courses require the same level of English language proficiency. For some VET programs, English proficiency may not be necessary for a student to demonstrate competence. However, if a course is delivered and assessed in a language other than English, then consideration must be given (and it may be required) to stating that on the testamur

(IEAA, 2008)

Providers identified a range of reasons why offshore students undertake Australian training programs from gaining skills and qualifications to assisting with migration.

Most students are from poorer rural areas and are undertaking the Australian qualification to enhance their job prospects in Vietnam. A very small proportion use [sic] the program for migration purposes or to articulate to university programs in Australia. (Private Provider, Vietnam)

Diploma level courses are generally for articulation in business, but not to a VET course. (Public dual sector provider)

Some use the Australian qualification just to improve their English language skills. (Private Provider)

Different reasons for doing the program – some for articulation, some for status, but no intention to articulate, some seek entry to the local university. They demonstrate English language competence through undertaking the Diploma level course in English. (VET international teacher)

Student intent depends on country. In Vietnam there are good employment prospects in Singapore or Hong Kong with an Australian qualification so the labour market mobility principle is the main purpose. (Private Provider manager)

Students were studying a Diploma of Financial Services. For many completing the Diploma was their main objective, providing a qualification relevant to their career aspirations. Many do go on to RMIT business degree, either at Singapore Institute of Management or in Melbourne. (RMIT, AEI Project)

All providers agreed that an understanding of these motivations was important when delivering the program.

How are providers dealing with the question of student information, selection and outcomes?

Figure 10. Providers dealing with student information, selection & outcomes
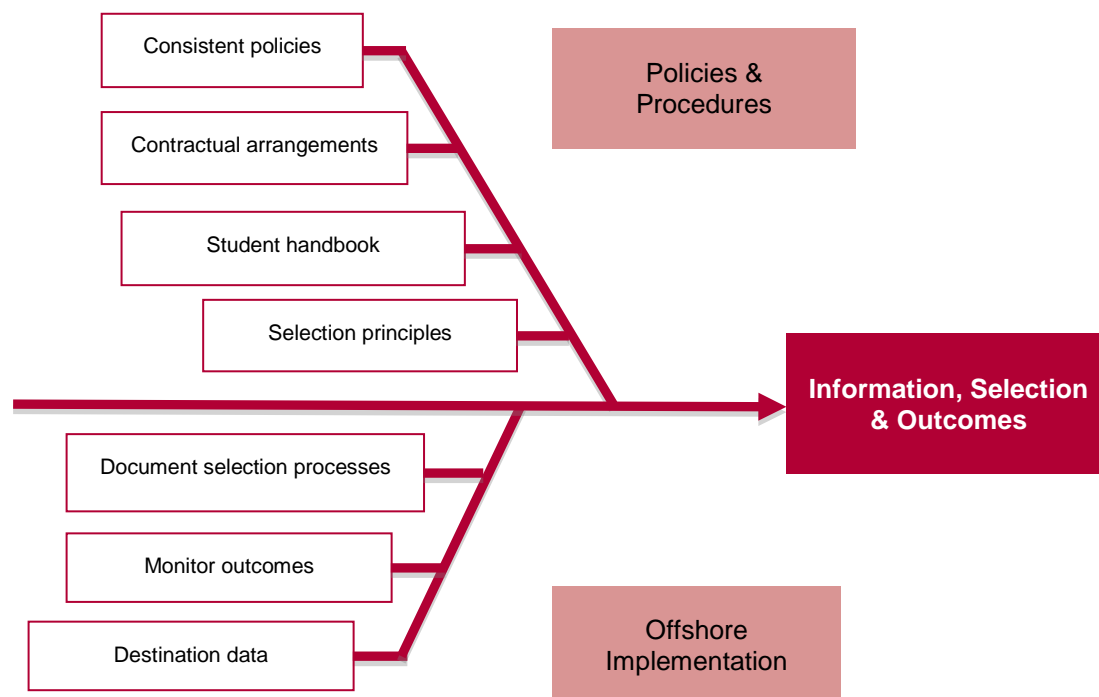
Consistent policies: Providers are applying consistent policies in relation to student information, selection and the gathering of destination data as they apply onshore. The context is different but the same principles are applied.

Contractual arrangements: Addendums to offshore contracts outline the responsibilities in the provision of information and the monitoring of selection and student outcomes.

Information: Information and selection requirements are usually outlined in student handbooks.

Selection: Providers are devising the same selection principles in the offshore environment as they apply onshore. Some providers are stipulating these requirements at the contract stage. These principles include:

- Ensuring a prospective student has a reasonable chance of success when they enrol in a program

- Ensuring prospective students have access to documentation of eligibility criteria and application and selection processes for all programs of study for which they wish to apply

- Only prospective students who meet the entry requirements for the course will be considered eligible to enrol in that course

- Appropriately qualified and experienced staff will assess each applicant to ensure their suitability for the course

- Partner institutions offshore will have selection criteria and processes that are consistent with onshore selection criteria and processes.

Training and assessment strategies: The Training and assessment strategy developed for each offshore qualification will also document the specific requirements for entry into each course.

Clear processes: Chisholm Institute of TAFE has identified a process to follow for student application and selection:

- Information about courses (handbooks and brochures) providing course information including start dates, class location, tentative timetables and other relevant information
- Application and selection policy
- Application form
- Selection criteria
- Process for informing students of acceptance/rejection
- Appeal process for unsuccessful students
- Process for awarding students a place if and when one becomes available
- Records of student information relating to application and selection
- Interviews

(Chisholm 2006)

Monitor outcomes: Information given to students is monitored and reviewed in relation to each program. Selection processes are also reviewed and inform subsequent programs.

Destination data: The outcomes achieved by students participating in offshore programs are noted by some providers. Those students that articulate to onshore programs are recorded, but increasingly local employment outcomes are also student destination data that is noted.

Resources for student information

Appendix 9.1: – Course Information Checklist

Appendix 9.2: – Student Handbook Checklist.

Source: Chisholm Institute (2006) *Offshore teaching and learning quality assurance guide for delivery of Australian accredited VET course*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx

10. ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY

English language proficiency is the key reason offshore students are identified as being at risk.
(Woodley 2007: 2)

What is the issue?

English language skills of students and offshore teachers present a range of issues that are addressed in different ways by providers. Some providers negotiate to have instruction in English and the relevant offshore language, which results in that language being recorded on the qualification testamur. This contrasts with providers also reporting that students enrol in an Australian qualification in order to improve their English skills, so having instruction in English is important.

It may be a challenge for the Australian provider to actually monitor the language used for delivery as some providers report teachers and students can revert to the local language when the Australian teachers are not present. Offshore teachers from partner organizations want to improve their English skills.

The aspirations from the offshore learners and teachers to be competent in the English language also has implications for the Australian teachers, especially those delivering a stand-alone vocational qualification who may not have the capabilities or awareness to work with English as a Second Language learners.

Providers have English language requirements for VET programs, but like other selection criteria in the offshore environment, these requirements are often difficult to apply. Some providers manage their English language testing processes whereas others are presented with test results undertaken by the partner institution.

Experienced providers pointed out that English language proficiency needs to be addressed for offshore students, either through an upfront language program or a language program conducted concurrently with the vocational program. If offshore students articulate to onshore programs and have poor levels of English, this can result in a lack of acceptance of offshore provision by onshore Australian VET and higher education providers.

Key considerations

Providers recognise that English language competence is important for success in an Australian VET program. An RMIT AEI project found that: 'English language ability is critical to satisfactory student academic performance. Front-end intensive English, or concurrent English with a higher weighting at the earlier part of the course of study was recommended, as was specific assistance describing the "new words" students will encounter in their studies.' (Bateman 2007:30).

The English language issue for offshore students is complicated. Providers suggest that testing regimes are not always useful as it has been found that success on an IELTs test does not necessarily translate to English competence in the vocational course delivery. The RMIT AEI Project found that,

> *The ability of students to understand lessons taught in English is critical to success. Some students achieving the required IELTS score of 5.5 prior to commencement of their diploma program attest that they cannot always fully understand what is being taught, even though they are studying higher level English concurrently.*

Many providers are concerned about the reliability and suitability of IELTS tests

> *…IELTS scores are meaningless in context of TNE therefore we have developed our own test. …you can't rely on the integrity of offshore testing. We need more rigor in determining language levels if we are serious about offshore delivery. (Public provider)*

> *Students slip back in their level of IELTS in the year of their diploma. (Language teacher)*

Some providers mentioned their concern about long term implications of poor acquisition of English offshore.

> *English language is a challenge and ELICOS programs are important. It can be an issue when students come to onshore programs and their levels of English are poor. (International TAFE Manager)*

How are providers dealing with the question of English language?

Figure 11. Providers dealing with English language competence
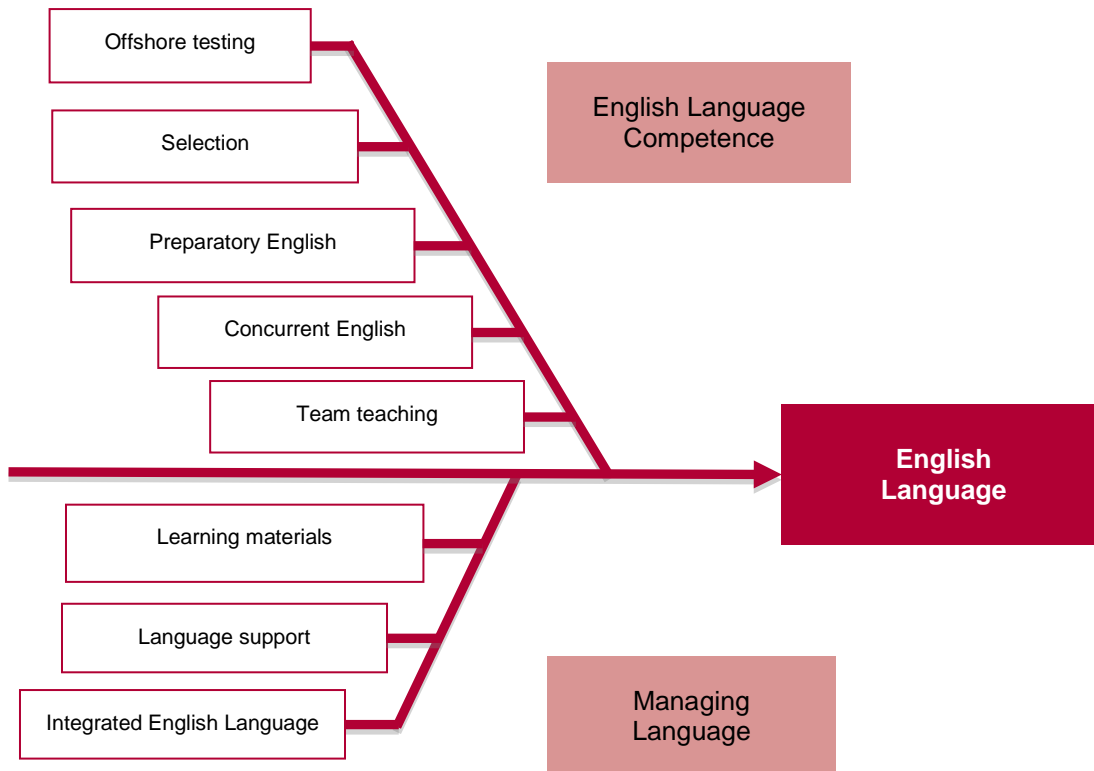
Testing: Some providers felt that it was important to develop and apply their own English testing regime in relation to the vocational qualification being applied for offshore as they could not rely on offshore administered tests.

Range of approaches: Providers are addressing the English language issue through the following mechanisms

- Selection procedures into VET programs to be based on a higher English language level than mandated for the program
- Upfront compulsory and preparatory English language classes prior to the commencement of the VET program
- English language workshops on relevant vocational topics and terminology provided concurrently to the VET program
- Bi-lingual programs and bi-lingual materials in restricted programs and where appropriate
- Testing offshore by the Australian language teachers.

One provider had a strict policy of not providing bi-lingual education to ensure equivalence. For this provider it was considered important to have the delivery and assessment in English. This provider also believed that the community would expect this of a graduate of an Australian qualification.

Chisholm Institute in China worked in partnership: 'with English language departments of each participating institute to develop the English language levels of prospective students to meet the prescribed entrance requirements for Australian accredited VET courses. This is a 1-year program.'
(Burchell et al 2006:6).

Learning materials: The Southbank Institute of Technology AEI Project found that learning materials need to be written in plain English and at a level appropriate to the students (Collings 2006:20).

Language support: English language assistance is provided throughout the program by various mechanisms, such as concurrent vocational and language classes being delivered or an English language teacher and a local trainer working together to deliver the program.

Resources

Appendix 10.1: – Australian Universities Quality Agency (2009) *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities*
http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Documents/Final_Report-Good_Practice_Principles.pdf [accessed 10/2010]

Appendix 10.2: – Teaching strategies from Wenjie & Woodley, C., (2008) *Closing the gap between teaching and learning styles – an internationalised pedagogy for offshore VET*
www.voced.edu.au/docs/confs/ncver/vetconf17/tr17wenjie.doc [accessed 9/2010]

Jones, P., Pickford, S., Jones. C., Leggat, M., Isbester, R., & Smith, L. (2006) *Vocational Language Support for Students*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Sydney :TAFE NSW, Western Institute. A kit consisting of a pre assessment package and an orientation package (skills and strategies kit) for teachers delivering offshore. This is a generic kit that can be applied to different vocational areas. It is available at:
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx (accessed 10/2010)

Southbank Institute (2006) *QA for offshore delivery of Australian VET programs: RTO manual*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Brisbane: Southbank Institute.   It is available at:
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx (accessed 10/2010)

IELTS: International English Language Testing System
IELTS the world's leading test of English for higher education, immigration and employment.
www.ielts.org (accessed 10/2010)

The Internet TESL journal (Monthly) 1995
This free online journal is published in Japan and contains articles with practical teaching tips, lesson plans, web links for students and teachers, reports of projects and class handouts.
http://iteslj.org (accessed 10/2010)

11. CONTEXTUALISATION OF VET PROGRAMS

What is the issue?

The application of Training Packages in the offshore environment has been canvassed many times (Moran & Ryan, 2003; Schofield and McDonald, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Woodley, 2008). However, providers express divergent views on their suitability and their use of Training Packages in this offshore environment. Some providers are adamant that Australian qualifications need to be more flexible in order to be responsive to the international market, whereas other providers report that Training Package qualifications could be easily contextualised by consulting with local industry.

It was generally accepted that VET programs delivered onshore do not transfer exactly to the offshore environment. Some providers report that balancing the integrity of the Australian qualification, the Training Package requirements, the English language levels, the available infrastructure and the social and cultural context can indeed be challenging. For providers, achieving the balance between in-country relevance, Training Package consistency and AQTF compliance is often difficult. Furthermore, usually programs for offshore delivery are negotiated with a client – either an educational institution or an industry. This results in specific requirements in the training to be delivered.

Many providers believe they do not have the flexibility to devise a course for offshore by delivering units to meet the learning needs of students including English language and cultural requirements with available resources. They state that the current rules are too restrictive as the core units and content are often targeted to an Australian specific context, particularly in terms of Australian legislation, regulations and values such as equal opportunity and occupational health and safety, which are not applicable in offshore contexts (Foster et al 2010).

All providers agree that Training Packages and accredited curriculum require contextualisation to address offshore industry contexts. Contextualisation means tailoring units of competency, or packaging certain units into a qualification to suit specific needs.

Current advice on contextualisation is provided in the Training Package development handbook, which includes advice to Training Package developers and providers. The mandatory statements regarding contextualisation of qualifications and units of competency are described below with further details in Appendix 11.

Contextualisation of units of competency by RTOs

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) may contextualise units of competency in this endorsed Training Package to reflect required local outcomes. Contextualisation could involve additions or amendments to the unit of competency to suit particular delivery methods, learner profiles, specific enterprise equipment requirements, or to otherwise meet local needs. However, the integrity of the overall intended outcome of the unit of competency must be maintained.

Mandatory text

Any contextualisation of units of competency in this Training Package must be within the bounds of the following advice:

- RTOs must not remove or add to the number and content of elements and performance criteria.
- RTOs can include specific industry terminology in the range statement.
- Any amendments and additions to the range statement made by RTOs must not diminish the breadth of application of the competency, or reduce its portability.
- RTOs may add detail to the evidence guide in areas such as the critical aspects of evidence or required resources and infrastructure – but only where these expand the breadth of the competency and do not limit its use. (DEEWR 2010c: 477)

The purpose of the mandatory text is to ensure contextualisation does not deviate from the core knowledge and skill requirements that are intrinsic to achieving an Australian Qualifications Framework credential.   However, providers express their concerns about a lack of sufficient guidance on this issue.

Some providers claim that contextualisation is not always sufficient to make all aspects of Training Packages relevant and meaningful in the offshore context. The degree of contextualisation of competencies is critical to the integrity of the Australian qualification, but without contextualisation it may not meet offshore client needs. Providers operating offshore can face a conflict in meeting client needs on the one hand, and satisfying the intent of the qualifications in the Training Packages on which their offshore programs are based, on the other.

The TAFEWA AEI report identified the uncertainty that RTOs feel about the lack of guidance on contextualisation and about how far they can contextualise without being non compliant with the AQTF (Harris, et al 2006:4).

Key considerations

Contextualisation is achieved by including, modifying or substituting text within units of competency and usually within the range statement or evidence guide.   It is about providing training and assessment that is specific to an enterprise or individual learner. Any modifications to a unit of competency must maintain the integrity of the industry skill and portability requirements, including all legislative licensing and any other regulatory requirements.

In planning the delivery of VET qualifications, care should be taken to ensure that the units and elements of competency are relevant to the context. Some competencies in Australian courses have very specific legal, cultural and industrial knowledge components with little relevance to offshore students. Training Packages rely on real and simulated work environments and providing these in offshore locations may be limited.

How are providers dealing with the question of contextualisation?

Figure 12. Providers dealing with contextualisation
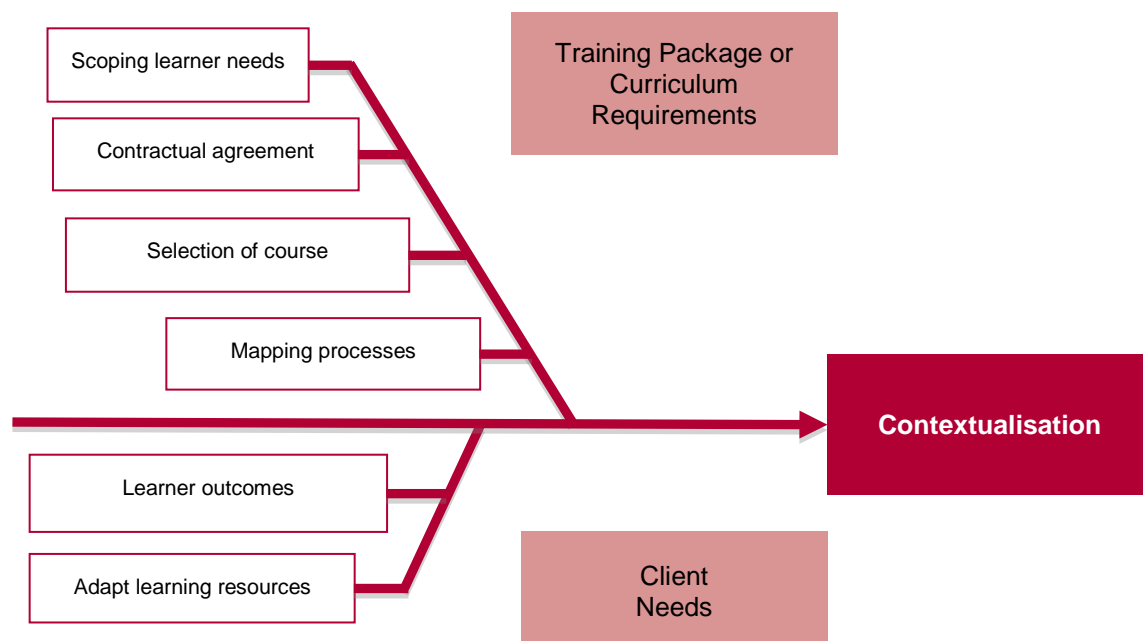
Scoping learner needs: Providers in the initial discussion stages of setting up a program identify the learning needs of the students and the client. For example, some providers work with local industries to identify training requirements that fit with the available employment in the local area. Other providers actually train in conjunction with regional industries. Information gathered in the set up phase is useful to contextualise the program to these local needs.

Contextualise to local conditions: Many providers are confident in contextualising to local conditions. Providers reported on delivering Australian qualifications and having access to local industry or simulated industry environments.

Accrediting special courses: Some providers have designed their own courses and gained accreditation for these to deliver in the offshore context. One provider undertook a needs analysis of the skills required in industry enterprises in the offshore country and used that as the basis to develop a curriculum.

Careful selection of courses: Some Training Packages are less problematic to adapt to the offshore environment in other countries.

> *The Diplomas in Business and IT are 'pretty universal' and require little contextualisation. The Diploma: In banking is relatively new and some changes are being introduced to take into account the banking standards in other countries. Overall, the Diplomas being delivered in Vietnam are virtually the same content as those being delivered in Adelaide. (Provider, South Australia)*

Dual qualifications and mapping processes: One provider does an extensive mapping of the Australian qualification to the local qualification in the service industries. This process assists contextualisation but also clearly identifies the additional training and assessment that is necessary to cover to complete both qualifications. A dual credential is then awarded to students to suit both the local and the international employment market.

Contextualise resources: Providers contextualise resources so that they are more accessible for the students.

The resources were contextualized to the cultural and organizational contexts of the participants in the program and the operational processes required by the Samoan Government.
The process of contextualisation involved:

- An initial two weeks to collect information on what was required in the timeframe for the program; local procedures and processes; local cultural considerations; potential case studies; and scenarios to be applied in the course.

- Information was collected through a series of workshops and interviews with key stakeholders, including the other trainers who had experience in training in Samoa and Ministry officials.

- They then worked with course material writers to prepare the material which was circulated to the reference group and Samoan steering committee for sign-off prior to delivery.

- The materials were reviewed on a daily basis with participants and, in subsequent programs, with local staff that had previously completed the program in the first group and who provided training and mentoring services to latter groups.

- The final product was in both hard and soft copy. It included templates and processes for use in sessions.

The development process was highly interactive and resulted in products that were seen to be relevant to the participants and the project clients.   (Victorian Provider)

Resources for contextualisation

Appendix 11.1: – Relevant information on contextualisation from Department of Education, *Employment and Workplace Relations (2010c) Training Package Development Handbook*, Canberra, DEEWR. (http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Overview/Policy/TPDH/Pages/main.aspx) (accessed 9/2010)

NMIT (2005) *Contextualising Teaching and Learning: a guide for VET teachers.*
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources (accessed 9/2010)

Training Package Developers Handbook
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Overview/Policy/TPDH/Pages/main.aspx

Training Packages @ Work
http://www.tpatwork.com/

VETinfonet
Western Australian site with VET resources.
http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/home/

12. PROVIDE LEARNING RESOURCES

Provision of high quality learning and assessment resources is a critical component of quality assurance. (AEI Project TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute)

What is the issue?

Providers would usually provide the offshore partner with learning resources as this is another mechanism to ensure consistency with Australian qualifications delivered onshore. These resources are used by offshore teachers and provide guidance about the content of the delivery of the VET Training Packages. Learning resources for the programs delivered should be identified in the planning stage and be documented on the training and assessment strategy.

Providers report that the offshore environment and infrastructure dictates to a certain extent the approach to resources:

> *The availability and capacity of offshore infrastructure to supply, for example, electricity,*
>
> *communications, technology and textbooks, have a major influence on the resources and facilities that may be available in the offshore location. Access to computers, the internet, discipline specific facilities such as laboratories, and other learning resources are essential to students studying offshore. (Pannan et al 2006:4)*

Providers reported that there were various approaches to contextualising resources used offshore. Some providers felt that it was important to use exactly the same resources as onshore, whereas others went into a detailed research, planning and adaptation phase before their learning resources were considered suitable to use. Many providers felt that learning resources had to be part of a package with mentoring by Australian staff as well as other forms of professional development and capacity building. The scope of offshore learning resources was often understood to include resources for teachers, such as delivery and assessment guides.

The provision of resources is not always straightforward. The Australian City College AEI Project found that even adapting a curriculum for delivery offshore in China was not a simple matter because of a range of factors. It was a time consuming process; there were language and cross cultural factors; there was no curriculum or texts in English; there was no Chinese curriculum expert available so that mapping and an understanding of the curriculum was difficult (The Australian City College 2006:5). Other providers mentioned concerns with the time and financial commitment involved in developing specific resources for the offshore environment and believed it was essential to factor this in during the contract phase.

Some providers see the provision of resources as a revenue and business opportunity through the sale of learning resources, software packages and fee for service resource related activities (TAFE SA2006:16).

Key considerations

Providers said that they developed resources for offshore teachers to use as this assisted consistency in delivery. Of particular importance was the development of consistent assessment resources and assessor guides. Some providers in the trade and technical areas reported that they used exactly the same learner booklets and assessment exercises as they used onshore. These booklets contained diagrams, pictures and such visual aids that assisted understanding in the offshore classroom.

Providers experienced in offshore delivery had a range of approaches in providing resources, but all followed the general principle of consistently supporting the Australian qualification outcomes.   Woodley argues that the notions of equivalence and comparability need to be clearly understood in relation to VET programs and resources and that: 'it is more realistic to expect that programs, while equivalent in terms of learning outcomes, program purpose, evaluation tools, teacher qualifications, facilities and resources, also

be relevant and appropriate to the student cohort and the culture in which they are delivered' (Woodley 2008:3).

The AEI Victoria University project argued for the need for contextualisation of resources and that it can indeed be an AQTF audit issue:

> *Learning and assessment strategies were not developed with a particular focus on international delivery. They were in fact the same as onshore. This was not considered to be appropriate as it did not take into account different cultural references, language needs or different learning styles.*
> *(Victoria University 2006:32)*

Victoria University had responded to this by developing a Teacher Guide and Quality Resources for both onshore and offshore teaching staff. This Guide identified a range of features in developing and devising resources:

- Include local content in the program through examples and case studies

- Adapt learning activities to suit the needs of offshore students

- Use different modes of delivery to assist student learning.

                    (from Leask et al 2005 cited in Victoria University AEI project, VU 2006: 45)

Access to technology makes the storage and exchange of resources simpler and providers were using this approach more and more. Many reported ongoing use of email to discuss the use of resources. In some cases partners offshore had the technological infrastructure, but not the training materials:

> *It was noted that our partner colleges tend to have access to sophisticated technology in the classroom and need teaching resources that make use of that technology, such as PowerPoint presentations and video. (TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute)*

The management of resources is also considered important enough to set up a system for document control and management of course changes. For Northern Sydney Institute this was achieved through the use of SharePoint (NSI web based platform for document sharing and communication). However it was not always accessed consistently by overseas partners. Key documents were also provided on compact disk.

How are Providers dealing with the question of learning resources?

Figure 13. Providers dealing with learning resources
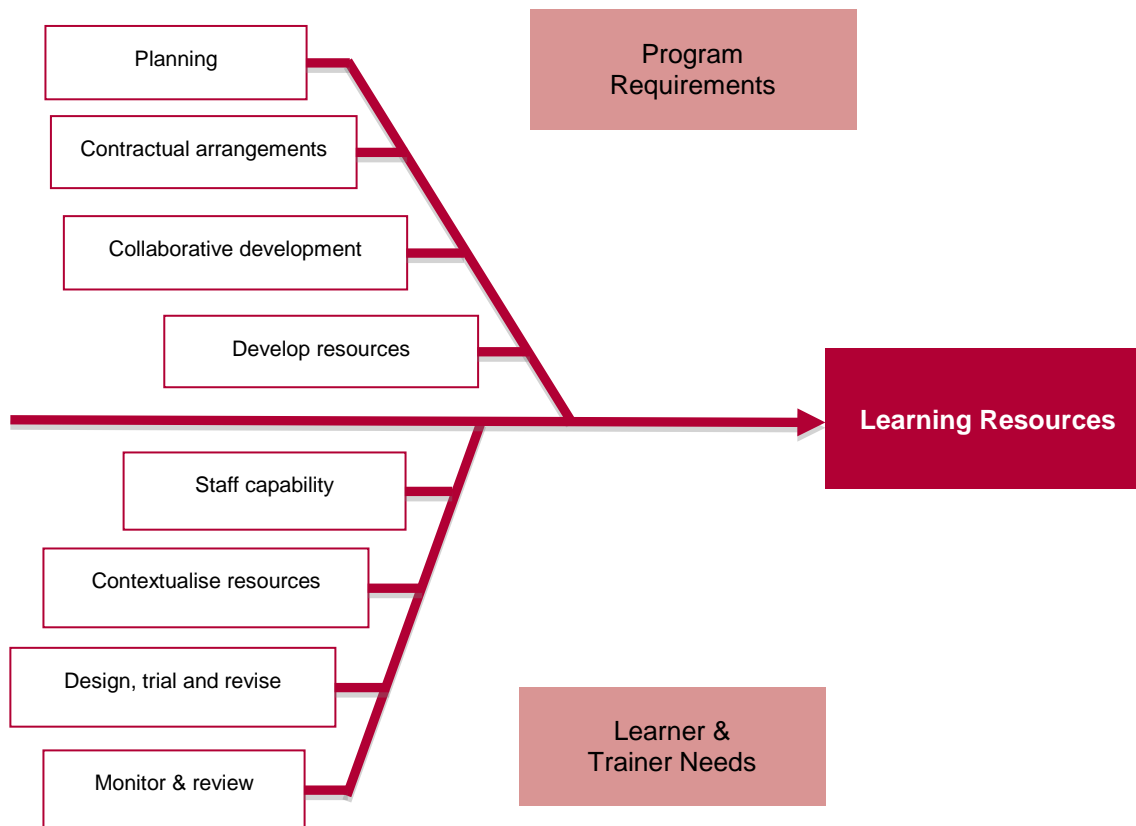
Identify and plan resources in the contract stage: Appendix 12 has a checklist to identify and plan resources. It is adapted from Shaw, L. & Macindoe, J. (2006) *Improving the quality assurance of a VET program delivered in China* – submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Sydney, TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute.

Collaboration in resource development: Providers suggested that the best approach for resource development was offshore-provider collaboration in developing contextualised, international learning materials. This needs to be stated and agreed to upfront in the negotiation stage.

Staff capability: Offshore staff members from the partner provider need support and guidance in using and adapting learning resources for AQF qualifications.

Designed, trialled and revised: One provider had Australian government funding in their program to develop resources, contextualise them and further review them after trialling them with the first group of trainees. This meant that they were well adapted to the needs of the group.

Use of technology: The Moodle communication system is used by several providers to exchange resources. Sharepoint is used for document control. Email is used for communication. Some providers have specific sites for offshore staff and students, but this is mostly in the higher education sector.

See also:

Victoria University – http://w2.vu.edu.au/library/evaluate.htm [accessed 9/2010]

UniSA – www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/staff/practice/transnational/unisa.asp [accessed 9/2010]

University of Western Australia
www.catl.uwa.edu.au/resources/teaching/teaching_offshore [accessed 9/2010]

Flinders University
 http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/support/resources.cfm [accessed 9/2010]

Developed resources: Many providers have to develop the resources for the program as part of the contract. Other providers had prepared and developed learning resources on a fee for service basis. In one example discussed in consultations, the Australian teachers incorporated local symbols.

> *They provided the learning resources for the client. This was part of the tender requirement. Intellectual property resides with the client, but the Australian provider has permission to use them. These were provided in both hard (set of folders) and soft copy. They used local symbols as the face sheets and in the pictographs that provided cues within the materials. This helped to provide cultural relevance for participants. (Public provider)*

> *The materials included resource guides and educator materials as they co-facilitated with trainers onsite that they had trained in the initial program. (Private provider)*

One provider felt that it was also important not to provide too many resources.

> *There needs to be a balance between overwhelming them with notes and manuals and giving them too little. (Public provider)*

Contextualising resources: An AEI Project undertaken by Australia City College adapted off-the-shelf resources to use in China to produce a model of low cost resources. This project produced a range of instruments to research and devise the most appropriate resources. It is important to survey both the students and the teachers to identify the learning needs of the cohort to be reflected in the learning resources (Shaw & Macindoe 2006).

Resources for learning resources

Appendix 12.1: – Resource checklist
Source: adapted from Shaw, L. & Macindoe, J. (2006) *Improving The quality assurance of a VET program delivered in China*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Sydney: TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

Wilson, G. & Firth, E. (2006) *Customising an off the shelf VET package for delivery in China*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Australian City College. http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

National Training Information Service
Information on courses, qualifications, Training Packages and competency standards and links to some support materials. http://www.ntis.gov.au/ [accessed 9/2010]

Resource Generator
Training Package support materials that can be downloaded, packaged and customised. A web based library of training resources that can be downloaded free of charge.
http://www.resourcegenerator.gov.au [accessed 9/2010]

AESharenet
AEShareNet assists the sector 'discover' resources, take out a copyright licence online and then connect to the owner to arrange purchase. www.aesharenet.com.au [accessed 9/2010]

Training Support Site – Victorian site with resources
Provides a range of curricula and Training Package resources.
http://trainingsupport.skills.vic.gov.au [accessed 9/2010]

Vetinfonet Western Australian site with VET resources
http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/home/ [accessed 9/2010]

TVET Australia
The TVET website is a gateway to Training Products Australia and the National Quality Council.
http://www.tvetaustralia.com.au/products [accessed 1/2011]

Educational Network Australia – EdNa VET
Extensive database of materials and valuable links to other sites. A very good source of materials that complement and supplement national materials. www.edna.edu.au [accessed 9/2010]

Australian Flexible Learning Framework
Contains materials on issues relating to flexible e-learning initiatives. Also full text of reports that contain information about access to flexible learning resources. www.flexiblelearning.net.au [accessed 9/2010]

Multimedia flexible learning resources.
www.flexiblelearning.net.au/toolbox [accessed 10/2010]

Contextualising Teaching and Learning: a guide for VET teachers
Author: Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, Research and Development Department, 77–91 St Georges Road, Preston. Publication Date: 7/10/2005
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources [accessed 9/2010]

Recognition of prior learning resources – Department of Education and Training Queensland.
www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/training-organisations/rpl-resources.html [accessed 9/2010]

Charles Darwin University site on Training Packages
http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/t4l/teachinglearning/planning.html [accessed 9/2010]
Industry Skills Councils A range of resources for Training Packages.
www.isc.org.au   [accessed 9/2010]

Transnational teaching resources for UniSA staff
www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/staff/practice/transnational/unisa.asp [accessed 9/2010]
Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning – Teaching Offshore

University of Western Australia teaching and Learning Resources – not all accessible to the public.
www.catl.uwa.edu.au/resources/teaching/teaching_offshore [accessed 9/2010]

Support for offshore teachers – Flinders University
http://flinders.edu.au/teaching/support/offshore-teachers/ [accessed 9/2010]

13. DETERMINE PROVISION OF STUDENT INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Student experience is a key indicator of the quality of educational provision. In its simplest form, quality in education is that which satisfies the student. (Ellis, quoted in Pyvis & Chapman1993:1)

What is the issue?

Clear marketing and information material needs to be supplied to students in offshore programs. This information, along with student support, is considered essential by providers to provide a quality educational experience and is a key consideration in the AQTF Essential Conditions and Standards.

Levels and understandings of student support in VET offshore are determined by the type of program, location and delivery model negotiated between the Australian Provider and the offshore client. Models of student support can cover the entire range of possibilities from the establishment of a discrete student support facility (e.g. usually on an Australian offshore campus) to a reliance on the partner to provide all the student support.

Provision of student support can be managed by the local provider. However, there are different cultural interpretations of support and local employees do not always have the same idea of 'welfare' as the Australian provider. Consequently, the Australian provider has to provide ongoing professional development for these staff to ensure that appropriate student support is in place.

The whole understanding of student support is different in many offshore destinations than in Australia:

> *Student support is very important but in general providers are not able to offer the same level of support as that offered in Australia. There are often cultural issues around such things as making a complaint, giving honest feedback, seeking language and study skills approach, seeking personal counselling, accessing online help, etc. (Melbourne Public Provider)*

> *Saving face is an issue in seeking help (Queensland Private Provider)*

> *Student support is not the same as here. It is a shared responsibility – day-to-day and regarding student achievement. (Public Provider)*

Evaluation of the student experience in the offshore environment is an important part of monitoring student support and to continuously improving student services. Satisfaction surveys of offshore students and staff are undertaken as part of a provider's continuous improvement strategies.

Key considerations

Offshore providers suggest that the first issue relevant to student support was to induct offshore students into the new course and at the same time the context of the Australian provider. This phase is important to ensure students clearly understand educational requirements and expectations, but also to provide them with suitable information on the Australian Provider. Appendix 13 contains some examples of student induction checklists and a student handbook checklist.

Offshore partners and students have an expectation that teachers have a greater role in providing support which results in a merging of the teaching role and the support role.

> *Australian VET teachers need a range of skills to both be effective offshore and to prepare students for future study onshore. Chinese teachers teaching into Australian VET programs also need to have teaching strategies suitable to both the students and the program. (Wenjie & Woodley 2008:1)*

Students want to have a better understanding through pre-enrolment marketing materials of how subjects will be taught and the respective roles of both institutions (RMIT, AEI Project).

Providers identify the provision of information and support as important factors in student satisfaction. However, it is also important to consider English language competence and cultural notions about student support to satisfactorily address this issue.

How are providers dealing with the question of student support?

Figure 14. Providers dealing with student support
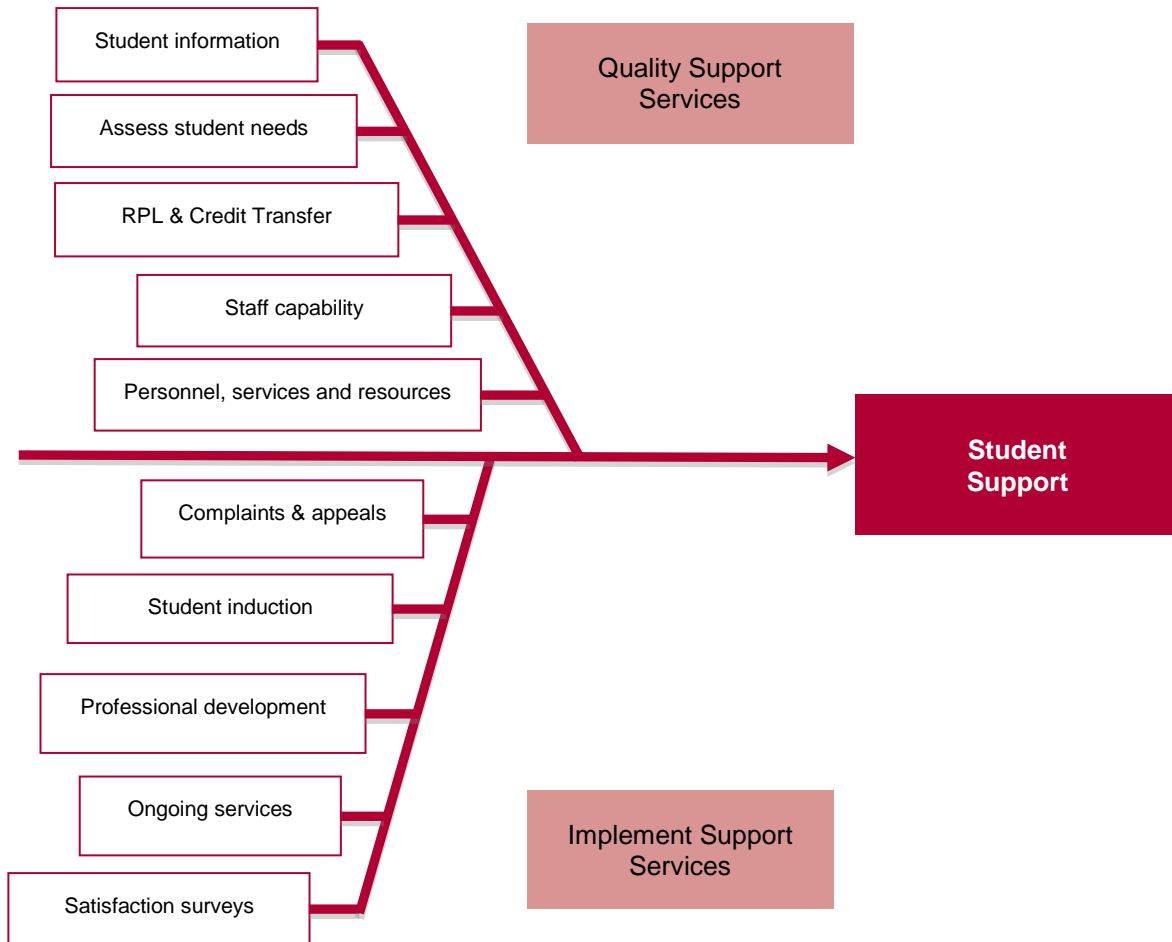
Student information: Marketing information which describes the learning processes clearly and which is provided in the local language to aid parents' understanding of the program was recommended by the AEI RMIT University project. This project also recommended that pathways information provided especially clear advice that successful completion of the course does not guarantee a visa.

The VTI Guide suggests the following to be covered in initial information:

- Selection, enrolment and induction
- Course information, including content and vocational outcomes
- Assessment information
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- Fees and charges and refunds
- Provision of language, literacy and numeracy support
- Student support
- Flexible learning, if applicable
- Welfare and guidance services
- Appeals, complaints and grievance procedures
- Disciplinary procedures
- Staff responsibility for access and equity, taking account of the requirements of the jurisdiction in which the course is offered.

(Dempsey 2009:16)

Course information: Any Australian onshore licensing or regulatory requirements associated with the qualifications to be delivered need to be clearly stipulated to the offshore partner and communicated through the student information.

Online contact: Student induction and student handbook are put online. Web based assistance is important:

> Technology – broadband is more available than here in many countries. – provide web based assistance. (Queensland Private Provider)

> Group email is used for support – someone must respond – improves communication, but at the cost of time (Public Provider, Melbourne)

> Student Support Provision on overseas campuses

> There is a welfare officer based in each of the three campuses. These officers are locals who are employed to provide language, literacy and study skills support as well as looking after personal welfare issues

Professional development: All offshore teachers need to be briefed on supporting and communicating information to students about their learning options.

Satisfaction surveys: Increasingly providers are surveying their offshore students to gain feedback on satisfaction levels and to use this information for continuous improvement in offshore provision. Providers should consider the particular cultural context when deciding on the form of data collection. For example, surveys are not well responded to in some cultures.

Resources

Appendix 13.1 to 13.4: – Checklists for the provision of student support and information.

Dempsey, K. (2009) *Quality assurance in transnational vocational education programs: A policy and procedure document* developed by all members of the Victorian TAFE International Inc. Melbourne VTI www.vti.edu.au [accessed 9/2010]

Russell, G. Bishop, R. and Strahan, K. (2006) *Measuring, assessing and enhancing the student experience in offshore programs*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: RMIT University.
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

This project examined the value of the learning experience for students studying offshore. Issues examined include program marketing and expectations created, admission criteria, suitability of curriculum, skills and the qualifications of teaching staff, barriers to learning, assessment and moderation methods, support services and graduate outcomes. The project has produced a range of useful evaluation instruments and processes, as well as a research report.

Products available include:

- Research methodology
- Proposal to the RMIT University Ethics Committee
- Survey instruments
- Focus group questions for students
- Focus group questions for staff (teachers and managers)
- Transcripts of focus groups
- Notes of interviews with staff
- Final and supplementary report.

14. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

What is the issue?

It is of the utmost importance for the success of offshore programs that the coordination and educational leadership provided to onshore teachers/trainers by way of course coordination, peer meetings and professional development should also be made available to offshore teachers/trainers from both the Australian and the offshore providers. Strong program management is important to ensure good relationships as well as a solid educational outcome. Australian providers are increasingly integrating the coordination and leadership of onshore and offshore delivery. This means that the Heads of Departments and Program Coordinators have responsibility for educational quality, regardless of location. Their offshore delivery becomes another mode of provision with the educational responsibility being the expert Head of Department onshore. Smaller private providers are ensuring that there is a consistency with management, both on- and offshore.

Providers have realised that the quality of offshore delivery can be compromised if inexperienced teachers are left to work in isolation. The relationships in the offshore environment need to be handled sensitively and this requires a strong management presence.

Key considerations

Managing transnational teaching teams involves:

- Clarity of program ownership
- Appropriate program monitoring, reporting and feedback
- Adequate numbers of teaching and administrative staff systems in place to inform the ongoing Professional Development program
- Timely distribution of course materials, with comprehensive communication about the delivery and adaptation of the materials to their local context
- Timely organisation, planning and resourcing of recruitment, staff induction and professional development
- A collegial approach through the delivery of induction, preferably face-to-face
- Processes and timeframes for assessment, moderation and evaluation that are understood and adhered to
- Support networks for associate institute staff.

Management strategies/techniques include:

- Academic support in the form of appropriate induction and professional development, such as in areas of teaching practice
- Provider counterpart staff members need to be actively encouraged and supported to undertake this access by offshore staff to a career structure and opportunities to develop professionally
- Appropriate recognition and time allowance for offshore staff to fulfil their roles in developing appropriately contextualised course material for their offshore location
- A range of different forms of meetings, using appropriate communications media to ensure effective, timely and regular offshore–provider communication.

(IEAA 2007:81)

It is important that clear management responsibilities are established and recognised for all offshore projects, otherwise it can be confusing. As one manager said:

> *'There wasn't one person from woe to go who knew all about the project…this did my head …emails were coming from all over the place' (International Manager).*

An important part of this management responsibility is to ensure staff living arrangements are appropriate, to prepare staff adequately, to establish a system of ongoing support and to be prepared for emergencies, such as health problems experienced by staff or unforeseen situations arising offshore.

How are providers dealing with the question of educational leadership, coordination and support?

Figure 15. Providers dealing with educational leadership & support
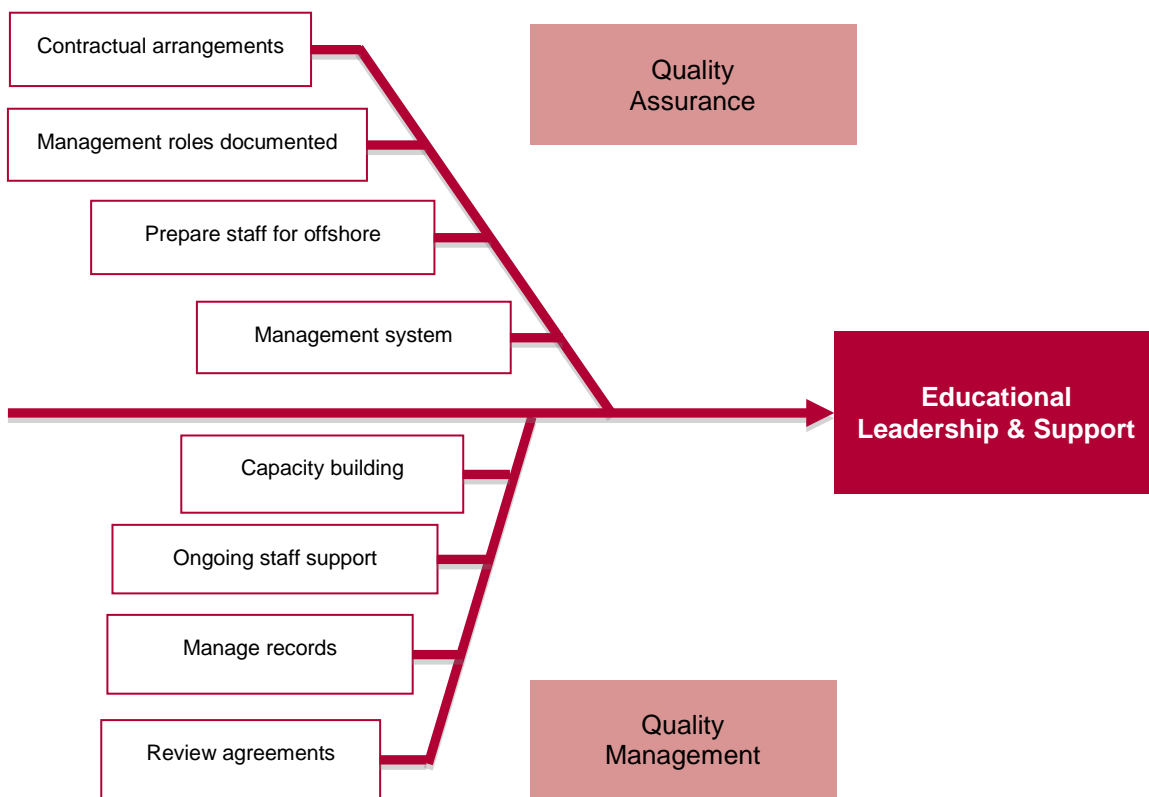
Management of staff: Management responsibilities include ensuring staff conditions for teaching offshore are clearly stated in the contractual arrangements and that the various management roles are documented.

Staff exchanges: Offshore staff members participate in staff exchanges at the Australian provider and participate in meetings as well as observe the operations of the provider.

Involving managers in teaching offshore: Management involvement in offshore teaching is an effective way to streamline processes and understandings.

> *The lead manager in the Department was a participant in the program. This ensured that there was leadership and close relationship to the government project management processes as all projects were managed through*

his Department. It was a highly interactive program and very relevant to the client needs.   It ensured that the program fitted the principles of project management to their needs, what they actually did as well as models of best practice. (Public Provider)

Integrate offshore into provider management structure: There are different models of management to assure educational leadership, consistency and quality of delivery. One provider has leading teachers in Melbourne also act as leading teachers offshore. Others have Australian based moderation processes where assessment exercises are sent to Australia and moderated with onshore student work. At many providers, the Australian based Department Heads take on academic responsibility for all course delivery, regardless of location.

Resources

Appendix 14.1: – Offshore teaching and learning checklist from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL) at the University of Western Australia.
http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/resources/teaching/teaching_offshore [accessed 10/2010]

Chisholm Institute (2006) *Offshore Teaching and Learning Quality Assurance Guide for Delivery of Australian Accredited VET Course*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne.
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

Dempsey, K. (2009) *Quality assurance in transnational vocational education programs: A policy and procedure document* developed by all members of the Victorian TAFE International Inc. www.vti.edu.au [accessed 10/2010] The VTI has developed a document in relation to Quality Assurance activities in education Programs and management.

TAFE NSW North Coast Institute (2006) *Quality Assurance in auspicing offshore delivery: RTO guide, partner guide and customisation guide*. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Sydney: TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute
http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

15. ASSESSMENT AND VALIDATION

Assessment is the key. It is the highest risk and the highest priority in the quality assurance system. (Public provider)

What is the issue?

Assessing students' competency is core business for providers on- and offshore. Australian VET qualifications are based on assessing skills and knowledge against industry standards in Training Packages or accredited courses. The notion of 'workplace competence' is central to this approach.

Providers collect and analyse a range of evidence against the unit/s of competency, the four dimensions of competency, facets of Employability Skills, and ability to apply skills and knowledge to new contexts, if relevant. They are aware that their reputation and the credibility of students' qualifications depend on the quality of the assessment process. Assessments are conducted consistently with those onshore and across the range of their locations.

Key considerations

The IEAA report on transnational education (IEAA 2008:66) identified that Australian providers must be able to demonstrate that assessment:

- Is equivalent to comparable onshore programs

- Is at least approved and moderated by, if not marked by, the Australian provider

- Is aligned to the same learning outcomes as onshore assessment and that appropriate learning activities allow for timely and constructive feedback to students

- Develops students' knowledge and skills through timely formative assessment tasks well before any summative assessment

- Allows for the same conditions as onshore

- Provides appropriate levels of security for assessment tools and authentication of candidates.

Are staff and students in the partner organisation familiar with competency based assessment? This is a central characteristic of Australian VET qualifications which may be a challenge for offshore partners and students to accept, particularly if they expect graded assessments. Practical assessment may not be valued by offshore partners and students who tend to value written, theory based assessment and may see practical assessment as a 'soft' option. Similarly, recognition of prior learning is not well understood or valued in some countries.

Is there access to industry and work placements in the offshore context or will the Australian provider need to manage this aspect of the program? Providers commented that in many offshore countries there is little contact between the education sector and industry. It is difficult to gain industry input for courses or to provide opportunities for students to develop workplace skills, as required for AQTF compliance.

Further cultural difficulties may develop where the candidate is not judged competent; in particular this is seen as a loss of public esteem and status in some Asian cultures. Different cultural attitudes to 'cheating' and the realities of offshore delivery that result in large class sizes may make it difficult to manage assessment offshore.

How will the provider manage the difficulties of delivering in what are ultimately remote locations relative to Australia? What are the risks for assessment in the model of delivery for each site? If there is a partner organisation will they be able to manage the assessment requirements, or are risks best managed directly

by the Australian provider? Assessment is conducted at a distance, which presents significant challenges that must be carefully managed to ensure that potential risks to reputation are reduced.

Can the requirements for resources in Training Packages be provided for in the offshore location? For example, resources available to Hospitality training may be difficult to replicate in offshore contexts due to excessive costs in some locations. A further example is that assessment in Building and Construction offshore will be subject to Australian industry standards when any deployment in the local context will be subject to different building codes, regulations, knowledge and skills, materials and techniques. A related issue is that the notion of workplace assessment is often foreign and realistic simulations may be very expensive and difficult to achieve. For example, a 5-star hotel in areas of China may be very different to a 5-star hotel in Australia.

Providers are also challenged by the practical reality that assessment tools developed for one assessment target group context may not be valid in other contexts or for different groups. For example, unfamiliar cultural references in assessment materials can compromise the assessment process if students' performance is affected by their limited understanding of the assessment tools.   This implies that there are likely to be additional costs and workload to ensure that assessment tools are appropriate to the relevant offshore context/s.

How are providers dealing with assessment and validation offshore?

Figure 16. Providers dealing with assessment
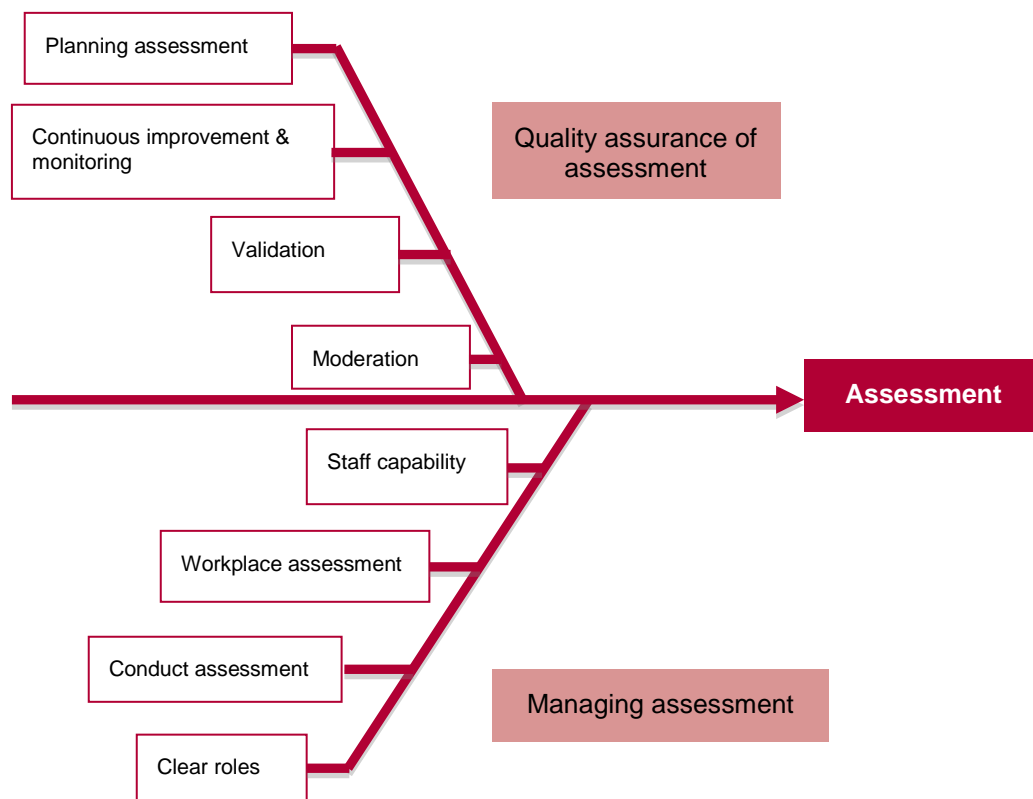
Planning: All assessment should be planned and negotiated with the partner organisation.

Continuous improvement and monitoring: Providers reported that quality assurance of assessment processes offshore is managed through: planning assessment strategies and detailing them through an

Assessment Plan; ensuring that Australian assessors assess critical units of competency; providing clear guidelines to the candidate on the conduct and expectations of assessment; providing clear guidelines to assessors, including clearly defined assessment criteria for judging competence in the practical assessment tasks; and, marking guides or exemplars and benchmark material for locally marked activities.

Specific guidelines should be prepared for offshore assessors, to ensure that the assessment process is managed thoroughly and evidence is collected, analysed and judged consistent with assessment onshore. In addition, there should be clearly defined responsibilities for managing compliance with assessment requirements at a managerial level. The role should be separate to that of the supervisor or mentor; professional development for assessors to ensure that they are familiar with the offshore context and relevant cultural factors.

Continuous improvement and evaluation of assessment: An important aspect of quality assurance of assessment systems is evaluation and review of the assessment strategy. Such evaluation would consider such factors as,: cost effectiveness, the adequacy of resources, timing of assessment, awareness of roles and responsibilities of relevant parties, engagement of relevant parties, coordination of assessment, documentation and perceptions of the quality of assessment.

Validation: The validation process ensures that the assessment of unit(s) of competency and evidence collected through the assessments are consistent with the requirements of the unit(s) and with industry requirements. It includes validating the assessment process, assessment tools and assessment instruments, the evidence collected and the interpretation of that evidence in relation to the unit/s of competency. Sample pre- and post-assessment validation checklists are provided in Appendix 15.5 and 15.6. These are no different to those which would be used onshore.

Moderation: Moderation provides confidence in the tools and ensures that there are benchmarks to assist consistency in judgment by assessors. It is a key process in ensuring that equivalence between onshore and offshore programs has been achieved. It is critical that the process is well documented to assist ongoing improvement processes. Providers implement a range of strategies including:

Appointing teacher moderators for each qualification delivered at each site. They visit twice annually and audit the quality of assessment, along with delivery, resources and facilities. Student samples may be transmitted electronically to the Australian provider for moderation.

Moderating and supervising offshore assessment includes random sampling of student work (between 10% and 25% of all work submitted) and samples related to each assessment instrument used. This provides a basis for ensuring consistency of judgement and equivalence with assessment onshore. It also assists local teachers to become more familiar with the assessment standards and become more consistent. They set a fixed turnaround to ensure that moderation is completed before student results are released. One provider's assessors moderated assessments together around three times during the program, then on return before commencing with the next cohort. They reviewed samples of 'good work', 'average' and 'only just competent' examples and provided sample portfolios to in-country trainers to demonstrate what is expected to be demonstrated by candidates.

Staff capability: Preparing both onshore and offshore staff for the particular context of delivery and assessment is a basic part of managing assessment processes.

Staff with management responsibilities offshore need a clear understanding of the assessment process so that they are fully aware of the area of activity that they are managing. They the coordinator in the partner organisation must have the TAA/TAE and expect staff to have completed the delivery and assessment clusters. In other cases the Australian RTO's trainer and assessor permanently leads the course while embedded in the offshore partner organisation. This is in a supervisory position and is supported by

separate assessors to monitor students and trainees. Some providers locate a discipline expert offshore in an embedded role with the offshore partner to ensure continuity for students and parents.

Developing partner capacity through developing professional development activities is another strategy to build capability, for example, by providing extended training to offshore staff members in the approaches used in Australian delivery. These staff members then provide training to other staff at the partner organisation.

Workplace assessment: Workplace assessment can be assisted through developing strong relationships with local industry bodies and worksites. This involves developing strong relationships with offshore partners and, through them, their local industries. Negotiating simulations and work placements where these are available is a further strategy employed by providers, for example, negotiating with resort hotels for placements for hospitality students.

Conduct assessment: The basic quality principle of assessment offshore is that assessment must be to the same standard and application as in Australia. It must comply with the standards and elements as outlined in the Australian Quality Training Framework and relevant Training Packages. Assessment as 'competent/not yet competent' takes precedence over graded assessments. Where a provider is required to include 'graded' assessments they must be based on pre-specified, explicit and clear criteria for allocating grades.

Clear roles: Developing clear roles in the assessment process for onshore and offshore participants is important in coordinating assessment offshore. A set of roles for each partner is provided in Figure A2 in Appendix 15.3.

Resources available for assessment

Appendix 15: – Assessment and validation resources for managing assessment offshore.

TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute (2006b) *Quality assurance manual for delivery and assessment of courses offshore.* Sydney: TAFE NSW Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: Chisholm Institute. http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries/Education/Education-resources/default.aspx [accessed 10/2010]

Dempsey, K. (2009) *Quality assurance in transnational vocational education programs: A policy and procedure document* developed by all members of the Victorian TAFE International Inc. www.vti.edu.au

Department of Education and Training (2008) *Guidelines for assessing competence in VET.* East Perth: DET. http://vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/progdev/docs/guidelines_assessing_competence_2nd_edition_2008.pdf [accessed 10/2010]

Department of Education and Training (2008b) *A guide to continuous improvement of assessment in VET*. East Perth: DET https://vetinfonet-staging.det.wa.edu.au/progdev/docs/guidetocontimprovement_2nd_edition_2008.pdf [accessed 10/2010]

NQC (2009A) *Implementation guide: Validation and moderation 2009*. Melbourne: TVET.

NQC (2009B) *A code of professional practice for validation and moderation 2009*. Melbourne: TVET.

16. CERTIFICATION

Ensure that graduates receive the certification documentation to which they are entitled when they graduate and that they and others are confident that the qualifications they have been awarded are part of Australia's national qualifications framework. As well as providing a form of protection of the bona fides of qualifications. (AQFC 2010: 7)

What is the issue?

Accredited qualifications and national qualifications frameworks provide students, educational institutions and employers with assurance of the quality of training and assessment delivered as well as the nature of outcomes achieved by students.

Formal processes for issuing certificates are provided within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Certificates and statements of attainment provide students with a record of their achievements in terms of learning outcomes or competencies. These may be for completion of a full qualification or particular units.

The AQF defines the format and contents of certificates and statements of attainment that are required for qualifications to be 'credible, respected and nationally and internationally recognised qualifications' (AQFC, 2010: 3) that assist student mobility through recognition of the qualifications issued.

Providers ensure that students receive the appropriate credential for the program completed as required by the AQF.

Key considerations

Delivery and assessment offshore is conducted at a distance. It may be provided through delegation of roles and responsibilities to partner organisations or staff of the Australian providers who have a high degree of discretion in their roles.

There are associated risks of poorly managed or even fraudulent activity related to issuing certificates. Providers realise that the integrity of VET credentials issued under their name has the greatest influence on their reputation and that of the Australian VET system. It is a major risk, which can best be mitigated by ensuring strict onshore control of all credentials which are issued offshore in their name. Several providers, via their own internal reviews/audits, have taken steps to tighten their processes for certification.

A key concern is that providers issue the appropriate certificate to the right student.

The certificate and statement of attainment also alerts industry, employers and the broader community to particular features of delivery and assessment, for example, where instruction and assessment is conducted in a language other than English this must be signalled on the testamur.

where relevant, include the words, 'has been delivered and assessed in <insert language>'
(AQFAB 2007: 75)

How are providers dealing with the question of certification?

Figure 17. Providers dealing with certification
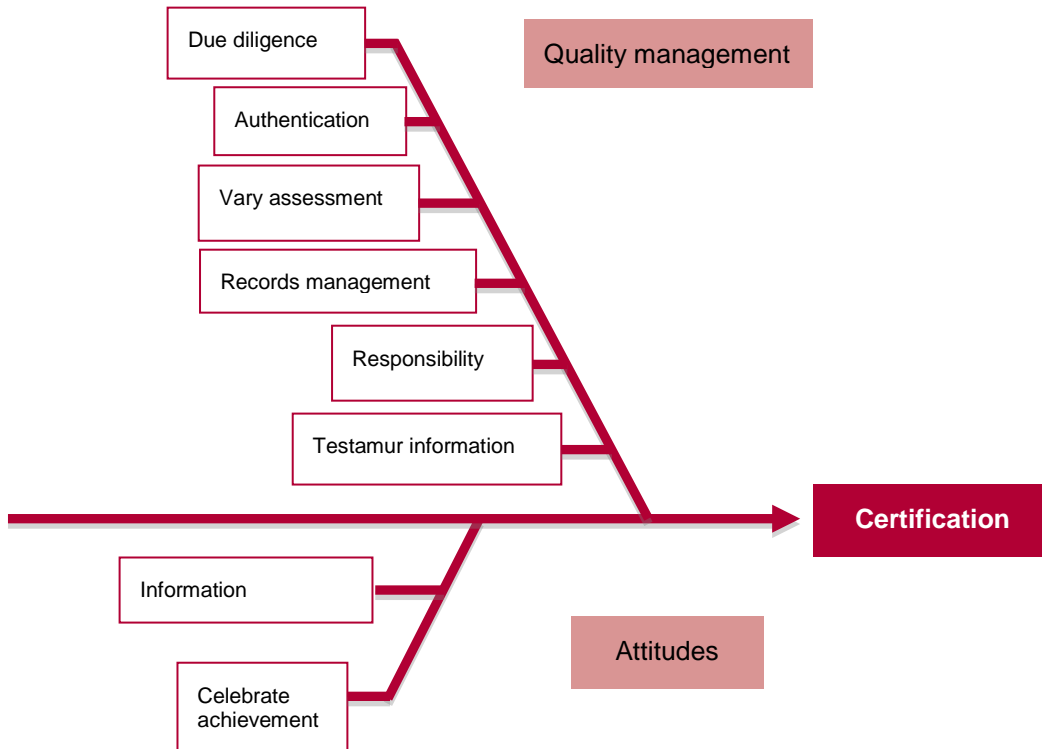
Due diligence: Careful selection of the offshore partner is one of the main steps in reducing the risks of inappropriate practices that may impact on the credibility of certification.

Authentication: The basic question for authentication: Is the evidence provided in assessment the candidate's own work? One provider cited the 'see, observe, quiz and do' approach to authenticating that the candidate has actually completed the required assessment activities. Using simulations assists authentication, particularly where there is limited access to workplace contexts for assessment.

Vary assessment: Using a range of assessment strategies over time to provide a range of opportunities to assess the learner's capabilities and development. Assessments from one course and cohort to another can be varied.

Records management: Clear records of assessment results stored securely through the Australian provider's student management system.

Responsibility: One of the main operating principles offshore is that the Australian provider is responsible for enrolling students, managing their records of achievement and

The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority has developed a set of Guidelines for providers to strengthen quality standards for RTOs. Plagiarism is identified as an area which providers must manage.

2.2 The provider must demonstrate that it has measures in place to prevent and detect cheating and plagiarism amongst its students and to deal appropriately with any instances of these practices.

Required evidence for registration of all RTOs

2.2.1 Policies and procedures covering definitions of plagiarism, and cheating and indicating forms of preventative and corrective actions (VRQA 2010: 5)

conferring credentials, and that partners are completely aware of the credential being delivered. They also ensure that the issuing provider is responsible for printing certificates.

Testamur information: Some providers are very concerned that the language of instruction is English; this reduces the need for special acknowledgement on the testamur. Others delivered in the local language as required by student language needs, but recorded this on the certificates, as is required under the AQF.

Information: Providing clear information to candidates of the implications of copyright, plagiarism and intellectual property of material sourced from the internet is very important.

Celebrate achievement: Graduation ceremonies provide status for the program and for participants. Some institutes have formal graduation ceremonies as a celebration of student achievement. Representatives of the Australian provider, the partner organisation (where this is applicable) along with local dignitaries attend the ceremony.

Resources available to assist providers with certification

Appendix 16: – Certification

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Advisory Board (2007) *Australian Qualifications Framework: Implementation Handbook*, Fourth edition. Carlton South: AQFAB www.aqf.edu.au [accessed 10/2010]

VRQA (2010) *VRQA Guidelines for VET Providers. Melbourne*: Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.   www.vrqa.vic.gov.au [accessed 10/2010]

17. MONITORING, REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The 16 steps in the earlier sections of this guide should not be viewed as a linear process. Monitoring, review and continuous improvement occur, as the term suggests, continuously throughout the life of the project.

> *An underlying theme of the majority of the projects was that a robust, well-articulated quality management system is the cornerstone in assuring quality training and assessment services in offshore arrangements. (Bateman 2007: 21)*

What is the issue about?

Continuous improvement is about:

- Learning from your practice so that opportunities to do things better are recognised and acted upon. This ensures that client services and outcomes are enhanced and risks to the provider's reputation and viability are managed effectively.

- Providing information to ensure that requirements of quality frameworks are met. These include the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), any regulatory requirements of the offshore country and any other quality frameworks, such as Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislation, Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), the new National Training Regulator, or providers' own quality systems such as developed through ISO 9000:2001.

The process of continuous improvement occurs through collecting, analysing and acting upon information from the full range of relevant stakeholders about the operation and progress of training and assessment offshore.

Key considerations

If the provider is in a partnership arrangement, what are the responsibilities of the Australian provider and the partner? Quality assurance is the responsibility of the provider that will issue the qualification. Offshore clients are signing up for that provider's qualification. It is in their interests to manage risks that may impact on the reputation of the brand and quality of the qualification.

Who should data be collected from and how? Are there considerations that are particular to the specific context in which the project is delivered? It is possible that different cultural groups will have different perceptions and meanings for the concept of 'quality' and of the evaluation process. This will affect their expectations of the quality of delivery and assessment and the associated risks. There may also be implications for the extent to which offshore partners will accept the processes and outcomes of the Australian providers' monitoring and review processes. The Australian approach to evaluation, with its focus on open and direct communication, may also be challenging and confronting to some cultures. For example, in some cases criticism can cause embarrassment to the offshore partner or individual staff, which makes open exchange of information difficult. Risks associated with offshore delivery are also compounded by distance, which must be managed.

Language differences are a potential source of difficulty in terms of mutual understanding. This is a particular concern for those with authority in an organization to ensure that they have a complete understanding of the purpose and implementation of evaluative approaches for monitoring performance. Interpreters may assist the process to some extent, but may introduce an additional source of difficulty in communication.

What are the implications of the AQTF for offshore delivery? The requirements of the *AQTF Conditions and Standards*, as outlined below, apply equally to training services in offshore contexts as they do to onshore.

Australian Quality Training Framework Essential Standards for Continuing Registration.

Conditions of Registration
Condition 1 – Governance
Condition 2 – Interactions with the registering body
Condition 3 – Compliance with legislation
Condition 4 – Insurance
Condition 5 – Financial management
Condition 6 – Certification & issuing of qualifications & statements of attainment
Condition 7 – Recognition of qualifications issued by other RTOs
Condition 8 – Accuracy and integrity of marketing
Condition 9 – Transition to Training Packages/expiry of accredited courses
Standards
Standard 1:
The RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations
Standard 2: The RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients.
Standard 3: Management systems are responsive to the needs of clients, staff and stakeholders, and the environment in which the Registered Training Organisation operates.
(National Quality Council (2010) *AQTF Essential Standards for Continuing Registration*, Melbourne, NQC)

The Transnational Quality Strategy requires that providers ensure genuine equivalence between offshore and onshore training services.

> *When an Australian qualification is delivered offshore, the training must be delivered with the same standards and outcomes as when it is delivered in Australia.*
> *(quoted in Southbank 2006: 5)*

> *This may be affected by language and cultural differences in conducting education and training, facilities and equipment, regulations and standards.*

Providers must cater for the quality and compliance requirements of onshore as well as their offshore activity. They may also be subject to the requirements of other quality frameworks, such as ISO 9000:2001 and the regulatory environment in the host country.

How do you manage the difficulties of distance in providing offshore training services? Regular communication and clear responsibilities for communication are important in managing difficulties of distance, language, culture, divergent educational philosophies, time zones, different seasons and academic calendars. Difficulties arising from poor communication are not limited to relationships between onshore and offshore personnel; they may come from poor communication between the provider's staff. For example, separation of sales and delivery staff may add to confusion if informed educational input is not provided during negotiation.

How are providers dealing with monitoring, review and continuous improvement of offshore delivery and assessment?

Figure 18. Providers dealing with monitoring, review and continuous improvement
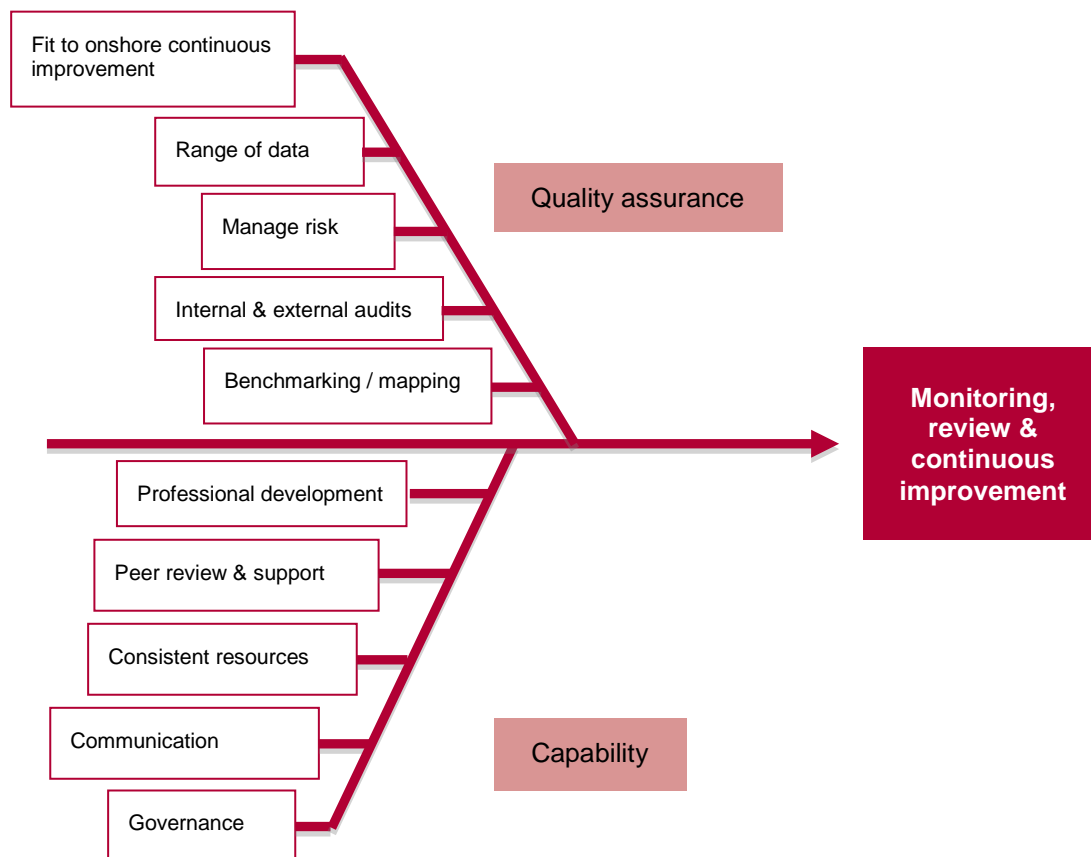
Fit to onshore continuous improvement: Southbank Institute of TAFE (2006) identified that many quality assurance processes onshore are able to be adapted for the offshore context; this reduces the impact on the provider. Most large and experienced providers interviewed ensure that offshore arrangements and programs are subject to the same internal review and continuous improvement policies and practices as apply to onshore delivery.

Range of data to inform improvement: Strategies include collecting, analysing and acting on data collected through: surveys and interviews with key stakeholders; regular staff and management meetings; validation and moderation processes; annual review for all programs; quality assurance visits to all organisations by an independent party; and, regular review of all offshore delivery, including site visits.

The particular approach chosen takes account of the nature of the offshore context, the delivery and assessment model and is developed consultatively with partners. Data collection is conducted throughout the life of the project.

> *The various strategies employed have to be well planned, negotiated in the early stages of contract agreement, mutually agreed, fit for purpose, culturally sensitive and implemented in a systematic manner. (Bateman 2007: 38)*

Manage risk: Providers realise that each of the steps outlined above represents a delivery challenge and risk. They realise, too, that making a 'graceful and ethical exit' can be the consequence of a rigorous review

of an offshore program. Their quality assurance processes, therefore, seek to identify and address each of the risk elements associated with offshore delivery. This occurs in a variety of ways, but most frequently within the framework of the providers' quality management and internal audit processes.

Internal and external audits: Some providers audit every partner annually against all aspects of the AQTF through a site audit and a quarterly desk audit. This is built into the contract with partners, where that is the project model. The degree to which face-to-face offshore audits are conducted depends on a variety of factors, including provider size and capacity, quantum and location of offshore provision, internal assessment of risk against AQTF and other internal quality indicators. The tension between cost factors, AQTF compliance and continuous improvement is a common and ever-present issue. Audits will consider each of these factors, rather than just a compliance approach.

Benchmarking: Benchmarking performance across offshore and onshore operations provides a basis for evaluating the extent of equivalence between programs. Chisholm Institute of TAFE mapped 'the extent to which the processes prescribed within the Institute's Quality Management System align with the processes implemented at their Chinese partner institutions in the delivery of their local courses' (Burchell, De Zilwa and Louey 2006: 6). They found that the major issues in project implementation and evaluation were:

- Having central coordination of quality implementation and management to ensure consistency across staff and to reduce duplication of effort
- Course coordinator champions from the provider and the partner organisations for effective implementation of processes and documentation
- Access to best practice information for staff from the provider and partner
- Recognising the language needs of the partners' staff in developing resources and providing information (Burchell, De Zilwa and Louey 2006).

Professional development: Whatever the model and frequency of offshore monitoring/audits, it is universally acknowledged that providers' internal auditors must have skills in cultural understanding and knowledge of the particular offshore contexts that they are reviewing. Most have invested in additional training for their internal auditors. Providers universally commented on the negative consequences of culturally insensitive audits on offshore partnership and delivery arrangements. Staff induction, including induction of those conducting internal audits is an important activity. Some providers have exchange programs with the managers from offshore partners to develop relationships and mutual understanding of each other's perspectives on the programs. NMIT developed a program of auditor training that developed skills and knowledge in: the audit process; the standards – AS/NZS ISO 9000:2001 and the AQTF; and, cross cultural communication issues (submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2006).

Peer review and support: Trainers and assessors sit in on each other in training and assessment to provide feedback and support. Some providers have an experienced staff member embedded in the offshore partner operations to provide ongoing support and develop awareness of the requirements of competency based training and assessment and the AQTF. Members of Victorian TAFE International cooperated to prepare a best practice resource on quality assurance in offshore VET programs. It provides information on evidence in relation to the AQTF and best practice in the areas of legal and governance, resources, marketing, enrolment, learning and assessment strategies, and evaluation and process improvement.

Consistent resources: Providers develop common tools for partners and provider staff to conduct validation and audits. A variation on the audit approach was adopted by Victoria University through 'cultural audits' to support both offshore and onshore international students through internationalised approaches to training and ensuring culturally appropriate resources (VU 2006).

Communication: An International Key Contact officer is nominated for each offshore course. Their role is to establish and maintain regular communication. Coordinators ensure that they have regular communication with offshore staff through, for example, weekly telephone or Skype conferences, regular emails of new processes and resources, use of internet support, such as intranets to ensure access to the onshore providers' materials and resources. They conduct an annual meeting or conference with the provider and their staff to review the project and plan their ongoing training and assessment services. This is a two-way review process to ensure genuine input from partners.

Governance: An internal governance committee is responsible for all aspects of offshore projects from entry to exit. They recognise that a focus on contracts may overemphasise expectations of partners rather than the Australian provider's role and responsibilities in the process. Members are drawn from across the provider's operations and include staff with responsibility for quality, resource development, teaching and learning, finance, human resource management, and international projects.

Resources available to assist providers with monitoring, review and continuous improvement

Appendix 17.1: – Process for mapping /benchmarking local to offshore processes.

Appendix 17.2: – Checklist for program review

Appendix 17.3: – Sample Audit Guideline – Quality systems and corporate governance

Appendix 17.4: – Sample evaluation form for teachers returning from offshore

Appendix 17.5: – AQTF – Good practice principles for auditors

Appendix 17. 6: – Contract review and risk assessment sheet

Appendix 17.7: – QA checklist

Bateman, A. (2007) *Quality assurance of offshore delivery in VET: Synthesis report*. Canberra: DEST.

Bellis, F. (2006) *Internal quality auditing (A training program for internal quality auditors) Participant handout*: Resource. Submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: North Melbourne Institute of TAFE.

Bellis, F. & Grech, J. C. (2006a) *Auditor training program and offshore audit checklist*. Final report submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: NMIT.

Woodley, C. (2006) *Quality matters: Promoting quality improvement for offshore VET programs*. Final report submitted as part of a project managed by Australian Education International and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Melbourne: Victoria University.

18. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The preparation stage wasn't followed, because staff didn't understand it. Changes in personnel and their roles here and for our offshore partner contributed by interrupting the continuity of the program and understanding of what can go wrong as well as not maintaining continuity of relationships with offshore partners. (TAFE International Manager)

What is the issue?

Providers emphasised that in order to manage the range of challenges of delivering VET qualifications offshore they needed to ensure that each of the projects was well managed.

Project management is an area of activity that is applied across all aspects of the providers' operations offshore. Project management ties the overall set of activities together and ensures that all the necessary operational and procedural considerations are taken into account. Effective project management depends on staff with delegated authority being allocated to the project. They check that the mechanics are in place to ensure compliance and overcome the 'tyranny of distance'.

Key considerations

Distance, cultural differences and financial constraints are contributing factors to the providers' ability to manage offshore VET programs across all of the areas of their operations. These factors complicate what is already a difficult area of activity.

The duration of the providers' involvement in each offshore project is conducted over an extended period of time from initial approach through to conclusion of each cohort's training, and potentially the ultimate cessation of the project. It is inevitable that expectations for the conduct and outcomes of projects will change over that time. These changes are greater, and more difficult to manage, if there is limited continuity in the project team membership. Staff may change, but it is important that their knowledge of the project, its purpose and conduct are retained within the Australian provider and, where relevant, the offshore partner.

How are providers dealing with project management?

Risk mitigation: Providers develop strategies to minimise the impact of changes in the context and operation of projects, such as turnover to staff and changes to Training Packages. They define the administration and operational requirements up front. That is, clear outlines of policies and procedures are defined within the contract and developed before commencement.

Resource allocation: Defining positions with clearly defined responsibilities for managing the project demonstrates the provider's commitment to ensuring that the project is well managed. It also ensures continuity and coordination across the project. The job requirements for the 'international project officer' role should be clearly defined and cover all areas of operational areas.

Project planning: Providers undertake formal strategic planning processes. One provider developed a three to five year plan from the commencement of the project. Every week of the plan is mapped with responsibilities clearly identified to ensure that staff members are aware of their roles and who they should work or liaise with. The project plan is discussed with staff and partners. It assists in managing changes in staff and changing visions of the project.

Resources: Project management resources are developed and include templates, briefs, plans, strategic plans, policies and procedures.

Transnational matrix: One provider developed a 'transnational matrix' that defined roles and responsibilities for all involved staff across every aspect of their offshore process. The matrix records responsibilities against every area of the contract and any relevant staff as appropriate to the individual provider.

Each area of activity was coded through a colour key. A different colour was shaded in the cells of the matrix for responsibility for outcome, management of process, input required and that input may be requested. A sample matrix is provided in Appendix 18.

Resources available to assist project management of offshore delivery

Appendix 18.1: – Draft communications process map – Stage 1 Contract signed

Appendix 18.2: – Draft communications process map – Stage 2 Program running

Appendix 18.3: – Flow chart: Planning an offshore program (Southbank Institute, 2006)

Appendix 18.4: – Sample Transnational Matrix

Project management resources from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania.
http://www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/project_management

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DEEWR (2010c) *AQTF Audit handbook*. Canberra: DEEWR.

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