

Let's revisit a tertiary sector

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In 2008, Bradley proposed a tertiary sector, noting that previous attempts to strengthen the connections between higher education and vocational education and training (VET) over the last twenty-five years had been hampered by structural rigidities as well as differences in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. In this presentation, the author argues that the timing is ripe to revisit the tertiary sector. Significant headway has been made since Bradley's review, with VET and higher education increasingly operating on common ground. Students and training providers are increasingly moving and operating between the sectors, and many universities and VET institutions have partnership arrangements to support the transition of students from VET to higher education and vice versa. A demand driven funding model is in place in higher education, and this has been well trialled in VET in various forms across the jurisdictions. Income contingent loans have been extended from higher education into higher level VET qualifications. Pillars of support for a tertiary governance framework are emerging. Both sectors are working to the same educational framework (AQF), similar regulatory bodies (ASQA and TEQSA) have been established, both sectors now come under a common government portfolio (Department of Education), and there is shared purpose in graduate outcome surveys. The Reform of the Federation White paper could realise oversight of higher education and VET at a single level of government, at least for some higher level qualifications. The expansion of the newly introduced Unique Student Identifier (USI) from VET to the higher education sector could be the jewel in the crown for a tertiary sector. It could realise a common transcript service for Australia's tertiary education, demonstrating how the two sectors can work together for mutual benefit, achieving Bradley's vision for a shared information base and a system more readily navigated by students.
