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Title

The emergence of private higher education in Australia : the silent provider / Lorraine Bennett, Chenicheri Sid Nair and Mahsood Shah

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Abstract

For many years, the university sector has been the dominant provider of higher education in Australia. However, recent changes in government policy which have broadened access to publicly-funded subsidised student loans have resulted in the emergence of small and large private higher education providers and consortiums offering English language, vocational and higher education courses. This new entrant into the higher education sector has experienced consistent growth of more than 20% in the years 2007-2009, with predictions of ongoing expansion in coming years. This article is based on the perceptions and experiences in undertaking quality assurance reviews in three diverse private provider institutions offering both vocational and higher education courses in Australia. The reviews focused on the provision of higher education programs and the authors are of the view that private higher education providers have played a key role in diversifying participation in higher education in Australia. Specifically, they have opened up access, opportunity and pathways for many students who

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previously may not have pursued higher education studies. The authors characterise this new entrant as the 'silent provider', because it has largely been ignored by the academy. The jury is still out on whether this oversight will present significant competition and threat to universities, which have traditionally enjoyed a monopoly in higher education. While reviewing the private providers the authors were heartened by the evidence of outstanding learning and teaching taking place within the institutions. While improvements need to be made in terms of developing systematic quality assurance processes and embedding professional development for staff, the reviewers found the private providers to be worthy participants in the sector. They recommend that rather than seeing the private providers as competitors, university leaders need to find ways to collaborate with private providers by initially focusing on the learner and their needs. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)