

**Public Relations Education in Australia – Perspectives from
Educators in the Higher Education (HE) and Vocational
Education and Training (VET) Sectors**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to uncover how Public Relations (PR) is taught in the Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors in Australia. It involved 51 Public Relations educators from both sectors around Australia representing 19 universities and four VET institutes. It is the first national study that seeks to provide a snapshot of Public Relations education in Australia, based on the perspectives of those who design and deliver Australian PR courses.

Among the key concerns of the study was to investigate issues such as: who is teaching Public Relations in Australia and where; positioning of courses at respective institutions; educator perceptions about why students enrol; especially similarities and differences between institutions and sectors; involvement of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA); links between industry and courses; suitability of the name 'Public Relations' and what impact that has on the success and status of courses; educators' thoughts about the vocation's status as a profession and the impact that has on issues of course quality.

Grounded Theory methodology was adopted to guide the study with semi-structured interviews and personal observations chosen as the specific methods for data gathering. Out of the 51 interviews, 38 were conducted face to face, in the workplace of the respondents, with the remainder being conducted over the phone. Grounded Theory provided a useful framework that allowed the research process to be led by the data that was being gathered in the field, through constant comparisons and observations. The outcome is that the theoretical analysis that has come from the data is an "interpretive rendering of a reality not an objective reporting of it" (Denzin 2005, p. 509).

The key findings of the study include the following:

- (1) Most of the universities involved in the study have a name for their degrees other than Public Relations, and the Public Relations degrees are taught from within faculties with varying names across both sectors
- (2) Across both sectors, most students enrol in PR courses with the view that it will get them a job in the area, after completion of their study
- (3) Accreditation guidelines provided by the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) have a significant influence on the way PR degrees are designed and lead to some level of uniformity across the board, at least within the PR majors
- (4) Respondents from both sectors were divided about whether Public Relations is a profession, with a slight majority believing that Public Relations is the right name for the field
- (5) There was little agreement about the purpose of Higher Education and of the role of PR educators in HE.

The study concludes that the content of PR courses in both sectors is significantly influenced by the industry experience and/or academic qualifications and level of individual educators, and also that, VET and HE courses are fundamentally very similar due to educators in both sectors believing that their courses are and should largely prepare students for employment in the industry. The consequence is a loss of the inherent value that each individual sector brings, particularly Higher Education. The conclusions of the study underscore the point that if Public Relations education does not “signal something more than professional training” (Collini 2012, p. 7), then there could be negative consequences for the status of Public Relations as a discipline. The study also foreshadows the likely demise of Australia’s two-sector approach to teaching Public Relations and the possibility that this approach may now be anachronistic.

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Karen Conrad

March 16 2019

Melbourne, Australia

DEDICATION

With all my love, I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Brett Conrad, whose unflinching support in all aspects of my life made it possible for this dream to become reality.

DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

I, Karen Conrad, declare that the examinable outcome:

1. contains no material which has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome; and
2. to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how Public Relations (PR) is being taught in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and at the undergraduate level in Higher Education (HE)/university sectors in Australia from the point of view of educators from both sectors. There were 51 respondents to the study, from most states and both territories in Australia, and the data was collected from December 2011 and throughout 2012. It is the most comprehensive face-to-face data collection with Public Relations educators conducted in Australia to date.

Within the VET sector, this study limited its investigation to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses. It does not therefore include Public Relations courses and educators from private institutions. The study seeks to identify what is being taught in Australia in the VET and HE sectors regarding Public Relations and how that is being done, and also to understand who the teachers are and what backgrounds and qualifications they bring to their teaching. Within the HE sector, the study is focused on undergraduate degrees. It commences with a review of literature on the history of Public Relations in Australia and the United States of America (USA) to chart the emergence of Public Relations education and its links to the professionalisation of the vocation. The literature review also examines the philosophical arguments around the purpose of both higher and vocational education for context, and current views and research about Public Relations education in Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom (UK). The study is mostly based on primary data that was collected by way of semi-structured interviews with Public Relations educators in both sectors. More information about the study is provided in the subsequent sections of this and further chapters.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research direction of the study and puts it in the context of existing literature. It presents an examination of the distinctive roles of the HE and VET sectors in which Public Relations is taught in Australia and discusses the educational and conceptual issues this raises. The chapter also briefly outlines the methodological approach undertaken, previewing a comprehensive discussion in Chapter Three. It also discusses the scope of the study while providing an insight into the researcher's experiences that led to and underpin her interest in undertaking this study. The penultimate section of the chapter provides justification for the study and its significance, while the last section summarises the chapter and provides an overview of the remainder of the thesis.

MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

I bring to the research topic experience as both a Public Relations practitioner, having been employed as a consultant in international firms as well as having run my own mid-size PR consultancy for more than 10 years, and a teacher of Public Relations in both sectors over a period of two decades. Although I have some relevant academic qualifications, I did not yet have a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) but had been employed as a lecturer in Public Relations in both ongoing and sessional roles in six Australian universities, including five in Melbourne. I hold the minimum VET teaching qualification, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, as well as the higher qualification, the Diploma of VET Practice, and have also been employed as a teacher of Public Relations at three TAFE institutes, including one where I was the Public Relations program manager. As I have the point of view of both a practitioner and an educator, I felt a profound sense of the need to better understand the role of education in professionalising Public Relations. My view prior to undertaking this

study was that, from my perspective as a teacher, the content of a university Public Relations course was too theoretical and not sufficiently focused on the thrust and grunt of practice and, from my perspective as a practitioner, I thought that some discussion of academic constructs could truly enhance the thinking and work of a Public Relations professional. Equally, many university Public Relations courses focus heavily on teaching vocational skills including the writing of media releases and the convening of media conferences. The content of a TAFE course in the VET sector seemed too focused on teaching the skills required by junior practitioners without any of the bigger picture thinking about why the work was done, or needs to be done, and where the vocation fits into the world.

In the VET sector, in TAFE institutes, I observed that there was status anxiety of students wondering how their Public Relations education would compare with that of their university counterparts. Students worried about how their course would equip them in seeking employment and then providing value to their employer. In the HE sector there was a similar concern about being 'work ready' and whether their course would 'get' the graduate a job. These concerns very often echoed the concerns of the students' parents who I engaged with at university open days.

My first-hand experience teaching in both sectors also led to the understanding that there appeared to be vast difference in the experience and qualifications of Public Relations teachers in both sectors. This is a theme that is taken up in the study and discussed in depth in the findings and discussion chapter, Chapter Four. My observations prior to undertaking the study were that the people teaching Public Relations in either sector did not typically meet the expected or stereotypical criteria for teaching in that sector. For example, many Public Relations educators at universities did not have a PhD, my self included. Many did not have any exposure to academic literature in Public Relations. Public Relations teachers in the VET system did not necessarily have any experience as PR practitioners or if they did, their experience was not always recent. Given that employing appropriately qualified and experienced educators is part of the delivery of knowledge-based education at

universities and skills-based training at TAFE institutes, this was noteworthy and merited further investigation. My personal observations on all of these matters informed the topic and design of the study.

As well as referring to the existing academic literature and interviewing Public Relations educators at universities and TAFE institutes, it was important to me that the study built on what originally sparked the interest in this subject. Essentially, the initial idea for the study was the result of many years of being asked by students in both sectors which sector's courses I, as a practitioner, thought were better between the TAFE (VET) and the university option. TAFE students of Public Relations wanted to know about the benefits of university courses and university Public Relations students wanted to know if their counterparts at TAFE had practical skills they considered they didn't have and if, as a consequence, they were more employable. They all wondered what the relative competitive advantage was of studying in either sector and this question also influenced this study.

To provide another reference point for the study, I took the opportunity to teach in both sectors at the same time. I was employed as a Public Relations educator in both sectors of a dual sector university simultaneously for a semester in 2011.

In the HE sector, employed as a tutor in a bachelor level Communication subject that was part of the PR major, I was teaching a subject that was already written, the text book and readings prescribed, each weekly class planned, and assessment and marking protocols all prepared in advance. Anyone could teach those classes. All of the 'content' was delivered by the lecturer, that is, not by me the tutor, and there was an expectation that the lecturer's views and professional 'biases' (rather than those of the tutor) were to be reinforced by the tutors. This is not a reflection of the lecturer. It is just how the traditional lecture/tutorial model works (Phillips 2005, p. 1). Vella (2008, pp. xviii & xix) describes this style of teaching, or delivery of information, as similar to that taught in her teachers' college years where she was shown (little more than) how to organise a lesson, how to structure a lesson plan and to build a curriculum, agreeing with Phillips, who notes that lectures are "consistent

with a pre-modern view of controlling knowledge” (Phillips 2005, p. 3). The lecture and tutorial model is nothing like the aspirational style of Paolo Freire’s teaching that “evocatively invited adult learners to consider their own lives and experience and the potential they dreamed of” (Vella 2008, pp. xviii & xix).

Although the ‘content’ was relevant, there was limited opportunity for students to learn anything about Public Relations from my professional experience and insights. And despite the lecturer and all of the tutors, including myself, being former practitioners, there was little if any direct linking of the academic content to their professional practice. Given Gould’s view that universities have now become professional training institutions as well as places dedicated to nurturing the intellect, hence the employment of former practitioners as lecturers, this approach seemed to undervalue the professional development contribution they could make (Gould 2003, p. ix). It is questionable why former practitioners are relevant to the Public Relations education process at all when one adopts Lewis’s approach and considers that universities’ fundamental role is:

to turn eighteen year olds into twenty-one and two-year olds, to help them grow up, to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings (Lewis 2006, p. xiv).

In the VET sector, like in the university courses, the TAFE units I taught in the diploma level Public Relations course were already prepared according to the government training package requirements, prescriptive and provided to me to ‘deliver’, to use the TAFE vernacular. This, just like the university teaching, was ‘teach by numbers’. PowerPoint presentations, unit guides, assessments and every aspect of the units were provided and, again like the university teaching, anyone with presentation skills could do it irrespective of their skills and experience in Public Relations. This approach to teaching and learning fails to acknowledge that education is a “moral activity” (Clemans 2010; Kemmis & Smith 2008, p. 17) that requires the teacher to have some idea about the self-development interests of each individual learner and should be conducted for the good of humankind. It requires more than a teacher knowing how

to get a particular learner to learn a particular piece of knowledge or to attain a particular learning outcome (Kemmis & Smith 2008, p. 17) or for students to have content 'delivered' to them.

Lewis states that education is "not the teaching of dates and formulas and laws and names and places" (Lewis 2006, p. xv). It should be life-affirming and transformational but the style of teaching described above is not that and is emblematic of the approach teachers are being asked to take in a heavily regulated, market-driven education sector (Buchanan 2011; Gould 2003; Kemmis & Smith 2008). Gould describes this as the market culture strongly favouring "knowledge with exchange value over knowledge with symbolic and cultural value" (2003, p. ix). Praxis is being replaced "by that form of (teaching) practice that amounts simply to following rules" with the teacher abdicating the moral agency role in favour of being merely the operative of a system (Kemmis & Smith 2008, p. 5). The teacher 'teaches by numbers', fills out the forms and 'delivers education' as if education is a product to be delivered rather than a process that "shapes social ideals and generates new knowledge" (Gould 2003, p. ix).

My then credentials as a (recently former) Public Relations practitioner, along with the standard TAFE teaching qualification, were required for me to be appointed to the teaching position in the TAFE course but my industry experience was not drawn on in the teaching. The course was so prescriptive that to teach from my own experiences, it would have been necessary to break away from the unit outlines and assessment constructs and knowledge. This raised the question for me about how the TAFE courses deliver on their promise of being skills-based training taught by current industry practitioners. They appeared to me to be government-prescribed sets of information that are customised by the course leaders for ease of delivery so that each time someone new teaches it they are given the materials that are ready to teach. It may be efficient information delivery but it was questionable whether it was teaching and learning. The simplest definition of teaching, that is "the acts of the 'teacher' imparting knowledge" (*Collins English Dictionary* 1998, p. 493), suggests it is

not. It was also questionable why industry practitioners were needed as there was no need for them to add anything from their experience. All they needed to do was stand and deliver someone else's material, to be an operative, not an agent (Kemmis & Smith 2008), except perhaps to answer industry-based questions from students, should they have asked any. They didn't.

This led me to wonder who the other teachers in the courses were and what their credentials for teaching Public Relations were. More importantly, it raised the question of how the students were benefiting from being taught by industry practitioners compared to a 'qualified teacher' without Public Relations industry experience. This is especially important when considering that a university lecturer is typically engaged for their academic qualifications or, surprisingly, for their professional experience and are not required to have knowledge, experience or qualifications in teaching. The extent to which Australia's Public Relations educators have teaching knowledge or qualifications also became a line of inquiry for the study.

In later weeks of this period of TAFE teaching, when the topic was the PR industry in which I was engaged for 25 years until three years prior to then, the material was again provided for the teacher, in this case me, to deliver. My concerns about being out of touch after three years away from consulting practice were unfounded as the content led the teaching, not the industry professional who was engaged as the educator. I was concerned about this situation for two reasons and wanted to better understand the role of practitioners in teaching. Firstly, if employing an industry professional, would it not be best to allow them to draw on their professional experience in their teaching? Secondly, if three years out of the industry still met the currency expectations for TAFE teaching, how many years of being out of touch was acceptable? These questions informed this study as did pursuing the answer to the question that almost every Public Relations student asks:

Are Public Relations courses in the VET sector better than university courses because they are more practical or are Public Relations courses in the

university sector better than VET courses because of notions of status or perceived or relative quality?

Despite the above question being the impetus for this study, answering it is not in fact the objective. There is no desire to decide which of HE and VET delivers the best Public Relations education, and one would need to analyse actual course content and how it is delivered, to be able to answer the question, and this is outside of the scope of this study. As a result, the study focuses on one aspect that can provide some indications of how at least part of that question might be answered. So, the specific overarching question for this study is:

What are the views of Public Relations educators from both sectors on Public Relations education in Australia?

Many questions needed to be asked to answer that overarching one. These include the following:

- What are the credentials, experiences and motivations of the Public Relations course leaders in VET and HE?
- Who is teaching Public Relations in VET and HE and what are their industry experiences and/or academic qualifications?
- How do these factors (in questions 1 and 2) contribute to how teaching is done in these courses?
- Do educators see the university course as inherently theoretical, guiding the 'brain' to acquire 'knowledge' and the VET course as inherently practical, guiding the 'hand' to develop 'skills', as people tend to expect of the two sectors and consistent with traditional reasons for the existence of these separate sectors?

These questions shaped the research and underpinned the investigation I felt compelled to undertake. The following section provides an overview of the educational landscape in Australia in which Public Relations is taught.

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Australia has a dual-sector post-secondary education system providing HE traditionally at universities, and VET traditionally at private colleges and TAFE institutions. Changes to the Australian education landscape now allow some institutions from each sector to deliver courses from the other sector, with government approval. Some organisations are dual-sector and are able to deliver qualifications from both sectors.

Public Relations courses are currently taught in both sectors in Australia and this raises the question – why? Why do we need Public Relations courses in two different sectors? This is an unusual situation as education in a topic area is not typically available in both sectors. For example, Law, Medicine, Engineering, Property Valuations, History, Science and Dentistry are all disciplines that are taught exclusively in the HE sector. Plumbing, Carpentry, Cooking and Hairdressing are examples of disciplines taught exclusively in the VET sector. This is because the respective education sectors are designed to facilitate teaching and learning designed to produce the outcomes that the country's economy requires for these students, industries and professions. The two different sectors exist to enable skills development (VET) and knowledge development (HE) and adopt different teaching and learning philosophies, strategies and education environments to deliver them. Given that Public Relations is taught in both sectors, this study seeks to find out whether, and if so how, the philosophy behind each sector offers something different and valuable to the students who undertake courses in them.

It is important to provide introductory definitions of the key terms of this discussion, namely Public Relations, Higher Education, and Vocational Education and Training, before deeper, context-specific definitions are discussed later in the thesis. One definition of Public Relations is “a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change” (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 5). Higher Education is defined as “education involving qualifications under the Australian Qualifications Framework at associate degree level and above, as well as diploma and advanced diploma qualifications accredited under higher education arrangements” (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 199). Note that this definition, from the final report of the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008), pertains to where HE is located and its scope rather than its purpose. Vocational Education and Training is “learning activity which contributes to successful economic performance and tangible economic and social gains” (Carter & Gribble 2004, cited in Tovey & Lawlor 2008, p. 10). Note that this definition refers to the activity of VET that is mostly, but not necessarily exclusively, conducted in the sector of the same name. The definitions of both HE and VET do not describe the purpose of the activities that they describe but these are provided later in the thesis and underpin much of the discussion.

It is also useful to define the term ‘vocational’ as it is used extensively throughout this thesis. The *Collins English Dictionary* (1998, p. 1706) provides two definitions which are both useful:

1. Of or relating to a vocation (a specified occupation, profession or trade)
2. Of or relating to applied educational courses concerned with skills needed for an occupation, trade or profession

To investigate how Public Relations is being taught in both sectors, it is useful to understand a key difference between how a VET course and an undergraduate university course are designed and accredited. A VET course, and this study refers specifically to the Certificate IV in Business (Public Relations), Diploma of Business

(Public Relations) and Advanced Diploma of Business (Public Relations), is designed by government with reference to an industry advisory panel and accredited with very specific and prescribed content to be delivered. A VET course focuses on teaching the skills that can be applied to the workforce by the learner when the training is complete. It is based on 'competency', the notion that a learner can either perform the skill and is therefore competent, or they cannot and as such is not yet competent and in need of further training (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, p. 43). A VET course is the same across the country irrespective of which institution, government (TAFE as part of VET) or private (VET), delivers it. It may also be accredited by the industry peak body/professional association, the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA).

Conversely, a university course is designed by the individual university that offers it and it may also be accredited by the PRIA. Only the course structure and a 'top level' overview of content in each subject is approved by the university but what is actually taught in each subject/unit is largely determined by the course leader or the individual subject teacher/unit convenor. This, in theory, enables considerably more flexibility to teach whatever the lecturer in the HE model chooses to teach than is available to his or her counterpart in the VET model. Elton described this as some "professors (in HE) individually (being able to) exercise and often abuse a considerable amount of academic freedom" (cited in Barnett 2005, p. 110). Grant and Sherrington (2006, p. 4) argue that the home of this 'academic freedom' is often mistakenly called an 'ivory tower' and it is important – or necessary – to maintain some boundaries between the academy and the wider society, to retain standards of intellectual integrity to avoid subservience to vested interests.

Although an extensive review of the philosophical place of universities and VET institutes and their espoused respective teaching purposes is outside the scope of this study, enough literature on the subject is reviewed in Chapter Two to provide a theoretical context for analysing the findings of the study. Exploring the teaching of a discipline cannot be done without reviewing the context in which that teaching takes place so understanding these drivers is also an objective of the study.

To understand the teaching context, it was important to “investigate the distinctive aspects that characterise Public Relations education in both sectors” and explore “what each sector affords the teaching of Public Relations” (Clemans 2010). As mentioned briefly in the introduction, traditionally – and philosophically – the two education sectors, VET and HE, exist for different reasons. VET is a jobs-focused industry and government employment policy initiative that is designed to ensure the government is investing in systems that will produce the skilled workers to provide the labour force of key national industries (Blunden 1997; Goozee 2005; Kearns, Bowman & Garlick 2008; Misko 1999). HE exists to produce graduates to meet the different employment needs of the government’s various economic policies (Collini 2012; Walker 2006). Spies (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000, p. 20) describes universities as “the standard bearer of the education of an age”. The Australian economy needs people from both sectors, whose employment will be based on different “ways of knowing” (Clemans 2010). Graduates of HE become the knowledge workers or the “educated citizenry” (Walker 2006, p. 4) and graduates of VET become the artisans, craftsmen and technicians (Tovey & Lawlor 2008). The two groups will have different ways of knowing and different ways of doing, some guided by the brain and others by the hand (Clemans 2010). As such, their educations, or skills acquisition, will have been traditionally catered for in two different sectors.

The HE sector, which is thought to provide ‘education’ (Bowen & Schwartz 2010; Phillips 2005) rather than ‘training’ (Misko 1999; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011), traditionally exists to guide the ‘brain’ and to develop the higher order thinking that equips the graduate, Walker’s “educated citizen” (2006, p. 4), to produce value from the body of knowledge taught. In the practice of Public Relations, higher order thinking is thought to be demonstrated by having developed a ‘world view’, including being inter-culturally competent and having the capacity to “think critically and strategically” (Toth & Aldoory 2010). Habermas’ term ‘life-world’ (Habermas 1970, p. 50) describes the total world experience of human beings which HE must address. This contrasts with the notions of “teaching that limits its practice to the intellectual

‘academic competence’ of the discipline–world or to the practical ‘operational competence’ of the work-world” (Light, Cox & Calking 2009, pp.46-47). There is an inequality between the status of theory and practice in scholarly thinking with abstract knowledge considered more valuable (Clemans 2008, p. 1; Kessels & Korthagen 1999, p. 20). This distinction is based on centuries-old Platonic thinking about education being about ‘the search for truth’ and Aristotelian thinking about ‘the search for the rational’ (or practical) (Clemans 2010; Kessels & Korthagen 1999). Based on these classical traditions, and consistent with Habermas’ thinking (Habermas 1970, p. 50), the HE sector, which is thought to educate rather than train, is based on the Platonic model of ‘guiding the brain’ and the VET sector, which is thought to provide ‘training’ rather than ‘education’, was formed to teach practical skills, to guide ‘the hand’ (Clemans 2010). Clemans (2008, p.1) explains that in HE terms, knowledge and practice are sometimes seen as polarities, knowledge being seen as stuff that ‘bad’ adult lecturers lecture about and practice as the stuff that ‘good’ teachers are seen to encourage. The Platonic model, Higher Education, focuses on teaching episteme which can be characterised as “abstract, objective and propositional knowledge” (Kessels & Korthagen 1999, p. 30) and the Aristotelian model, VET, focuses on teaching phronesis, which is “perceptual knowledge, the practical wisdom based on the perception of a situation” (Kessels & Korthagen 1999, p. 21). It has been described as “the classic moral virtue” (Birmingham 2004, p. 313) or more simply, the demonstration of “doing the right thing” (Kinsella & Pitman 2012, p. 163). Clemans (2010) further categorises the HE sector as developing in its students ‘critical knowing’ or ‘knowing what’ and the VET sector as developing in its students ‘craft knowing’ or ‘knowing how’.

As mentioned earlier, Public Relations is taught in both sectors in Australia. As the researcher has taught it in both sectors, this fuelled her interest in the impact that the sector and the philosophies that drive them have on how Public Relations is being taught in Australia. The following section outlines how this experience helped to shape the purpose of the study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher's direct experiences as described in the previous section fuelled the desire to undertake the study and a review of Grounded Theory helped narrow down the research questions. It was obvious to the researcher, as the idea for this study developed, that it would investigate various aspects of Public Relations courses, including perceived roles of educators and industry, the respective roles of VET and HE, what is being taught and how, who is teaching Public Relations and if their industry backgrounds and academic qualifications are influencing how Public Relations is being taught.

The literature review also shaped the research questions. Reviewing key literature in education policy in Australia (Goozee 2005; Misko 1999; Tovey & Lawlor 2008), theorists on the role of HE and VET (Collini 2012; Dewey 2007; Graham 2005; Markwell 2007; Walker 2006) and the evolution of Public Relations practice and the role education has played in it (Lattimore 2004; L'Etang 2003; Morath 2008; Toth & Aldoory 2010; VanSlyke Turk 2006) provided the nuance for finalising the questions themselves. Ultimately it was determined that the overarching research question, which would enable all of these aspects of Public Relations education to be explored, would be:

How is Public Relations conceived of and taught in the VET and HE sectors in Australia?

Specifically, the research questions are:

1. In what ways do/es the industry experience and/or academic qualifications of Public Relations educators influence the running/teaching of PR courses in Australia?
2. Is there a conceptual and/or real difference between the way PR educators in the HE and VET sectors see their courses and how they subsequently run them? In other words, from the perspective of educators, are university

courses inherently theoretical, focusing on knowledge acquisition, and VET courses inherently practical, focusing on skills teaching/acquisition, as traditionally expected of the two sectors?

3. What are some (if any) of the similarities and differences between the way in which PR courses are run/taught in the two (HE and VET) sectors?
4. What role does an academic orientation, including the use of textbooks and journals and the academic body of knowledge in general, play in the makeup and running of Australian PR courses and how does this impact on the way teaching is done?
5. What role does an industry orientation, including industry course advisory panels, case studies and industry speakers play in the make-up and running of Australian PR courses and how does this impact on the way teaching is done?

Seeking answers to these questions would help to determine what is happening in Public Relations education in Australia from the point of view of PR educators. Understanding how Public Relations is being taught requires an examination of the purpose of the sector in which it is taught. Public Relations teaching in HE could be seen as a demonstration of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake without vocational intent (Collini 2012). This is in line with the ideals of John Henry Newman whereby a university education focused on the search for knowledge for its own end, rather than merely as a means toward a vocation (Boschiero 2012), or as Bertrand Russell described it, creating “wise citizens of a free community” (cited in Chomsky 2000, p. 38). Public Relations teaching in VET could be expected to fit with the philosophy of teaching skills for employment in a particular industry with the guidance and support of that industry. It is ‘competency-based training’ (Misko 1999, p. 1) or, using Norton Grubb’s colloquial and arguably pejorative term, ‘trade school’ (cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996, p. x). This distinction is important as it demonstrates that as there are two education sectors teaching Public Relations, this is either duplication or it is structured in that way for strategic purpose. That is, there are divergent reasons for teaching Public Relations in the HE and VET sectors, and as such, the teaching needs to be different in each in order to fulfil their respective

purpose. Subsequently, gathering the data to answer the research questions will provide an understanding of how PR is currently taught in both sectors and lead to recommendations for the VET and HE sectors, the Public Relations industry and for future research.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research methodology underpinning this study is Grounded Theory, a methodology particularly suited to this qualitative inquiry. Grounded Theory does not require the researcher to start with any hypothesis nor to decide a sample size in advance. It enables the researcher to let the data being gathered inform the data collection by constantly comparing the observations that unfold (Babbie 2009, p. 307). The outcome of using Grounded Theory is that the theoretical analysis that comes from the data is an “interpretive rendering of a reality not an objective reporting of it” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.509). The data was collected in two ways:

1. By a series of semi-structured interviews, undertaken by the researcher mostly face to face but over the phone where this was not possible.
2. Personal observations made by the researcher while conducting the fieldwork. These included but were not limited to observations about the status of academic buildings and participants’ working conditions, the personal presentation of the participants and their attitudes and behaviours.

A comprehensive account of the research methodology for this study is provided in Chapter Three. An account of the scope of the study is provided in the next section and following that is a statement about the significance of the study to a number of stakeholders.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study investigates Public Relations education in post-secondary courses in Australia. As Public Relations is taught in both the HE sector and the VET sector, both sectors were included in the study, but limited to undergraduate degrees in HE. Private training organisations were however not included. As this was to be a national study, Public Relations educators from every state that offered Public Relations courses were interviewed, which was all states and territories except Tasmania. Forty-five educators from the HE sector were interviewed and six educators from the VET sector were interviewed. The imbalance of numbers is reflective of the weighting of the delivery of PR courses in the two sectors, that is, although it is taught in the VET sector, Public Relations courses are much more prevalent in HE. It was not intended that the study would include all PR educators in the country, but it is estimated that a very significant majority have been included.

This study is essentially about the perspectives of Public Relations educators about how PR is being taught in both sectors in Australia. It does not seek to make an assessment as to which sector – or institution – is teaching PR better. By comparing the views of the respondents to the purpose of the sectors, it does explore how well the HE sector is delivering on its promises of being theory-based and focusing on the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ (Collini 2012; L’Etang 2003; Markwell 2007; Robinson 2006; Walker 2006) and how well the VET sector, being vocationally-oriented, is focusing on the acquisition of ‘skills’ (Blunden 1997; Kearns, Bowman & Garlick 2008; Tovey & Lawlor 2008).

This study focuses on the views of educators and therefore, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, does not examine course structures or content and makes no comparison between individual courses other than in the views of the respondents or to provide context for their views as and when required.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides the first national review of Australian post-secondary Public Relations education and as such can contribute to future decision making in and about the design and delivery of Australian Public Relations courses. There is a paucity of research into Public Relations education in Australia and as it has now a history of almost 50 years, there is an imperative to contribute to that which already exists and to set up the opportunity for other research to build on this study in the future.

It is expected that this study will help the Public Relations academy in Australia and around the world in two significant ways – by providing an impetus and a framework on which to review Public Relations teaching and to determine areas for improvement, and to identify opportunities to conduct further research on related topics. It will help individual educators to grapple with their own issues and philosophies about Public Relations education and its relationship with broader academic disciplines and with the Public Relations industry.

The study provides never-before published insights into Public Relations education that will help the Public Relations industry, particularly but not solely in Australia, to discuss and determine their role in and contribution to Public Relations education and how well they understand it, support it and benefit from it.

Key Public Relations education decision makers, including university and institute professional staff involved in the management and administration of Public Relations courses, will be able to draw on the findings and recommendations from the study to review and reflect on the way their courses are organised and delivered.

Similarly, the study will be invaluable to senior administrators and faculty from disciplines other than Public Relations who have the capacity to influence aspects of Public Relations education and who want to better understand contemporary issues in Public Relations education in Australia. Areas of concern to them may include, for

example, which faculty it sits in or the selection criteria for employing Public Relations academics. Outside of universities and TAFE institutes, the study will also be significant. Government policy makers involved in the HE and VET sectors can draw on the study's investigation of the relative merits of teaching Public Relations in each sector and from the findings and recommendations about contemporary Public Relations education in Australia.

The study's significance in educational research is also important as it serves as a case study of one vocation being taught in two different sectors. The study also adds to the growing body of literature on Grounded Theory showing it to be an effective and illustrative methodology that helps provide a 'moment in time' account of any phenomenon under study; in this case, Public Relations education. Future researchers can draw on the elements of the methodological approach that worked well in this study.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE AND OVERVIEW OF THE REST OF THE THESIS

This chapter has provided an introduction to all aspects of the study. It has provided an overview of the Australian educational context in which the research is conducted and outlined the researcher's motivation for the study, by way of explaining how the researcher's own experiences in Public Relations practice and in Public Relations education shaped the desire for and scope of the study.

It has also outlined the research questions to which answers will be sought while shedding some light on the chosen methodological approach – Grounded Theory – to help answer the key questions. Finally, the chapter also set the parameters of the study by discussing the scope within which answers to the questions will be pursued and concluded by looking at the significance of the study from various perspectives.

The next chapter (Chapter Two), titled 'Theoretical Framework and Literature Review', provides an outline of the history of Public Relations in Australia and the

United States, and a reflection on the role that education has played in the increasing professionalisation of the vocation. The chapter then reviews published works about education policy philosophies in which the Australian VET and HE sectors operate and goes on to explore the praxis of education and training to provide a theoretical framework relevant to understanding how Public Relations is being taught in Australia. It concludes with a review of current research on Public Relations education.

Chapter Three, 'Methodology', provides an overview of 'Grounded Theory', the methodology used to gather and analyse the data for the study. It outlines the process that was used to determine and approach the participants in the study, the techniques used to collect and analyse the data for this study and the limitations of the study.

The fourth chapter, 'Findings, Analysis and Discussion', presents the findings from the fieldwork, that is the perspectives from educators in both sectors and observations made by the researcher in the collection of those perspectives, and analyses and discusses the data in reference to the research questions that underpin the study.

In the last chapter (Chapter Five), a summary of the whole study is provided, together with conclusions and implications of the study and recommendations for the HE and VET sectors, the Public Relations industry and for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

This chapter examines and analyses published academic literature in order to demonstrate the connection between the beginnings of Public Relations practice and the emergent need for formal Public Relations education. It looks at the role education played in providing those working in the fledgling industry with the professional development they needed to optimise their reputations and that of the services they provided. The chapter commences with an overview of the history of Public Relations from its American roots and explains how the Australian Public Relations industry was founded on the lessons first learned in the US. It also explores how Public Relations education commenced in the US and then in Australia and later in other parts of the western world, in particular, the UK.

In the context of determining what Public Relations is and how therefore it should be taught, the chapter goes on to examine what constitutes a profession. It provides a range of perspectives on the extent to which the discipline of Public Relations could be seen to earn professional status. This chapter also unpacks the role that education can and does play in Public Relations practice that can eventually help the vocation develop into a profession. This then informs an account of how Public Relations is taught in the VET and HE/university sectors in Australia, why and to what effect. The chapter breaks down Australian Public Relations education into two sectors, VET and HE, and examines the respective purpose of education in both sectors and what that means for PR education. The chapter finishes with a discussion about contemporary educational theories and how they impact Public Relations education in Australia and the western world.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Modern Public Relations has its roots in the practice of press agency which started in the early 1800s in the United States (Johnston & Zawawi 2000). Press agency is essentially the strategic and often creative art of attracting the attention of the media to an organisation, person or event (Johnston & Zawawi 2000). However, Page (2014, p. 684) states that there was evidence as early as 1817 of Public Relations tactics other than press agency being used. He argues that lobbying was occurring, publications with the intention of influencing were being written and produced and activities he termed 'Media Relations' were taking place, although the latter is arguably press agency. Among the early 'press agents' was nineteenth century American showman, Phineas T. Barnum, who was a master of what he called the 'pseudo event'. This was essentially a 'stunt' held expressly for the purposes of attracting press coverage for his circus. In 1835, for example, he exhibited a black slave who he claimed had nursed George Washington 100 years earlier. She would have needed to have been 161 years old for this to have been true but the newspapers ran the story not just as fact but with enthusiasm (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 21). Barnum's stunts have seen history record him as an early Public Relations practitioner, even though he lived and worked long before the notion of Public Relations practice was developed (Bernays 1952; Johnston & Zawawi 2000; Wilcox et al. 2000).

And while there was not yet a term for what was to become 'Public Relations' – Watson (2014, p. 874) retrospectively called it 'proto-PR' – Public Relations-like activities can be identified in American history long before Barnum's engagement with them in the nineteenth century. These include Harvard College's systematic fundraising campaign in 1641 and King's College, now Columbia University, issuing the first press release in 1758. The publication and dissemination of the Federalist Papers which led to the ratification of the US Constitution in 1788 was reportedly "history's finest Public Relations job" (Lattimore et al. 2004, pp. 22-23). Yet, Barnum's antics see him remembered for his ground-breaking efforts in what has since been

labelled press agency. Consequently, this period is often cited as the beginnings of the development of Public Relations in the United States (Bernays 1952; Johnston & Zawawi 2004; Lattimore et al. 2004; Wilcox et al. 2000).

By the early 1900s in the US, businessmen – and they were all men – started to recognise how vital public opinion was to the success of their organisations (Bernays 1952, p. 64). Previously, their attitude was described by Bernays as “the public be damned” (1952, p. 63), implying that organisations did not consider it important to engage with or inform the public of their activities. This was a reflection of corporations’ focus on themselves and their business objectives and it should also be said that there are critics of this account of Public Relations history for this reason. Coombs and Holladay (2012, p. 347) argue that this emphasis on the corporate function of Public Relations has distorted history and given it a dominant “myopic corporate-centric view”. They argue that this has “perpetuated a negative (and inaccurate) view of Public Relations as merely a tool of big business”. Despite their concerns, this was during a time when people were workers who were paid for their labour and told nothing and offered little if any protection or safety. It was long before any notion that ‘staff’ were people who were valuable ‘human resources’ and it was these circumstances that made ‘damning the public’ possible. Indeed, this was the prevailing view for some time. The ‘public’ were more able to ask questions of corporate America (Bernays 1952, p. 63) due to the development of communication – the linotype, telephone, wireless and the telegraph – and the improvements in transportation brought about by the invention of the ‘motor truck’. Ordinary citizens also had governments and the press, also better resourced due to technological advancements, representing them and asking the bigger questions about the nature of the actions and consequences of the behaviour of corporations. But under this new pressure brought on by more robust inquiry and a press capable of reporting corporations’ actions unfavourably, corporations started responding differently. Previously they would have simply ‘whitewashed’ such inquiry and gotten away with it, hence Bernays’ use of the term “the public be damned” (Bernays 1952, p. 63). The

prevailing social culture up until that time had allowed this disregard for the public but times changed and it was no longer acceptable. Consequently, companies began using what we would now call Public Relations activities to “deal with the broad field of social justice and conservation, with better safety of the workers, with food adulteration and with greater care of children” (Bernays 1952, p. 63).

Industrialisation had created conditions requiring Public Relations expertise. As corporations were being forced to submit to more government regulations and to deal with criticism from the newly created ‘press’, they recognised that deception and manipulation were inappropriate responses to the press and the government and, worse in their minds, that they would no longer get away with it. This heralded an era where to provide the advice that corporations now needed, the very first Public Relations consultancies, as they would be called now, were formed (Bernays 1952; Lattimore et al. 2004). Industry pioneer and some say ‘the father of Public Relations’ (Lattimore et al. 2004; Mackey 2001), consultant Ivy Lee coined the phrase that closed the door on the time when corporations could say ‘the public be damned’. He described this new era and the culture in which early Public Relations was practised as “the public be informed” (Bernays 1952, p. 70). Organisations began to understand that their interests were best served when the public was informed and sought out the counsel of Lee and his counterparts. Lee’s approach to Public Relations was to tell the truth about his clients’ organisation’s actions and that if telling the truth damaged the organisation, his view was that the organisation should correct the problem so that the truth could be told without fear (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 25). The early seeds of the Public Relations industry were being sown and Mackey (2001, p. 93) described this period as when “public relations was born and grew up in this purposive rational climate of fiercely utilitarian, Fordist, Taylorist, and instrumental thinking”.

There is discrepancy about the first use of the term ‘Public Relations’ however. It has been said that it was first coined in 1908 by Theodore Newton Vail, chief of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) (cited in Bernays 1952, p. 70), despite claims it was first used as early as 1882 by Dorman B. Eaton in his address to the Yale Law School

graduating class (Lattimore et al.2004, p. 24). In 1913, Vail (cited in Bernays 1952. p. 70) said “we have found ...that our interests were best served when the public interests were best served and we believe that such success as we have had has been because our business has been conducted along these lines”. Despite much earlier use of the term ‘Public Relations’, what we now understand as PR techniques were typically called ‘press agency’ or ‘propaganda’ in the early part of the twentieth century and then ‘publicity’ up until the end of World War One (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 24).

While New York was the hub of the emerging Public Relations industry in the US in the early 1900s, PR was also being practised in other American cities. George V. S. Michaelis, a former journalist, opened a firm called the Publicity Bureau in 1900 in Boston and “gathered factual information about his clients for distribution to newspapers” (Cutlip 2013, p. 6). That business was successful enough to expand to have offices in many US cities before long.

Also, in the early 1900s, United States presidents, aided by access to the press, then America’s number one communications medium (Bernays 1952, p. 66), used PR techniques to reflect their leadership. President Theodore Roosevelt, “the colourful president” (Cutlip 2013, p. 6), had a “mastery of public relations (that) profoundly shifted the power from the Congress to the Presidency”, which Cutlip cited (2013, p. 6) as an example of “the unseen power of public relations”. Another president who used Public Relations devices, President Woodrow Wilson, who previously had been an academic, understood that his self-interest could benefit from pro-actively communicating his views in an attempt to be understood and to win people over. He believed that “public opinion is a cleansing force in the world” (Bernays 1952, p. 66).

When the First World War broke out, Wilson applied his knowledge of ‘publicity’ and formed the Committee on Public Information, a collaboration of navy, state and war offices, set up to ensure Americans understood the war aims of the United States. The activities of this committee became known as ‘propaganda’ (Bernays 1952, p. 72). It is important to note that the term ‘propaganda’ is now a far more disparaging

term than it was intended to be then and its association with war time activities has contributed to that. The *Collins English Dictionary* points to propaganda meaning “organized dissemination of information, allegations, etc, to assist or damage the cause of an ...organization” (1998, p. 1237), showing that it can be negative or damaging and so it was not an auspicious start for a vocation aspiring to becoming a profession. There were a number of key figures in the foundation of Public Relations in the USA and their individual contributions to the development of the discipline are outlined in the following sections.

Edward Bernays

After the First World War ended, a former employee of the Committee on Public Information, Edward Bernays, embarked on a career in this emerging field. Unhappy with the negative connotation of being called a ‘press agent’ and finding the term ‘publicity’ “too indefinite” he called his work ‘publicity direction’. He believed the addition of the term ‘direction’ gave greater dignity to his work and indicated that it included planning and directing and taking a broader approach to a problem. As “publicity direction was becoming more than the use of the mimeograph machine” and he understood that to “arouse and interest the public, words had to be backed up by deeds” the nature and scope of his work broadened and in the early 1920s he began to describe what he did as “counsel on public relations” (Bernays 1952, p. 78).

As ‘counsel on public relations’, Bernays advised his corporate clients on the development of attitudes, directions and policies that would help them to build goodwill with the public. He argued:

public relations could only be effective when conducted in a ‘professional, ethical and socially responsible way’ and that it was “not a one way street in which leadership manipulates the public and public opinion. It is a two way street in which leadership and the public find integration with each other” (Bernays 1952, pp. 82-83).

In the 1920s, Bernays was practising a very sophisticated version of Public Relations. He was engaged by the Lithuanian National Council for advice on how to help position Lithuania as an independent nation. His work was multi-dimensional and commenced with an exhaustive study on the country's history through to its (then) current customs and this information was divided to match media and other areas of society's interests. Ethnologists were informed about its ethnic origins, linguists about language, sports fans about sport, women about fashion and the like so that many pockets of American society had a better knowledge and appreciation of Lithuania (Bernays 1952, p. 78). Placing this work for the Lithuanian National Council into a contemporary context, based on the industry experience and observations of the researcher over thirty years, it would be of the nature that the biggest and most successful global Public Relations agency, for example Edelman or Ketchum, would likely be engaged to undertake in the twenty first century. It would have then been a major project that would require both very sophisticated strategic thinking and a large team of practitioners to execute and this would be the same if it were to be undertaken now. Bernays was leading the way for future Public Relations practice in his undertaking of this complex work. He was also engaged by the war department to appeal to American businesses to employ former servicemen and by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce to appeal for help to harvest Kansas' wheat crop (Bernays 1952, p. 78). Again, both of these tasks are significant PR challenges requiring considerable expertise and demonstrate that high level Public Relations was being practised early in the twentieth century, whether or not it was so called or could be definitively identified as such.

Bernays wrote three books about Public Relations from the 1920s to the 1950s at a time when there were very few books written on the subject. In fact, his first, in 1923, is thought to be the first ever book about Public Relations. The books were titled *Crystallising public opinion*(1923), *Propaganda* (1928) and *Public Relations* (1952) and, according to Mackey (2001, p. 104), the titles of his first two books "are a gift to critics of public relations and a considerable embarrassment for orthodox public

relations practitioners". Notwithstanding the legitimacy of Mackey's view, while Bernays developed a professional reputation among his contemporaries as a 'persuader', care should be taken when looking back to not misunderstand the intent of that by applying current thinking to how we understand that term. Like propaganda, as Mackey (2001) points out, persuasion could now be seen to be pejorative. However, persuasion was not deemed manipulation when Bernays was practising his craft nor should it be deemed so now when practised legitimately and ethically. However, typically the contemporary use of the term 'persuasion' is pejorative. Nonetheless, persuasion in Bernays' time was less controversial than it is thought to be now. It is also important to put the titles of his first two books, published in 1923 and 1928, in the context of the time in which they were written. It would be incorrect to judge them on current understandings and biases about persuasion and manipulation or on our post-Second World War interpretation of the term 'propaganda' (Mackey 2001). Indeed, all three of his books if being written now could be innocuously called 'Public Relations' as they were very much about Public Relations theory and practice as we understand it now. If one considers that Bernays was writing and publishing authoritatively at the time and was the first to do so, it can be concluded that in authoring those early books, despite the fact that some of the titles have not aged well, should be seen simply that he was a thought leader in an emerging industry.

Arthur Page

Another Public Relations practitioner to become prominent and make his mark in PR history was Arthur Page. In 1927, Page joined AT&T in a role described, at his insistence, as 'policy-making', as he advised the company that he was not interested in being a 'publicity man'. His appointment made him the first American, and likely the first person, to become a Vice President of what we would now describe as Public Relations in a large corporation. Page was a pioneer in the practice of corporate Public Relations and has left a significant legacy (www.awpage.com). Page's position

was not as an advisor to management, but as part of the management team, or the dominant coalition as Harrison describes it (2001, p. 14), or it could be said as Turnbull (Morath 2008, p. 28) simply puts it, he had a “seat at the top table”. This access to senior management is still thought to be the ideal, yet sometimes elusive, role for in-house Public Relations counsel (Harrison 2001, p. 14).

He viewed Public Relations as a “broad-based management function that transcended both the journalistic publicity and persuasive communication campaign traditions” (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 31). He believed in planned and proactive communication and required organisations to “act all the time from the public point of view, even when that seems in conflict with the operating point of view” (p. 31).

Ivy Lee

Whether or not Lee or Bernays was the real ‘father’ of Public Relations (Mackey 2001, p. 101), Ivy Lee’s contribution to the history of Public Relations and the evolution of its practice was significant. He established principles of Public Relations in his 1906 handling of a coal strike when he advised the press as follows:

This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency. If you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate, further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly and any editor will be assisted, most cheerfully, in verifying any statement of fact...

In brief our plan is frankly and openly on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of interest and value to the public to know about (Lloyd 1971, p. 3).

Lee’s approach was successful and Public Relations began to emerge as a vocation (Lloyd 1971, p. 3).

Ivy Lee's use and explanation of the term 'Public Relations' also helped the vocation to emerge to the point that the difference between a 'counsel on Public Relations' and a 'publicity man' was being understood. In 1921, Ivy Lee and Associates issued a bulletin called 'Public Relations' (Bernays 1952, p.91). Some still saw the latter term as a new one for the old 'press agent' and did not alter their understanding or opinion of it (Bernays 1952, p. 93). By the end of the Second World War, consumerism fuelled the need for corporations to make use of both Advertising and PR activities to promote and sell their products. This led to an awareness of PR techniques and in turn an increase in their use. As a result, the industry expanded to meet this new demand. The development of new media outlets including FM radio, magazines, community newspapers and trade publications also created new opportunities for PR practitioners to expand the breadth of their services (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 35). Later, Government Affairs, which was also known as Public Affairs, was added to the remit of Public Relations practitioners. And later again, societal changes in the 1970s that championed civil rights saw a change of emphasis on Public Relations activities away from persuasion and toward public participation and the development of long term relationships with stakeholders (Lattimore et al. 2004, p. 35).

CHALLENGES OF PR HISTORY

Watson (2014, p. 874) argues that there are flaws in the account we have accepted of the history of Public Relations in that we have neatly adopted a 'Great Men' focus referring to the likes of Bernays, Lee and Page. This can also be seen in Australian PR history with references to founders of the industry here being described as 'PR legends' (Morath 2008). Watson states, and Coombs and Holloday (2012) concur, that, there is impetus for a genuine revision of the history of Public Relations and the revealing of a less corporatist and more authentic foundation. Hoy, Raaz and Wehmeier (2007, p. 191) also note that the majority of textbooks have simply relied on story-telling (consistent with Watson's view, recounting stories of the great men) and not a theory-driven approach to PR history.

Nonetheless, PR history as it has been determined to date continues with the period between the end of the Second World War and 2000 being characterised by professional development in Public Relations that saw the practice maturing and aspiring to become a profession (Lattimore et al.2004, p. 35). Critics of the “functionalist and organisation-centric” (Fitch 2016; Macnamara 2012, p. 2) way that PR was being practised during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, informed by the work in the 1970s and 1980s of US PR scholar James Grunig, believe that the positivist Excellence Theory model was the dominant approach to PR practice at that time. As has been discussed, this is consistent with Australian PR practice taking its lead from the US where this was also the case. For the purposes of this study, this period is examined in the context of the emergence of Public Relations as a vocation, an industry and a body of knowledge in Australia.

The following section explores the development of the Public Relations industry in Australia and explains the links of early Public Relations practice in Australia to the beginnings of the industry in the US.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

There is evidence that Public Relations in Australia has “strong governmental roots” (Sheehan 2014b, p. 4)and was being practised in Australia as early as during World War One when national leaders used PR tools to persuade the Australian public of the need to win the war (Sheehan 2014a, p. 14). Public Relations was used in the 1920s and 30s to alter the “perceptions of the Chinese in the White community”, in the 1940s by the government to boost the population using the ‘key message’ ‘populate or perish’ and to attract immigrants to Australia (Sheehan 2014a, pp. 16-17). In Australia in the 1930s there were obvious links to the PR-type activities that had been developing up until that time in America. There were businessmen, and they were then all men, using titles that had come directly from the US, such as press agents and publicity officers, but the term ‘Public Relations’ had not yet been introduced in Australia (Potts 1976, p. 335).

Any attempt to influence public opinion through the media ...was regarded as an act to obtain publicity rather than a planned move to condition the thought processes of readers and listeners (Potts 1976, p. 335).

Australia was about to start a journey of taking its lead from the United States in the development of a Public Relations industry and of Public Relations practice itself, developing out of “journalism and press agency” (Alexander 2004, p. 1; Morath 2008, pp. 26-27).

PT Barnum’s press-seeking stunts in the United States had been copied by others in the entertainment industry in America, particularly the new and thriving Hollywood movie industry. By the 1920s, major film production companies had offices in Australia and they modelled to their Australian counterparts how significant publicity stunts and campaigns were handled. As such, film publicity became a major part of the early Australian Public Relations landscape (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 22).

There are similarities that can be observed between Barnum’s tactics and those of Hollywood publicists and later, Australian film publicists. Barnum famously ‘took his circus to the people’ by marching all sorts of unusual animals and people down main streets in the cities and towns he brought his circus to, to capture the attention of the circus ticket-buying public, and importantly, to get reported in the press. An example of an event in Australia that looked to have been inspired by Barnum’s approach was when the Australian film publicists who were engaged to promote the film ‘Ben Hur’ organised a man in a Roman costume to drive a chariot from Sydney to Melbourne (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 22).

It was not until the early 1940s when the five-star general Douglas MacArthur, chief of staff of the United States Army, arrived in Australia that the term ‘Public Relations’ was used in Australia:

MacArthur was a communication expert. He maintained a highly skilled staff (of 35) who were recruited from every associated field and they toiled

unremittingly to present the chief's image and his war policy (Potts 1976, p. 336).

MacArthur's team took its cues from how they had observed US presidents Roosevelt and Wilson successfully using publicity-seeking tactics to increase their public profiles. Other American methods of Public Relations were introduced into Australia and these included 'news management', the idea that replaced thoughts that 'all publicity is good publicity' with a more nuanced approach that stressed that press coverage must be managed, controlled and influenced to achieve an end that met the expectations of public opinion (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 25).

In the late 1940s, Australia had its first 'Public Relations practitioners', but there are conflicting views as to who was the first – George Freeman (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 36), George FitzPatrick (Tymson & Sherman 1987, p. 13) or Asher Joel, who had learned his craft when he was a naval officer seconded to the staff of General MacArthur (Joel 2016). Institutes of Public Relations were established in both Sydney and Melbourne in 1950 and 1951 respectively before becoming the national Public Relations Institute of Australia, so named "to have the definitive words of public relations at the beginning of the title" (Potts 1976, p. 339).

Public Relations in Australia began "when journalists, mostly men, began to conduct media relations on behalf of organisations or clients" (Motion, Leitch & Cliffe 2003, p. 123). By the early 1950s, despite a number of businesses in Australia, mostly in Melbourne and Sydney, purporting to provide Public Relations consulting, all they typically offered was publicity or press-agentry services. However, Golding notes that as early as the late 1940s Eric White was "insisting on attitude research" before Public Relations plans were implemented (Golding 1991, p. 6). There had been a name change from Publicity to Public Relations but it was, at that time, little more than an attempt to reposition the industry, and the consultancies did not alter the services that they were providing (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 26). The introduction of television to Australia in the 1950s was the next major development to affect how Public Relations was practised here. This new visual medium meant PR planning had

to take into account not just a new schedule of deadlines but also how clients would look on screen. This led to media training and grooming services becoming part of the Public Relations practitioners' repertoire (Alexander 2004, p. 1; Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 27).

State government authorities started to appoint Public Relations practitioners as employees, again echoing the practice in the US that saw practitioners becoming known as 'in house' counsel. There were then only three Public Relations consultancies in Sydney, so they were slow to become part of mainstream business. By 1960 however, Eric White Associates became Australia's first international Public Relations consultancy (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 26; Morath 2008, p. 159) and the first publicly listed Public Relations consultancy in Australia (Hill & Knowlton 1968, p. 4; Morath 2008, p. 52). Golding notes that

in the late 1950s and 1960s Eric White's empire became very large indeed with branches in all Australian states, in Canberra, and overseas in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and New Zealand (1991, p. 6).

Eric White Associates was also among the first consultancies in the world to introduce specialisations into Public Relations practice and to break away from "the almost total orientation toward publicity" (Golding 1991, p. 6). By the beginning of the 1960s, Eric White Associates had several divisions, all led by specialists in their fields. They included financial relations, a government relations unit in Canberra, and groups specialising in tourism and travel Public Relations, and health and science (Golding 1991, p. 6). Connolly (Morath 2008, p. 159) adds that the real beginning of the industry in Australia was Eric White Associates, stating that "Eric was a world leader in public relations – no doubt about that. He spawned everyone who was everyone in the business in Australia". Golding notes that Eric White "created the biggest public relations team in Australia – at its peak in terms of numbers of people employed probably the third or fourth largest in the world" (1991, p. 5). According to Golding, White:

could always see the broad canvas; while most public relations people thought of their craft in terms of marketing-related publicity, he always saw it as having a much broader function and as an essential tool of senior management. Moreover, he could articulate this better than anyone (Golding 1991, p. 5).

According to Golding, Eric White Associates was recognised as an international leader in virtually every facet of Public Relations practice for years, was seen as an innovator and pace-setter and instilled in his staff a pride in the work they were doing and therefore “in Public Relations as a vocation” (Golding 1991, p. 6).

A description of the industry in Australia in the 1960s was provided by a handbook about Public Relations around the world written by Hill and Knowlton executives that noted that there is “a widespread awareness and use of public relations...but this is not to say that management on the whole has an appreciation of public relations in its broader sense” and “most public relations activity is directed narrowly to product publicity alone” (Hill & Knowlton 1968, p. 4). The 1968 book also stated that “the Public Relations Institute of Australia operates throughout the country but mainly in the major cities of Sydney and Melbourne. The institute is of good repute and has the support of industry” but “as yet it has little public influence or recognition” (Hill & Knowlton 1968, p. 5). This view of the PRIA in 1960 was echoed by Golding, speaking in 1991 to the PRIA. He said that none of the 20 consultants at Eric White Associates were members of the PRIA and that “Eric White viewed the Institute if not exactly with disfavour at least with ambivalence” and was critical of what he perceived to be “unsatisfactory standards of practice in the Industry and the Institute’s lack of action to correct them” (Golding 1991, p. 1).

By the early 1970s, according to former consultant Lesley Brydon (Morath 2008, p. 96):

There were about three major consultancies. Neilson McCarthy was well-established and Hal Myers, John Cameron, Tom Flower and Bob Adams were

partners there. It had a very strong reputation in corporate PR. International Public Relations (IPR) was owned by Laurie Kerr and based in Melbourne and John Connolly was running the Sydney office at that time. Laurie Kerr's strong government contacts meant that the consultancy did a lot of government work and IPR was noted for this, as was Eric White Associates, the third of the major consultancies. At the time, issues management was just emerging as a major area of public relations. There were other consultancies around but these three were the major ones.

As part of documenting how the industry developed in Australia, Brydon's recollection of the role gender played in the 1970s is worth noting:

I realised they'd hired me because they wanted a 'sheila' to do the publicity work. In those days the men did all the finance, corporate, all the heavy duty stuff and the girls did the publicity (Morath 2008, pp. 102-103).

In 1976, the first Australian textbook on Public Relations, written by David Potts, was published but it was almost a quarter of a century, and what Macnamara calls "a local academic publishing gap", before the next Australian-authored PR text was published (Macnamara 2012, p. 10). The industry in the 1980s and 1990s saw both multinational PR consultancies and advertising agencies set up offices in Australia and ultimately nine of the top 10 biggest Australian consultancies were bought by Advertising agencies (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 27; Tymson & Sherman 1987, p. 73). This was the beginning of corporations starting to see the merits of integrating their communication activities. "Advertising agencies had realised that clients were looking for broader-based communications strategies – not just advertising – and that PR could play a complementary role" (Morath 2008, p. 103). They started to align what they were doing in Advertising and in Public Relations and other marketing support activities, as up until then, in most cases, these activities were planned and implemented completely separately and usually by separate consulting businesses, for example a Public Relations consultancy, an Advertising agency and a Sales Promotion company. This in itself reflected a real 'growing up' of the status and

perceived relevance of Public Relations activities alongside the often flashier and more expensive Advertising function.

As companies began to see the value PR provided, Advertising agencies bought high performing Public Relations consultancies (Johnston & Zawawi 2000; Tymson & Sherman 1987) and either incorporated them into their agencies under the one brand or maintained the name of the firms they bought and were seen to 'partner' with them. This recognition by these large multinational agencies of the value that Public Relations services afforded organisations marked a significant shift in the perceived value of its services and its practitioners. In 1985, several major PR consultancies in Australia reported a 25% increase in turnover on the previous year, and a similar growth pattern occurred in 1986 (Tymson & Sherman 1987, p. 15). A high-profile example of a campaign that integrated Advertising and Public Relations at that time was the 'Grim Reaper' campaign for the National Advisory Committee on AIDS in 1987 (Sheehan 2014a, pp. 14-15) which used Advertising, Opinion Leadership and Media briefings and kits.

The 1980s and 1990s were also noteworthy in the development of PR practice in Australia because of the efforts by the then thriving industry (despite the challenges of the Australian economy at the time) to expand the body of knowledge of Public Relations and make it available through ongoing professional development activities and tertiary education. Institutes and universities began to develop Public Relations qualifications in the 1980s and 1990s, after the first institutes introduced them a decade or more earlier (Johnston & Zawawi 2000; Morath 2008) and increasingly sought accreditation for them from the PRIA. Competent, well-trained Public Relations graduates started to be in demand as the industry changed and grew, and education has continued to be an integral part of the expansion and development of the Australian Public Relations industry (Johnston & Zawawi 2000, p. 28). Public Relations education in Australia is discussed in more detail in the next sections of this chapter.

By the first decade of this century, despite the efforts of a growing industry, the introduction of qualifications and the activities of the professional body, Public Relations had failed to make a good name for itself. Writing in 2003 about PR in Australasia in an international textbook on Public Relations, Motion, Leitch and Cliffe stated that:

There is no requirement for PR practitioners to belong to the professional association. Thus, anyone – regardless of education, experience, or understanding of ethics – is able to use the title ‘public relations consultant’ and profit from it (2003, p. 124).

Public Relations had become a “pejorative term” that was not well regarded by the general community (Morath 2008, p. 28). Connolly (Morath 2008, p. 163) agrees that the Australian Public Relations industry has “done a particularly bad job” of managing its image and reputation. The terms ‘spin’ and ‘spin doctor’ that Johnston (Morath 2008, p. 238) dismisses as “emotively-charged terms that have unfairly been pinned on the public relations profession” have not helped. Brydon (Morath 2008, p. 117) notes that the way people in an industry behave will always ultimately over time create and project the image of the industry, stating that:

...if you think you’re a spin doctor, you sure are a spin doctor. And it isn’t attractive, you know, it’s sort of a smart-arse image really isn’t it?

Johnston observes that the:

massive growth of public relations has probably meant that the image of PR has improved as it is better understood and incorporated into management structures, but that it has suffered by the way it has, at times, been used to impair or deflect transparency (Morath 2008, p. 238).

This view is in line with Brydon’s comment above that it can be the “way people behave in the industry”, that is if they use PR “to impair or deflect” then the industry will not gain, or deserve, a better reputation. Ward (Morath 2008, p. 239) points out

that the PR function has improved out of sight but its image has not improved in line with the improvement in practice. Harrison's account (Morath 2008, p. 239) of his 30 years in Public Relations practice supports Ward's view that the practice is sound: "Most PR people work hard and are totally honourable. In 30 years, I still have never personally seen any PR person act unethically."

The connection between education and professionalism which will be discussed later in this chapter will examine the impact that educating practitioners have and can have on the reputation of the Public Relations industry and on the practice of Public Relations. Before that dynamic can be explored, it is important to examine the history of Public Relations education so far, firstly in the western world and then later in Australia. The following sections attempt to chronicle how PR education developed and the impact it has had on both how Public Relations is practised and how the industry is perceived.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN THE WESTERN WORLD

The first ever Public Relations course delivered in an institute of higher learning in the US, and possibly in the world, was in 1923 when Edward Bernays addressed a class at New York University. In an attempt to clarify the field and to widen public understanding of it (and to promote his first book published that year, *Crystallizing public opinion*), Bernays successfully approached New York University in 1923 and offered to conduct a course on Public Relations (Bernays 1952, pp. 83 & 84).

Among his objectives were to extend some status to the term 'counsel on public relations' which he believed was possible by lecturing on the principles, practices and ethics of the new vocation at a university (Seitel 2017). According to Bernays:

It gave students an opportunity to become acquainted with the field; and by giving public relations academic standing, it aided the development of the profession (1952, p. 84).

His course did not lead to an immediate flood of Public Relations courses being offered but over the course of the next decades, Public Relations education established itself in higher education. Boston University was the first institution to offer an academic degree in the field (of Public Relations) (Bernays 1952, p. 135). Rex Harlow, thought to be the first American professor of Public Relations, commenced teaching a course in it at Stanford University in San Francisco in 1939. By 1945, 21 American universities offered courses in Public Relations and two years later this number had increased to 47. By 1947 Boston University had expanded its first PR degree and launched the first School of Public Relations (Lattimore et al.2004, p. 35). By 1950, many universities offered complete degrees in Public Relations. By 1951, the first Doctor of Philosophy degree in Public Relations was conferred by Columbia University in New York (Bernays 1952, p. 145).

A 1977 study (Johnson &Rabin 1977) documented the continual rise in numbers of PR courses, showing a nearly 80% increase in the number of American colleges and universities which offered PR courses in the previous two decades (Johnson & Rabin 1977, p. 38). This led to their concerns about the impact of this growth on the quality of PR courses, and to their subsequent investigation. Their study examined the effects of the backgrounds and qualifications of university Public Relations instructors on the 'content and substance' of PR education and, eventually, on the profession itself (Johnson & Rabin 1977, p. 38). Their study of 164 PR instructors in the US was significant and until this current study, no similar or substantial research involving PR educators had occurred in Australia.

Some of the findings of the Johnson and Rabin study are that 41.5% of university PR instructors held PhDs but few of them, 7.2%, were in Public Relations and the authors suggest that was due to a lack of a "true doctoral path for prospective public relations faculty" (1977, p. 41). More than half, 54.2%, believed that theory and practice should be taught in equal measure in PR courses. Most instructors had some Public Relations industry experience but still valued and used industry speakers and 51.9% of instructors had never published a book or article on a PR topic. Ultimately the

study found that the answer to the question of whether the instructors were qualified to teach PR was a “cautious yes” (p. 47) that they were qualified in general but that it “is not prudent...to utilize practical experience as the sole determination of acceptability and competence” (p. 47). The authors were concerned that the majority of PR instructors also taught other subjects and were not focused on PR or contributing to its body of knowledge.

Despite these issues in PR education in 1977, the significant growth in PR courses continued and Vercic et al. (2001) claimed that in 2001 there were more than 3000 university courses in Public Relations in the US. By the beginning of this century, two thirds of American PR practitioners were college and university graduates with bachelor’s degrees, with almost half of them in Public Relations. In 1999, 30% had master’s degrees and half of those were in Communications, Public Relations, Journalism or related media fields (Lattimore et al.2004, p. 17).

As mentioned earlier, PR education in the United Kingdom lagged behind the USA and Australia. The formation of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in Britain in 1948, which set out as one of its aims “to consider the institution of examinations or other suitable tests with the object of raising the status of those practising public relations to an agreed public relations level”, first introduced the notion of a need for Public Relations education (L’Etang 2003, p. 44). In 1956 the IPR introduced its own qualifications – a certificate and a diploma. The development of Public Relations education in the UK was occurring there in a period of time when PR was seen as “an extension of personal relations and good manners and therefore dependent upon personality and social class” (L’Etang 2003, pp. 44-45) and not something that formal education prepared someone for. The following quote captures the view of the society then and that of many PR practitioners about the role of, and need for, formal Public Relations education:

In taking on people, degrees don’t matter a damn. What does matter is to have critical ability, to be able to assess a situation and the factors affecting it.

You must have maturity. This is the sort of man who will go to the top (Tim Traverse-Healy in 1962, cited in L'Etang 2003, p. 45).

It was not until 1989 that the first undergraduate PR degrees commenced at Bournemouth and Plymouth Universities in England. A Public Relations degree also commenced at Leeds Metropolitan University, also in England, in 1990. The views of the 1960s prevailed and there were tensions around what should be taught in a Public Relations degree – what the balance should be between theoretical and practical elements in the courses (L'Etang 2003, p. 45). In the 1990s, the IPR specified what universities needed to do (and teach) to earn IPR accreditation and this caused much contention with academics. Academics were concerned not just about the loss of academic freedom, which was described in Chapter One, but also about the IPR's emphasis on practice and, in their view, its lack of understanding of the existence of a theoretical body of knowledge.

As the introduction of Public Relations degrees created the United Kingdom's first Public Relations academics, they were required to undertake scholarly research and this led to the early signs of a development of a culture of Public Relations research and the emergence of a body of knowledge that the IPR had failed to identify and value (L'Etang 2003). Theaker (2001) noted however that even though the number of PR courses and the academics required to teach them grew, Public Relations research was still in its infancy and there were few academics actually doing research. What was being produced had little connection to the Public Relations industry and the tensions this caused highlighted the different expectations of Public Relations education of practitioners and educators. L'Etang (2003) noted that some practitioners expected university courses to produce practitioners who had been 'trained' in techniques and administrative skills and they were 'scornful' of well-educated graduates who understood the strategies and theories underpinning Public Relations but who were without fully honed practical skills. Pritchard, Fawkes and Tench (in Tench &Yeomans 2006, p. 45) described the "wider UK contextual framework for education and training" as putting skills centre stage and noted that

the achievement of vocational skills was being listed as the intended learning outcomes of courses. There has been a trend in the last decade towards generic skills and towards the involvement of employers and educationalists in defining those skills. This has led to new concepts in Public Relations education such as 'employability' and 'externality'.

The issue of competing expectations between the Public Relations industry and the academy about the needs of Public Relations education has been addressed a number of times in the US. In 1998, the National Communication Association sponsored a conference on PR Education which later informed the report, *A port of entry*, which will be discussed next. Two outcomes of that conference ran counter to "the conventional wisdom regarding a divide between educators and practitioners" about PR education (Neff et al. 1999, p. 34). The first was that there was little discrepancy between the outcomes in graduates highly valued by educators and those highly valued by practitioners, with the authors of an article on the findings suggesting the "gap between the 'ivory tower' and the 'real world' is narrower than believed" (Neff et al. 1999, p. 34). The second was a contrast between educators and practitioners in what they determined was the most desirable, 'highest rated' graduate outcome. Practitioners valued 'good attitude' and educators valued 'writing news releases', revealing that practitioners value an affective outcome and educators value a skill.

The issue of educators' and practitioners' supposedly differing views on PR education, not supported by the above findings however, was addressed in 2006 in the US by the Commission on Public Relations Education, a body that was established in 1999 and sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (Heath & Coombs 2006, p. 429). It commissioned a report on the status of and the relationship between Public Relations education and practice. The report, titled *Public Relations education and practice for the 21st century – the professional bond*, edited by VanSlyke Turk, presented recommendations for PR undergraduate and graduate education "to

demonstrate, facilitate and encourage the kind of linking of public relations education and practice that is the hallmark of any profession” (VanSlyke Turk 2006, p. 5).

VanSlyke Turk noted in the 2006 report that there had been significant growth in PR education since a 1999 PRSA report, *A port of entry*, and “everybody wanted to get into public relations” (pp. 13-14). She cautioned that a downside of the strong demand for PR courses was that they were being taught by faculty not experienced in Public Relations nor properly credentialed to teach the subject. She noted that teaching vacancies in the field had been filled with instructors without a PhD or research or theory knowledge, without actual practitioner experience, or both.

The publication of *The professional bond* most notably led to the establishment of ‘the five-course approach’ to the content of a Public Relations degree that reinforced much of what was already occurring in PR education and established a framework for others that was enthusiastically adopted around the world. Today, at least three quarters of Public Relations degrees are based on the ‘five-course approach’ (Toth & Aldoory 2010, p. 4).

The report recommended that a minimum of five courses (or subjects or units depending on the language of the university) should be required in the public relations major. As such, an academic emphasis on Public Relations should minimally include the following courses:

1. Introduction to public relations (including theory, origin and principles)
2. Public relations research, measurement and evaluation
3. Public relations writing and production
4. Supervised work experience in public relations (internship)
5. An additional public relations course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns (VanSlyke Turk 2006, p. 7).

Tensions between practitioners and educators of Public Relations about whether the emphasis of what is researched and taught should favour the theory or the practice have existed since the beginnings of PR education and exist to this day (Heath & Coombs 2006; L'Etang 2008; Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg 1996; Theaker 2001). L'Etang (2008, pp. 249-252) provides a real insight into the issues facing early Public Relations academics by her perceptive use of the term 'first generation' Public Relations educators to describe where they existed in the history of university academia. Sociology academics, for example, have hundreds of years of research and academic experience to draw on, and for more than 30 years Sociology education has demonstrated its focus on improving Sociology education by publishing a pedagogical journal *Teaching Sociology*. Equally the American Sociological Association has had a strong teaching movement since the early 1970s (Cross, cited in McKinney 2007, p.1). Compared to Sociology teachers and to Mathematics academics who might reasonably be described as 'twentieth generation' Mathematics educators, the first Public Relations academics, and realistically this includes the current ones, did not have mentors in their field. They could also be seen by others, including academics from long established academic disciplines who would view them dimly as a result, as having been employed "by their institutions solely as teachers of convenient cash-cow courses" (L'Etang 2008, p. 249).

Attempts to connect academic theory with the industry and to ensure each informs the other include the launch in 2006 by US PR academic Elizabeth Toth of a new research annual *Best Practices in Public Relations and Communications Management*. By contrast, the online journal *PRism*, edited by New Zealand PR academic Elspeth Tilley, sets out to 'encourage diverse perspectives', which by definition may not mean industry-focused or industry-friendly (L'Etang 2008, p. 252). These fledgling initiatives of 'first generation' academics typify the nature of attempts to grapple with defining Public Relations as an academic discipline and to find its most legitimate place in the university landscape. Reviews of Public Relations education have been regularly undertaken by the industry – outside of Australia – over the past three decades

(1981, 1987, 1999, 2006 and 2010), demonstrating that it was grappling with the issue of PR education serving the industry and how this should be done. These actions by an equally fledgling industry could be seen as attempts to control Public Relations education or at least to ensure that it was functionalist and non-critical.

In 2010, a review of Public Relations education was commissioned by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management and undertaken by PR academics Elizabeth Toth and Linda Aldoory. Their findings provide an account of the status of Public Relations education in the context of Public Relations practice in the western world (particularly) at that time. The key findings of the study are:

1. Public relations is generally defined as a strategic function for building and maintaining relationships
2. Undergraduate programs are basically designed to prepare future practitioners
3. Curriculum frequently reflects the five-course standard suggested in the Commission of Public Relations Education's 2006 report *The professional bond*
4. However, important cultural distinctions are often embedded within programs
5. Barriers to development of "the ideal public relations program" include resources, government, country culture, program structure and inadequate and ineffective relationships with practicing [sic] professionals
6. Graduate programs emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking.

Toth and Aldoory (2010, p. 4) determined that the needs of the global PR industry could be met by:

public relations education and training ...being structured along a global perspective: educators must meet the demands for skilled workers who are inter-culturally competent and technologically savvy, and who hold a *world* view.

This 'world view' could be thought about in terms of Habermas' notion of 'life world' (Habermas 1970), which was introduced in Chapter One, and means 'whole life' not merely one's 'work life'. Or it could be interpreted in line with McKinney (2007, p. 117) who states that Higher Education exists to provide an environment in which the core features of the emerging global culture can be "expounded, elaborated, applied and internalised" by students and faculty alike. McKinney (2007, p. 117) also notes that it is this "rather than any form of job preparation [that] is the great purpose that drives higher education's new found prominence wherever the assumptions of this global culture are adopted".

Toth and Aldoory (2010, pp. 13-14) also found that there was considerable agreement amongst providers of PR education about its purpose and that it was largely vocational, challenging the views of many (L'Etang 2008; McKinney 2007; Tench & Yeomans 2006). Toth and Aldoory (2010, pp. 13-14) found that the main purpose of the undergraduate programs was to prepare future Public Relations professionals and "cultivate a person who can assume technical and managerial positions", "think critically and strategically as communication professionals" and to prepare graduates to meet the needs of 'industry'. This approach sits comfortably with the functionalist approach being taken to teaching PR in the US, based on PR educators' "reliance on Grunig's management theories and excellence study" (Holtzhausen 2002, p. 252), described as "a metanarrative lacking in reflexivity" (Holtzhausen 2002, p. 252).

This focus on teaching Public Relations with vocational outcomes in mind and in a manner designed to produce graduates who perform the expected function of Public Relations is among the questions being explored in this thesis. This study will explore the extent to which Public Relations is being taught from a functionalist perspective in

Australia and/or whether it has established itself in academia as a genuine academic research discipline and is being taught critically.

The issues of how and where Public Relations should be taught and who should teach it are not purely twenty first century concerns. Writing in 1952, Bernays (1952, p. 146) noted that there was a question about where PR fitted into university and college curricula, an issue still being grappled with in universities around the world 66 years later. He observed that sometimes it was put into Journalism, other times in Business or in Economics, Politics or Government.

Which faculty Public Relations degrees belong in remains a contentious matter. Mackey, discussing the Australian HE landscape, has a firm view about where it should belong. He notes that although Public Relations is taught in different faculties at different universities, including Business faculties, because “public relations is to do with the philosophy of social understanding, although it is related to business measures”, the subject is more properly located in Arts faculties (Mackey 2001, p. 8). He advocates for the ‘intelligent integration’ of Politics, Literature, Religion and Philosophy with a better understanding of Public Relations. He believes this integration of Public Relations with the critical approach of the Arts faculty would expose the ethical, political and cultural implications to the most rigorous intellectual scrutiny which he considers “would be more valuable than the currently simplistic demonising and rejection of public relations by many academics” (Mackey 2001, p. 9).

L’Etang agrees with Mackey’s desire to integrate Public Relations scholarship, and teaching and learning as a logical consequence, with other academic disciplines when she notes:

There is a danger the public relations academics and students can be too introspective or ‘navel gazing’ working convergently within rigid railway grooves rather than wandering freely and creatively in search of useful insights. Can we talk about ‘persuasion’ (and we must) without reading psychology and political science? (L’Etang 2008, pp. 6-7)

Despite there being increasing numbers of Public Relations degrees at more and more universities, some people still see Public Relations as a 'vocational subject' (Mackey 2001, p. 2) although Mackey himself does not, suggesting that the discussion should not be about which university faculty it belongs in, but instead whether (as it is currently being taught) it should legitimately occupy a place in university teaching and research at all. Botan and Hazleton (2006, p. xi) stated that it should be possible to study Public Relations as an instance of applied communication theory to explain and predict Public Relations practices and use Public Relations practice as a site for the development of communication theory. Clearly, they believe that PR education should be the purview of a university but they pointedly state "it should be possible" (Botan & Hazleton 2006, p. xi) rather than claiming that it should be the status quo.

Formal Public Relations education did not commence in Australia for approximately 50 years after the first fledgling PR courses started in the US. Given the Australian academy had the US experience to draw on in establishing its approach to PR education, the next section's account of how Public Relations education commenced in Australia and has developed until now describes an interesting time in Public Relations history.

HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

There has been little written about the history of Public Relations education in Australia and of what does exist, it is mostly a re-telling of original sources and therefore there is considerable consensus on 'what' occurred. There is however some discrepancy about the 'where' and the 'when' and this will be part of what is discussed in this section. In 1960, before formal courses in Public Relations were established, Golding (1991, p. 6) claims that Eric White Associates developed Australia's first "internal Public Relations training" in the form of its own cadet program as a source of new practitioners. Golding, acknowledging that at that time most people working in Public Relations were former journalists, noted that "it was becoming clearer that we could not rely forever on newspapers as a recruitment

source” (1991, p. 6). In fact, more than just stating that most PR practitioners at the time had left newspapers to join the new PR industry, as a journalist himself until 1957 when The Argus newspaper closed and his employment opportunities were limited and he reluctantly joined Eric White Associates, his view of PR had been that he “didn’t like what he saw” (1991, p. 3) and that he “shared the widely held view that only the unsuccessful and the unwanted left journalism to go into Public Relations, and to do so by choice was rather like leaving the Labor Party to stand as an independent in your old seat” (1991, p. 3).

Laurie Kerr was an ex-newspaper journalist who founded the Melbourne-based International Public Relations, which became arguably the leading national consultancy in Australia (Morath 2008). In a chapter he authored, ‘The skills and training of a Public Relations practitioner’, in the 1976 book *Public Relations practice in Australia* edited by Potts, Kerr wrote that up until the 1970s in Australia, entry into Public Relations practice had been through the ranks of journalism (Kerr 1976, p. 23). In fact, well into the 1970s most people entering the field came from journalism (Alexander 2004, p. 1) as their media contacts (in the guise of their former colleagues), writing ability and news sense made them suited to the publicity-orientated nature of the work at the time. But as the work of Public Relations practitioners became “no longer simply publicity” (Kerr 1976, p. 17), echoing the evolution of PR practice in the US (www.awpage.com; Bernays 1952; Lattimore 2014), and required skills other than just writing skills, the industry relied less on journalists as recruits.

Kerr observed that even though some people came into Public Relations “with no more qualifications than an ability to get on with people”, he believed that by the 1970s “it was no longer good enough to learn on the job”. He argued that people needed education but it should not aim to “simply turn out technicians but to turn out educated men and women who are experts in the field of communication” (Kerr 1976, p. 24).

Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst, New South Wales (now Charles Sturt University) was the first institute of higher learning to identify that the emerging Public Relations industry needed formal qualifications for its practitioners. There is some discrepancy on the chronology of events, given that research has relied largely on the recollection many years later of those involved at the time. It has been cited variously as 1969 (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005; Johnston & Zawawi 2000), 1970 (Quarles & Potts 1990) and “towards the end of the 1960s” (Morath 2008, p. 52) that then consultant David Potts was sought out as a then senior Public Relations consultant and invited to design Australia’s first full time Public Relations course. The first students enrolled in 1970 and began the first course in Australia in Public Relations in 1971. The course became a degree in 1975 (Morath 2008, pp. 52-53). Queensland Institute of Technology (now Queensland University of Technology – QUT) started a diploma program at the same time and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) followed in 1973. QUT started the first Public Relations degree in 1974 (Xavier 2012) and UTS started the first graduate diploma (in Communication Management) in 1983 (Quarles & Potts 1990).

Contrary to this well-established and cited account of the history of Public Relations education in Australia, Gleeson (2014) argues that Australia’s first Public Relations course was in fact at RMIT in Melbourne in 1964, several years earlier than that in Bathurst or Queensland and this is also cited by Johnston and Macnamara (2013). Further support of Gleeson’s view is provided in a 1968 handbook on Public Relations around the world, written by Hill and Knowlton executives. In the chapter about the discipline in Australia, the authors note that “recently, it (the PRIA) has begun to generate courses in public relations at leading educational institutions” (Hill & Knowlton 1968, p. 5). Notwithstanding Gleeson’s view, Potts recalled that when he set out to develop (what he believes to be) the first Public Relations course, it was decided that it would be a three-year diploma. As there was at the time no model for a course like that in Australia due to Public Relations being “essentially a craft in those

days” Potts “based it on what (he) expected a potential employee to be able to do” (Morath 2008, p. 53).

Since there were, arguably, no (or few) Public Relations courses in the country at that time, the obvious consequence of that is that there were no qualified PR teachers either. So, when Potts finished designing the course, he was invited to teach it and so headed to Bathurst (in regional New South Wales) with his “RM Williams boots and Akubra hat” (Morath 2008, p. 52) for what he planned to be a short stint away from his consulting career. In fact, Potts never returned to consulting and later became Australia’s first professor of Public Relations (Johnston & Macnamara 2013, p. 3). In 1975, Potts travelled as a visiting professor in Public Relations and Journalism to Ohio University in the US for six months. He learned about how Americans approached the teaching of Public Relations and brought some ideas back to Australia and implemented them in the courses at Bathurst (Morath 2008, p. 53).

This period marked the start of an era which was later described as “the early model (of PR tertiary education) in which tertiary courses were confined to teaching-focused institutions and conducted largely by teacher-practitioners” (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005) and offered in Arts or Communication faculties in “vocationally-oriented second tier institutions” (Fitch 2014b, p. 623).

In Ohio, Potts became aware that there was a body of knowledge about communication. According to him, once he came to understand that one of the qualifications for a profession is that there needs to be a body of knowledge, he suddenly saw Public Relations as a profession (Morath 2008, p. 53). Based on his observations in Ohio in 1975 and then again when he returned to America to do some post-graduate study at California State University and Stanford University in 1981, Potts believed that Australian PR practice was of great quality. He felt “that Australians had nothing to look up to anywhere in the world” (Morath 2008, p. 55).

At that time, there was a pioneering energy in the industry in Australia that led to the establishment of the structures and ideological frameworks needed to support the

growth and development of the industry and of practitioners as aspiring professionals. Education was just one area that benefited from the work of these industry pioneers. State Public Relations institutes formed a national body in 1960 to standardise the codes of ethics, membership gradings and educational standards. By the late 1980s, most states had university degrees majoring in Public Relations and within a few years 40% of new recruits to the industry were PR graduates. Speaking in 1991, Golding (p.13) said he believed that there were now

many fine courses (in PR) available to people who seek a career in Public Relations and the growing attraction of Public Relations as a vocation will...underwrite the calibre of the people (p. 13).

The timing of the introduction of PRIA accreditation of courses is contested and is thought to have commenced in June 1985 (Tymson, Lazar & Lazar 2002, pp. 15; 74), in “the late 80s and early 90s” (Johnston & Macnamara 2013, p. 10) and in 1990 (PRIA 1991). The 1970s and 1980s were marked with “contested and diverging understandings of public relations education, as either suitable training to meet industry requirements or as a theoretically informed academic discipline offering a broad generalist education” (Fitch 2014b, p. 623). Macnamara calls one of the key factors that has shaped Australian PR education “the practice-theory debate” which he describes as “industry pressure for ‘work-ready’ vocationally-orientated graduates” (Macnamara 2012, p. 10). He points out that most scholars agree that graduates need to be able to find employment and meet reasonable expectations of employers but they equally recognise that the role of universities includes producing graduates who know how to think analytically and critically and who are equipped to contribute to society as a whole, not only to specific fields of practice (Macnamara 2012, p. 10). Conversely, Macnamara also notes that “the influence of the industry with its practical (vocational) focus is strong” (Macnamara 2012, p. 10). Fawkes and Tench state that in the UK, on one hand industry perceives PR education as overly theoretical and lacking practical application and on the other blames PR educators for failing to instil the “analytical flexibility found in non-PR graduates” (Fawkes & Tench

2004, p. 2). This study will explore the extent to which these issues are occurring in PR education in Australia.

In an interview in 2006, Potts stated that he believed that Australian PR practitioners could still be proud of their abilities. He believed that the Australian industry was (then):

training people well at the technician level and at the mid-level of public relations or public affairs practice, which is the supervision of the technician. Where there is a weakness is at the strategic level. What we need to be able to do is place the practitioner in such a position that management requires of them certain qualifications, one of which might be membership of the industry association. At the moment anyone can call themselves a public relations practitioner... without any qualifications (Morath 2008, p. 55).

Potts observed that academic learning has helped to position Public Relations as a professional discipline, consistent with the broader contextual view of Hatherell and Bartlett (2005) who noted that the growth of the Public Relations academy is part of a move to an instrumental view of Higher Education. According to Potts, he has always held the belief that Higher Education PR education was about training people not necessarily for their first job, not even for their second job, but maybe for their third, where they are going to employ the knowledge, the skills, the education they have acquired through a three-year degree program (Morath 2008, p. 57).

This view will be explored in the next section about Public Relations education and is in fact central to the questions this study seeks to answer. Mackey (2001) believes that where the Public Relations discipline is located in the university academic structure, for example in the Arts or Business faculty, influences whether it is being taught from a 'functionalist' or 'theoretical' perspective. Mackey's views follow on from the perennial debates about whether Public Relations is an Art, a Social Science or a Management function. His view is that it is more than a Management function that can be taught in a functionalist manner and this approach to teaching PR

compromises students' understanding of its broader function and capability. While McKie and Hunt (1999) wrote that Public Relations was struggling to gain the academic recognition its burgeoning undergraduate and postgraduate degrees deserved, and posited that this could be because PR academics were not connecting with major new ideas in established academic disciplines, Hatherell and Bartlett (2005) saw that the teaching focus of universities offering Public Relations education was being replaced with a greater emphasis on research. Alexander notes that "because public relations in the region historically developed out of journalism and press agency ... this history has informed much of the present curriculum" (2004, p. 1).

As discussed, Public Relations education has played a significant role in the development and status of Public Relations as a vocation and as an academic discipline. The role that education has played and continues to play in it being regarded as a profession is explored in the next section. The following describes a highly contested account of the relationship between education and the professionalism of Public Relations, including a lack of agreement around what constitutes a profession and whether or not Public Relations is yet to achieve 'professional' status.

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM

As discussed in the previous section, Public Relations education in Australia largely took its lead from the United States. But Australia had quite a developed range of PR courses in the VET and university sectors 20 years before the United Kingdom could make the same claim (L'Etang 2003, p. 45).

This section will discuss the considerable importance placed on the role of formal education in a practice or discipline earning the status of a profession. Writing about the notion of professionalism in Public Relations in the UK, L'Etang (2003, p. 43) states that "it seems unlikely that PR will ever achieve full professional status" and

subsequently uses the term 'occupation' to describe it. Her view is that in the UK the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) has failed to establish clearer jurisdiction (control of occupational boundaries), a cognitive base (expert knowledge) or social legitimacy (acceptance of its social role and acknowledgement of standards of ethical practice) and Public Relations there cannot as a result claim professional status.

Theaker (2001), Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (1996) concur that one of the tenets of a profession is the existence of an academic body of knowledge that supports the understanding and practice of the discipline. There are other tenets of professions, and these will be discussed later in this section, but a standardised approach to education is one that has a pivotal role in the establishment and existence of a discipline or vocation being recognised as a profession (Heath 2006, p. 429). Fitch (2014b, p. 623) contends that Public Relations education is in fact "a professionalisation strategy for a professional organisation" and the PRIA introduced accreditation of Public Relations courses to ensure there was a properly constituted, controlled and industry-supported education system. The PRIA at the time described accreditation as an important milestone in the development of a vocation into a profession (PRIA 1991).

Before going on to explore the role of education in determining a profession, it is important to acknowledge that some scholars readily accept that for whatever reason and rationale, Public Relations is already a profession. Toth and Aldoory (2010) declare Public Relations "a global profession" while Kruckeberg (1998) is less absolute but still ready to apply the 'professional' status. He contends that while Public Relations is not quite a profession it is a "professional occupation" albeit "ill-defined and vaguely described" (Kruckeberg & Starck 1988). While they agree that formal education in PR is essential, they do not see it as leading to it becoming a profession, like others do, as they can accept Public Relations as it is as already being a profession, or in Kruckeberg's case, as 'close enough' as it is. Kruckeberg states that Public Relations is a professional occupation requiring a specific professional education curriculum of study (Kruckeberg 1998). He does not see it as problematic

that as an occupational specialisation it cannot meet the traditional criteria of a profession. He thinks other service-oriented occupations also don't meet the established criteria for a profession but as with those, Public Relations can be related to 'professionalism' because its practitioners perform services for individuals whose interests are at stake.

By declaring Public Relations a profession, practitioners and scholars are empowered to claim ownership over an occupational specialisation and help to elevate its status as both a practice and an academic discipline, no longer relegated to a sub-set of Journalism or Mass Communication. Fitch (2014c, p. 271) describes this, referring to the role of PR degrees in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, as education having a "professional narrative" which distinguished it as a distinct field and "confirming its professional status". As a 'professional' area, Public Relations has its own set of curricular needs and professional values (Kruckeberg 1998) and by recognising it in such a way it creates the opportunity, and sets up the need, for those to be met.

As will be seen in the following discussion, there is a divergence of opinion about the role that education plays in the professionalisation and professionalism of Public Relations. Some scholars think that conceptualising Public Relations as a profession requires it to be supported appropriately by education and the desired academic status, others see the development of appropriate education as one of the steps toward the professionalisation of Public Relations. Another view is that education is not always a major factor or even a requirement of professionalisation and there are in fact a number of ways of "conceptualising professionalism in public relations" (de Bussy & Wolf 2009, p. 377).

According to Heath and Coombs, "part of becoming a profession is standardised education/training" (2006, p. 429) although it could be argued that they are misusing the term 'training'. For example, people who have taken part in the electrical industry's standardised training to become electricians would be regarded as professionals by Heath and Coombs' reckoning. Yet as electricians are not typically regarded as professionals, this raises the issue that there are differences between

education and training that are critical here. It is likely that Heath and Coombs are referring to the notion of people taking a professional approach to their work. Using the example of an electrician, who has undergone the industry training, learned his or her trade and become qualified as an electrician, the electrician could conduct him or herself professionally but that does not make him or her a member of a profession. An electrician has a trade not a profession but can certainly be a professional tradesperson just as a Public Relations practitioner can be a professional practitioner without Public Relations being a profession. Part of becoming a profession is standardised education; part of becoming a trade is standardised training. A comprehensive account of the characteristics of and differences between education and training is provided later in this chapter, but 'education' can essentially be defined as developing in people the impetus to think about issues of values and ethics, to be fully alive to the world and to become civilised human beings (Markwell 2007, p. 29) and 'training' can be defined as the teaching of skills required for employment (Misko 1999, p. 1).

To determine her view on the key features of a profession, L'Etang drew on sociological literature. She determined that these were:

- A specialised skill and service
- An intellectual and practical training
- A high degree of professional autonomy
- A fiduciary relationship with the client
- A sense of collective responsibility to the profession as a whole
- An embargo on some methods of attracting business, and
- An occupational organisation testing competence, regulating standards and maintaining discipline (L'Etang 2003, p. 50).

Cooper's view is that the claim to be a profession traditionally rests on certain precepts, which he outlined as:

- Esoteric knowledge – theoretical or technical – not available to the general population
- Commitment to social values, such as health or justice
- National organisation to set standards, control membership, liaise with wider society, and
- Extra-strong moral commitment to support professional values (cited in Tench & Deflagbe 2008, p. 7).

Tench and Deflagbe (2008) believe that the so-called Public Relations body of knowledge has become available to non-professionals and therefore the first of Cooper's precepts means PR does not qualify as a profession as the educational barriers that would essentially 'control membership' of the field as a profession are not in place. According to Shanahan, Meehan and Mogge (1994), the term 'professionalisation' is the movement of a field towards some standards of educational preparation and competency and indicates a direct attempt to:

- Use education or training to improve the quality of practice
- Standardize professional responses
- Better define a collection of persons as representing a field or endeavour
- Enhance communication with that field (p. 1).

There are many ways of defining professionalism but using the criteria based on the above definition Public Relations can certainly be seen to have attempted to use education or training to improve the quality of practice and therefore met, if attempting is sufficient, that criterion for professionalisation. L'Etang and Pieczka are not amongst those who believe Public Relations education will professionalise the

practice. Although they acknowledge the premise that “the practice of public relations has aspirations to professionalise itself and public relations education is a tool which can help achieve that status”, their view is that it is too simplistic or abstract an argument as it either assumes or does not factor in the context of the role of education (L’Etang & Pieczka 1996, p. 1).

Their contention is that, in the UK, the context for discussion and disagreement between academics and practitioners about the content of courses and their purpose (broad education or vocational training in preparation for employment), is one in which the UK Government explicitly encourages vocational education. Education there is thus increasingly required to serve business and industrial interests (L’Etang & Pieczka 1996, p. 1). Consequently, although university education is available to support the status of the discipline of PR as a profession, its government-prescribed vocational focus undermines its professional aspiration. In the United Kingdom then, it might be said that the formal education criteria for professional status exists but can be seen as ‘ticking the box’ of preparing graduates for a vocation rather than a profession.

Kruckeberg (1998) noted that the value of a liberal arts education in the United States – including English, History and Political Science – to help the practitioner understand the world cannot be overemphasised. But overwhelming numbers of students want to major in a professional specialisation, their parents want them to major in something career-focused and employers want entry level practitioners who have had a professional education. The societal context in which Public Relations education is placed in the US supports a vocational approach to Higher Education and the market demand that it creates shapes how Public Relations education is designed and taught there.

As discussed above, while education is one tenet of some frameworks of professionalism, there are other ways of thinking about professions. Bernays’ view was that a profession is a vocation, an art applied to a science in which the primary consideration is not pecuniary reward (Bernays 1952, p. 127). He believed that

universities were doing their students a disservice as he believed that the reason people attended universities was to have status bestowed on them once they graduated rather than equipping them with the skills and knowledge to enter an esteemed profession. He believed that university education added status to the graduate, not to the field of work they entered (Bernays 1952, p. 127).

From its roots as a practice or a discipline in the United States, commencing as a fledgling industry in the early part of the twentieth century, Public Relations has expanded to become a mainstream vocation. It is practised in most parts of the world and taught at all academic levels in universities also in most parts of the world. Yet for all of its growth, the great irony about Public Relations as a discipline and its aspiration to become a profession, given the services it provides to others, is that it has struggled to lift itself out of its earliest reputation in persuasion and propaganda (Mackey 2001) and to weather the storm of the attachment of the disparaging British political term 'spin' to it in the 1980s and 1990s and since.

Part of the difficulty facing Public Relations being seen as a legitimate profession is that it does not present a united front in terms of what it calls itself, nor what it practices and how. In industry or organisational contexts, it is referred to variously as Public Relations, Communication/s, 'Comms', Strategic or Corporate Communication, Publicity, Stakeholder Relations, Public Affairs, Community Relations, Investor Relations, Government Relations, Media Relations, etcetera) (Morath 2008, pp. 14-15).

In Australia, another reason why the industry has largely failed to be recognised as a profession is that it is not regulated (Morath 2008, pp. 14-15). And this is another of the tenets of a profession which, along with a body of knowledge, were mentioned earlier. Anyone can say they are in Public Relations, even people who hand out hats at the cricket who are, literally, 'relating to the public'. Equally if you can find a client, you can operate as a Public Relations consultant. People 'go into PR' without any education or training and, unlike in traditional professions such as Law, Medicine and Accounting, or in trades such as that of an electrician, as discussed previously, there is

'no regulation to stop them'. Unlike accountants who are able to demonstrate their qualifications and professionalism by becoming 'Certified Practising Accountants', there is no such thing in Australia as a 'Certified Practising Public Relations Practitioner' qualification. There is a 'professional association' or 'industry body', the PRIA, but even after more than 60 years of existence, it is yet to get to the point where membership is critical to success in the industry. In fact, it is not even necessary for someone to be a member to call themselves a Public Relations practitioner (or Public Relations educator). Or someone could join the PRIA, and without any qualifications in PR or experience, call themselves a practitioner. It is difficult to see, given these scenarios, what role the industry body plays in Public Relations being, or becoming, a profession. L'Etang (2003, p. 44) reports a similar situation in the UK. She notes that "a tiny proportion (about 7,000) of those employed as PR specialists in the UK (estimated to be around 55,000) are members of the IPR" and puts that forward as a major factor inhibiting the professionalisation of Public Relations in the UK.

In the US, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was established in 1948 and its charter included "interpreting the field to the public" (Bernays 1952, p. 139) as it transitioned from 'public opinion' to 'public relations' and from a stand-alone occupation to one with an academic field. The PRSA was the first to publish a journal on Public Relations, which it did in 1948, and developed a code of ethics for Public Relations practitioners in 1954 and a program of voluntary accreditation in 1964 (Lattimore et al.2004, p. 35).

In the UK, there is the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) which is working toward elevating the status of PR practice to the level of the traditional professions such as Law and Accounting. It has developed and accredited its own Public Relations courses and also offers practitioners the opportunity to become 'accredited' or 'chartered' practitioners. To be eligible, practitioners must meet criteria around experience and qualifications. These initiatives in the UK are more progressive than the equivalent organisations in Australia and the US but so long as there is not a

requirement in the UK for practitioners to be accredited before they can practise, the UK Public Relations industry cannot yet call itself a profession (CIPR 2016).

Not everyone equates formal education with the development of or as a criterion for becoming a profession however. In the UK, according to Theaker (2001, p. 66), some practitioners, who see themselves as creative, not scientific, have resisted the general idea that PR is maturing into a profession. As such, the growth of degrees at both undergraduate and master's level and the development of vocational qualifications have been greeted with suspicion rather than as evidence of professionalism.

However, many discussions about the pre-requisites for a profession (Grunig & Hunt, cited in Theaker 2001; Shanahan, Meehan & Mogge 1994) include the requirement that there is specialised educational preparation to acquire the knowledge and skills based on a body of theory developed through research. When the Global Alliance of Public Relations Associations was founded in 2000, one of its first protocols was a declaration that one of the 'profession's' characteristics was "mastery of a particular intellectual skill through education and training" (Theaker 2001, p. 68).

It was one thing to believe that education was vital to the professionalism of practitioners and the professionalisation of the vocation, but the next step was to agree on what the basis of the academic body of knowledge should be. The 1981 Commission on Public Relations Education (in the US) recommended that the content of undergraduate and post graduate courses should include Mass Communications, Public Relations theories, Media Relations techniques, Research Methodology, case studies, work placement and Public Relations management. A further commission in 1987 added Ethics, Law and Evaluation (Theaker 2001, p. 69). Fitch observed that in Australia in the early 1990s, before the PRIA started to accredit university PR courses in 1999, the existence of university education was seen to "demonstrate the professional standing of PR" but "there were divergent understandings of its role and content" (2014b, p. 623).

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) (in the UK) also published guidelines for Public Relations education in 1990. Its view was that PR courses should

be taught by “individuals with a sound experience and understanding of both the academic and professional aspects of the field”. It also expressed the view that teachers “continue to develop their teaching experience while they hold teaching appointments” (cited in Theaker 2001, p. 69). It reported that as “most public relations educators – not having attained PhD level – have not been required to do research...most are teaching skills courses that have little relationship to basic research” (cited in Theaker 2001, p. 71).

In an interview in 1989 Bernays, looking back on six decades of observing the development of the Public Relations industry in the US, commented that:

any plumber or car salesman or unethical character can call himself or herself a public relations practitioner. Many who call themselves public relations practitioners have no education, training, or knowledge of what the field is. And the public equally has little understanding of the meaning of the two words. Until licensing and regulation are introduced, this will continue to be the situation (cited in Seitel 2017, p. 44).

This exact state of affairs not only still applies in America almost 30 years later, but it equally applies in Australia, in the UK and indeed anywhere in the world where Public Relations is practised. Until there is real accreditation required that prevents unqualified people from claiming to be Public Relations practitioners, this will not change.

Research undertaken in 2009 by de Bussy and Wolf into the state of Australian Public Relations investigated levels of professionalisation of Public Relations as a vocation in terms of criteria such as:

- the strategic orientation of public relations
- its position within organisational hierarchies, and
- the importance placed on ethics and professional development.

Their findings show Australian PR professionals to be highly educated, comparatively well paid and frequently in positions of influence with their CEOs (2009, p. 376). Paradoxically, despite these strengths and the impact of the development of Public Relations courses at institutes and universities nationally, the profession (de Bussy and Wolf's term) in Australia, and we can extrapolate that to include the western world, does not seem to have outgrown Public Relations' pervasive identity crisis. Indeed, Cutlip (2013, p. 1) quotes critics of PR as saying it is "a corrosive element in our society". Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (1996, p. 13) make the case that the very fact that anyone would question whether Public Relations is a profession, proves that Public Relations is not a profession.

EXISTING RESEARCH INTO PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Although some of the research cited in the previous sections is Australian, the specific Australian focus of this study means that the study lends itself to a separate section that provides an overview of existing research on Public Relations education in Australia. As this section will show, there is a general dearth of literature on Public Relations education in Australia. Specifically, there has been very little general research into Public Relations education in Australia (Alexander 2004, p. 4); almost no research on contemporary Public Relations education and even fewer publications about Public Relations education authored by Australian researchers. This realisation was one of the significant drivers for this study and highlights the study's significance.

This section is not intended to provide an exhaustive review of all published research on Public Relations education in Australia and, as such, to focus on the most recent research, it is limited to research published since 2000 which will be included in chronological order. It is hoped that it will highlight some of the key researchers in the field and provide a veritable context and justification for this study.

A chapter titled 'Public relations and contemporary theory', in Steve Mackey's PhD, *'The current state of public relations education – a critique of current university teaching and research of public relations theory'* (2001) does not focus very much on Australian education, which is interesting in itself. It suggests that Mackey equates how PR is taught in Australia to how it is taught in the US, but some insights into Public Relations education in Australia specifically are included. Mackey quotes then General Secretary of the (Australian) National Tertiary Education Union, Graham McCulloch, in a 1997 address to the Council as stating:

The corporatisation of the university is associated with a loss of priority for liberal studies and instead a promotion of professional and vocational studies (Mackey 2001, p. 265).

Mackey makes clear his stance on the importance of 'liberal studies' by making the wry questioning observation that "presumably undergraduates who will mostly go out into industry do not have to burden themselves so much with notions of what they are doing in and to society?" (2001, p. 271). One of his findings is that "public relations as a university subject is seriously under-theorised to the extent that its academic status must be questioned" (p. 290). This finding applies to Public Relations education generally (globally) but includes that in Australia. His research demonstrates a divide in scholarly thinking between:

On the one hand, those who want university public relations education to be about clearly understanding the role of public relations and its effects on society (and) on the other hand those who feel they can only sanction theory development from the perspective of serving the public relations client better (pp. 290-291).

Mackey's thesis is that, in line with Cutlip's description, Public Relations is an "unseen power" (Cutlip 2013) and:

only by making the power seen can we properly understand its effects on our lives and start to reclaim some of the dignity that we lose when we succumb

to perceiving the world through the instrumental spectacles which others would have us wear. For this reason public relations SHOULD be made a university subject, a genuine university subject – something which it is not at present. However, it can only become a genuine university subject if universities themselves are alive to their true role in our society... (if not, it) will remain... a cash cow that attracts thousands of students... and an under-theorised subject with a primarily vocational training curriculum (p. 292).

In a 2004 article by Donald Alexander, titled *'Changing the public relations curriculum: A new challenge for educators'*, some perspectives on future directions for strategic Public Relations curriculum planning are put forward. Alexander notes that early academic Public Relations courses were "heavily vocationally focused and directed toward managing the print channel ... as the primary means of communicating with publics" (2004, p. 1) and because PR grew out of "journalism and press agency" (2004, p. 1) they were typically co-located with Journalism in universities (2004, p. 1). His account of the development of the Public Relations course curriculum in Australia is that it broadened with the advent of television, to include "training in how to handle this new form of media" (2004, p. 1) and again in the early 1980s to incorporate academic theories of the social sciences. Communication theories based on persuasion followed and subsequently also embraced relationship management (2004, p. 1). Despite the evolution of courses including theories, Alexander's article raised the need (in 2004) for a change in course curriculum to include particular vocationally-focused skills. He argued that the impact of technology meant that curriculum needed to change to include technology-led skills as "the public relations professional of the future needs to develop a new range of specialist skills" (2004, p. 5).

In 2005, Hatherell and Bartlett published a much-cited article on Australian Public Relations education, titled *'Positioning public relations as an academic discipline in Australia'*. They claimed:

Academic public relations in Australia appears to be entering a new phase in its relatively short history. The early model, in which tertiary courses were confined to teaching-focused institutions and conducted largely by teacher-practitioners, is being supplanted by one in which the discipline is now offered in most Australian universities, is increasingly embracing research, and is being taught by staff following more traditional academic career paths (2005, p. 1).

They note that Public Relations has been accepted into the academy but also that its status remains problematic. Notably, they refer to it as a “business discipline” (2005, p. 2) echoing that the course they teach in is in a Business faculty and point out that the attempts of business disciplines to be “simultaneously instrumental and academic have always been problematic” (2005, p. 3). Hatherell and Bartlett argue that to boost the prestige of Public Relations as an academic discipline, the Australian Public Relations academy needs to make a series of choices – between an industry/skill focus and a critical focus, between empiricism and the European critical/philosophical tradition and between reinforcing disciplinary boundaries and embracing interdisciplinary opportunities (2005, p. 6). They note that although the academic discipline seems to rely on its links to business practice for its legitimacy, they are not advocating a complete break between the academy and the industry, but rather, more of a review of the boundaries (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 7). They argue that research has for too long focused on defending or attempting to legitimise Public Relations, “PR for PR” (2005, p. 8), and adopt a functionalist view of education in advising that it would be better focused on “developing skills likely to be useful in a wide range of workplace contexts” (2005, p. 9).

A 2010 article by Talbot and Onsman from Monash University refers mostly to US texts but nonetheless provides some useful views about Australian Public Relations education. The article, *‘Reconceptualising undergraduate public relations learning’*, outlines the authors’ view thus:

The need for undergraduate public relations programs to provide structure, content and theoretical concepts relevant to operate within a competitive industry are as important as the need to equip the graduate with a necessary skill-set for employability (2010, p. 51).

They argue that teaching and assessment tasks should focus on creating graduates who are work-place ready because they can analyse situations critically, manage tasks strategically and guide human behaviour effectively (2010, p. 54). Their instrumentalist philosophy on PR education is summed up with their statement that “one important aspect of the industry-HE nexus is to constantly update its understanding of what the industry requires of its graduates” (Talbot & Onsman 2010, p. 54).

Academics Jane Johnston and Jim Macnamara undertook an analysis of Public Relations scholarship by Australian academics (*‘Public relations literature and scholarship in Australia: a brief history of change and diversification’*), and found that:

Growth within the academy in recent years reflects the rise in Australian-based literature and a burgeoning scholarly environment within the Australian tertiary education sector (2013, p. 1).

They noted:

Figures indicate how an industry that saw its first certificate offered in 1964 and diploma introduced several years later has gained recognition within the Australian academy in less than 50 years (p. 11).

Johnston and Macnamara also report an increase in the last 10 years in PhDs in Public Relations being commenced and being completed and a significant increase in Australian Public Relations academics publishing text books (2013, pp. 11-12).

Another Australian academic, Kate Fitch, investigated Public Relations education in Australia in her 2014 PhD thesis *‘Professionalising public relations – A history of Australian public relations education, 1985 – 1999’*; in the book that followed it,

Professionalising public relations – history, gender and education (2016), and articles on the same theme including *'Perceptions of Australian Public Relations education, 1985 – 1999'* (2014). She notes that a context of broad societal changes including the massification and increasing vocationalisation of Australian Higher Education is necessary to make sense of the emergence of Public Relations in Australian Higher Education. Her key area of inquiry was the role of the PRIA in Public Relations education and the objectives for its involvement. Fitch largely focused her research into PR education on the period 1985 – 1999 as she contends that these years saw significant growth in education and the PRIA sought greater regulation and jurisdiction over public relations activity. She found that during that time scholars from other academic disciplines “challenge(d) its academic legitimacy” (2016, p. xiii) and, as cited earlier, the PRIA used Public Relations teaching in universities as part of its professionalisation strategy for the industry as well as having a mechanism, via course accreditation, to control Public Relations and training (Fitch’s word) and to have “a controlled and industry-supported education system” (PRIA, cited in Fitch 2014a, p. 23).

Fitch argues that Public Relations remains dominated by a paradigm that is functionalist and normative and this paradigm continues to frame expectations of Public Relations education (2014a, p. 4). Her PhD thesis encourages educators to redefine the scope and aims of tertiary Public Relations education beyond meeting industry needs (2014a, p. 9).

It is noteworthy that the ‘functionalist versus critical’ or ‘theory versus skills development’ questions about the role of PR education that have been discussed extensively throughout this chapter are as observable in the Australian literature on PR education, as they are in that from the US and the UK. This provides a useful backdrop for the analysis of the philosophical objectives of higher and vocational education that follows and for the investigation itself.

The next two sections explore the philosophical underpinnings of the two types of PR education available in Australia; that is, education provided by universities and

training provided by TAFE institutes in the VET sector. As such, the sections provide an overview of the distinctive purpose of Higher Education, or explore what universities are for, and an overview of the distinctive purpose of VET, or what TAFE institutes are for. They examine the theoretical roles of higher education and vocational education and how their distinctive purposes impact the delivery of Public Relations education in Australia.

THE DISTINCTIVE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION – THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE

This section discusses the role of Higher Education while the section that follows explores the role of Vocational Education and Training. The separation and discussion of the two post-secondary education sectors provides an educational construct for the research that will follow.

Research (and opinion) on what universities are for, falls mainly into two schools of thought. The first school of thought, based on the classic Greek idea of developing the whole person, sees universities as “the standard bearer of the education of an age” (Spies, cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000, p. 20). This school of thought believes that universities should provide a liberal education for their students and engage in research aimed at increasing society’s depth of understanding of the world (Langtry 2000, p. 88) and removed from having anything to do with employment of its graduates. John Henry Newman (1852) described the outcome of a university education thus: a “habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom” (cited in Boschiero 2012, p. 1). He believed that these attributes were only able to be developed by a university education, “contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching”. Scott and Dixon (2008, p. 12) note that complying with the whims of industry and government has not been a traditional mission for universities, stating that “the academe is already optimally organised to accomplish its own objectives and these may not necessarily be the same as those of industry”. This first

way of thinking is arguably the traditional view of the role of universities and represents a more significant share of the literature in this chapter than the second way of thinking. This second way of thinking, based on how some see the traditions of universities, is that they have always had a “dual purpose – vocational training and education for its own sake” (Gould 2003, p. ix; Graham 2005, p. 28). Mackey (2001, p. 263) refers to this as the long-standing debate about the balance between ‘utility’ and ‘liberal studies’. Picking up on the theme of utility, an emerging model of universities, as described by Davis (2017, p. 22), sees them existing with a “frankly utilitarian narrative”. Describing Phoenix University in the US, he says it is:

not a place for leisurely self-exploration or the slow accumulation of graduate attributes. It is about securing a better paid job with the lowest student debt possible (Davis 2017, p. 22). There is no rhetoric about building character or lifelong skills, no commitment to comprehensive knowledge (the universal in university). Education is about employment, an instrumental investment, and anything not essential to securing a qualification is jettisoned (Davis 2017, p. 17).

This ‘extreme utilitarianism’ approach to university education is being put forward by Davis as an outlier now but also as an example of not what is to come but what is already here, flagging the need for all universities to question their reason for being and their plan for how they will compete. This way of describing universities is being mentioned here to demonstrate a third way of thinking about the role of universities, which could be seen as an extreme example of the second way of thinking, or of what could happen with the complete loss of the pursuit of education for its own sake. This view is not yet sufficiently widespread to merit ongoing discussion in this thesis. By contrast, the views from the following commentators support the purist ‘standard bearer’ role.

Collini stated that as an absolute minimum, the modern university possesses at least the following four characteristics:

1. that it provides some form of post-secondary school education, where 'education' signals something more than professional training
2. that it provides some form of advanced scholarship or research whose character is not wholly dictated by the need to solve immediate practical problems
3. that these activities are pushed in more than just one single discipline or very tightly defined cluster of disciplines, and
4. that it enjoys some form of institutional autonomy as far as its intellectual activities are concerned (Collini 2012, p. 7).

Walker states that as more and more students enter Higher Education and it shifts from elite to mass provision in many countries, the moral role of Higher Education regarding citizenship and democratic life becomes more obvious as "democratic society requires an educated citizenry blessed with virtue as well as wisdom and knowledge" (Walker 2006, p. 4). Sullivan and Rosin (2008, p. 118) describe this purpose as 'culture shaping', explaining that the role of universities is to teach the ability to transform thought and experience from the local to the universal and general. In the UK specifically, there are particular traditions that apply to universities. They are part of society's elite and 'the British establishment' and are therefore a fundamental structure of the British class system. There is a clear hierarchy within British universities and Oxford and Cambridge universities specifically still retain the closest links with power, particularly political power. There are advantages to the people and the professions that are aligned to universities generally, and in the UK, to Oxford and Cambridge in particular (L'Etang 2003).

Some consider graduating from university as being granted eligibility to be a part of a social or political elite that have the influence or capacity to wield a power of sorts. Others see the objective of graduating from university as being about the 'development of the whole person'. These objectives are however not mutually exclusive. Robinson too describes education as being about educating the whole

being (Robinson, 2006). Spies (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000, p. 20) sets out objectives for that human development, suggesting universities should guide students through a process with the following noble goals:

- A search for welfare
- A search for truth
- A search for order and freedom
- A search for what is good, and
- A search for beauty.

Such altruism, or pursuit of knowledge and growth as its own reward, is often applied to the ideals of a liberal education, rather than a professional or vocational one. Even a far-from-liberal university course will seek to do more than convey facts and procedures (Langtry 2000, p. 88). 'Skills' can be left for the graduate to acquire on the job. Markwell points out that to be well educated, to be effective citizens, to be significant social and economic contributors, to be all they can be, graduates of the twenty-first century will need many qualities. These qualities in his view include:

- the importance of education in encouraging each of us to lead lives of service to the community, and lives of active citizenship
- the need for education to encourage students to think about issues of values and ethics, of what is right and what is wrong for the individual and for society, and
- the desirability of intellectual breadth, so that we are fully alive and alert to the world around us – if you like, so that we become civilised human beings (Markwell 2007, p. 29).

It is worth noting that Markwell makes no claims about the need for 'skills', whether learned on the job, or otherwise.

The above views can be understood to be consistent with maintaining academia's independence to pursue its own agenda, unburdened by input or expectations from government or industry. Scott and Dixon have observed what is an increasingly complex – and pointless in their view – debate over the perceived value and cost of 'education' over 'training' (2008, p. 6). They observed that the academy is already optimally organised to accomplish its own objectives and these may not necessarily be the same as the objectives and 'whims' of industry (Scott & Dixon 2008, p. 12).

Another way of thinking about how universities see their purpose and perceive it to be different from the VET sector (if they think about the VET sector at all) is to consider the design of the programs they offer. The HE sector does not consider VET and its purposes nor "have an intellectual engagement with what TAFE is" (Sweet, cited in Maslen & Slattery 1994, p. 215). Consequently, that divide between the sectors has largely separated Vocational Education from intellectual developments in other disciplines. According to Dee Fink some elements of good university programs include:

- Challenge students to significant kinds of learning
- Use active forms of learning
- Have teachers who care about the subject, their students and about teaching and learning
- Have teachers who interact well with students, and
- Have a good system of feedback, assessment and grading (Dee Fink 2003, p. 28).

Like the pure objectives outlined previously by Spies (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000), Dee Fink's elements of a good course or program are also without vocational intent. Markwell concurs. In outlining the 14 attributes of the finest undergraduate educational institutions in the world, he noted that they are not primarily vocational

and don't seek to train a person to do a particular job in the workforce (Markwell 2007, p. 29).

Contrary to the altruistic ideals discussed earlier above about educating the whole person, the second way of thinking about the distinctive purpose of universities is well-described by Graham as 'dual purpose'. Universities exist to provide vocational training *and* education for its own sake (Graham 2005, p. 28). He believes this 'purism' about the role of universities to be "not only out of place, but ...never in place" (Graham 2005, p. 27). Graham notes that universities are for the training of professionals and the advancement of learning and Gould (2003) concedes that universities have now become professional training institutions as well as places that "nurture the intellect" (Gould 2003, p. ix).

According to Graham:

[A university] provided doctors, lawyers and priests, and it gave the populace the opportunity to obtain 'the most precious pearl of knowledge' in the form of an education in the liberal arts. Its service to the locality therefore...was both to provide for what we now call manpower needs and to civilize (Graham 2005, p. 27).

The merger of the higher and vocational education sectors has "catastrophically blurred" the roles of education and instruction. The distinction between study in and for itself and study for the purpose of acquiring a skill or for training is what originally marked the difference between universities and polytechnics and this has been lost to the detriment of both sectors (Graham 2005, p. 27).

Learning encompasses a range of intellectual, personal, social, cultural, ethical, political and practical obligations, interests and concerns which students will need to both address and balance in their lives. They go far beyond the learning demands of specific 'discipline knowledge' or of generic transferable skills (Light, Cox & Calkins 2009, pp. 46-47). This positioning of discipline knowledge and transferable skills into a broader context of learning helps to explain what it is that Graham (2005) believes

has been lost. Graham's view is that not understanding the distinctive purposes of 'philosophical education' and 'mechanical instruction', or 'education' and training', and therefore the benefits that they individually offer means the benefit each brings is lost. The conceptual difference between the two is that in the former, a student studies while in the latter, a student is taught (Graham 2005, p. 51).

He maintains that education is not superior to instruction, but rather it is different (and serves a different purpose) (Graham 2005, p. 47). Such a view however challenges social convention:

It is a mark of the British education tradition that the 'academic' (nature of learning) has been held in higher esteem than the 'practical' and this prejudice partly explains why polytechnics and colleges of technology were keen to change their names. At the same time prejudice is at work in the other direction also, which is why the 'purely' academic has often felt under a special pressure to justify itself. It is questionable whether a preference for the 'academic' can be given any rational foundation, and equally questionable whether we should accept the value of the 'practical' at its own estimation...it is not the issue here. What we want to know, rather, is what the nature and significance of the distinction is, and how it might reflect on the value of university education (Graham 2005, p. 51).

John Dewey argued that the notion of trying to educate individuals with an eye to only one line of activity (we can extrapolate for example, to train them for one vocation) was 'absurd'. He believed each individual has of necessity a variety of callings in which he or she could be "intelligently effective" and also that any occupation is not understood or executed wholly when it is isolated from other interests. Dewey understood that the broad process of acquiring a general education was a goal in its own right and was not necessarily linked to being trained for a specific vocation (Dewey 2007, p. 226).

Chomsky saw the role of education to be about the production of free human beings associated with one another in terms of equality rather than a tool for the training of people to produce goods (2000, p. 38). Similarly, Bertrand Russell saw the goal of education as helping to create “wise citizens of a free community” rather than as specific preparation for the workforce (cited in Chomsky 2000, p. 38). These views are consistent with the ideals of John Henry Newman who founded the Catholic University of Ireland in the 1850s on the principle that valued “the search for knowledge for its own end, rather than merely as a means toward a vocation” (cited in Boschiero 2012, p. 1). As discussed above, the idea of education for its own sake has been contentious in the many decades since (Chomsky 2000; Dee Fink 2003; Dewey 2007; Markwell 2007; Scott and Dixon 2008). Indeed, in questioning why anyone would enrol in a university in the twenty-first century, Boschiero points out that:

the answer lies not in the pursuit of the type of life-lasting attributes Newman claimed as the purpose of a university education. Instead, the reason most commonly given these days for obtaining a degree is that university graduates earn more money once they enter the workforce than people without a tertiary qualification. In the twenty first century therefore, the purpose of a university education is to train students for employment. Indeed, the ambition of most Australian students entering university is to gain the qualifications required to improve their career and financial prospects (Boschiero 2012, p. 1).

An interesting perspective on the role of Higher Education is described as ‘integration’. McInerney uses the study of Biology to describe what is essentially the same as Dewey’s view of the role of HE:

... a person studying biology, for example, should not only concern himself with the demands of his particular subject, rather, he should wish to know how biology connects, for instance, with physics: and, beyond the practical and theoretical sciences, he should wish to know how physics relates to

ethics, to poetics, to politics, to the novel he's reading, to the person to whom he's speaking, to the butterflies he spies in his garden or the star that shines above his house. How does his intellectual life relate to his moral life? Because the student of biology is first of all a human being (cited in Boschiero 2012, p. 34).

Markwell (2007), Dee Fink (2003) and Scott and Dixon (2008) sit in the same camp as Dewey (2007), Chomsky (2000) and; Boschiero (2012). Graham (2005) and Gould's (2003) contrary views are more in line with those of lawyer/Law educator, Marlene Le Brun, who made the following observation:

In the past I think one of the problems with the law curriculum was that skills weren't considered to be very important to 'real law'. I feel it is absolutely essential to make the learning of theory and the learning of skills complementary...the crux is in the doing, it's not in the telling. It's absolutely critical that they *do* (cited in Ballantyne, Bain & Packer 1997, p. 412).

Graham (2005) made a similar analogy to Le Brun's comments about learning to be a lawyer when he said "botanists do not necessarily make good gardeners" (p. 53). It is possible to argue that Le Brun's view of the role of a university course in establishing the skills of practitioners differs from those cited earlier because she was a practitioner first before becoming a lecturer. Some scholars' view is that the practice of PR is best taught through practical training methods such as case studies and work placement, where reality can be compared to ideas (Mallinson 1996, p. 637). Smith supporting this position, puts it bluntly: "Education is killing PR when it is taught by non-practitioners" (cited in Mallinson 1996, p. 82). Perhaps the backgrounds of individual academics inform their view about whether or not they have a role in preparing students for industry. Both the impact of educators' perspectives about the purpose of the education sector they work in and whether or not they were a practitioner before they became an educator will be examined later in this thesis.

Clearly there is no consensus amongst scholars on what the role of higher education is. One group, the larger, sees it as being about broadly educating students, “educating their whole being” (Robinson 2006, n.p.) and preparing them for life. The other, much smaller group sees the role of higher education as being ‘dual purpose’ and existing to develop knowledge and personal growth as well as training students for their chosen vocations (Gould 2003; Graham 2005).

Nonetheless, this section about the role of HE was intended to provide a brief overview of two schools of thought about why universities exist and to make clear that although there is a divide in the literature, the larger school of thought focuses on the role of universities to ‘civilise’ without concern for vocationalism and the other school of thought believes that it is dual purpose – to civilise and to provide manpower needs. Either way, Davis (2017) points out that in Australia, as a consequence of needing to be more responsive to industry and more in line with national interests and objectives, that “all Australian universities became essentially...the same” (Davis 2017, p. 99). The respective roles of HE and VET in Australia are important to understand as is the reason we have two distinct sectors – rather than just one – that meet the needs of all students, industries and the national economy. An understanding of the traditions and intentions of the two sectors also helps to build an appreciation of the differences between education and training and how they fit into the two sectors. Just as this section has provided a conceptual understanding about higher education and educating the whole person, the next section will provide a similar context for understanding the role, or ‘distinctive purpose’ of the VET sector and of training.

THE DISTINCTIVE PURPOSE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION – TEACHING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

The previous section explored various views about the distinctive purpose of Higher Education, as provided by universities. In this section the role of Vocational Education is discussed.

In contrast to the views in the previous section about the role of a university education being either to provide a general, non-vocational education or to be dual-purpose and to provide both a general education and the skills and knowledge required for employment, the distinctive purpose of Vocational Education is less contested. It is clearly and unanimously about teaching the skills required for a particular vocation, informed by that industry and in some cases in partnership with the industry (Maglen, cited in Blunden 1997; Misko 1999; Seddon 2011; Wheelahan 2011). Part of its regulations and expectations are provided by government as an economic instrument. Robinson's (2006) view that our education systems "encourage people to choose subjects that lead to jobs" and consequently discourage people from studying music, for example, because there are too few opportunities for professional musicians, can be usefully applied to the reason VET exists – to provide people with training that "leads to jobs".

Vocational Education and Training has been described in many ways. Government refers to it as 'competency-based training' (CBT) (Misko 1999, p. 1); it is known colloquially as 'learning for earning' and as 'trade school'. As the contemporary VET sector offers far more than trade skills, to call VET 'trade school' is to significantly misunderstand the service it provides. Seddon (2011) describes VET as a place of "practical wisdom" and urges it to increase its reputation by "claiming and legitimising occupational expertise".

Kearns, Bowman and Garlick contest the view that the primary purpose of VET is to skill Australians for work (2008, p. 14). Maglen (cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix-xi) agrees that VET is education and training designed explicitly with paid employment as the objective and in this way distinguishes itself from education which is justified for its intrinsic value. It involves a combination of learning from experts and learning by doing. Maglen categorises VET as:

all educational and instructional experiences – be they formal or informal, pre-employment or employment related, on-the-job or off-the-job – that are designed to directly enhance the skills, knowledge competencies and

capabilities of individuals, required in undertaking gainful employment (cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix-xi).

Interestingly, he does not see Vocational Education and Training as the domain of the VET sector exclusively and education as the domain of schools and universities. He does not define VET by sector, but by aims and content, and thus, considers that it may be designed and provided by schools, TAFE or Higher Education institutions, by private training providers or by employers in industry and commerce. To Maglen, VET is an activity and not a sector.

Despite Maglen's extrapolation and support for the importance of the sector (Seddon 2011; Wheelahan 2011), there is little divergence of opinion on the purpose of VET. It is any learning activity which contributes to successful economic performance and tangible economic and social gains (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, p. 10). It can also be described not as a process but as a system comprising work-related education and training institutions that consciously prepare individuals for relatively specific occupations that do not require a degree (Guthrie 2011; Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996; Tovey & Lawlor 2008). This description pre-dates changes to the post-secondary education landscape that now sees degrees being issued by the VET sector but is still absolutely valid in its intent.

Some scholars note that to be viable, VET must have effective feedback from the occupations, industries and employers it is designed to serve (Blunden 1997, p. 113) and warn that definitions of VET can be too limiting and can distort people's understanding of the role of VET and ultimately how it is delivered. His view is that describing VET as 'learning to do' and focusing on its skill development orientation overly simplifies what we know about how people learn. In his view learning to do cannot so easily be separated from learning to know and VET teaching and learning needs to embrace both. That is, learning to know is not just something to be done in Higher Education.

The title of a government report *Skilling Australia – new directions for Vocational Education and Training* (2005) indicates both the context in which VET is delivered and the direct link it has to national economic outcomes. Robinson (2006, n.p.) described this as “education systems developed to meet the needs of industrialisation”. It is evident that “a greater emphasis is being placed on the role of VET (than on other education sectors) to ensure the economic growth and cooperation with industries and business” (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, p. 11). In fact, many VET courses are included as a requirement in industrial awards and for licensing purposes. For example, in the meat processing industry, increased pay is linked to successful completion of VET qualifications and a plumbing or electrical licence, as examples among many others, cannot be obtained without successfully completing a VET qualification (Goozee 2005, p.1).

According to Tovey and Lawlor (2008, pp. 36-37) the term ‘skill’ in the broadest sense means that a degree of practised ability or expertness has been developed. To be able to exercise skill a person must have an underpinning knowledge about that skill, what the application of that skill achieves and how to apply it. In training or learning terms a skill is the ability to perform a particular task or series of tasks that result in a particular and predictable level of performance in the workplace.

The VET sector currently uses the term ‘competency’ to describe the state of being competent to perform particular activities at a particular standard (Misko 1999; Tovey & Lawlor 2008). It must be demonstrated by the individual and is measured against a performance standard to determine if the individual is competent. People who meet the criteria are considered competent and earn their VET qualifications by demonstrating they can perform as expected in the workplace. This is the basis of assessment in the VET sector (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, pp. 36-37).

This section has provided an overview of what training is and what it is for. It also explained why Australia has a specific sector, the VET sector, which exists purely to deliver the training that Australians need to enable them to obtain the skills required of them so they can gain employment and make their contribution to the Australian

economy. It followed the earlier section that explained what education is and why and how it is provided to students and described the HE sector that was designed separately from the VET sector, to enable the education process to occur, also for the good of the Australian economy. The next section puts the philosophical purposes of the two sectors into the context of the Australian education system in which the study was conducted.

EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE AUSTRALIAN VET AND HE SECTORS OPERATE

The VET and HE sectors comprise Australia's dual-sector approach to tertiary education. The two sectors exist for distinctive and separate purposes, as described in the previous sections, and this section explains the role they each play in the provision of Public Relations education in this country. It is appropriate to set any discussion about education in Australia into a cultural context and Sweet provides a useful starting point to understanding how Australians view education. Maslen and Slattery (1994) citing Sweet explain the separation of the VET and HE sectors in Australia, as "rooted in the Australian tradition of believing that most workers do not really need an education, that a bit of training will suffice" (p. 215).

Australia's dual sector approach to post-secondary education and training sees Public Relations being taught in this country in both universities and TAFE institutes. To understand the Australian education system, it is useful to consider Greek philosopher Aristotle's (384 – 322 BC) determination that there are three types of knowledge. These are 'episteme', 'techne' and 'phronesis'. 'Episteme' translates from Greek as 'to know' and refers to the acquisition of scientific knowledge, 'techne' translates as 'craftsmanship, craft or art' and refers to skills development or the acquisition of a craft and 'phronesis' translates to practical wisdom and refers to the ability to realise how specific goals or value is reached. In contemporary education theory, the latter refers to the need for critical analytical reflection (Clemans 2010; Kessells & Korthagen 1999).

Australia's dual-sector 'further education' system – that which is designed for students after secondary education – has its philosophical basis in Aristotle's categorisation of types of learning. The traditional purpose of these sectors was discussed in the previous sections, however, at its simplest, one sector, HE, which is traditionally provided by universities issuing degrees, is designed and organised for students to gain knowledge. Students learn 'to know'. This notion is based on Aristotle's 'education' traditions of episteme and phronesis. The other sector, VET, which incorporates the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector which comprises government-owned institutions, typically issues certificates and diplomas and is designed and organised for students to gain skills. Students learn 'to do'. They learn a skill or a craft and, in some cases, a 'trade'. This is based on the 'training' traditions of techne, as first understood by Aristotle (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 180; Kessells & Korthagen 1999).

The two-sector framework is designed to meet national and regional economic needs and the employment needs of industries, ensuring the availability of suitably trained and qualified labour and knowledge workers. It means that students can take one of two paths. One option is that they can enrol in a vocational certificate or diploma course in the VET sector, either at a government-owned institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or at a privately-owned college accredited to deliver VET qualifications. The other option is that they can enrol in a degree at a public or private university. It is worth pointing out that both private colleges and universities are outside the scope of this study. Therefore, this study will focus on the publicly funded university and TAFE sectors as part of the Australian HE and VET landscape. Colloquially, the difference between the two sectors is understood as the VET sector being 'practical' and the HE sector being 'theoretical' or 'academic'. A distinctive feature of universities in Australia is that teaching within them is informed by research to develop or apply new knowledge (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 123). This often leads to the misconception that VET is "downmarket" and "vocational" and HE is "upmarket" and "not-vocational" (Buchanan 2011, n.p.). In fact, philosophically each

sector simply exists for a different purpose, that is, the development of 'episteme', 'techne' and 'phronesis'. The roles of the VET and HE sectors in Australia and how well they fulfil these theoretical objectives and colloquial expectations will be explored more fully later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

As well as to meet national economic needs (Buchanan 2011; Seddon 2011; Tovey & Lawlor 2008; Wheelahan 2011), the existence of the two sectors is intended to provide students with the choice between pursuing vocational 'training' in the VET sector and academic 'education' in the HE sector. 'Training' is defined as being focused on knowledge, skills and attitudes to be used immediately or in the near future (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, p. 47). The *Collins English Dictionary* defines 'training' as "the process of bringing a person, etc., to an agreed standard of proficiency, etc., by practice and instruction" (1998, p. 1621). Both of these definitions focus on the development of skills for later application. The *Collins English Dictionary* offers five definitions of 'education'. They are:

1. the act or process of acquiring knowledge, esp., systematically during childhood and adolescence
2. the knowledge or training acquitted by this process: his education has been invaluable to him
3. the act or process of imparting knowledge, esp., at school, college, or university
4. the theory of teaching and learning: a course in education
5. a particular kind of instruction and training: a university education, a consumer education (1998, p. 493).

While two of these definitions incorporate the word 'training' it is clear that they do not imply that they are one and the same thing. Both 'training' and 'education' are described as processes, the former is differentiated by being about achieving a level

of proficiency of skill that can be predictably applied and the latter is differentiated by a focus on the acquisition of knowledge.

Education philosopher John Dewey described the notion and purpose of education as:

- A necessity of life
- A social function
- A direction, by which he meant not aimless
- Growth and maturity, and
- Formation (Dewey 2007, p. 1).

He believed that the thing that differentiated the living and the inanimate was that the living maintained them selves by renewal, by an ongoing process of education, and this is how society transforms itself (Dewey 2007, p. 6, p. 13).

THE AUSTRALIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

If Dewey's ideas about the notion and purpose of education, or Buchanan's (2011) or Bradley et al.'s (2008), are to come into effect, philosophies need to find form and governments need to make policies to ensure education and training is properly structured and resourced. In Australia, as well as having a dual-sector approach that separates training and education, the government further categorises education and training using 10 levels of government-accredited qualifications across the two sectors. The qualification levels are outlined and described in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which was introduced in 1995 to provide a hierarchical framework of skills from basic through intermediate to Higher Education skills to which education and training levels are matched. The table below outlines where each qualification issued in Australia fits into the framework (AQF 2016).

Level 1	Certificate I
Level 2	Certificate II
Level 3	Certificate III
Level 4	Certificate IV
Level 5	Diploma
Level 6	Advanced Diploma/Associate Degree
Level 7	Bachelor Degree
Level 8	Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma
Level 9	Master Degree
Level 10	Doctor of Philosophy

Table 1: The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF 2016)

The first six qualification levels are typically offered in the VET system, commencing with Certificate I and going up to Advanced Diploma, which is level 6. The highest four levels of qualifications are typically offered in the HE sector, commencing with a bachelor degree, which is level 7, and going up to a Doctorate in HE, which is the highest of the 10 levels.

The HE qualifications are thought to be the ‘higher’ level qualifications that sit above or build on the VET sector qualifications. The actual difference between them is about providing different types of outcomes, not that one is ‘higher’ or ‘superior’ to the other. They are different types of qualifications and the distinctive purpose of each sector – training or education - will be discussed later in this chapter.

To understand what the AQF, the taxonomy of levels and qualification types, is intended to do, it is useful to look at the government-ascribed outcomes of some of the qualification levels. For example, graduates of the lowest level qualification, level

one, which is a Certificate I qualification, “will have knowledge and skills for initial work, community involvement and/or further learning”. Graduates of level six qualifications, advanced diplomas, which are the highest qualification issued by the VET sector, “will have broad knowledge and skills for paraprofessional/highly skilled work and/or further learning”. Graduates of doctorates, level 10 and the highest level in the AQF, “will have systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialised research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice” (AQF 2016).

Theoretically then and based on the history of how and why these sectors were set up, there should be particular outcomes from a VET course that are distinctly different from the outcomes of a HE course. This seems to be a logical assumption because if that was not at least the intention, then there would be no theoretical reason for two different sectors to exist (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 180). But the vocational and professional focus of Higher Education has grown in recent years (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 180). Marginson (2000, p. 203) traces this ‘vocationalism’ in universities back to the recession of the early 1990s that established a ‘vocational culture’ in universities where degrees became about getting into the professions. Whether or not the theoretical intention plays out in reality, however, needs investigation and cannot simply be logically assumed. This study will explore to what extent this is occurring now. In fact, the title of a report by researcher Fowler questions any logical assumptions about how well the sectors perform their functions. The report for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *The boundaries and connections between the VET and Higher Education sectors: confused, contested and collaborative*, quotes Jones as saying:

We have two dissonant competing sets of qualifications at AQF 5- 7. The HE qualifications at this level generally provide broad based education, incorporating some version of the so-called 21st century capabilities that prepare students for future work and learning as well as for work immediately after graduation.

Employers and students who choose those qualifications over VET alternatives may be making sensible decisions since this type of education is more likely to produce a graduate with the capability to manage their own uncertain future and adapt to changing workplace needs.

VET institutions continue to deliver narrowly-focussed competency-based higher level VET qualifications (cited in Fowler 2017, p. 14).

Jones is saying that even though the two sectors were organised under the AQF and the theoretical construct should help students and the industries that depend on them for 'labour' to understand what they each offer and how they differ, that this is not necessarily the case. Again, noting Fowler's choice of title, there are signs that the delineation of the sectors is "confused and contested" (Fowler 2017, p. 14).

Historically, universities were established to be the teachers of 'the knowing why' and TAFE institutes in the VET sector were established to be the teachers of 'the knowing what' (Clemans 2010). Additionally, as Jones points out, there is now also the expectation that the universities will teach 'capabilities that prepare students for future work and learning as well as for work immediately after graduation' (cited in Fowler 2017, p. 14). Traditionally this teaching of 'employability skills' has been seen to be the domain of the VET system but with the increasing emphasis – and expectation from students – over recent years on vocationalist outcomes, that is, degrees leading to graduates getting jobs, it has also become the community's and the federal government's expectation of the university sector (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 180; Marginson 2000, p. 203).

There is now an increasing focus in TAFE institutes on the development of 'employability skills' for graduates from the VET sector and in universities of 'graduate attributes' for graduates from the HE sector. The education sector can be seen now to be delicately balanced between meeting the needs of industry and meeting the expectations of the community, and mandated by new government funding approaches, under more pressure to deliver 'measurable results' than ever before (Guthrie 2011).

This study was undertaken during a period of significant change in the tertiary education sector (Bradley et al. 2008). For decades, governments divided up their education budgets and allocated them amongst registered education providers and seemed to do little more than merely 'hope for the best'. In the past decade, the government funding landscape in education has changed fundamentally and governments, industries and communities are increasingly scrutinising how education is funded and measuring return-on-investment in part by counting how many graduates find employment. This has led to institutions responding to this government requirement, perhaps not just to fulfil their altruistic purpose, but also to meet the requirements for government funding, or both, and organising themselves differently than in the past (Bradley et al. 2008).

The VET sector typically refers to the desired skills they seek to teach their students as 'employability skills' and the HE sector typically refers to the desired attributes they hope to develop in their graduates as 'graduate attributes'. Nagarajan and Edwards note that 'graduate attributes' are also called 'professional skills', 'soft skills', 'transferable skills', 'graduate capabilities', 'work ready skills' and 'key skills' (2014, p. 12). Graduate capabilities or attributes are the:

qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These capabilities include, but go beyond, the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that graduates should possess to be agents for social good in an unknown future (University of New South Wales 2017).

Employability skills are decided upon by government and embedded into VET courses. They are:

- Communication
- Teamwork

- Problem solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Learning skills, and
- Technology

(Department of Education 2006, pp. 1-2)

While universities' 'graduate attributes' resemble the VET sector's 'employability skills', they are not government-mandated like the VET ones are. Rather, they are a response to changing government policy (Bradley et al. 2008) that has seen greater linking of graduating and gaining employment. Despite the perceived need for universities to have and to publish graduate attributes, a review of university websites and other literature reveals that universities are able to self-determine what graduate attributes their university values and seeks to develop in its students. Each university determines its own list of graduate attributes based on its individual heritage, philosophies and leadership. Bond University lists its as:

- Communication
- Time management
- Teamwork
- Working with people
- Working across cultures
- Project management, and
- Business skills (Bond University 2018)

In an article titled '8 ways to enhance your students' graduate employability', academic Shelley Kinash (2015) explains that:

Graduate Employability means that Higher Education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work...Graduate Employability means that institutions and employers have supported the student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition and identity that graduates need to succeed.

The Bond paper cited above calls for educators at Bond to set industry-relevant, non-academic assessments focused on vocational outcomes, for example writing 'press' releases and tweets rather than academic essays.

Swinburne University describes its approach to developing graduate attributes in its *Swinburne Graduate Attributes and Key Generic Skills Policy (2007)* as such:

Swinburne intends that its teaching programs assist all its graduates to be:

- Capable in their chosen professional, vocational or study areas
- Entrepreneurial in contributing to innovation and development within their business, workplace and community
- Effective and ethical in work and community situations
- Adaptable and able to manage change, and
- Aware of local and international environments in which they will be contributing (eg socio-cultural, economic and natural).

The policy also states that Swinburne "acknowledges the importance of generic skills for teamwork, analysis and problem solving, communication, tackling unfamiliar problems and working independently" (Swinburne University 2017).

Graduate attributes feature strongly on the website of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) (UTS 2017). UTS states:

At UTS we work hard to ensure our graduates are well-rounded professionals who are relevant and ready for their chosen future the moment they walk out the door. To achieve this, we have worked with industry partners to develop sets of graduate attributes for each course.

These attributes (for example, communication and collaboration, professional competence, indigenous proficiency, critical thinking, leadership, etc) inform our teaching, learning and assessment practices and enable students to work and thrive within complex and ever changing work environments.

UTS has a reputation for producing highly-employable graduates. Our teaching is research-inspired and integrated, providing academic rigour with innovative technology.

Another university, Charles Sturt University (CSU), claims in its *Graduate Attributes Policy* (Charles Sturt University 2017), that:

CSU aims to produce graduates who:

- a) are well-educated in the knowledge, capabilities, practices, attitudes, ethics and dispositions of their discipline or profession
- b) are capable communicators with effective problem-solving, analytical and critical thinking skills and can work well both independently and with others
- c) value diversity and the 'common good' and work constructively, respectfully and effectively with local and global communities and workplaces
- d) engage meaningfully with the culture, experiences, histories and contemporary issues of indigenous Australian communities
- e) practice [sic] ethically and sustainably in ways that demonstrate 'yindyamarra winhanga-nha' – translated from the Wiradjuri language as 'the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in'

- f) are digitally literate citizens, able to harness technologies for professional practice and participate independently in online learning communities, and
- g) critically appraise and continue to develop personal and professional capabilities.

On the RMIT website (RMIT 2017), a quote attributed to its Vice Chancellor Martin Bean, says that “At RMIT our goal is to provide every student with the tools they need to succeed in life and work”. This is the essence of the strategic plan of this dual-sector institute that bases its industry-linked education philosophy on this and its proud heritage as a working men’s college (RMIT 2018). It focuses on developing employability skills and enterprise skills. At RMIT, employability skills ensure graduates “stand out to prospective employers” and enterprise skills, or the development of an ‘enterprising mindset’, enable graduates to “create new ventures and seize business opportunities”. RMIT does this “in collaboration with industry”(RMIT 2017).

There is much that unites these lists of graduate attributes from a number of different universities. They expressly value communication, life-long learning, cultural awareness, innovative or creative thinking, ethical practice and work-readiness. They are also very close in content to the list of VET employability skills.

Each of the universities whose graduate attributes have been reviewed in this discussion were part of this study. None of them are part of the elite group of Australian research universities, known as the Group of Eight. Group of Eight members are the University of Melbourne, Australian National University, University of Sydney, University of Queensland, University of Western Australia, University of Adelaide, Monash University and the University of New South Wales (Group of Eight 2017).

A review of the graduate attributes aspired to by the Group of Eight universities included in the study, the Universities of Sydney and NSW, revealed a distinct

difference in their attributes as compared to their non-Group of Eight counterparts. This was considered worthy of further discussion.

The University of Sydney website (University of Sydney 2017) states that the university aspires to three “overarching graduate attributes”. These are scholarship, lifelong learning and global citizenship. These are broken down further to five “more specific attributes”. They are:

1. Research and inquiry
2. Communication
3. Information literacy
4. Ethical, social and professional understandings, and
5. Personal and intellectual autonomy.

University of New South Wales “aspires to develop globally focussed graduates who are rigorous scholars capable of leadership and professional practice in an international community” (University of New South Wales 2017). Its programs aspire to graduate:

- a) Scholars – capable of independent and collaborative enquiry, rigorous in their analysis, critique and reflection and able to innovate by applying their knowledge and skills to the solution of novel as well as routine problems
- b) Entrepreneurial leaders – capable of initiating and embracing innovation and change as well as engaging and enabling others to contribute to change
- c) Professionals – capable of ethical, self-directed practice and independent lifelong learning, and
- d) Global citizens who are culturally adept and capable of respecting diversity and acting in a socially just and responsible way.

The universities of Sydney and NSW both focus on one graduate attribute that the universities outside of the Group of Eight do not. They aspire to produce scholars. This distinguishes them not only from the VET sector but also from the other universities mentioned above. When, in the following section, the role of educators is discussed, the context in which they work and the purpose of the institutions they work for needs to be factored into how they see their roles and what is expected of them in their roles in twenty-first century institutes. This question about the role of educators and the purpose of the programs they work in is among those asked to the respondents to this study.

There are a number of schools of thought on what the role of each sector should be. It is important to contemplate as a community what is expected from the VET sector and equally what is expected of the HE sector. It is also important to acknowledge that government policy and funding changes have seen an increase in the number of education organisations making the decision to become dual-sector and as such be able to offer, in some cases, the whole range of Australian government qualifications from certificates to post-graduate degrees (Bradley et al. 2008). Nonetheless even where this issuing of VET and HE qualifications is possible all under the 'one roof', the inherent value and the integrity of the purpose of the qualifications from each sector needs to be well understood. If not, and education organisations seemingly take a 'grab bag' approach to attempting to offer as many levels of qualifications as possible, then the distinction between the two sectors, and therefore the value of the qualifications in both sectors, will be lost.

In a conference presentation in 2011, Buchanan warned that a consequence of the blurring of sector boundaries is that "TAFEs turn themselves into little downmarket universities". The corollary of Buchanan's view is that universities, especially those not focusing on scholarship, risk becoming not 'teaching universities' but second-rate trade schools staffed by teachers teaching skills they don't actually possess or that are outdated. Buchanan argues that the mechanism to get the best out of both

sectors is not to answer the question ‘how do we integrate VET and Higher Education?’ but to understand them and value them separately (Buchanan 2011, n.p.)

The comparison between the VET sector’s employability skills and the HE sector’s graduate attributes earlier in this section demonstrates similarities and differences in the roles of the two sectors. Consequently, the role of the VET sector in teaching Public Relations should be different from its HE counterpart or it could be argued that there is no need for it to be taught in both sectors. Bradley et al. support this view when pointing out (2008, p. 179) that one of the principal characteristics of a fully effective tertiary system would be the equal value given to both VET and HE, reflecting the importance of their different roles in the development of skills and knowledge and their contributions to our economy and society.

This study will seek to further understand those similarities and differences and determine if they are by design or are the result of history and habit. Despite the differences and similarities in the objectives of the VET and HE sectors, and the differences within the HE sector, there is no reason why both sectors cannot produce “critical beings with the capacity to work” (Clemans 2010). Part of the analysis and understanding of the purpose of the two tertiary sectors with a view to determining how Public Relations is being taught in the respective sectors, is identifying who is currently teaching Public Relations in each sector, what their qualifications and experiences are, how well they understand the purpose of the sector they work in and what their personal and professional philosophies about Public Relations practice and Public Relations education are. These factors are discussed in the next section.

PERCEIVED ROLES OF EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS – WHO IS TEACHING PUBLIC RELATIONS AND HOW IS IT BEING DONE?

This section builds on the above discussion on the nature of HE and VET generally and focuses specifically on the teaching of Public Relations. It considers the impact on the

learning outcomes for students and their preparation to meet the needs of the industry they hope to work in. This section examines who is currently teaching Public Relations and considers the appropriate roles of educators and practitioners in PR education. For the purposes of this section, educators are deemed to be specialist teachers whose profession is education, not people who are or have been practitioners and who have decided to teach without pursuing teaching qualifications. These are sometimes called teacher/practitioners (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 1) or “pracademics” (Posner 2009). Practitioners in this case are defined as people who are currently or recently employed as Public Relations practitioners, whether consultants or in-house counsel, as their main occupation.

Some scholars (Dee Fink 2003; Mallinson 1996) believe that ex-practitioners make the best teachers of Public Relations and others (Dozier & Lauzen 2000; L’Etang & Pieczka 1996) consider that any Social Science educator is best placed to teach the principles and the broader context. This dichotomy needs to be put into the context of the philosophical debate outlined in the earlier discussion about whether the purpose of education is to acquire knowledge and develop values or whether it is to be trained with the skills for employment in the field, or perhaps that both can be achieved. To fully consider who might be best placed to teach Public Relations, it is important to understand the differences between academic and vocational education and the role of universities and TAFE institutes, specifically as it pertains to PR education.

In the context of Public Relations education and training, a VET PR course should develop a student’s ‘craft knowing’ and a university PR course should develop a student’s ‘critical knowing’ of the subject matter of the discipline (Clemans 2010).

Like Dee Fink (2003), there are commentators who see some form of employability outcomes as key to appropriate teaching of Public Relations, even going so far as to saying that those who have practised Public Relations are best qualified to teach it. Mallinson (1996, p. 63) believes that the practice of PR is best taught through practical training methods such as case studies but also sees that the study of it by social scientists is nevertheless beneficial to PR practice, since it can help practitioners

to take a detached look at what they are doing and how their work affects society (p. 68).

L'Etang and Pieczka (1996, p. 7) see the needs of educators and practitioners as fundamentally different and note that they are unlikely to come together because they see no need to do so. They contend that educators and practitioners have different perspectives with regard to the role, scope and content of PR education, with some confusing education with training. L'Etang and Pieczka's view underlines the fundamental difference in opinion about the role of educators and practitioners in Public Relations education. They point out that the perspectives of the two groups are different. Educators, typically but not all, are interested in education in its broadest sense, and not its vocational outcomes, and practitioners and ex-practitioners understand PR education as the teaching of skills in preparation for becoming a practitioner in their own image. Consequently, practitioners consider it logical that a practitioner is ideally qualified and experienced to teach what they can do and educators consider themselves ideally qualified to teach how to think about the context and purpose of a discipline, in this case PR, as it fits into society.

Some academics believe in what Miller (2000, p. 128) describes as "individual academic autonomy" and consider that vocational outcomes, or any other type of measure, threaten an academic's freedom of intellectual inquiry. This is a theme developed in the interviews conducted with academics as part of this study.

Pohl and Vandeventer (cited in Heath 2001, pp. 357-358) believe that "although academics do not consider themselves responsible for job training ... they must provide students with realistic skills and knowledge for ultimate use in the marketplace" yet "most faculty are unaware of the skills that students actually need to succeed in the workplace". As discussed previously, universities now have a framework of prescribed attributes that they plan for their graduates to possess and all of the university's courses are (in theory) designed to ensure that these qualities and traits are achieved. These 'graduate attributes' are typically general in nature, not specific to any one vocation or industry. They do not therefore inform educators

about the particular requirements of the industries their students are likely to be seeking work in.

The question about the role of educators and practitioners in PR education raises the higher-level question about whether industry should support the academy or the academy should support the industry or whether both should maintain their professional distance and leave each other to their own endeavours. Cottone (1993, p. 173) warns that:

too cosy a relationship between education and practice threatens the development of the academic discipline: public relations is compromised when educators allow practitioners to view universities as production houses for business interests, rather than as entities that should engage in critical research.

In the beginnings of formal Public Relations education, whether in the US, the UK or Australia, there were no Public Relations academics, so there was little choice but to encourage practitioners to teach (Bernays 1952; L'Etang & Pieczka 1996; Morath 2008; Potts 1976). In Australia, as discussed earlier in the section about the history of Public Relations education in Australia, the first PR course was written by a practitioner, David Potts, who went on to teach the course as there were no professional PR educators at that time (Morath 2008; Potts 1976). In the UK, the first Public Relations courses started in the 1980s and "the majority of those recruited to teach in the field came from practice" (L'Etang & Pieczka 1996, in L'Etang 2008, p. 248). Public Relations as a vocation was establishing in the UK but there was no acknowledged body of knowledge or professional parameters and the practitioners-cum-educators had a "...variety of educational backgrounds that included those with and without degrees" (L'Etang 2008, p. 248).

These early practitioners who became the first Public Relations educators were in need of learning resources so they "...turned to the USA for undergraduate-level textbooks" (L'Etang 2008, p. 248) and as they were then based on the theories

around one of the first ways of explaining PR, Grunig's 'symmetrical model' of Public Relations theory, in the absence of anything else, that was what they taught. What happened though was that these Public Relations practitioners didn't "recognize themselves in the theoretical mirror that was held up to them" (L'Etang 2008, p. 248). Their practice of Public Relations had been based on commerce and they were being presented with abstract theoretical models that may or may not have anything to do with the work they had been doing. And so was born the dilemma for establishing the respective roles of educators and practitioners in Public Relations education. Heath (2001, p. 357) quotes Pohl and Vandeventer who question whether it is the role of academics to "understand the needs (of the profession) and prepare their students accordingly", while Johnston and Zawawi (2004, p. 19) ask if quality Public Relations education needs "...a combination of theoretical and practical input" and Morris (1994, p. 8) questions if it is "...up to academics to challenge the definitions set by the people who are practising public relations".

Practitioners want from academic research (and therefore teaching) "a confirmation of their professional identity, of their status and perceptions of the practice and of their own professionalism in terms of working on the basis of scientific findings" (L'Etang & Pieczka 1996, p. 6). But practitioners did not recognise themselves in L'Etang's 'theoretical mirror' (2008) partly because of the gap between theory and practice and partly because they are not accustomed to critique of their vocation nor see it as a helpful part of preparing students to work in the industry. Practitioners, especially by the very nature of some of the work of Public Relations practitioners, typically want to promote a positive image of their vocation. They tend to be 'positivist' and expect educators to take the same approach. Educators, on the other hand, very often consider their role to be the exact opposite, especially those who represent the 'critical school' of Public Relations scholarship that sets itself up as critics of Public Relations theory generally and of practice in particular (Fitch 2014b, p. 23). L'Etang and Pieczka (1996, p. 3) state however that it appears that PR aspires to the status of a social science, but at the same time is not ready to conduct basic

research or to accept that positivism is not the only world view. L'Etang and Pieczka (1996, p. 7) also observe that practitioners typically are keen that relevant practical skills should be taught.

Some observers are more optimistic. In 2000, Marjorie Anderson, then chairperson of the PRIA National Education Committee, noted that there had been "...a significant increase in the standard of public relations education" and that students were supported by well-qualified educators, an ever-growing body of knowledge and strong relationships between tertiary institutions and industry (Singh & Smyth 2000, p. 399). Internationally, the *2006 Report of the Commission of Public Relations Education* concluded that there was substantial agreement between educators and practitioners on what a PR undergraduate student should learn, and therefore be able to perform at the practitioner entry level (VanSlyke Turk 2006, p. 4). It reported that there was also agreement that a Public Relations education should include an internship, practicum or some other work experience in the field (VanSlyke Turk 2006, p. 4).

It is unlikely that Public Relations educators will be happy with this 'agreement' about what their role is and what they should teach, seemingly on behalf of the industry. Morris argued that it was "up to academics to challenge the definitions set by the people who are practising public relations" and that there should not be limitations in education. He noted that academia did not exist to produce clones and was there to educate people, pointing out that one of the "things that industry has got wrong is thinking that we're (universities) a training school, because we're not" (Morris 1994, p. 8).

This struggle over whether educators should serve industry or whether academics have an independent role exists in many spheres and differs slightly from country to country.

US academics Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis found that in American universities "public relations education was associated with a management orientation..."

(Berkowitz 1999, p. 100). From this they concluded that if Public Relations leaders wanted students to graduate with a manager capacity rather than a technician capacity "...then public relations education should follow the US approach". They also stated that for professionalism to be achieved in Public Relations, a commitment must be made by both practitioners and educators (Berkowitz & Hristodoulakis 1999, p. 101).

This study examined the possibility of there being a role for educators in preparing students for practice and if so whether it is different in HE than in VET.

Dozier and Lauzen (2000, p. 20) acknowledge that (PR academics) try to prepare students to be competent and professional in the organisational roles they will play but don't believe they should do that while looking over the shoulder of practitioners. Dozier and Lauzen see PR scholarship and PR practice as being worlds apart: the former an "intellectual domain" and the latter a "professional activity". A 'professional activity', they say, is what Public Relations practitioners do in and for organisations and Public Relations in an 'intellectual domain' is the study of the intended and unintended consequences of those relationships (between organisations and publics) for individuals and society as a whole (Dozier & Lauzen 2000, p. 4).

As the intellectual domain matures, Dozier and Lauzen believe that the professional agenda should play a declining role in defining and setting the agenda for the intellectual domain (Dozier & Lauzen 2000, p. 20). Citing Paisley from 1972, Dozier and Lauzen argue that a "preoccupation with the day-to-day thoughts and actions of practitioners is an earmark of intellectual immaturity" (2000, p. 20). They go on to argue that "public relations practitioners are inadequately trained and ill-situated to prescribe the scholarly agenda in the intellectual domain of public relations" (2000, p. 20). Mallinson's view is also that Public Relations practitioners are not suited to grapple with academic pursuits and is quoted as saying "Let's face it, public relations practitioners are not exactly great intellectuals" (Mallinson 1996, p. 82). It is hoped that Mallinson's contempt for those practising Public Relations is based on something

more than academic snobbery, but nonetheless it alludes to a lack of unity between Public Relations practitioners and Public Relations educators.

The question of "...whether public relations academics should link their work to the needs of the industry..." (Cheng & de Gregorio 2008, p. 377) was addressed in a survey of 996 public relations academics in 2008 (Cheng & de Gregorio) and revealed "... that two main sides in the discussion can be synthesized as follows:

1. The academy should be closer to its industry roots – its research is largely irrelevant, esoteric, excessively abstract in subject matter, and unusable by practitioners. Moreover, the communication of that research has become overly complicated and highly unreadable, although academic members are not cognizant of, and/or not concerned with, the needs or challenges of practice.
2. The academy should remain distant from the industry – increased devotion to pleasing the practitioner will result in research that is limited in its scope and bankrupt of its joy. Academic members should not give up their academic freedom and sell their intellectual souls to cater to the industry" (Cheng and de Gregorio 2008, p. 380).

Cheng and de Gregorio conclude that in a study of the views of PR practitioners "a comparison of both sides' views would provide an even greater understanding of how the gaps between the two may, or should, be shortened" (2008, p. 400). If Mallinson is correct, and pure Public Relations can be taught by any successful practitioner under the rubric of training (Mallinson 1996, p. 81), then Public Relations practice should be taught by 'those who do' in a vocational setting. This is consistent with Goozee's view (2005) that a significant difference between VET and HE is that, in line with the strong vocational content of VET courses, most VET teachers are recruited from industry and required to complete a VET certificate in training and assessment.

Former British Institute of Public Relations president Doug Smith concurs but believes that if PR is to be taught successfully in academic institutions at degree level, it has to

be taught in conjunction with practitioners, through placements, practical projects, speakers from the world of Public Relations, or, preferably, all three (Mallinson 1996, p. 82).

There has been little research done about who is teaching Public Relations in Australia and there has been no investigation into how it is being done. This study seeks to address that. This section has examined the 'who', namely, the educators themselves, and explored varying views on the role of industry backgrounds and academic qualifications of educators in PR education. The following section looks at what should be taught in Public Relations courses in each sector and why.

WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT WHERE AND WHY

This section synthesises the published literature on the teaching of Public Relations both in Australia and around the world. It focuses particularly on what has been written about what should be taught, pertaining to 'content', and where it should be taught, in reference to the relative benefits of the VET and HE sectors.

Some clarity about what should be taught and who should teach it is provided by Johnston and Zawawi (2004, p. 19) who argue that the focus of quality education in Public Relations needs a combination of theoretical and practical input. Yet Australian Public Relations education in both sectors has continued to build on the technical course Potts developed in the 1970s to overcome "the lack of trained recruits in the public relations industry" (Morath 2008, pp. 52-53).

L'Etang states that there is an assumption that academic work (in Public Relations) should contribute directly to practice (L'Etang 2008, p. 252). Yet, according to Turnbull, if most practitioners were asked about academia their responses would focus on alleged failures to produce graduates who write well enough and can 'hit the ground running'; on academic research being too theoretical to be useful; and, on the need for academics to promote themselves and their work more effectively" (Turnbull 2007). L'Etang and Pieczka (1996) note the lack of clarity among some

practitioners and some teachers regarding the distinction between education and training. Practitioners are naturally keen that relevant practical skills should be taught but often express doubts about the value of underpinning theory, as noted in the preceding section. Some practitioners (and even some academics) are uncomfortable with the notion that academics may adopt critical perspectives of Public Relations practice.

By any definition, Public Relations is a broad field that embraces a wide range of skills and experience. *The Handbook of Public Relations* (Skinner, Von Essen & Mersham 2001, pp. 12-13) attempted to quantify what employers would look for in a Public Relations practitioner.

They are:

- Organisational ability and administrative talent
- Communication proficiency
- A lively, enquiring mind
- Tenacity and adaptability
- Moral courage and integrity, and
- Professionalism.

It is questionable how these could be predictable outcomes of any course of study, in any discipline. Rather, they suggest the importance of the industry attracting the right types of people to it, should they be identifiable and should that be achievable, rather than expecting that any sort of educational program can deliver such a suite of traits and qualities in every individual.

The 2006 Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education stated that there were a number of aspects of Public Relations that required more emphasis. These included ethics and transparency, new technology, integration of messages and tools,

interdisciplinary problem solving, diversity, global perspectives and research and results measurement (Chia 2009, p. 36).

Public Relations practitioners need theoretical and practical credentials to manage in complex environments (Chia 2009, p. 36) and this need for a synthesis of education and practice is what Mallinson (1996, p. 81) was describing when he said “you cannot ski well, however good your technique, unless you know your mountains”. Education and practice need to be mixed efficiently (Mallinson 1996, p. 81). The interviews with PR educators as part of this study will explore how efficient – or relevant – that mix currently is in Australia.

The study will also consider if there has been any real progress in Public Relations education since it commenced in the 1970s or even since 1990 when Sam Black argued that despite years of effort by curriculum committees and commissions made up of educators and practitioners, experts still disagreed over what should be taught and who should teach it (Black 1990; Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg 1996, p. 85). This study will quite pointedly seek to determine if there is agreement now on these same issues. Do the Public Relations industry and academy know what should be taught and who should teach it? And how do the answers to these questions, if they exist, fit into and benefit from Australia’s dual sector tertiary education system?

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO AND KEY CONCERNS ARISING FROM THE DISCUSSION

This chapter reviewed literature on Public Relations and Public Relations education in Australia, the US and the UK. It commenced with a brief account of the evolution of the practice of Public Relations in the US, where it is generally thought to have commenced as a vocation. It then described how the practice started in and

developed in Australia. It went on to examine how Public Relations education commenced in the US and later in Australia, linking the role of education to the professionalisation of the practice of Public Relations. As PR is taught in Australia's two post-secondary education sectors – Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training – an account of the distinctive purposes of each was provided. These described the philosophical underpinning of the two sectors, essentially, that traditionally universities exist to foster the pursuit of knowledge and Vocational Education exists to teach skills for employment. Having looked at the intent of HE and VET, the chapter continued with a discussion about the backgrounds of Public Relations educators in those environments, what approaches are being taken to teaching PR in each sector and why. This chapter also reviewed the literature informing the preceding subjects and set up the parameters for the rest of the study.

The following chapter describes the methodology that informed the study, including its advantages and disadvantages, outlines data collection techniques and methods of analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will outline the methodological approach of this study, explaining how the study was planned and conducted using Grounded Theory and how the findings were interpreted. It will also discuss the methods of data collection – interviews and personal observations – as well as sampling techniques and techniques for data analysis. The strengths and limitations, validity and reliability of the research project component of this study are also explained in the context of ethical research practice.

The chapter also explains the role that personal observations played in primary data collection for this study and the advantages and disadvantages of this method, the techniques used to analyse the data and concludes by touching on some limitations of the study.

GROUNDING THEORY

As the primary target population of this study was Public Relations educators around Australia, it was determined that Grounded Theory would be the most appropriate methodology suited for conducting the study on this group. Grounded Theory methodology and its inherent methods are now among the most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research when generating theory is the principal aim (Strauss & Corbin 1997, p. vii). First conceptualised in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss, Grounded Theory was a reaction to the notion that theory generation should occur as the result of logical deduction and offered a way that theory suited to its supposed uses—grounded in the data—could be arrived at (Glaser and Strauss 2017, pp. 1-3). It can be described variously as theoretical generalisation generated by an inductive approach (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 153) or a qualitative research process whereby “theory emerges from the data” (Burns 1994, p. 288). It

“brings together two main traditions of research: positivism and interactionism” and attempts to “derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational data” allowing the researcher to be “scientific and creative at the same time” (Babbie 2009, p.307). Pandit (1996, p.1) describes the three elements of Grounded Theory as “concepts, categories and propositions”, describing the process of teasing out of the data the themes and linkages that build the theory.

Grounded Theory would provide the researcher with a sound structure and process to use two key data collection methods – interviews, in this case semi-structured interviews, as will be described in detail later, and personal observations. Using semi-structured interviews gives the interviewer the flexibility to pursue new or different questions in future interviews as informed by the data collected in earlier interviews (Babbie 2009; Merriam 2009, p. 87). The nature of the research that the researcher was embarking on valued the opportunity to be flexible with the questioning; to follow up on new ideas that were put forward in answering questions, rather than simply noting it and moving on to the next pre-prepared question. In this approach, Grounded Theory would enable the exploration of concepts and ideas as they presented themselves rather than simply analysing them as part of the data gathered after the interview was over. Grounded Theory means the researcher can respond to answers given or observations made instead of having to stick to the same format of questions with each participant (Babbie, 2009; Burns, 1994; Merriam 2009) and this was ideally suited to the research goals. Questions can be in no pre-determined order or wording and this can see the findings taken from the data collected differing from the original goal or purpose of the study and force, or enable, the researcher to redefine the project. The purpose of Grounded Theory, in line with its origins outlined above by Glaser and Strauss, is to build a theory that is faithful to the evidence (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 53). Indeed, it often produces “substantive theories leading to a core theory based on a central idea that appeared frequently in the data” (Merriam 2009, p. 29). Concepts and ideas could emerge and influence the remainder

of that interview as well as the form and shape of future interviews. As this study was to involve interviewing a large sample of people, it meant that the methodology could also impact the sample size as interviewing would continue until data saturation was reached, or 'enough' interviews had been conducted (Fusch & Ness 2015) and the researcher was confident that, as Merriam described above, an inductively derived theory about the research topic could be developed from the data. This research project was to commence with a small list of potential interviewees and then 'snowball' from there based on the recommendations of those early interviewees until the point of data saturation, where there was nothing new being added to the data from interviews. Accordingly, a finite number of interviewees was not established and Grounded Theory methodology could help to shape how that list developed and when it would stop. Data saturation will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

According to Denzin (2005, p. 509), Grounded Theory is a constructivist technique. It lets the researcher adopt a pragmatic emphasis on process, change and probabilistic outcomes. The researcher can accept the emergence of trends and focus on the present. This saw the research be shaped by the responses to questions by changing later questions, discontinuing with some that were planned and asking new questions, both planned due to earlier answers and un-planned, in response to interesting information emerging from the interviews. The technique was traditionally positivist but is no longer always used in that manner and it was not intended to adopt a purely positivist approach for this study.

Denzin's understanding of Grounded Theory being constructivist and no longer necessarily positivist points to the direction that Grounded Theory has taken since its founders Glaser and Strauss began to adopt individual views around the approach. There are divergent opinions about why this occurred with some calling it a 'rift' (Stern in Morse et al. 2016, p. 15), others saying the differences were the consequence of each independently teaching their respective students the methodology using their own biases and preferences (Morse 1994, p. 213). As a

result, however, two different approaches developed over time. Whatever its cause or causes, this reconceptualising by Glaser and Strauss of their pioneering work in Grounded Theory, at once built on their foundation work and led it into two schools of thought (Morse et al. 2016; Neill 2006). By the 1990s, two versions of Grounded Theory were apparent and labelled by Phyllis Stern as Glaserian Grounded Theory and Straussian Grounded Theory (Morse et al. 2016, p. 15). Glaser's own view was that the differences were so significant (suggesting a rift) that the methods should have very different names. He proposed that his approach, so-named Glaserian Grounded Theory, was the true Grounded Theory and should be called simply 'Grounded Theory'. His view was that the Straussian approach should be called 'conceptual description' and not Grounded Theory at all (Morse 1994, p. 213).

The Straussian approach is thought to be more prescriptive and structured (Evans 2013, p 145) and the Glaserian model to be 'constructivist' and 'reflexive' (Neill 2006, p. 253). It is the latter approach, that sees concepts 'constructed not discovered' (Neill 2006, p. 253), that has emerged as the contemporary, in-use methodology, passed on to new researchers by the self-titled 'second generation' of researchers who were students of Glaser and Strauss themselves (Morse et al. 2016). It was the Glaserian model of Grounded Theory, with its constructivist roots, that guided this research, emphasising the researcher's desire to develop new data, concepts and theories from what was found rather than to test any hypothesis.

This constructivist approach was described by Glaser as allowing data to "be developed without pre-conceived ideas", to "integrate previous work during the comparative analysis" and to enable the generation of "concepts that will have different meanings to different people" (Glaser in Neill 2006, pp. 253-6). It is Glaser's approach that better describes the approach adopted for this study. As mentioned above, the intention of the researcher was to construct theory and not to test it (Seale 2012).

The opportunity to make observations of the "respondent's non-verbal communication and environment" provides additional data that may provide added

dimensions compared to simply conducting interviews over the phone or by questionnaire or using another research methodology that does not embrace personal observation as a data collection method (Burns 1994, p. 361). Herzog (cited in Gubrium et al. 2012, p. 207) notes that the location that the interview is conducted at plays a role in constructing reality and researchers should “relate to every interview as a socially constructed, negotiated event” (p. 210). Consistent with Herzog’s view, guidelines for making personal observations in qualitative research suggest observing the following:

- The physical setting of the interview
- The participants – who is there and who is not there
- Activities and interactions
- Conversations and silences
- Subtle factors – informal and unplanned activities, symbolic meaning of words, non-verbal communication such as dress and physical space, what does not happen
- The researcher’s own behaviour (and the impact it has on the above) (Merriam 2009, p. 87).

This was a useful, and adhered to, set of suggestions for conducting the fieldwork and was consistent with Kreuger and Neuman’s list of the theoretical categories that researchers adopting Grounded Theory use to understand and interpret the social world. They include motifs, themes, distinctions and ideas that researchers create as part of the process of gathering and analysing data. It makes qualitative research more flexible and lets the data and the theory interact (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 158). Herzog (cited in Gubrium et al. 2012) argues that a qualitative interview is about “the ability to traverse social boundaries and to acknowledge that as part of the process, noting that the physical location of the interview recontextualises social relations and boundary crosses” (p. 211).

The advantages of Grounded Theory above, especially those identified by Herzog, also inform its limitations – some say that are a lack of credibility and validity of data collected following its principles (Kolb 2012; Merriam 2009). The crucial element in Grounded Theory data collection, the involvement of the researcher, is “a major threat to validity” due to the effect that the researcher has on the setting, by way of ‘biased interjection’ (Kolb 2012, pp. 84-85). Similarly, the study being “influenced by the researcher’s personal world view and individual biases” are factors that can affect the credibility of the data (Kolb 2012, p. 85). These concerns and the researcher’s handling of them are discussed in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

The outcomes of using Grounded Theory see that the theoretical analysis that comes from the data is an “interpretive rendering of a reality not an objective reporting of it” (Denzin 2005, p. 509). Consistent with Herzog’s views about the social construct of an interview, Starks and Trinidad (2007, p. 1372) support Denzin’s ideal of ‘an interpretive rendering of reality’ and argue that the location for the interviews provides a framework for data collection and analysis that enables Grounded Theory to develop explanatory theories of basic social processes studied in context. The benefits of the social construct of interviews, personal observations being made by the researcher that are later ‘memoed’ and analysed and inform the next interviews in the case of this study were considered alongside perceptions of bias and the interjecting of a world view that could potentially shape the data and consciously balanced within the boundaries of personal bias. The strengths and limitations of Grounded Theory are closely linked.

This study was not starting with a hypothesis that would then be tested from the results of data collected, hence the suitability of Grounded Theory as it is “inductive and doesn’t seek to test or verify” (Urquhart 2013, p. 4). The study was planned to inform itself in part “from the constant comparing of unfolding observations” and to be shaped by the research itself (Babbie 2009, p. 307). The guidelines for Grounded Theory according to Babbie (2009, p. 307) are:

1. *Think comparatively* – “it is essential to compare numerous incidents as a way of avoiding the biases that can arise from interpretations of initial observations”
2. *Obtain multiple viewpoints* – this means “the different points of view of participants in the events under study”
3. *Periodically step back* – “as data accumulate, you’ll begin to frame interpretations about what is going on, and it’s important to keep checking your data against those interpretations (as the data don’t lie)”
4. *Maintain an attitude of scepticism* – “as you begin to interpret the data, you should regard all those interpretations as provisional, using new observations to test those interpretations, not just confirm them”
5. *Follow the research procedures* – “grounded theory allows for flexibility in data collection as theories evolve, but ...three techniques are essential: making comparisons, asking questions and sampling” .

The Grounded Theory approach guidelines provided a framework for the approach to the research. The conduct of the research required talking to people and comparing their views and experiences to establish data, trends and observations, rather than to test any hypotheses. Indeed, Grounded Theory is highly suited to when little is known about the area of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, cited in Birks & Mills 2015, p. 9) and in this case, while the researcher had experience with and significant interest in the topic of the study, the study itself was to focus on, if not a whole new area of inquiry, a new broad scope for it, becoming the first national study about Public Relations education in Australia. No previous researcher has conducted such extensive research with PR educators or investigated PR education in Australia from the perspectives of PR educators. The study planned to explore how Public Relations is being taught in the two post-secondary education sectors in Australia. It sought to discover how it is being taught in each sector, how it is perceived to be taught, who is teaching it and what is informing the teachers. It also examined the relationship of the academy to the industry and what the implications of this relationship are for PR education. For

example, the study investigated the relevance of 'Public Relations' as the name of the industry and if and how that was apparent or important in education institutions where PR was being taught. It also assessed the professional status of the vocation of Public Relations and examined if and how that had an impact on how Public Relations was being taught.

RESEARCH DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

To establish the overall purpose of the inquiry, a process was undertaken along the lines of Patton's (2001, p. 13) six-point framework "Some Guiding Questions and Options for Methods Decisions". This involved posing a series of questions and letting them ultimately inform the selection of research methodology. Consequently, Grounded Theory emerged as an ideal methodology for this research project. The process used to select the research methodology is outlined in the following section. The questions in Patton's framework that helped to determine the purpose of the inquiry, and my subsequent answers, were:

Q1 What are the purposes of the inquiry?

A1 The purposes of the inquiry were to investigate how Public Relations was being taught in the two sectors in Australia and to consider to what extent that best practices were in place. To do so meant ensuring that questions could be open-ended, suggesting they would be mostly qualitative, that the researcher could deviate from standard questions to pursue new ideas presented, and it was this that suggested Grounded Theory's suitability given it seeks to build theory grounded in evidence rather than test hypothesis, and that the sample could be shaped by referrals from early participants.

Q2 Who will be the primary audiences for the findings?

A2 The findings would be of most interest to five key stakeholders in Public Relations education:

1. the Public Relations academy in Australia and around the world
2. the Public Relations industry in Australia
3. institute professional staff involved in Public Relations courses
4. course administrators and senior academics in disciplines other than Public Relations with the capacity to influence Public Relations courses
5. government policy makers in education, due to the examination of the HE and VET sectors and the relative advantages and disadvantages of teaching Public Relations from each sector

Q3 What questions will guide the inquiry?

A3 Questions would need to focus on who is teaching Public Relations in terms of their qualifications and experience, in which sector and in which geographic location in Australia. Further, they would need to explore the thoughts of decision makers in PR courses about content, pedagogy, globalisation and other broader contexts. This would be the key to the inquiry. To ensure the research captured this demographic data, there had to be a quantitative element to the data collection as well as the mostly qualitative approach to be taken. Again, the Grounded Theory methodology not only enabled this to occur but in fact added value to that part of data collection, encouraging more demographic questions to be asked than were initially intended, when interesting data was revealed and warranted further investigation.

Q4 What data will answer or illuminate the inquiry questions?

A4 The data required to answer the research questions would be information that provides concrete insights into the professional views and experiences of participants in the study about macro and micro issues in Public Relations

education. These could include their thoughts on how PR is being taught, how well their course is fulfilling its purpose, insights into the numbers and profile of students enrolling in PR courses and what their perceptions of their motivations and interests are, content, resources, trends and the future of PR education. Additionally, quantitative data would be required. How many PR courses? How many educators? What are their demographic profiles? What are their qualifications? How many students?

Q5 What resources are available to support the inquiry?

A5 Swinburne University provided resources to the researcher, including the involvement and support of two academic supervisors. Further, it provided an allocation of funds to contribute to the researcher's costs of travelling interstate to conduct the fieldwork. The researcher also intended to provide her own resources to cover the travel and any other costs as required. Under the terms of a part time PhD candidature, eight years were available in which to conduct the study.

Q6 What criteria will be used to judge the quality of the findings?

A6 The findings would be reviewed by two academic supervisors and, periodically, in line with the university's PhD candidature procedures, by internal review panels of suitably qualified academics. Ultimately, the quality of the findings would be determined by the external assessors of the finished thesis.

Answering these questions helped to determine that it would be necessary to undertake both qualitative research and quantitative research to fulfil the purposes of the inquiry. This is because quantitative data would provide demographic information about the participants and qualitative data would provide an understanding of how Public Relations is being taught in Australia from the

perspectives of those who are teaching it (Gubrium et al. 2012). The majority of the study would be based on qualitative research.

Qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena and includes various genres including naturalistic, interpretive and, increasingly, drawing on multiple methods of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman 2006, p. 2). Qualitative methodology refers to research that produces descriptive data – people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviour (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016, p. 7). The planned study did in fact need to use multiple methods and these were consistent with Patton’s framework. They were research, evaluation, dissertation and personal inquiry. Based on assessments of descriptions of the most appropriate uses of qualitative research it was evident that this would form the majority of the study. A number of definitions and explanations about qualitative research helped to determine its suitability for this study. Descriptions of qualitative research include that it uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, focuses on context, is emergent rather than tightly prefigured and is fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman 2006, p. 3).

Kumar (2011, p. 138) describes qualitative research as the pursuit of qualitative information. This is explained as:

- An observation recorded in a narrative or descriptive format
- An unstructured interview recorded in narrative or descriptive form
- Responses to open-ended questions
- Data generated by focus groups, oral histories, narratives or group interviews.

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016, p. 7) state that qualitative research is concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their life and requires the researcher to seek to understand people from their own frames of reference. This study was to involve data collection in the field, in real work contexts, which were the participants’ working spaces or in other spaces on-campus, and to be conducted in a manner

that enabled themes to develop organically. Its pursuit of qualitative information suggested naturally that the study would be largely based on qualitative research. The purposes of this nature of research can be organised into three groups depending on what the researcher is trying to accomplish. Therefore, they can help to determine the purpose of the inquiry. These are:

- Explore a new topic
- Describe a social phenomenon, or
- Explain why something occurs (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 21).

More than one of the above can be the focus of the inquiry but typically there is one dominant objective. This was useful in determining that the purpose of this inquiry was to provide a descriptive account of a situation in a moment in time, in Kreuger and Neuman's nomenclature, to 'describe a social phenomenon' or as mentioned earlier, to seek to understand other people's meaning (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016). This would involve:

- Providing a detailed, highly accurate picture
- Locating new data that contradicts old data
- Creating a set of categories or classification types
- Documenting a causal process or mechanism, and
- Reporting on the background or context of a situation (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 22).

Following the model above, the study would seek to ultimately describe a picture of the specific details of a situation, the individual respondent's "social world" (Herzog, cited in Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti & McKinney 2012, p. 207) and conduct research to reveal new and accurate data that contributes to a new and contemporary understanding of that situation. As such, the approach was wholly consistent with the

tenets of 'descriptive research' which illustrates how things are in the context of the research subject and who is involved in it without concerning itself with why it is that way. Descriptive research uses surveys, field research, content analysis and historical comparative research and this approach would frame the basis for this inquiry (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 22).

To shape the approach of the study, it was useful to work through Kreuger & Neuman's explanation of the field research process which is outlined below:

1. Field research begins with a loosely formulated idea or topic
2. Researchers select a social group or site for the study
3. Once they gain access to the group or site they adopt a social role in the setting and begin observing
4. They may conduct formal interviews
5. They take notes and consider what they observe and refine or focus ideas about its significance
6. They leave the site
7. Then they reread their notes and prepare their reports (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 37).

Consideration of Kreuger and Neuman's approach to field research also reveals the suitability of Grounded Theory to this research project. The "loosely formulated idea" suggests the opportunity to construct theory from the ground up rather than starting with a hypothesis to test. Points 2 and 3 refer to the selection of initial participants and place the researcher in a social, interactive role in the data collection, consistent with the approach of Grounded Theory. Points 5 and 7 are suggestive of the flexibility in question asking afforded by Grounded Theory, the opportunity to both take notes and compare notes from previous interviews and pursue new ideas, the opportunity to reflect on the data collection, to 'memo', and to construct new theory based on

the data. Similarly, Pandit (1996, p. 2) identifies five analytic (and not strictly sequential) research phases – research design, data collection, data ordering, data analysis and literature comparison and this approach was also deemed compatible with Grounded Theory. Planning for this study commenced using the Kreuger and Neuman model with a loose concept for the nature of the inquiry and the understanding from Pandit that the process need not be linear and that was in part its strength. Typically, qualitative researchers begin a study with general research questions and interests but, as was the case for this researcher, do not have a rigid plan regarding the number of cases to be studied (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016, p. 31). As is consistent with descriptive research, the process of gathering data and determining findings saw the direction of the inquiry evolve from the original goals and iterative changes were made as the data forced the researcher to redefine the project (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 53). For example, as each interview was conducted and themes began to emerge in the data and some questions were met with little or no enthusiasm from the participants, a sharper focus of the study began to organically reveal itself. This is exactly the set of experiences that the original Glaser and Strauss model of Grounded Theory was designed for and which, later became the research space that the Glaserian version of Grounded Theory claimed.

The researcher started out with the simplistic view that the study would focus on asking semi-structured but flexible questions to a number of people in Public Relations education and the data would then be analysed using a form of thematic analysis. ‘Semi-structured’ interviews sit between ‘unstructured’ interviews in which the researcher asks minimal questions and often just a ‘grand tour’ question (Morse, cited in Gubrium et al. 2012, p. 194) and ‘structured’ interviews that are more commonly used in quantitative research. ‘Structured’ interviews see all the subjects being asked the same questions in the same order (Morse, cited in Gubrium et al. 2012, p. 194). What actually occurred in the data collection phase was that participants engaged differently from each other with the questions, some not answering those that for whatever reason did not interest them. This study was

shaped by the engagement (or lack of it) with and of the participants. Rather than being just passive respondents to a series of questions, their selective engagement with the questions and rapport with the researcher resulted both in richer data and a sharper focus of the study than was intended or foreseen on the similarities and differences of PR courses in the two sectors. This can be explained in part by the varying rapport between the researcher and the respondents. Different people have had different experiences and have learned to see things in different ways (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016, p. 13) and consequently respond differently to similar questioning and social context. It could also be a result of 'interviewer effects' (Hox, de Leeuw & Kreft 1991, p. 439) although little is known – or proven – about the impact on data of the interviewer's own opinions and attitudes (Hox, de Leeuw & Kreft 1991, p. 439).

In accordance with the aims of the study, which included determining who is teaching Public Relations in Australia and their views about a series of questions including how it is being taught, the 'social group' that would be researched would be Public Relations educators in the VET and HE sectors around the country. The research questions required that some quantitative data be collected so as to establish some demographics about who Australia's Public Relations educators are and to attempt to frame how and why they are going about their work.

The research aimed to identify aspects about Public Relations education in Australia from the perspectives of PR educators and, based on the themes of the literature review, investigated:

- The influence of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA)
- The relationship between practitioners and academics
- Curriculum design in both sectors and the role of industry, if any
- Educators' satisfaction with Public Relations education
- Educators' industry knowledge and teaching experience and expertise

- The role of case studies, industry placements and guest speakers in PR education.

The qualitative research aspect of this study was mostly conducted using the qualitative data gathering methods of interviews and field (personal) observations and these are explained in detail later in this chapter. Resources of time and money were factors in how the data was collected but there is no evidence that these reduced the quality of the interviews in any way. The interviews were conducted within a calendar year and almost all of them were conducted face to face and the remainder were conducted over the phone.

A number of methods were used to approach the potential respondents and to secure the interviews. Some potential interviewees were industry colleagues known to the researcher so they were therefore approached directly. Others were contacted after referrals from intermediaries known to the researcher who were able to facilitate introductions. For interviewees who were essentially 'cold called', it was anticipated that as the purpose of the study was relevant to them that that would encourage their willingness to take part. This proved to be almost unanimously the case.

The criteria that would be used to ultimately assess the quality of the data collected so as to determine the findings would centre largely on the robustness of the interview design, the quality of the interviews themselves and the number and relevance to the subject matter of the people who agreed to be interviewed.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUES – PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

Adler and Adler (cited in Baker & Edwards, 2012, p. 8) suggest qualitative researchers:

generally study many fewer people, but delve more deeply into those individuals, settings, subcultures, and scenes, hoping to generate a subjective

understanding of *how* and *why* people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact.

Working in the context of discovery qualitative researchers are “more open-ended, and often follow emergent empirical and conceptual findings in unexpected ways” (Adler & Adler, cited in Baker & Edwards, 2012, p. 8).

It is for these reasons that Adler and Adler (n.d., p. 8) and Fusch and Ness (2015, p. 1498) in answering the questions ‘How many qualitative interviews is enough?’ (Adler & Adler n.d.) and ‘Are we there yet?’ (Fusch & Ness 2015), surmise that qualitative researchers do not know in advance how much data they will need to gather and that the best approach is simply to gather data until empirical saturation is reached (where practical).

This was the approach taken in the conduct of this research. An initial list was developed of people considered vital to interview as per criteria including their academic status, their location (because this is a national study), their publications, and perceived interest and knowledge of the topic. The interviewees themselves suggested other suitable interviewees. This is called snowball sampling (Goodman 1961, p. 148; Ove & Snijders 1994, p. 53). Goodman (1961) described the process as each individual in the sample being asked to name other individuals to be involved in the study based on a particular criterion. In the case of this study the criterion was any PR educator known to the respondent who he or she believed would be an interesting interview subject. The initial parameters for the data collection included an intention to interview people currently engaged in teaching Public Relations in most states and territories in which it is taught, that is, a representation, and it was important to the purpose of the study that people from both the university and VET sectors were interviewed. Private training organisations that can also teach VET qualifications and non-government-accredited courses were considered to be outside the scope of the inquiry and therefore no one from that sector was interviewed.

It was not the intention to attempt to interview every single person in such a role in the country. The numbers would way exceed the capacity of the researcher and would be superfluous to the requirements of the research methodology. 'Data saturation', the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006, p. 59), or "when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch & Ness 2015, p. 1408), could be anticipated to occur before every possible person could be included in the study. Equally, it was not important to attempt to interview someone representing every institute that teaches Public Relations in the country either. However, the way the interviewing developed, someone from almost every university in the country that teaches Public Relations was in fact interviewed. The initial list of potential interviewees in the university sector included all of the Professors and Associate Professors of Public Relations in Australia, all of the authors of current Australian PR text books (the lists overlap) and academics who have published in the area of Public Relations education. Tasmania was not represented as there were no Public Relations courses taught there in either sector at the time of the data collection. Interviews were planned in every other state and territory and from regional areas as well as capital cities.

During the course of the inquiry, the number of TAFE courses in PR decreased due to changes in government policy (and also because of other factors including competition due to the increased offerings from the university sector). As a consequence of the reduced number of courses, interviews with TAFE teachers were only undertaken in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. South Australia has not had a TAFE course in Public Relations for many years so it was naturally excluded. There are fewer teachers of PR in the TAFE sector than the university sector and this was clearly evident in the ratio of interviews in both sectors. The researcher was fortunate to have access to two visiting overseas academics - one on sabbatical for a semester from the US and the

other here on a longer-term contract from the UK. They were included in the research as representatives of the universities that were employing them in Australia. Their views and observations on the teaching of Public Relations in Australian universities are useful additions to the data.

At some institutions, interviews were sought with the entire PR teaching team (ranging from two to seven people) and at others only one representative was interviewed. It was expected that this technique might avoid undue repetition of information, that is, that all the members of a team would hold the same views, but the results demonstrated that this was only true in some cases. Many members of teaching teams, although united in their views about some aspects of what they are teaching and how they are teaching Public Relations, still hold their own individual views, and some quite strongly, that differ from those of their colleagues.

Educators of various employment types were also sought out. Interviews were conducted with 44 full time staff, three sessional and four part-time staff. It was important to include some people at universities who were academic chairs and course coordinators and others of varying academic seniority. No attempt was made to facilitate a gender balance as an examination of the demographics of who currently is teaching Public Relations in Australia (and whether there is a demographic difference between the sectors) was part of the research inquiry. Similarly, there was no attempt to include people of particular educational attainment. Finding out who had PhD level qualifications, who had qualifications in Public Relations and who had industry experience was part of the purpose of the study so attempting to pre-select on these bases would have skewed the results. It is important to point out however that a desire to include all of the Professors and Associate Professors in Public Relations in the study did result in the data reporting a higher proportion of PR educators holding PhDs than would likely have resulted if the study sample was random. The benefit to the study of the perspectives of those senior academics was deemed valuable and this impact on the data was accepted as such.

A sample size was not decided in advance and a final list of names of potential interviewees was not decided before the data collection started either. This allowed for interviewees to recommend others to interview, for the process 'to snowball', as outlined earlier. Thus, the sample group informed its own sample group in some ways. The objective with regard to the number of interviews was to 'to keep interviewing people until the same answers started to be given'. By the time this empirical saturation had been reached, interviews had been conducted with 51 people in five states and two territories, representing 17 universities, two dual sector institutes and two TAFE institutes. Amongst the number of interviewees, 29 were female and 22 were male.

Burns states that a "properly designed and executed interview survey should yield a response rate of at least 80 to 85 per cent" (1994, p. 361) and this was demonstrated in this study. Conducting face to face interviews is likely to increase a response rate as "more people are willing to talk and react verbally than to write responses to questions" and given that the majority of the interviews for this study were conducted face to face it is possible that this contributed to the high number of people who agreed to take part (Burns 1994, p. 361). Of the people approached for interviews, a handful did not respond to email or phone calls, but only two people blatantly refused the request, resulting in an extremely high response rate. It is possible that the high level of co-operation received was in part due to academic reciprocity, that is, the people asked to be interviewed, most especially in the HE sector, are very often in the researcher's shoes themselves and feel obliged to take their turn in the interviewee chair in the interest of research. Those who took part also expressed a genuine interest in the subject matter and wanted to be part of thinking seriously and reflectively about the work they do and these interviews provided that opportunity. This is consistent with Burns' (1994) view that people prefer to engage face to face.

Even though there were only very low numbers (fewer than five) of people who chose to not participate, explaining the rejections and apathy is problematic. Those who did

not agree to be interviewed were not the most senior academics in the country. Indeed, most senior Public Relations academics in the country have been interviewed for this research. The research would have been enhanced by being able to better represent regional education but potential interviewees in the few regional locations at which Public Relations is taught in Australia did not make themselves available. The two academics who denied interview requests cited unusual reasons. One was because all of his colleagues had already been interviewed and he did not consider he had anything different to add. The other, despite being a senior lecturer in the field by title, said she did not feel qualified to comment on the subject matter. The absence of this interview is possibly the biggest omission to the study. It would have been interesting to explore why this person was teaching in an academic discipline that she, by her own admission, knew nothing about or felt unqualified to comment about.

There are of course limitations to all sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling is characterised as 'non-probability sampling' (Achayara et al 2013) and this informs some of the limitations of this approach. Probability sampling refers to that where each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected in the study. The data produced by that study can then be 'generalised' beyond the sample. Data gathered using non-probability sampling, where the sample has been chosen by the investigator for reasons that may include 'convenience', cannot be generalised beyond the sample (Achayara et al. 2013, p. 330). Therefore, this lack of 'generalisability' of findings can result in the investigator having difficulty defending the findings as they can be thought to be impacted by 'researcher bias' or the bias of the participants who self-selected or suggested other suitable participants (Morse 1991, p. 138). Morse also notes that another limitation of this approach is that the trust a researcher places in others by being referred to these other suitable participants may be misplaced (Morse 1991, p. 138).

The following section delves specifically into the methods of data collection that were used in this study.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Much of the data collected for this study falls into the category of 'primary data' which typically is drawn from observations, interviews and questionnaires (Kumar 2011, p. 139; Patton 2001, p. 4). In the specific case of this study, the primary data collected was from interviews and personal observations. This was gathered personally by the researcher in December 2011 and throughout 2012. Secondary data gathered for this study included the literature review that was the focus of Chapter Two.

Interviews

In line with the tenets of Grounded Theory methodology which guided this research project, and as outlined earlier, apart from some minor demographic questions to establish the profile of who is teaching Public Relations in Australia, the primary data collection for this study was qualitative. According to Kumar (2011) and Patton (2001) there are essentially three kinds of qualitative data – interviews, observations and documents – and the research for this study adopted just the first two. Face to face interviews were conducted in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia and these were supplemented with some telephone interviews with participants in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. A sample set of the interview questions is in the appendices (see Appendix 1 – Interview guide). Interviews are a common method of gathering information from people and can take various forms. Typically, an interviewer reads questions to an interviewee, elicits answers and records them. Any interaction between two or more people with a specific purpose can be thought of as an interview (Kumar 2011, p. 144). There is great strength in using unstructured interviews and this study, drawing on the guidelines of Grounded Theory, sought to benefit from that (Kumar 2011, p. 145). This was done by using semi-structured

questions, where the same questions were asked to all participants but there was room for follow up or to respond to unexpected information provided, thus enabling said advantage to accrue. This is a basic principle of Grounded Theory, enabling the researcher to pursue a new line of questioning when something new is presented by a participant. The use of unstructured interviews provides a flexible approach to the interview structure, interview contents and interview questions. Semi-structured interviews enjoy these benefits but with the consistency of data collection made possible by asking a standard core of questions to all participants. This in no way minimised the anticipated advantage of the standardised approach where mostly “respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses” and “data are complete for each person on the topics addressed in the interview” (Patton 2001, p. 349) nor that of grounding new theory. The interviews conducted in this study were almost typical of the ‘informal conversational interview’ (Patton 2001, p. 349), meaning that during some of the interviews the researcher could make spur of the moment decisions to respond to the context of the discussion (Kumar 2011, p. 145) and ask questions out of sequence to both better maintain a line of inquiry in that particular interview and to pursue new data on which to build new theory.

The principles of Grounded Theory also required a slight deviation in the approach to using semi-structured interviews rather than un-structured interviews. Building on data already gathered is a key element of Grounded Theory so some of the pre-planned questions were prioritised over others as the data collection went on. A limitation of altering the structure of interviews is that it does not result in easily comparable data as one question could be asked early in one interview and last in another. This makes data analysis less straightforward as each set of data is not structured in the same manner. This is a limitation of efficiency rather than of quality of data collected, since all of the interviewees are still asked the same foundation questions, albeit not necessarily in the same order. The effect of that in this study was reduced because the researcher took physical notes as well as recording the

interviews that were later transcribed. This means that there were hard copies available to enable answers to the same questions to be easily compared irrespective of the order in which they were asked by the researcher. As such, the data gathering still benefited from easy “organization and analysis of the data” (Patton 2001, p. 349). This potential limitation was taken into consideration for this study on that basis and it was decided that the benefits of freeing up the interviews outweighed the data collection and analysis challenges.

Another advantage of giving the researcher the flexibility to minimise the formality and structure that using “standardized wording of questions” contributes to is that it helps to enable the naturalness and relevance of questions and answers (Patton 2001, p. 349). During fieldwork, there was a strong attempt by the researcher to steer interviews into the ‘informal conversational interview’ approach rather than simply reciting a standard set of questions. Sometimes this was as simple as asking questions out of order to fit in with the respondent’s interests. This could be done while still completing the series of questions and ensuring comparable data sets and without reducing the merit of the flexibility in question asking provided by following the guidelines of Grounded Theory. The questions were also written in ‘spoken word’ so did not suffer from the “constrained or limited naturalness” that Patton (2001, p. 349) cautions can stymie rapport between researcher and participants.

In the case of the face to face interviews (which made up 75% of the total), an effort was made to create a similar environmental context for each one of them, due to a desire to make comparative observations. This meant that where possible the interviews were conducted in the interviewee’s own office or workspace. The reason for doing this was partly to enable comparable personal observations to be made, a method of data collection that is key to Grounded Theory methodology. This is described in detail in the next section. In almost all cases where the interviews were conducted face to face, the whole or part of the interview was conducted in the participant’s office, at their workplace. However, in a few instances, participants elected to be interviewed outside of their offices for personal reasons (which

included avoiding being overheard by colleagues) and these interviews were held in an on-campus coffee shop or cafeteria. While the researcher's focus on interview location was in part logistics and a desire to make the respondent comfortable, Herzog (cited in Gubrium et al. 2012, p. 207) argues that location is more than logistics and convenience and that it provides a valuable social construct for the exchange. While she believes "who chooses and what place is chosen" (Gubrium et al. 2012, p. 207) should be analysed as an integral part of the interpretation of the findings, it is regrettable that the researcher placed too little emphasis on observing the nuance of these processes.

The interviews were designed to take approximately 90 minutes. There were some quick answers possible but mostly the questions were open-ended and required considerable thought and reflection to answer fully. The ranges of interview durations varied quite dramatically – from as brief as thirty minutes to approximately two hours. The subsequent analysis of the data revealed a direct correlation between interview duration and quality of responses, with the longer interviews making the richest contributions to the inquiry.

Most of the interviews were conducted in a relaxed and conversational manner, an outcome due, in part, to conducting the study using Grounded Theory, which enabled the interviewer to allow room for each interviewee to expand on their views on the subject matter. Many respondents were quite impassioned and genuinely enjoyed the opportunity to spend time thinking about or articulating ideas they had previously thought about. One participant said the questions were the type that "kept her awake at night" and another said her team had been given much to think about by the interview questions, especially given the timing of her interview being the day before their annual planning day. Most interviewees seemed to enjoy having their views recorded and most, irrespective of where they stood on the big philosophical questions posed by the researcher, held strong views on each question. One interviewee asked the interviewer to "settle in" and he then put his feet on his desk and slid back in his chair to pontificate. Another participant said he had a lot to say on

the subject and said: “how long is your longest interview? I am going to break the record”.

As discussed earlier in this section, in keeping with the flexibility provided by Grounded Theory, the interviews were designed to be semi-structured, enabling the interviewer to follow up on each answer to fully explore each new idea.

Consequently, the interviews were observably enjoyable experiences overall and in the main, conducted on very friendly terms. The lonely life of the Public Relations academic was noted by a number of participants who commented that it was nice to have the opportunity “to have this type of discussion” and “groups of us should get together and talk about this stuff more”. The interviews were all audio-recorded, with permission, but, as noted previously, the researcher also took extensive notes throughout. The impact of the recording was interesting in a number of cases. Some participants, after getting overly enthusiastic in their comments and saying dramatic things, were concerned that comments they thought to be controversial were ‘on tape’. They were reassured of the confidential nature of the interviews. One participant had the opposite reaction to the tape, stepping up to the interview as if the recording provided a pulpit for impassioned views. Even after the interview was over and the recorder turned off, the participant had another thought and insisted the recorder be turned on again to capture the comments.

Personal observations

One of the richest contributions to this study resulting from adopting a Grounded Theory approach was the opportunity for the researcher to make personal observations as part of the data collection process. Personal observations were used to collect data because they would provide an additional layer of information on which to draw data. They would complement the information provided by the respondents in the interviews by allowing observation of the individuals interviewed, of their work environments and other non-verbal information that the researcher could glean while conducting the interviews.

Personal observation as a research tool is defined as “a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it occurs” (Kumar 2011, p. 140). It can be used to study the behaviour or personality traits of an individual and provide information that supplements what the individual says or even does. According to Patton (2001, p. 4) “data from *observations* consist of detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience”. This ‘ethnography’, or writing about people, accepts that human behaviour exists within a context, such as a social setting, an organisation, a behaviour or activities, and ethnography is essentially the “science of cultural description” (Burns 1994, p. 245). It allows the researcher to make meaning of the observed patterns of behaviour engaged in by those studied. It was these observations in the field that the interviewer made that informed the research arguably as much as the interview data itself.

Some of the advantages of personal observation as a data collection method are made clear later in this section where some of the direct observations made during the field work are outlined. However, as with all techniques, there are also some disadvantages. Some of the problems of personal observation as a data collection method are:

- Individuals being observed can change their behaviour and what they say for a number of reasons including wanting to appear more impressive, knowledgeable or powerful or even just to get the interviewer to like them or agree with their point of view. This is called the Hawthorne Effect and placebos or other techniques can be used to counteract the biasing effects of participation (Burns 1994, p. 227; Dessler 1985, p. 257; Robbins 1994, p.45).
- The issue of human factors is also a very real disadvantage in using personal observation to gather data. Objectivity is a difficult frame of mind to have or maintain, as people, including researchers, have lived their own lives and hold

their own opinions and biases (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016, p. 13). It is reasonable to expect that any researcher may be biased in some way. This naturally occurring bias could impact potentially on all of the variables being observed. These could include seeing the observed individual respond positively or negatively to the researcher, the researcher's demeanour altering that of the interviewee and therefore not providing an accurate 'observation' or simply the researcher misunderstanding what they have observed because of their own different perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, cited in Birks & Mills 2015, p. 20).

- Incomplete data could be collected if the researcher either focused too much on making personal observations or too much on asking questions. If there is too much focus on making observations the researcher might compromise the rapport with the participant and limit the quality or quantity of the data they collect. If there is too much emphasis on the rapport with the participant and the asking and answering of the questions, the interviewer may not be able to make sufficient personal observations and may compromise the data collected (Kumar 2011, p. 140).
- It is impossible to keep personal observations objective. Nonetheless, all observations are subjective, none more so than others and there is a parity created accordingly. All research is interpretive as it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, cited in Birks & Mills 2015, p. 9).
Reporting on data gleaned by personal observation is declared as such.

The four potential problems outlined above were considered and dealt with, as much as possible, in terms of their likely impact on this study in the following ways. It was hard to determine whether there were any cases of the Hawthorne Effect and if so what the impact of that might have been. It is likely that some respondents wanted to appear more impressive or knowledgeable than they perhaps were, as this is the

human condition, but instead of this being seen as a negative, if it did occur, it may in fact be a positive that led to more thoughtful, better quality responses. Objectivity is a difficult point of view to adopt, given the realities of human experience, so in terms of how it impacted on the respondents and on the interviewer, the most that can be said is that the researcher was aware of it. It is hard to be sure that the researcher has not interpreted the responses and encounters with respondents through her own biases and views of the world and this reality has to be considered, like in all qualitative research, as part of the process.

There is some significance to the concern about the researcher focusing too much on one or the other of asking questions and making personal observations and the researcher admits to regretting not being able to concentrate on being better at doing both simultaneously. For the record, the researcher considers that she focused more on building rapport by asking questions and listening to the answers and as a consequence made fewer observations than she would have liked. While she believes her personal observations add to the richness of the data, on the same theme, more personal observations would have further enhanced the data. Just as subjectivity impacts on questions and answers, equally it impacts personal observations and this would have been the case in this study as in any other. This was offset, ironically, by the relatively few observations made due to the researcher's focus on interviewing.

These problems notwithstanding, the usefulness of personal observation in this study cannot be understated. For example, and consistent with the emphasis Herzog (cited in Gubrium et al. 2012) places on the role that the interview location plays in constructing reality, and consistent with the focus it is given in Grounded Theory, the researcher was able to glean a lot about how Public Relations education is valued at one institution without even asking a question about it. The virtue of interviewing in the interviewee's own office in this case revealed much about the status that this Public Relations professor held in the organisation. The magnitude of this status may have gone unnoticed if the interview was conducted by phone but was undeniable due to the professor's office being directly observed by the researcher. Its size,

luxury, the view from large windows on two sides and business (rather than academic) appearance were equal in terms of appointments and status to any chief executive's office anywhere in the world.

By making observations in the field it was also possible to some extent to understand the cohesion of an academic team without asking a question about it. The interpersonal behaviour of one team was clear to the researcher because of the opportunity to have a very casual lunch with them. Burns (1994, p. 256) explains this through the lens of 'timing' where the rhythms, timetables and calendars of organisational life impact on the behaviour of those who work there. In an education setting, semester breaks when students are absent would provide a different observable 'rhythm' on campus than when students are on campus and the rhythms of orientation week would look and feel different than exam weeks. So, a team lunch provides a different dynamic than observing the team individually at their desks, in class or wherever.

There were many other observations made during the face to face interviews that had nothing to do with the questions. One interesting dynamic was that some interviewees treated the researcher – who is both a highly experienced Public Relations practitioner and a Public Relations teacher in both higher and vocational education as well as a PhD student – as a student and others acknowledged her as a peer. This is a form of the "interviewer effect" (Burns 1994, p. 362; Hox, de Leeuw & Kreft 1991, p. 439) which may result from the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. Factors which may bias it include personal characteristics of the interviewer and the amount of experience he or she has at interviewing (Birks & Mills 2015). In this case, it was impacted by my education status – a PhD student, not a PhD graduate who would then have been an academic peer to many of the respondents. The rapport established during the interviews with those who treated me (the researcher) as a peer was typically better than those who treated me as 'just' a student. While some interviewees who were interviewed by telephone also chose to treat me as a student, it was easier to ignore than in the face to face interviews

and consequently made little difference to the rapport established and the quality of the data that was produced. This could possibly be due to the reality of a phone call just being two voices over a phone line with little else to influence the tone other than the people themselves. Conversely, during face to face interviews, interviewees who chose to treat me as a student typically used the accoutrements of their status to enable it. In research, this is called “impression management” and is a technique used by respondents who “put on a show” to ensure they create a favourable impression of themselves and their institution (Burns 1994, p. 255). It is unsurprising that individuals who are Public Relations educators would utilise an obvious PR tactic. The impression management included sending their staff to greet me and to ask me to wait for them well beyond the appointment time, sitting behind their desks for the interview when there was a less formal alternative available, using a condescending tone in answering some of the questions and in a number of cases, criticising the questions themselves. The first two of these behaviours is known as using a ‘gatekeeper’ as a device to ensure an appropriate impression, in this case one of seniority and importance, is created (Burns 1994, p. 256). While almost all of the interviews were conducted in a personable manner, the impact that treating me as a student had on the interviews was that those interviews were less conversational. As a consequence, those interviews were typically shorter than those where I was treated as a peer and the dynamic of the questioning and answering was much less conversational. As previously mentioned, the longer interviews garnered the richer data.

Another advantage of the researcher’s physical immersion in the field was the opportunity to learn by observing the books on the bookshelves and the framed PhD degrees (or their absence) on the office walls. For example, some interviewees had very few PR books on their shelves and others had many and they were all Australian, or all from the UK or the US or both and to the exclusion of Australian texts. This was an interesting reference point for when the question was asked about the use of textbooks in PR courses and the interviewee’s philosophy on the choice of text.

Equally, when the question was about whether academics with PhDs should teach Public Relations or whether former industry practitioners without academic qualifications are better suited to do it, the certificates on the wall often informed the answers.

Only by going out into the field could the researcher have seen the 10-foot-high words 'Public Relations' opposite the lift doors that opened onto the floor where the discipline of Public Relations is taught in a Business school. This was remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, this study demonstrated that Public Relations is taught infrequently from a Business school and secondly, when it is it is not a high-status offering so it was very surprising to see the discipline being given such a high physical profile in a Business department. It was easy to reflect on the significance and influence of the fact that the head of that department was a Public Relations academic. An example of how these letters were relevant to the study is that one of the direct questions was about the rightful faculty or department for Public Relations to be offered from in a university environment. The existence of those 10-foot-high letters and their high-profile location said more themselves than any of the answers to that question that the interviews provided.

In many cases, it was the reflections, by way of "memoing" (Birks & Mills 2015), made after leaving the interviews – a significant element of Grounded Theory methodology - that provided the richest data. By the time the majority of interviews had been conducted trends had emerged in the data. The wide-ranging answers to the set of questions largely fell into two schools of thought. Towards the end of the data collection, the only two Public Relations faculty of a certain university were interviewed and this produced the two extremes of the key areas of the philosophical debate described in all the previous interviews. Each interviewee held the opposite view to their colleague. The two interviews revealed polarities of views on each of the issues the interviews explored. They are frank and divisive. But despite the value of their content in defining the scope of the research, it was the casual observations made about each of their personal presentation, books on their shelves, interaction

with others and the environment each chose for the interviews that were the most valuable to the research. For example, these revealed one to be extremely casually dressed and the other, well-presented in a more 'business like' manner and both of their presentations revealing in how they described where Public Relations sits in the world. One had only Australian PR textbooks in his office and the other had many more books in general as well as PR textbooks published around the world. It was observable what their views about Public Relations textbooks were. It was also observable what their views were about globalisation and how PR students can be prepared to practise in a globalised world and this informed their responses to questions about both. The human experience observed personally, in line with what Patton describes as 'data from observations', has coloured and deepened the data, and grounded the theory, in ways that the researcher could not have anticipated.

Data from observations made by the researcher while in the field was recorded by memoing about the documented details such as the names of the courses, the titles of the participants and the names of the schools, faculties and departments that the courses sat in. The decisions taken by the institutes involved about all of this nomenclature were revelatory and informed the research about how Public Relations education was regarded by the various institutes.

Despite the many advantages outlined above of conducting face to face interviews, research shows that telephone interviewing "can be used productively in qualitative research" (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004, p. 1), is "both a productive and valid research option" (Stephens 2007, p. 1) and is the "dominant mode of survey data collection in the USA" (Holbrook, Green & Krosnic 2003, p. 79). The researcher's experience in this study is consistent with the views of these scholars. In this study the use of telephone interviews was productive in that, given resource limitations, they enabled more data to be gathered than if the study used solely face to face interviews and therefore the study was able to capture the perspectives of more Australian PR educators than if telephone interviews were not used. The conduct of the telephone interviews and the quality of the data gathered meant that there were no concerns that the data

gathered using this method was less valid than that gathered during the face to face interviews. This is also discussed later in this chapter.

TECHNIQUES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

As discussed earlier, a limitation of Grounded Theory is that the researcher's presence, subjectivity and other factors can impact on the nature and quality of the data collected. Patton advises that the issue is how to monitor those effects and take them into consideration when interpreting data (2001, p. 36). That 'consideration' is part of the process of data analysis and part of what is included in this section.

Data analysis refers to analysing the contents of the interviews or observational field notes in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by your respondents or the observations made (Kumar 2011, p. 278). It is a starting point for determining what the data reveals and to fulfilling the purpose of the study. As discussed previously, the data was coded and analysed manually using approaches that included thematic analysis to examine and record patterns in the data (Aronson 2015, p. 3). The approach to coding and analysis is discussed in further detail later in this section. The data itself was collected in line with Kumar's description below and adopting Pandit's Grounded Theory 'concepts, categories and propositions' model (1996, pp. 1 & 2) that acknowledges that:

- concepts are the basic units of analysis as theory develops from the conceptualisation of data,
- categories (themes or patterns) are the cornerstones of developing theory, and
- propositions indicate generated relationships between a category and its concepts.

According to Kumar (2011), data processing and analysis in qualitative studies can be done in three ways. These are:

1. Developing a narrative to describe a situation, episode, event or instance
2. Identifying main themes that emerge from your field notes or transcription of your in-depth interviews and writing about them, quoting extensively in verbatim format, and
3. In addition to approach number two, also quantifying main themes in order to provide their prevalence and thus significance (2011, p. 277).

As mentioned previously, thematic analysis was just one method of coding and interpreting data in this study and Kumar's approach to data analysis provides a more comprehensive and accurate account of the three approaches undertaken. The first approach was used to provide context for the personal observations. Approaches two and three are consistent with the four steps in Kumar's approach (2011, p. 278). They are:

1. Identify main themes, based on the meaning of key descriptive responses. These themes then become the basis for analysing the text of unstructured interviews and field notes
2. Assign codes to identify main themes
3. Classify responses under the main themes that have emerged. This is called thematic analysis, and
4. Integrate themes and responses into the text of the thesis. This can be done in a number of ways. It could include verbatim responses to attempt to keep 'the feel' of the responses. It can be done by counting the number of times a theme occurred and providing a number of sample responses chosen by the researcher.

Following Weerakkody's (2008) format and consistent with Pandit's (1996, pp. 1 & 2) steps, data from the interviews were 'pattern coded' according to the following themes:

- key themes
- lessons learned
- areas of consensus
- areas of disagreement
- unexpected data, and
- issues (Weerakkody 2008, p. 176).

The key themes, having also been quantified in order to show their prevalence and thus significance in line with the third approach above, were then placed into the sub-categories that emerged from the data. This can be done using computer software or done manually and as mentioned earlier, in this study, this step was undertaken manually by the researcher. Manual coding was chosen because it enabled the researcher, as guided by Grounded Theory, to immerse herself in the data from the interviews, along with her fieldwork notes about personal observations and considering them alongside her reflections and memos about the data collection process.

The sub-categories that emerged from the data after it was coded were:

- course orientation
- role of educator
- role of textbooks
- characteristics of excellence
- role of professional body
- issues of professionalisation
- challenges and opportunities, and
- impact of globalisation.

This pattern coding and sub-categorisation let the theories develop from the ground up, revealing unexpected themes and categories. They do not all align directly with the interview questions that were used but rather emerged from trends in the data.

As has been mentioned previously, some data was gathered quantitatively due to the need for demographic information about the respondents. Consequently, this data was also interpreted quantitatively and presented in graphs and charts as percentages, for example, how many of the participants hold a PhD or how many participants are aged 35 or under, etcetera.

Another technique of data analysis available to the researcher was 'content analysis' which could have been used to investigate the similarities and differences of the courses in Public Relations that the participants worked in or led. This approach was not part of this study however and the study relied instead on participants to provide analysis of key aspects of the courses they described. Content analysis was not used because the focus of the study was an investigation into Public Relations education from the perspectives of PR educators, not an investigation into the content and other factors of PR courses, so it was the perspectives and opinions of the participants that were important not an objective overview of PR education. As such, data collection focused on interviews and personal observations.

MATTERS OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Hansen et al. (1998, p. 16) point out that "the research can never be better than the questions that are asked in the first place". Therefore, inadequately formulated questions are likely to produce research of questionable validity. Hansen et al. believe in the importance of ascertaining "the things that really matter" (1998, p. 17) when collecting data, and focusing on those. This research was informed by such thinking. It is thought that the results taken from a combination of the answers to the questions asked and from the direct observations during the field research did in fact identify

and focus on those things ‘that really matter’. Some examples of things that really mattered in this study were the answers that either united or divided the respondents. For example, even in a largely qualitative study, it is not of much interest that one respondent does not believe that Public Relations is a profession but when, of 45 HE respondents, 23 believe it is and 22 do not, then, that is potentially something that really matters. Data is of little value if there is no analysis of the reasons behind the various responses. Asking the questions that investigate why participants hold their views provides meaningful data on which to question the impact their views have, if any, on best practices in Public Relations education. The analysis of those things that really matter enabled the findings to be considered and more usefully reported.

Two hallmarks of ethical research practice are reliability and validity. Reliability has to do with replicability and validity refers to the nature of the findings and whether they are a true reflection of the formal aims and objectives of the research (Hansen 1998, p. 19).

As discussed in the section about personal observations, field research “can pose problems of reliability” (Babbie 2009, p. 325) due to the personal involvement of the researcher and the reality that a single person cannot be objective and detached. The researcher makes assessments about interviewees and their responses at least in part in comparison to their own ideas on the subject matter. Denzin and Lincoln (cited in Birks & Mills 2015, p. 20) caution that the researcher must be able to avoid imposing his or her own preconceptions on the developing theory. So, although the research questions were valid and the interviewees were deemed to be appropriately selected, because of the biases and subjectivity of one researcher, it is not reasonable to assume that another researcher could use the same questions and interviewees and necessarily replicate the outcomes (Babbie 2009, p. 325). However, the interview questions, as discussed below, although semi-structured, were sufficiently robust to ensure defensible data was captured, irrespective of the input or influence of the researcher.

The dependability of the research undertaken for this study was strengthened by a focus on conducting an ethical inquiry reinforced with good record keeping. Guided by Weerakkody (2008, p. 177) detailed records of all research activities have been created and maintained together with an archive of their transcripts. Researcher's notes, field notes and 'memos' about who was interviewed when, signed consent forms and the correct details of interviewees prior to being de-identified for publication purposes (Weerakkody 2008, p. 177) have also been carefully maintained. This information has been stored in such a way that accurate details are kept but that data has been de-identified to maintain confidentiality in line with the requirements of the university's Human Research Ethics Committee. This study was approved by the ethics committee and given ethics clearance on February 10, 2012 for the primary research collection to occur between February 10, 2012 and September 30, 2012. The project was recorded by the committee as SUHREC Project 2012/001.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit valid responses, which essentially means that they are "fit for purpose" (Burns 1994, p. 217) and that they measure what they were intended to measure. The manner in which the questions would be asked was also selected to ensure validity, following the advice of the researcher's academic supervisors and attending research classes conducted by the university. Validity in field research is enhanced by "being there" which is "a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs in all their rich complexity" (Babbie 2009, p. 324). The researcher concurs and believes the data collected was more valid as a consequence of "being there" in person for 38 of the 51 (74.5%) interviews that were conducted. In addition, "having a sufficient number and diversity of interviewees" (Weerakkody 2008, p. 177) strengthens the validity of the data. Also, the approach to this study was outlined in the earlier section and is clear for all to follow and analyse.

POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES

A potential weakness in the research was anticipated. It had been expected that what Patton refers to as the “traditional concern about the validity and reliability of observational data (of) ...the effects of the observer on what is observed” (Patton 2001, p. 269) would occur. There were likely to be myriad advantages of the interviewer conducting the interviews face to face and also in the work environment of the interviewees. There was the risk however that the interviewer’s presence could artificially enhance the interest of the interviewees in the subject matter causing them to demonstrate more considered views than they actually, or previously, held. Equally, there was a concern that by sheer strength of personality and enthusiasm for the subject matter, the interviewer could unduly influence the conversations and tarnish the integrity of the data collected. Both of these points will be raised again in the following section about personal observations.

While concerns that the researcher could potentially influence or colour the opinions of the participants are genuine, that risk is reciprocal. There is little doubt that the opinions of the interviewer were also informed by the process of conducting the interviews. Using Grounded Theory nomenclature, the planning for the inquiry was started with three of the guidelines for the researcher in mind – *think comparatively, obtain multiple viewpoints and periodically step back* (Babbie 2009, p. 307). By applying them rigorously, there was no evidence that the ‘observer had influenced the observed’. The opposite was in fact the case in this instance. Rather than this evidencing a potential weakness in the research, it can be argued, instead, that it is evidence of an inherent strength in the integrity of this research methodology. In this particular case, it is also worth pointing out that most academics/teachers/lecturers are generally confident people who have well-formed opinions, particularly in regards to the subject matter of what they teach. Consequently, the chances of the respondents being influenced negatively or otherwise by the researcher were very negligible.

One important point worth noting is that there was a potential downside to the approach taken in terms of conducting interviews in person. Setting up the interviews and advising the participants formally of the nature of the inquiry by way of providing the ethics approval documentation, and informally by introducing my self and outlining my research interest, could have possibly led to participants considering the subject matter in advance. This meant that in theory at least, they could pre-plan their positions on the philosophical questions posed and potentially provide responses deemed aspirational rather than real. There was some evidence that this was the case but many participants, having been given the questions in advance, approached answering the questions as if they had never heard them before. Although it was not the intention of the research to seek out gaps between answers provided and observable facts, there is nonetheless considerable evidence of such gaps between the views of some participants and the realities of the courses and/or sectors they work in. These gaps were identified by the researcher both during the data collection interviews and personal observations and later during the data analysis.

Thirteen of the interviews (25%) were conducted on the telephone for resource reasons and, as mentioned previously, they have also provided quality data. Prior to conducting those interviews, there had been concerns that rapport was typically difficult to develop on the phone, compared to in person. It was feared that interviews on the phone would be more like an exchange of questions and answers than conversations and would be compromised. This did not occur and the comments from scholars (Holbrook, Green & Krosnic 2003; Stephens 2007; Sturges & Hanrahan 2004) earlier in this section align with the researcher's experience that telephone interviews were valid and successful methods of gathering quality data. The success of the telephone interviews could also possibly be attributed in equal parts to the personality of the interviewer and those of the participants; all are people drawn to Public Relations and teaching, who easily engage with people and so built easy rapport on the telephone. That researcher and respondent, 'interviewer and

interviewee', were united by a shared interest in the subject matter of the interviews also enabled easy telephone exchanges.

Other than missing the social element, there was one relative failing of the phone interviews when compared to the face to face ones, and this demonstrates the virtue of the physical immersion in the field. This was the lack of opportunity to make personal observations in the participants' offices and at the campuses where they work or to "observe the informant" (Burns 1994, p. 363). The interviewer's voice "may be biasing" in a telephone interview (Burns 1994, p. 363) but there was no evidence that this occurred in this study as the telephone interviews were conducted with similar rapport and a free-flowing exchange of questions and answers as the face to face interviews. The lack of the opportunity to make personal observations does not invalidate or detract from the quality of data gathered from the phone interviews. The contribution that personal observations made to the data collection is discussed in the next section.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even when scrupulously following the principles of best practice and ethical research design, there will always be limitations to any study. Weerakkody (2008, pp. 177-178) outlines a number of factors that can 'contaminate' the data collected with qualitative interviews. These are:

- Interview bias, such as using loaded or leading questions, and giving negative non-verbal cues, including pitch and tone of voice, hints of disinterest and negative body language such as unconscious smirks or intimidating attitudes

- Sarcasm or embedding their own opinions in follow-up questions, which can easily lead interviewees to being guarded in their opinions (or to not express them at all)
- The social desirability effect: that is, interviewees trying to make themselves sound good or trying to give opinions they think the researcher wants to hear.

Weerakkody (2008, p. 178) cautions that these “factors are not easy to detect, estimate, measure or account for during the data analysis stage, and affect the validity, reliability and credibility of the findings”. The researcher agrees that these factors are hard to detect and acknowledges that conveying enthusiasm for the interview subject matter expressed through ‘pitch and tone of voice’ may have influenced the data collected in subtle ways. This however, should not invalidate the authenticity of answers given by respondents. Also, the ‘social desirability effect’ (Weerakkody 2008, p. 178) should not be underestimated. This can occur when well-credentialed interviewees, all who are considered authorities on the subject matter, try to make themselves sound good for ‘the tape’ and for ‘the record’. The downside of personal observations as a method of collecting data, as described in the previous section about personal observations, should also be acknowledged as a potential limitation of this study.

The study is further limited by being merely ‘a snapshot in time’ and any issues around the publication of data in 2018 that was gathered in 2012, including perceptions of currency. The part-time candidature of the researcher and the resultant design and implementation of the study resulted in issues of data currency. Nonetheless, this study does not profess nor pretend to be anything other than an investigation, and the first one at that, into how Public Relations was being taught in Australia from the perspective of the educators, based on interviews conducted with them in December 2011 and throughout 2012. It may be possible to infer or extrapolate other information from the research that informs the ongoing or future decisions about Public Relations education in this country or elsewhere but such issues are outside the scope of this inquiry.

Notwithstanding the above, this thesis is still a relevant and contemporary discussion of Public Relations education in Australia because not much has changed since the data was gathered in 2011 and 2012, except for the impact of technology and mobile communication.

Another limitation of the study can be seen from the under-representation of educators from the VET sector compared to those in HE. As there are many more universities that teach Public Relations than TAFE institutes and as the teaching teams at universities are typically larger than at TAFE institutes, there was always going to be an imbalance in numbers of educators representing the two sectors. Also, VET courses in Public Relations were declining during the data collection period and this exacerbated this limitation in the sample sizes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of the decisions that were made by the researcher about how to undertake this study. An overview of Grounded Theory, the research methodology used for the study, was given. As the study used interviews and personal observations to gather data, how the researcher was informed by Merriam (2009) on personal observations and Kreuger and Neuman (2006) on interviews was described. The chapter highlighted that the researcher relied on Babbie's (2009, p. 307) guidelines for Grounded Theory and on Birks and Mills (2015) and others on the very important contribution that 'memoing' made to the study.

The chapter explains that the researcher used Patton's six-point framework, '*Some Guiding Questions and Options for Methods Decisions*' to determine key aspects of the inquiry including its overall purpose, the questions that would shape it and who would benefit from it (Patton 2001, p. 13). It also explains that the work of Kumar (2011, p. 138) and Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 21) was drawn on to understand that the study needed to be conducted mostly, but not entirely, as qualitative research.

The plan for how the study would be conducted developed from the researcher's reading of Pandit (1996, p. 2) and Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 22) on the field research process and this was also described in the chapter. The chapter then described the process undertaken by the researcher to determine the research questions and how this was shaped by the key themes of the literature. An account of how the respondents for the study were identified was also provided.

The chapter explained that the data analysis phase of the study was guided by Kumar (2011), Pandit (1996) and Patton (2001). How the researcher handled weaknesses, limitations and issues of reliability and validity were all explained before the chapter closed.

The following chapter reports on the results of the study and presents an analysis and discussion of the data that recorded the perspectives about Public Relations education in Australia of those who teach it.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the data that was collected between December 1, 2011 and August 30, 2012, the interpretation of that data in reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the research questions that underpin the study that were outlined in Chapter One. It also refers to aspects of Grounded Theory that were described in Chapter Three. The following and final chapter (five) will then directly answer the research questions and explore the implications of and the opportunities created by the study.

PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES IN AUSTRALIA

This section presents the study's findings about the Public Relations courses being run in Australia in both the VET and HE sectors. In accordance with the guidelines of Grounded Theory, the data has been analysed and divided into the following sub-categories:

- The names given to the courses
- The locations of courses within the institutions that deliver them
- The length of time that the courses have been running
- The number of educators who teach in the course
- Who enrolls in the courses and why
- The differences, if any, between the sectors, including course content and type of textbooks and other resources used, if any.

This section is intended to provide an analysis of a range of factors and issues that contribute to the key concepts about how Public Relations courses are delivered in Australia. The section is also a follow on from the discussion in Chapter Two on the history of Public Relations education in Australia which provides an account of the development of Public Relations courses in Australia since the 1970s. The discussion touches on links, where they exist, between how Public Relations courses in Australia are delivered in comparison with other parts of the world.

NAMES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES

One of the first conceptual concerns of this study was to understand what names were given to Public Relations courses in Australia, and in parallel with analysis of other data, to determine why they were so-named. It might have been predictable that Public Relations degrees would be in fact called Public Relations degrees. However, the findings show that (Public Relations) degrees offered at 12 of the 19 universities (63%) involved in this study are called something other than Public Relations. Findings revealed later in this chapter, including the status of the Public Relations industry, the lack of agreement on whether it is the right term for the discipline, the relative lack of, and reference to, an academic body of knowledge in 'Public Relations' degrees and the variety of job titles Public Relations practitioners use, can all be seen to contribute to why there is an absence of the term 'Public Relations' in university education offerings.

Only seven out of the 19 (37%) universities represented in the study offered undergraduate degrees with the term 'Public Relations' in the title, for example Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations), including two universities that offered a pure Bachelor of Public Relations. Irrespective of the title of the course, seven qualifications include PR or Communication as a major sequence of study. Eight qualifications based all of the subjects in the whole degree, not just the conventional

six or eight-subject major sequence, on Public Relations and related subjects despite not necessarily having Public Relations in the title of the degree.

The names of the undergraduate degrees offered by the universities where the respondents worked included:

- Bachelor of Communication (Public Relations)
- Bachelor of Communication
- Bachelor of Communication Management (Public Relations)
- Bachelor of Communications
- Bachelor of Public Relations
- Bachelor of Creative Arts and Industries (Public Relations)
- Bachelor of Media (Public Relations and Advertising)
- Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations)
- Bachelor of Arts (Communication)
- Bachelor of Strategic Communication
- Bachelor of Business (Public Relations).

The most common name for a course that respondents taught in or led was Bachelor of Communication. It was used at four universities, with another university using the name Bachelor of Communication Management, another using Bachelor of Arts (Communication) and another using the name Bachelor of Strategic Communication. The term 'Communication' therefore was the dominant term in the naming of degrees with eight using the term in some way in the name of their degrees. Five universities used the term 'Public Relations' as a bracketed specialisation, for example Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations) and Bachelor of Business (Public Relations). Two universities call their degrees Bachelor of Public Relations.

As outlined in Chapter Two, courses in the VET sector are national government courses and they are named by the government, not the institute that delivers them, hence they all have the same name. In the case of Public Relations courses taught at the four TAFE institutes in the study, all have Public Relations in the title, for example, Diploma of Business (Public Relations).

As the names of VET courses are pre-determined, any TAFE institute delivering courses in Public Relations only needs to decide on the qualification level it will offer it at. As such, the six VET educators, representing four TAFE institutes, taught in courses that all included the term 'Public Relations'. They were:

- Certificate IV in Business (Public Relations)
- Diploma of Business (Public Relations)
- Advanced Diploma of Business (Public Relations).

Despite these contributing factors, it is surprising that the term 'Public Relations' is not more widely used in the names of PR degrees. A review of the undergraduate degrees accredited by and listed on the PRIA website (www.pria.com.au) reveals that all of them include the term 'Public Relations' in their titles and these are the same courses outlined above that do use the term. One likely explanation is that at the time this data was collected, the PRIA only accredited those in which the term 'Public Relations' appears in the title. This means it is possible that there are more Public Relations degrees, so named, than would have been the case if the term 'Public Relations' was not valued by the PRIA. This will be revisited later in the chapter when various issues about PRIA accreditation are discussed, including the impact of PRIA accreditation on courses. The importance that the PRIA places on the use of the term 'Public Relations' can be traced back to the institute's origins in the 1950s. When the PRIA was first formed it was so named "to have the definitive words of public relations at the beginning of the title" (Potts 1976, p. 339). This is further discussed later in this chapter.

To be able to analyse the impact of the term 'Public Relations' in Public Relations education and its connection to an evolving industry that is not united under that term or any other term, nor clear about whether or not it is a profession, as the data will show, it was important to determine what courses that purport to teach PR are actually called. As has been discussed, the term 'Communication' or 'Communications' is used more often than the term 'Public Relations' in the naming of degrees. The researcher's own experience of working in the industry in Melbourne, Australia, since 1983 is that Public Relations is the traditional term for the discipline, echoing the foundation work of the likes of Bernays in the US (1952) and Potts in Australia (1976). The term 'Public Relations', however, is scarcely used in corporate Australia any more. A study of Queensland Public Relations practitioners found that less than four per cent of PR professionals had a job title including the words 'Public Relations' (Bartlett & Hill, 2007, p.1). Given how rarely the term 'Public Relations' is used in the corporate sector now, it is perhaps not surprising that universities are seeking a more contemporary and industry-relevant description for the discipline.

The field of Public Relations struggled to define itself as a respected business function in its early years. It wanted a name that would reflect the 'seriousness' it wanted to project, so added terms such as 'direction' and 'counsel' to create 'publicity direction' and 'counsel on Public Relations' in an effort to enhance its standing and position itself as something more than Media Relations and Publicity (Bernays 1952; Kerr 1976). Since then, due to the lack of a uniting term to describe it, the field has left itself vulnerable to other fields making in-roads into the traditional domain of Public Relations. This has partly occurred because the industry has failed to brand itself clearly and to unite disparate functions and services such as Communication, Media Relations and Crisis Communication under one umbrella term, for example 'Public Relations'. Such is the power of language, the consequence of an absence of leadership which enabled the use of a variety of terms for Public Relations is that the field has splintered rather than united (Hutton 1999, p. 199).

In the VET sector, as the term 'Public Relations' is part of the official government course name, as explained earlier, all VET PR courses are described as Business courses 'in Public Relations'. This is because they are all from the same suite of government courses and the institute that delivers them has permission to deliver that particular course on the government's behalf. There is no confusion between VET PR courses and those in similar or related fields, for example, Marketing Communication, Advertising or Marketing. This is because the government has individual suites of VET courses in each of those disciplines and they each focus on meeting the needs for trained staff in their own industry.

Understanding the data around course names and identifying the way in which the courses are named is relevant to the discussions later in this chapter about whether the respondents consider the term 'Public Relations' to be the correct one for the discipline and the industry. The perceived desirability of PRIA accreditation as imprimatur on a course and the consequences of that also form part of that discussion. The key proposition here is that in the HE sector where universities have the autonomy to name their degrees, they overwhelmingly do not use the term 'Public Relations'. This could be to be consistent with the corporate sector's rejection of the term (Bartlett & Hill 2007, p. 1) or because Public Relations educators themselves cannot agree on whether it is the right name for the industry and therefore the courses. Only 55%, 16 of the 29 respondents who answered this question, thought 'Public Relations' was the right name for the industry but only 29 of 51 (57%) of the study's respondents answered the question at all. This reduces the real number of those who actively support the term 'Public Relations' to 16 of 51 (37%).

If universities are preparing students for employment in an industry, as is discussed later in this chapter, it would be useful to understand what the name of that industry is considered to be. Based on these findings, a significant proposition that can be formulated from this data is that it is not 'Public Relations'. The use of the term 'Public Relations' in the name of courses is a key difference between courses in the

two sectors. Public Relations is used in the title of all VET PR courses but only in a minority of HE PR courses. Therefore, one has to wonder what the implications of that are for PR education. It is possible to conjecture that an “ill-defined and vaguely described” (Kruckeberg & Starck 1988, p. 238) occupation would struggle to encourage rigour in its educational preparation.

LOCATION OF PR COURSES IN UNIVERSITIES AND TAFE INSTITUTES

As well as being called a range of titles, as discussed in the previous section, the Public Relations courses taught at the 19 universities involved in this study were also delivered from a range of different faculties. At some universities, a Public Relations major is offered in more than one degree from more than one faculty, for example from both the Business and Communication faculties.

Names of faculties that offered PR courses included:

- Arts, Humanities and Communication
- Creative Arts and Humanities
- Arts and Social Sciences
- Education and Arts
- Marketing (in a Business school)
- Media, Communication and Culture
- Arts
- Arts and Humanities
- Media and Communication

- Arts, Education and Human Development
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Business
- Mass Communication
- Arts and Design
- Higher Education
- Communication, International Studies and Languages.

The VET courses were offered from the following faculties or schools:

- College of Business
- Business and Management
- Creative Service Industries
- Creative Industries.

There are a couple of aspects revealed by these findings that are worthy of mention. In the HE sector, despite a wide range of names for PR courses, there was an even wider range of faculties teaching courses purporting to be 'Public Relations' degrees. All of the HE respondents were employed at large public universities which are all structured differently. As universities rapidly develop away from the traditional structure based on faculties of Arts, Science, Education, Medicine, Law and Engineering, they position themselves to find a market niche or to establish a particular reputation. This partly explains why PR degrees are being taught in faculties as diverse as Media and Communication, Business, and Creative Arts. These findings demonstrate that Public Relations as a discipline, both vocational and academic, does not have an agreed-upon or consistent academic home. It is proposed that this is partly because, relative to traditional academic disciplines such as Mathematics or

Theology, Public Relations is a new academic discipline (Morath 2008, p. 53; Xavier 2012).

However, a significant proposition of this study is that rather than esteemed courses linked to a respected body of academic knowledge, universities are running Public Relations degrees, irrespective of what they are called, as “convenient cash cow courses” (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p.6; L’Etang 2008, p. 249). Kruckeberg (1998, p. 239) calls this focus on running PR courses because they are popular and profitable the “mentality that threatens the integrity” of Public Relations education. Profit was identified by a number of respondents as the purpose of their courses at their institutions and could be part of the reason that the discipline does not have an academic home. In the VET sector, it is also the individual institution that decides which school delivers PR courses and they clearly do not all agree that Public Relations is a Business discipline, despite the title of the suite of courses having Business in it. Two of the four are taught in creative departments rather than in a Business school. This is consistent with what is occurring at universities. One possible explanation is that this is motivated by the ‘PR course as cash cow’ approach with the first department/faculty to claim it, teaching it. The situation also reflects Grunig and Hunt’s view that “public relations can be taught successfully in different university departments” (1984, p. 79).

There is a lack of unity about where Public Relations courses are accommodated in the organisation structure of institutions in both sectors. Neither sector can agree on which faculty PR courses should be in. Some of this is historical and some perhaps the result of corporate-thinking universities offering Public Relations courses due to their perceived marketability.

The lack of consistency of where PR courses are located in universities and TAFE institutes, combined with the lack of unity in the naming of PR courses in the HE sector, suggests that Public Relations is still struggling to become a definitive academic discipline with a legitimate education foundation in either sector.

RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON WHERE PR COURSES SHOULD SIT WITHIN UNIVERSITIES

The previous section explored which faculties PR courses were actually located in at universities and which schools at TAFE institutes. This section provides the findings on the sub-category of data about the perspectives of the respondents from both sectors about where they thought PR courses should sit in their respective institutions.

Thirty-seven of 45 (82%) HE respondents had a firm view about which faculty they thought PR should be taught in, and these fell into three main groups:

1. Business
2. Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences, and
3. Media/Communication.

These groupings do not seek to neglect the genuine differences between Humanities and Social Sciences, for example, but are useful categories that demonstrate the thinking of the respondents.

Of those respondents with a clear preference, 19 of 37 (just over 50%) believed PR should be taught in a Business faculty or stated that it was their first preference but that they were flexible. Eleven of 37 (31%) believed it should be in an Arts/Humanities/Social Science faculty with only three of 37 (9%) believing it should be in a more specialised Media or Communication faculty. Three respondents (6% of all HE respondents) were either ambivalent or believed it was appropriate to teach it from a range of faculties.

The opinions of those who, when asked which faculty Public Relations should be in, said it "should be in a Business school" (H12), were typically strongly-held. H28 insisted that PR is a management discipline and H31 stated that it "being in Arts is really dumb" and advised that it should be in Business with Marketing.

The researcher observed that the views of some of the 14 of 45 (31%) HE respondents who believe PR should be taught from an Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences faculty approached answering the question in a different way from those who favoured teaching it as a Business discipline from a Business faculty. They took a more philosophical, less direct approach and wanted to discuss it, and in some cases seemed to almost pontificate about the broad role of Public Relations in society. The researcher later noted that these respondents seemed resigned to holding a view that did not necessarily have a lot of support but that they considered was important and had not given up on. For some, the opportunity presented by the question appeared to give them a welcome platform to explain something they cared about. As part of a well-considered response, H36 described PR as being practised more widely than “just in Business” and H1 explained, rather than stated, that PR is not a Business or formulaic process.

The views of the three of 37 (9%) HE respondents who believed that Media and Communication is the appropriate faculty for teaching PR can be represented by the following definitive quote:

Core ideas in PR are about Media so it should be in a Media department. (H15)

H32 had a slightly different perspective, stating that Public Relations should be taught in Arts *and* Business and that “we should offer PR electives that everyone (including students from other disciplines) want to do. We need to get outside of our comfort zones and put PR out there”.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, lack of unity of opinion about the rightful academic home for Public Relations is not new. The views of the respondents demonstrate that there is the same lack of consensus about where PR should be taught as there has been since the beginning of formal Public Relations education. Writing in 1952, Bernays noted that there was still a question about where PR fitted into university and college curricula, stating that it was put into Journalism, Business, Economics, Politics or Government (1952, p. 146). More recently, Mackey’s

views both confirm and challenge these findings. Mackey's perspective is similar in tone and content to the respondents who appeared to care deeply that PR was not simply a Business discipline. He points out that:

Public Relations is to do with the philosophy of social understanding, although it is related to business measures, the subject is more properly located in Arts faculties (2001, pp. 8-9).

It is possible, perhaps likely, that individual respondents – and indeed commentators such as Bernays (1952) and Mackey (2001) – were influenced by their own professional or academic backgrounds. This can be seen in this study, where typically the respondents who believed PR should be in a Business faculty previously worked as practitioners in Corporate Communication or have a Business degree. Those respondents with a Media background, whether as academics or employed in the Media industries, saw PR as a Media subject and the respondents who are Social Scientists or Arts graduates saw PR fitting into the faculty they and their academic interests fit into. There are no surprises in these responses when they are matched to the individual respondents.

The responses to this question merely confirm the findings about where Public Relations is taught in university faculties – that there is no real academic home for Public Relations – and reveal that PR educators also have a range of views about where it should be. This certainly could be, but does not need to be, construed as a negative for the status of PR or Public Relations education. It could also be seen to be a reflection of the ubiquity of Public Relations, that it is practised in government, the private and public sector, in sport and in the not-for-profit sector (Sheehan & Xavier 2014, p. v) and as such can be taught from a range of perspectives. Aspects of Public Relations can be described as 'Government Relations', 'Financial Public Relations', 'Media Relations', 'Employee Relations', 'Community Relations', 'Issues Management and Crisis Public Relations' and 'Fundraising' (Tymson & Sherman 1987), which consequently makes it difficult to 'pigeon hole'. Perhaps any such 'pigeon-holing' would be restrictive without achieving anything useful. Nonetheless, the findings also

show that a slight majority of respondents who had a view on this subject believe that Public Relations is a Business discipline that should be taught in a Business school or faculty.

VET EDUCATORS' VIEWS ON WHERE PR COURSES SHOULD SIT WITHIN THE INSTITUTE

Four of the six (66%) VET respondents believed that PR should be taught in the VET environment in a Business school. They were united and definitive in their views that PR is a Business and Management function (V5), that PR students are Business students (V3) and that a Business perspective is valuable for PR graduates (V6).

One VET respondent believed “Media and Comms would be a more synergistic place for PR to sit than Business” (V1) and another stated that “it works reasonably well in Creative Industries alongside Professional Communication, Journalism and TV Production” (V2).

These findings are worth noting for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the majority are consistent with the views of the majority of HE respondents, who also favoured teaching Public Relations as a Business discipline. The government-designed VET PR courses are all Business qualifications, for example Diploma of Business (Public Relations), and this could perhaps have influenced the VET responses.

Secondly, two of the four TAFE institutions represented in this study currently teach PR in Creative Industries schools. The views of those who favour that approach, therefore, could be based on their experience that the courses work well from there, rather than a philosophical perspective.

This finding shows another similarity between the perspectives of educators in the two sectors in that the majority of educators in both sectors believed that, from an academic structure perspective, the courses they teach in should be taught in

Business settings. It suggests to the researcher who is aware of the professional backgrounds of the individual respondents (before they were de-identified), that one way that the industry experience of a PR educator influences the course they teach in is that they bring the bias of that industry experience with them to their teaching and academic decision making. For example, if a respondent has a background in Business, they tended to regard Public Relations as a Business discipline. Similarly, one way that a respondent's academic qualifications influence the course they teach in is that they too bring their bias. In this context, this resulted in respondents whose academic qualifications were in Arts or the Social Sciences believing that PR is bigger than a Business function and should not be taught in a Business school. How these biases impact on decision making in PR education will be discussed later in this chapter and in the final chapter.

LENGTH OF TIME IN WHICH COURSES HAVE BEEN RUNNING

According to respondents, university PR courses in Australia had been running from as little as one year at a university that was introducing it as a new discipline through to approximately 40 years.

It was important to establish how long PR courses had been running at the various institutions represented by the respondents. This is because it is possible that the length of time that an institution has been running a course could have an impact on its reputation in the area, its ability to attract students and teaching staff, the number and academic seniority of academic staff it employs and potentially the status that the discipline enjoys at that particular institution. These issues are all discussed throughout this chapter.

These findings are consistent with Johnson and Zawawi's research that indicates that the first Public Relations course in Australia was developed in 1971 and a number of institutes and universities began to develop Public Relations course in the 1980s and

1990s (2000, p. 28). A similarity in PR courses in the two sectors is that they have both been running for a similar amount of time, with each sector, arguably, introducing its first PR courses in the early 1970s.

NUMBER OF PR EDUCATORS IN THE COURSE

Of the 19 universities represented by the 45 HE respondents interviewed, data was recorded about the number of PR educators at 17 universities. Of those, six universities had the equivalent of 2.5 full time PR educators or fewer, seven had between three and four full time educators and four universities had five or more full time educators. These numbers do not include sessionals. One respondent said the university he/she worked in employed “heaps of sessionals” (H4) and this could suggest that the course is bigger than the full time academic staff number suggests.

Of the four VET institutes that employ the six VET respondents interviewed, the smallest number of PR educators engaged in teaching in their PR course was two part time educators. One had three full time educators, one taught its course using 10 sessionals and the other institute employed two full time educators and between six and nine sessionals.

Only four Australian universities employ five or more full time Public Relations educators. Although the study did not include all universities that teach PR in Australia, all of those with large Public Relations courses were included, so it can be reasonably assumed that there are no universities outside of the scope of this study that have as many as or more than that number. Putting this into a wider academic context, it shows Public Relations as an emerging academic discipline with no obvious natural home in the university structure, and with a very small academy. One of the TAFE institutes employed three full time Public Relations educators, which is a significant number relative to the university numbers, given how small VET sector student cohorts typically are. This finding raises the possibility that if Public Relations

was not seen by some universities as a 'cash cow course' (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 6; L'Etang 2008, p. 249), fewer universities would run courses in it and the Public Relations academy would be even smaller.

WHO ENROLS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES

All 51 respondents answered this question about who enrolls in PR courses. It was asked and answered from the perspective of the respondents as gathering data about student numbers from the institutes directly or from students themselves was outside the scope of this study. The data collected could be almost evenly put into four categories of students. They were described as:

- Informed students wanting to get into the PR industry
- Misinformed students wanting to get into the PR industry
- School leavers who want to attend a particular institute
- Students wanting a job-focused course.

Informed students wanting to get into the PR industry

This category of data revealed that respondents clearly identified that, based on their observations and understandings, the students that were attracted to their courses were well-informed and wanted to enter the Public Relations industry. They described students who knew what Public Relations is, believed they had an aptitude for it and sought out a suitable course to enrol in. Some courses attracted "(post graduate) students (who) are usually practitioners who want theory or graduates of other courses who need PR knowledge" (H6). Another considered that students were attracted to the course because of its PRIA accreditation and its status, "second only to (name of another university) in Victoria" (H41).

Students were described as “80-90% female, middle class (and) some international students” (H14), “outgoing, social, interested in some aspect of PR, about 70% female, predominantly school leavers but about 30% are mature age” (V1) and as 70% school leavers, mostly domestic and mostly female (H33). H9 cites “student experience” as the reason students did his/her course and explained that they offer “smaller classes, more face to face, personal relationships with students”. H9 also noted that there has been an increase in the number of students moving from Journalism to PR and considered that this is perhaps because of a decline in jobs in Journalism.

There was no discernible difference in the perspectives of educators from both sectors about this profile of students.

Misinformed students wanting to get into the PR industry

The comment that was the most representative of the views of the respondents about students enrolling in PR courses to get into the industry without being well-advised about what that might involve was:

They are young, 80% female and ‘lost’. They have fallen into PR without knowing what it is. Often someone has told them they would be good at it.
(V3)

This theme continues with responses such as “they tend to not know what PR is and think it is something to do with events or managing people” (V4) and they are “party people, good communicators – students who love writing and are unsure about whether they want to pursue Journalism or PR” (V5). H10 described them as “young women with a mix of aspirations in PR, often with limited knowledge of PR and expecting glamour”.

The response that is perhaps most easily identifiable as a PR student cohort to anyone involved in Public Relations education is that described by V2 whose students were:

People wanting glamour and events. They see themselves as a 'people person' and think that makes them suitable for PR.

Again, there were no differences between the views of HE and VET respondents. From the perspectives of the respondents, there are misinformed students wanting to get into the PR industry in both sectors. Conceptually, it could be argued that this continues because of the lack of leadership in Public Relations and the corresponding absence of the protocols that would help to make Public Relations a profession. Such leadership would serve to increase the profile of Public Relations as a vocation, help to position it as a profession and use that as a platform to promote what it is and what it does in and for society. These actions could lead to Public Relations being better understood and therefore PR courses could start to attract students who have a more accurate understanding of not just what Public Relations is but also a realistic sense of it as an academic discipline.

School leavers who want to attend a particular institute

Responses that fell into this category of school leavers wanting to attend a particular institute revealed that this group of students was not seen to be interested particularly in studying PR or working in the PR industry. They can be divided into two sub-categories. One group wants to attend a particular institute, either because it is geographically convenient such as is described by H31:

They don't know what PR is but if you live in a particular part of the city, then this is the university you attend, and they just pick something (to study here).

Another group is motivated to enrol because of a combination of the location and the reputation of the university, rather than a desire to study PR there or anywhere else. H10 believes that students enrol in their course because the university is well-regarded and conveniently located. For this category of student, geography, by way of the location of the institution, is a key factor in determining who will ultimately earn PR degrees.

Students wanting a job-focused course

The desire to do a course that would likely lead to a job was prominent in the responses to this question. Students were described as “interested in a degree with a strong vocational outcome” (H4) and were job-focused but blind about what PR is (H35). H43 believed that the ‘job ready’ nature of the degree attracted students. He/she said:

Our reputation attracts students to us. We are thought to be the best place to do PR. They go back to Sydney to work or get work in regional councils and the government. The big Sydney consultancies employ our graduates. It is a real job-ready degree. We have three subjects where they work for real clients and do research, plans and social media plans and activity.

V6’s students are studying PR “to develop the skills and abilities to be able to go into the workforce in the PR, Marketing or Advertising industries. They have a cross-pollination of opportunities despite being (strictly) PR students.”

The following quote also represents a common view among respondents about the students their courses attracted:

We get ‘green’ school leavers, nice people but not inquisitive. They want the quickest, shortest route and only want to know what is being assessed. They work (a lot of hours in paid employment) so it is hard for them to 100% focus on their learning. (H11)

Gender and who enrolls in PR courses

A sub-theme that developed and ran through all of the categories was that the majority of PR students in both sectors are female. H14, V1 and H33 reported that students were female in the majority and others described the cohorts as 80% female (H8 and H31), largely female (H19), 95% female (H20) and mostly female (V4).

The first two categories of students are:

- Informed students wanting to get into the PR industry
- Misinformed students wanting to get into the PR industry

They demonstrate that students were enrolling in PR courses in both sectors because they wanted to work in the industry. As the findings demonstrate, whether they are well-informed about the PR discipline or not, students see themselves working in PR as a result of their studies. The findings do not indicate whether the respondents believed that the students expected their courses to train them for their first jobs, as Potts described (cited in Morath 2008, p. 55), or educate them “to have critical ability, to be able to assess a situation and the factors affecting it” (Traverse-Healy, cited in L’Etang 2003, p. 45). What is clear from the data in this category is that students enrolled in PR courses in both sectors because they wanted a job in PR. An overview of the VET and HE sectors presented in Chapter Two points out that VET is linked to industry and exists to provide ‘skills’ through training and that there are two schools of thought about the role of HE. The larger, traditional school sees that HE exists to provide ‘knowledge’ through education. A smaller group of scholars believes the role of HE is dual-purpose and should provide an academically-based education and also provide graduates with job skills. Importantly, the latter school also cautions that the attempt to do both can damage the integrity of both pursuits (Graham 2005, p. 27). Notwithstanding those views, these findings reveal that according to respondents, students are engaging in both sectors with vocational outcomes in mind. How well the two sectors are placed to deliver on this will be considered when the content and orientation of courses in both sectors is discussed later in this chapter.

The category of findings ‘School leavers who want to attend a particular institute’ showed that, according to the respondents, about 25% of students enrolling in PR courses were doing so because that is the course they chose at the institution they wanted to be a student at, rather than an express desire to study Public Relations. As noted earlier, it was outside the scope of this study to survey students themselves so

their individual motivations for choosing a PR course over another course of study were unknown. However, it is a realistic proposition that at least some of them would overlap with those in category two who are misinformed about what the discipline is about and what the industry does.

The last category of students, 'Students wanting a job-focused course', revealed a group of students who, according to the observations of respondents, had chosen to enrol in a PR course because they believe that Public Relations is an industry with good employment prospects, compared to other industries such as Journalism for example. They also believed that the institution they were enrolling in had the capacity to equip them to get a job in the industry. The data showed that respondents believe that students have this expectation from universities as well as from the VET sector. Norton Grubb (cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996, p. 30) described this approach to education as 'learning for earning' and attributed it to the VET sector only. Nonetheless, students were enrolling in both sectors to 'learn to earn'. Maglen (cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix) stated that seeking education and/or training explicitly with paid employment as the objective, typically from the VET sector, was different from pursuing education, typically from the HE sector, that is justified for its intrinsic value. This separation of purpose between the two sectors was traditional and was the original basis for their existence (Clemans 2010; Kessells & Korthagen 1999). There is an increasing trend in HE to focus on building in graduate outcomes to degrees and measuring university effectiveness with graduate employment outcomes. However, Maglen's view was not supported by the data and all students in both sectors were described as having vocational intentions.

The finding that PR student cohorts in both sectors are predominantly female was completely consistent with the female gender dominance of the PR industry and is a factor that is explored again as part of the profile of PR educators in the next section of this chapter. It is also consistent with the researcher's own experiences teaching PR in both sectors. This has not changed in the researcher's 20 years in Public Relations education.

Notwithstanding the trend in HE toward graduate employment outcomes, which was explained in Chapter Two, one has to wonder the extent to which students enrolling in HE PR courses know or care about the philosophies that underpin the traditional purpose of university education, as outlined on page 83 in Chapter Two. These findings show that from the perspectives of the respondents, students did not appear to be influenced by the focus of HE on the pursuit of a well-rounded liberal education without vocational intent and were not motivated by being educated for its intrinsic value. Consequently, the respondents believed that students saw no difference between the PR course offerings of the two sectors as they mostly wanted to get a qualification that they considered would get them a job and they saw courses in both sectors as offering that. This is consistent with Marginson's account, cited in Chapter Two, of 'vocationalism' entering Australian post-secondary education in the 1990s. This happened as a consequence of the recession and established "a vocational culture in universities where degrees became about getting into the professions" (2000, p. 203). Respondents' views were that students' knowledge about the PR discipline and industry is mixed but they were motivated to work in the PR industry nonetheless. There will be a more in-depth discussion about the purpose of PR courses in both sectors later in this chapter.

CONTENT OF COURSES – HIGHER EDUCATION

A key concern of this study was to determine what is being taught in Australian PR degrees, who gets to decide and why. In the following section, the answers to the same questions from the VET respondents will be presented and discussed.

Forty-one of 45 (93%) HE respondents provided broad-ranging answers to this question about how content is developed in their course and what it is based on. The responses fell into three categories which indicated that the PR degrees:

1. Are both research led and industry led
2. Have a vocational or industry orientation

3. Have an academic or theoretical basis or orientation.

Twenty-nine of 45 (approximately 64%) respondents stated that the PR degree that they work in had both an academic/theoretical basis and an industry orientation. Eleven of 45 (approximately 24%) respondents stated that the degree they work in had a wholly vocational basis and/or industry orientation. Five of 45 (approximately 11%) respondents stated that the degree they work in had a wholly academic or theoretical basis that draws on the academic body of knowledge of Public Relations.

Both research led and industry led

Almost two thirds (64%) of HE respondents stated that the university degree that they work in or lead is based on academic research and theory as well as having a vocational focus and/or being informed or led by industry.

The responses in this category fell into two even schools of thought:

- those who describe an academic theory-based course informed by industry, and
- those who describe an industry-based course informed by academic theory.

Academic theory-based but informed by industry

The following sample quotes indicated that the perspective of these respondents was that their courses were ‘academic theory-based’ but informed by industry. They included views that their course content:

comes from the literature but enacted through practice via case studies, industry publications, my own thinking, B and T, PR case books, that type of thing. The structure is done by the team and the content is decided and interpreted by unit co-ordinators. Textbook selection goes through the teaching and learning committees. (H11)

is based on contemporary academic literature and industry literature such as case studies, press conferences, textbooks and we have four research academics who inject new information into the course. (H18)

is about PR being broader than just dealing with the media – issues identification and analysis, Lobbying, Community Relations. We cover the theoretical background of Communication in society, contexts and specialisations - Financial PR for example is not anything more than PR in context. We get them (students) thinking and planning. We use (PRIA) Golden Target Awards case study winners, PR journals, ‘the literature’, my own research, we keep in touch with the profession through PRIA contacts, not much has changed in the industry (since I worked in it until 10 years ago). I like the European models of PR and the New Zealand models. PR is about power...educators and students need to get more critical than just Grunig and other US models (of PR). (H36)

H6, who also said his/her degree was based on theory, added that it was important that industry sees a program as relevant but that programs should challenge and critique the industry, not just meet its needs. He/she believed that a program should also lead the industry and that means it needs to be industry-led and teaching-led.

H35’s comments linked back to the earlier discussion that the distinctive purpose of Higher Education is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, with the statement that:

We try hard to blend both, try to lean toward an academic (orientation) as that is what makes it a university. Why not how, but employers want job ready graduates. The role of our course is to educate students, open their minds, develop critical thinking in the context of PR. It is not about prescribing a single way of doing things, for example, there is no one way to write a report. We draw on academic research, journal articles, etcetera, and other readings. Also, industry expectations and practice. We use mostly a lecturing

and tutoring model as well as some writing in computer labs. We assess using about 30% academic essays, blogging, reports in strat planning, writing tasks, white papers. We don't have exams. We have presentations, group and individual work, journal writing.

H13 cited an academic basis to his or her course "but not enough of it" and H40 noted a change toward a theoretical basis, stating that "our course used to be vocational but PhD students are teaching it now so it is connected to research". It is difficult to agree that a vocational course could transition to a research-based course simply by engaging PhD students (not graduates) to teach in it. This proposition will be more fully explored in the section later in this chapter about the impact on teaching PR of whether or not the educators hold PhDs.

Industry-based but informed by academic theory

Some of the responses from those who described their course as 'industry-based' but informed by academic theory also mentioned the impact on their course of being PRIA-accredited. PRIA accreditation requires a course to have an industry advisory panel, and as such to have some input from industry practitioners. A section that focuses solely on the perceived impact of the PRIA on PR courses follows. The following comments demonstrate the extent to which the impact of PRIA-accreditation is noteworthy. They included:

We have an advisory panel and industry connections. We aim to teach industry best practice and refer to academic journals and research. (H10)

Our content is developed by previous academics and we use current examples, articles, news reports and case studies. We are also advised by industry representatives on the advisory board. (H22)

Other comments about the industry basis to PR degrees included:

We have practical assessments – presentations and reports – and no exams or academic essays. (H27)

Our course sits in an academic institution and is driven by [Australian text] Chia and Synott as the core book, theory, texts, my own experience [in the industry] and social media. We want to develop a sense of PR's place in the world. We have high graduate employment rankings. (H43)

We expose students to real clients from year one. (H17)

60% industry, 40% academic theory. (H28)

While H43 was discussing how his/her course is based in industry and measured on employment outcomes, his/her comments highlight another point that was a theme that developed throughout the data. That is, that the course "sits in an academic institution" and is based on a textbook. This view was intended to demonstrate that despite its emphasis on industry and vocational outcomes, the course is an academic one because it is taught at a university. A personal observation made during the interview that garnered that quote, and an example of an advantage of face-to-face interviewing compared to telephone interviewing, is that the respondent used his or her hands to point to the surrounds, that is, that we were sitting in a university building, and to reinforce the point that because the course is a university course, it is inherently academic. Other respondents made similar remarks and believed that even if everything that was done in their PR degree was industry-based and vocational in intent and that there was no theoretical foundation in the teaching in that degree, then it was still an academic course because it was taught in HE, not VET. This could be seen to reflect the lack of knowledge that respondents generally had about the roles of the two education sectors or their belief that the role of contemporary universities is to produce graduates who are 'job ready'.

Another group saw the value of both the contribution of the academy and the industry. This group believed that a wholly industry-based and focused course was actually academic because it was a university course and because vocational courses were exclusively taught at TAFE institutes and therefore could not be taught at universities. Although favouring one approach over another, some of the comments

indicated that respondents saw a place for both an academic and an industry focus in their courses. H25's comment made the case for the importance of both:

The academy and the industry should be complementary. Students learn a lot from industry. Undergrad courses should be training and post-grad should be about teaching higher thinking. Students shouldn't be taught about precedent, looking back on what others have done, they should be encouraged to solve problems. They should be thinking more about how and why and face new challenges and have to apply the principles they have learned.

Have an industry orientation or leadership

Eleven of 45 (approximately 24%) HE respondents stated that the PR degrees they work in or lead had a wholly vocational or industry orientation. They meant by this that the content of these courses is not based at all on the academic body of knowledge, on research or academic journal articles. In some cases, this also included the complete absence of textbooks as well as being in favour of industry case studies, industry guest speakers and stories and anecdotes from the educators' own industry experience. H21's comment, that they don't have textbooks at all and that they use guest speakers looking at real examples, needs to be considered in broader context. This reference to the absence of textbooks was meant to imply an absence of all texts, including journal articles. Similarly, H28's claim that his/her course was based on case studies and vignettes from his/her reading was also meant to describe a wholly industry-focused approach to teaching functionalist Public Relations. A slightly different perspective was that of H34 who claimed that his/her course was "vocational and academic" but revealed its purely vocational focus by adding that there is "an assumption (at our university) that PR people cannot handle theory and that affects what we do in the course. Our course was written by me, based on my (industry) experience and reading".

Have an academic or theoretical basis or orientation

Based on the data in this category, five of 45 (approximately 11%) respondents contend that the PR degrees they work in or lead are wholly academic in nature. Those degrees are described as being based on the academic body of knowledge about Public Relations and taught from a theoretical basis. All five respondents representing those degrees described a strong emphasis on academic journals in the content of their courses. H44's account of drawing on inter-disciplinary research in his/her course was a minority perspective about the basis of a PR course. He/she advised that his/her teaching is informed by his/her own research "and by academic journals in PR as well as in Organisation Studies, Media, Marketing and Philosophy – Foucault and Bourdieu because they don't study Public Relations in isolation".

Summary

Closer analysis of the responses about the majority of PR degrees being both academically-based and industry-led reveal the same "tensions around what should be taught in a public relations degree – what the balance should be between theoretical and practical elements of courses" (L'Etang 2013, p. 45) in Australian degrees as have been in play in the UK since the 1980s. Respondents revealed degrees are based on a wide range of elements, from academic journals and educators' own research, to textbooks, case studies and industry literature. It is possible to deduce from the data that there is a disconnect between the general themes claimed by respondents, that their courses are equal parts theoretical and industry-focused or led, and reality. Most responses referred significantly more to the vocational outcomes of their degrees and the involvement of industry material and the desire for industry approval (H6) than they focused on academic underpinnings. In many cases, this was despite the respondent's view being that a course was academic because it was taught in HE. The extent to which respondents' views about PR courses have been affected by 'rose-coloured glasses' and whether courses are in fact all more vocational in content and intent than academic is not able to be

determined within the scope of this study but should be flagged as an area worthy of further research. Another potential area of research on this theme is whether it is possible for a Public Relations degree to be industry-focused, an industry degree per se, and for Public Relations to fulfil the aspirations of a number of respondents of being a highly respected academic discipline.

It is important to clearly define the meanings of the terms 'industry-focused', 'industry-led', 'vocational' and 'employment-focused' in the context of this discussion. The two former terms mean that the degrees are designed and delivered based on industry relevance, informed by members of the industry and literature and case studies from industry. The two latter terms mean that the degrees are designed and delivered with the objective of preparing graduates for employment in the industry. The term 'vocational' was defined literally in this study, using a dictionary definition, in Chapter One. In the context of courses, vocational courses "are applied education courses concerned with skills needed for an occupation, trade, or profession" (*Collins English Dictionary* 1998). As words can be interpreted in more ways than just literally, and because of the significance of the term 'vocational' to this study, it is useful to explore other meanings that could be ascribed to the word beyond its literal meaning.

Culturally, the term 'vocational' could be thought to be seen as representing a lower-status approach to education, compared to Higher Education. It could be thought to be linked specifically to what some people might call 'the vocations', which might embrace both trades and work people are 'called ' to do, callings per se, such as teaching and nursing. Vital to this study is that the term 'vocational' is being used literally, in line with not only the dictionary definition but also those provided in the literature review chapter which are essentially that it is the focus on 'teaching industry skills for employment'. It is important to point out that the term 'vocational' is not used in this thesis in a pejorative way, if indeed it could be interpreted in that way, and when used to describe what is occurring in Higher Education, is not

intended to diminish it in any way. Vocational is simply meant, as the dictionary describes, to refer to that intended to focus one on a vocation.

In theory, these terms – ‘industry-focused’, ‘industry-led’, ‘vocational’ and ‘employment-focused’ – can all co-exist but in the case of the courses being described they do not.

In H36’s view, “not much has changed in the industry since I worked in it 10 years ago”. This perspective matters because this respondent bases the course he/she teaches in on the knowledge and experience gained while working in the PR industry. The reality is that in fact the PR industry is fast-paced and ‘shifting’ and much has changed in a decade, particularly as web-based technologies and the changing face of traditional media have impacted on Public Relations practice (Waters, Tindall & Morton 2010, p. 241; Wright & Hinson, 2008, p. 2). The consequence of this in the case of H36 therefore is that what is being taught could be at least 10 years out of date without the respondent being aware of that. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the overwhelming majority of respondents, 29 of 45 (64%), see the role of university Public Relations degrees to be at least in part vocational, that is, to teach industry skills for employment. Eleven of 45 (24%) respondents believe the role of a university PR degree is wholly vocational and 29 of 45 (64%) believe it is to teach industry skills and the theory that underpins them. It is a logical extrapolation that by this they mean the role is at least in part to teach *current* industry skills for employment and the data does not support that that is the case.

The extent to which a significant number of Public Relations degrees, that is PR courses in HE, are still partly or wholly based on teaching vocational skills is a proposition of this study. This is based on a number of factors. Firstly, it would be reasonable to expect as an academic body of knowledge in Public Relations has been established and growing in the last few decades, and Public Relations has established itself as an emerging academic discipline, that degrees would have developed and moved away from the 1970s approach (Morath 2008; Potts 1976) of simply and uncritically teaching students what a potential employee is expected to do. Secondly,

notwithstanding the expectation on universities to develop ‘graduate attributes’ in their students and prepare them for employment, given the amount of literature referred to in Chapter Two that describes the ‘elements of a good course’ (Collini 2012; Dee Fink 2003; Graham 2005; L’Etang 2003), an emphasis on just the vocational is out of touch. The discussion in Chapter Two, about the characteristics of universities and describing them as ‘standard bearers’ (Collini 2012, p. 7) focuses on university courses doing something more than professional training. It describes a focus on advanced scholarship or research not burdened by the need to solve immediate problems and maintaining institutional autonomy of intellectual activities. The findings of this study – that the majority of respondents describe their PR degrees as at least partly industry-focused, and some as entirely industry-focused – challenge these notions of what universities are for and what students and society should expect from them. Later in this chapter, there will be a comprehensive discussion about the respective roles of HE and VET, building on that in Chapter Two, and this notion will be revisited then.

The data reveals that the industry orientation of teaching Public Relations now is the same as what was called “the early model (of PR tertiary education) in which tertiary courses were confined to teaching-focused institutions and conducted largely by teacher-practitioners” (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 1) referring to the 1970s to 1990s. Typically these courses were offered in Arts or Communication faculties in “vocationally-oriented second tier institutions” (Fitch 2014b, p.623). This could be seen as simply a lack of progress in the development of Public Relations education, as a consequence of the prevalence of ‘teacher-practitioners’. Alternatively, it could be that it is deemed appropriate for universities to teach Public Relations in an industry-focused manner. This discussion also continues in the next sections.

The finding that five of 45 (11%) HE respondents describe the degrees they work in or lead as ‘wholly academic’ can be categorised and interpreted in a number of ways. One way it can be seen is that it is incorrect and in fact the degrees being described are also industry-focused and employment-focused, not just academic as the

respondents perceive them to be. This was also apparent in earlier data about respondents teaching vocational skills but believing their course to be academic because it was taught at a university. For example, H43, while describing that his/her PR degree was wholly academic, also stated that part of the course content involves students setting up websites and Facebook pages and following companies on Twitter. These activities are industry-focused and suggest that as the degree includes such work skills training it is not therefore wholly academic. H43 also stated that the university had “high graduate employment rankings”. This suggests it is possible to have a course based in academia but still focusing on preparing graduates for employment. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Another way of interpreting the finding that 11% of respondents consider their PR degrees to be ‘wholly academic’ is that, that is how those respondents wanted to describe their courses. This is not to say that they were being dishonest, rather that they placed a high value on academic learning and wished their course was closer to their ideals than in fact it was. This can also be interpreted as a sign of the times. As policy changes and institutional expectations influence how university courses are run, there is a greater emphasis in Higher Education on industry relevance and graduate employability (Bridgstock 2009, p. 31). This is reflected in the data and contributes to explaining why only a small minority of Australian PR degrees have been described by respondents as wholly academic and why even fewer, if any, actually are.

There are five key outcomes regarding the discussion about the educational basis of university PR courses that can be developed from this data. They are:

1. Respondents like to highlight that their courses have academic content but few of them actually mention genuine academic content, for example, academic journals or original or new research. One can conjecture that their reasoning for considering that their courses are more academic than they actually are, is that they are being run at universities and they therefore believe that they must be academic as a result. This is, in part, because they

consider what occurs in the VET sector to be vocational and that vocational skills training is the exclusive domain of that sector and therefore cannot or does not occur at universities. This challenges Maglen's view, discussed in Chapter Two, that VET is an activity not a sector. Maglen (cited in Blunden 1997, p. ix, x & xi) contends that all learning activities that are designed to enhance students' skills and competencies so that they can get a job are Vocational Education and Training and as such these can occur anywhere, including at universities. The respondents' lack of knowledge about the skills-based training the VET sector is doing (few HE respondents knew anything at all about the VET sector and VET courses), could contribute to their lack of understanding that it is possible that their courses are largely the same as VET courses and not based on very much academic knowledge or research at all. Quality of PR degrees could be affected by being designed and taught by educators who have come from industry and who consequently have little education in teaching and learning. Equally, the same could occur as a result of educators with PhDs and no industry experience making education decisions based on little or a flawed understanding of industry. Either approach could result in a vocationally-focused and industry-based course being designed and taught in the HE sector, similarly to as it would be in the VET sector, simply because the HE educators are unfamiliar with what is occurring in PR education in the VET sector and they believe that any course taught at university is therefore academic in nature.

2. Even the few respondents who claimed their courses are based on academic theory were concerned that their course was relevant and well-regarded by industry. It is possible that PR academics with a desire to be industry-relevant are filling their PR degree with skills development and industry engagement without understanding, or agreeing, that a vocational approach is the traditional domain of the VET sector.

3. A number of HE respondents do not have a PhD (this will be demonstrated in the next section of this chapter) and consequently have not typically undertaken significant academic research, especially if they have come into education from industry. This does not mean to suggest that it is impossible to pursue academic research without a PhD or with an industry background, but it is far less likely for educators of that profile to take an academic-research based approach to teaching and to keep abreast of new research.
4. When educators with industry experience are not teaching theory, but basing their teaching on their industry experience, which respondents mentioned frequently, currency of what is being taught is a potential concern. It could equate to out-of-date content and students being taught skills from when the educator was practising and which may now be dated. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next section which profiles Australia's Public Relations educators.
5. Policy changes and trends toward industry relevance and employment outcomes, along with the view of some respondents that education should be both industry-focused and research-based, have contributed to almost all PR degrees being at least partly industry-focused and the minority claiming to be academically-focused. As such, based on the definition of 'vocational' provided in Chapter One, PR courses in both sectors are largely vocational in content and intent because they "are applied education courses concerned with skills needed for an occupation, trade, or profession" (*Collins English Dictionary* 1998).

IMPACT OF THE PRIA ACCREDITATION ON THE CONTENT OF PR DEGREES

Neither this section, nor any significant discussion about the PRIA, was anticipated by the design or focus of this study. It has been included because the data revealed that

the impact on course content of PRIA course accreditation was perceived by respondents to be worthy of analysis and discussion.

Of the 43 HE respondents who answered the question about what the content of their course was based on, 10 (23%) referred to the requirements of PRIA course accreditation. Nine of those said that the accreditation required them to have an industry advisory panel and that their understanding was that the panel advised their university on ensuring that the course content was relevant to current industry requirements. The key theme from this data was that almost a quarter of respondents believed that the PRIA involvement had a tangible impact on what was taught in the courses it accredited. Of those, some considered it to be a positive association that ensured the quality of their course and others considered it a negative association that they believed led to restrictions about what they could and could not teach.

Before looking at some of the respondents' perspectives, it is important to understand a few aspects of PRIA course accreditation. The PRIA conducts a formal accreditation process which recognises whole courses, not just the PR majors that sit within them, and it is the courses, not the institutions that deliver them, that are accredited. According to the PRIA website (2018), it only accredits "courses that have as their primary objective the thorough preparation of students for a career in Public Relations or Communication". It requires education providers to demonstrate that "their courses align with current industry practice", to ensure that graduates are equipped with best practice skills and competencies that make them attractive to potential employees and "to provide a minimum standard for Public Relations and Communication degrees". The PRIA points out that only degrees "which have as their objective the preparation of students for careers in Public Relations or Communication" can be accredited. Degrees "that include PR units but which have other vocational aims will not be considered" (PRIA 2018).

Some of the quotes from respondents, which indicate their understanding of the impact of PRIA accreditation of their courses, included:

We have a PRIA accredited PR stream so our content is based on PRIA requirements. (H5)

The (requirements of the) PRIA accreditation shaped the curriculum but we added other issues like Community Consultation based on (my) learning journey. (H16)

Our course was developed by the (industry reference) committee's advice. (H23)

H25, whose course is accredited, was critical of the perceived desirability of PRIA accreditation:

(PRIA accreditation) is just a marketing exercise with no intrinsic value. We (PR academics) all want to be seen as big kids (by being accredited by the industry body). It is really just about meeting minimum standards and as long as it doesn't hinder what we do I am OK with it. We do need to have an industry body but whether it needs to be so linked to education, I don't know. They, (people who work in the PR industry) who have limited exposure and experience and have a three-year degree, want to tell us what to do.

While some cited the presence of an advisory panel as having a shaping effect on the content of the course and its orientation, others stated that it was the requirements of the PRIA accreditation scheme more generally that impacted on the design and content of their course. From either perspective, it was apparent that HE respondents who referred to the PRIA accreditation considered that one or more of the accreditation requirements or protocols directly impacted on what was being taught in their course. The PRIA Accreditation Guidelines 2014 state that there is a requirement for accredited courses to have an advisory committee comprising PRIA members. Other than stating that it should exist and should meet twice per year, the guidelines do not state what the purpose or role of the advisory committee should be. Therefore, other than to have regard for the perspectives of the respondents about how they believe they are impacted by their advisory committee, it is difficult

to provide further analysis. Some respondents were proud that their course had such a panel, and the status of accreditation that goes with it, and believed that this industry connectedness is part of contemporary Higher Education. Other respondents disliked what they considered to be industry interference in academic independence.

One respondent, who mentioned what were perceived to be the restrictions of PRIA accreditation but whose views were contrary to the other nine, rejected the idea that there was any intrinsic value of PRIA accreditation. H28 stated that as he/she worked at a Group of Eight university (which is thought to have inherent status, as described in Chapter Two, and that the respondent considered had such status), its course did not need (the perceived status of) PRIA accreditation nor the restrictions that are perceived to go with it. As his/her university had not sought accreditation for this reason, they could therefore make independent decisions and base their course on whatever they thought was appropriate. This is an example of a “form of institutional autonomy of its intellectual activities” (Collini 2012, p. 86) that is a characteristic of a modern university that was discussed in Chapter Two as part of the investigation into the distinctive characteristics of Higher Education.

The impact of the PRIA accreditation requirements attracted comments from almost 25% of respondents (10 of 43) despite no questions being asked about the PRIA in this context. The only reference to the PRIA anywhere in the interviews was a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question about whether the respondent was a member of it. The impact of PRIA membership of PR educators will be discussed later in this chapter.

Most of those who mentioned that the accreditation had an impact on the content of their course said so with acceptance, but some said so with pride in the association. It was obvious that they considered it appropriate if not desirable that the PRIA should shape their courses, as they understood the process to be. However, the views above of two respondents who were openly critical of the impact of accreditation on course content should also be considered, even if only because of the vehemence with which they expressed their views. This is an example of a personal observation made by the researcher while conducting the fieldwork that added to the richness of the data. H25

believed lesser-qualified (than academics with PhDs) industry practitioners (meaning PRIA members) should not be guiding PR education. H28 considered the status of the PRIA to be lesser than the Group of Eight brand that they were part of and was dismissive of the need for PRIA accreditation as a result.

The linking of a PR course to the PRIA, the industry body, by way of accreditation intrinsically connects education and industry. The PRIA Accreditation Guidelines 2014 describe this connection as “educators and academics play(ing) a vital role in progressing the profession in concert with the industry body”. The PR industry body playing a role in PR education embeds vocationalism into academia by focusing a course at least in part on the industry’s expectations of course graduates.

Remembering that 11% of HE respondents claimed that their PR degrees were wholly academic in nature, it would be interesting to ponder if institutions did not value and seek PRIA accreditation, whether there would be less focus on understanding and meeting industry requirements and whether courses would be less vocational as a result.

There are parallels between the impact of the PRIA on what is taught in Australian Public Relations courses and what occurred in the 1990s in England. According to L’Etang (2003, p. 45), at that time the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) specified what universities should teach to earn its accreditation. Academics then were concerned about the loss of academic freedom and the emphasis on practice (over theory), just as some of the respondents to this study are now.

Another way in which the respondents observed that the PRIA accreditation requirements impacted on what is taught is in the requirements to teach particular subjects. The requirement can be seen to be unchanged since 1999 when a report entitled *The professional bond* first published the now-common ‘five course approach’ to teaching Public Relations (Toth & Aldoory 2010; VanSlyke Turk 2006). That approach mandated that a minimum of five courses (subjects or units) be required in a Public Relations major. They are subjects on:

- introduction to PR including theory and principles,
- research,
- writing and production,
- an internship, and
- another subject of law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns. (VanSlyke Turk 2006, p.7)

H25 has been previously quoted on this subject and his/her view that “people from the industry who have limited exposure and experience and have (just) a three-year degree want to tell us what to do” clearly articulates one educator’s perspective. He/she believes that Public Relations education is best left to highly qualified Public Relations educators to determine in their own university academic teams, without input from any external body, including in this case, the PRIA.

Even though a bachelor degree will typically have 24 subjects or its equivalent, and a major, in this case in Public Relations, will typically comprise eight of those or a maximum of twelve, there was concern among respondents about the impact of the ‘five course model’. By way of explanation, the expectation of the ‘five courses’ is that they will comprise five of the eight that are typically in a PR major, ensuring that theories, ideas and skills deemed important by the industry are taught in all PRIA-accredited degrees. The PRIA requires a minimum of 33% of an undergraduate degree to be PR subjects for the degree to meet the requirements for accreditation, so typically the eight subject major needs to comprise eight subjects with content acceptable to the PRIA (PRIA 2014).

Some respondents, such as H25 who was quoted previously as saying PRIA accreditation is a worthless marketing exercise, saw PRIA accreditation as an attempt by the industry to control Public Relations education, and to ensure it is industry-focused. This was also raised in Chapter Two. There is a concern that allowing the industry, as represented by the PRIA, to have a say in what should be taught in PR

courses is another way that the PRIA can ensure that PR education is not only industry-relevant and employment-focused but also functionalist and non-critical. There are a number of key issues raised in regard to the impact of PRIA accreditation and given that accreditation was often raised by respondents in this study without prompt, they should not be ignored.

OTHER KEY OUTCOMES ABOUT HE COURSE CONTENT

Another theme to emerge from the responses to this question was that of the impact on content of the individual preferences of the course leader and/or the lecturer teaching a subject. Responses about academic content creation by individuals demonstrated the autonomy afforded to HE respondents to choose for themselves what they teach. They included:

- Our course is based on what the lecturer chooses to write and teach. (This includes) the academic body of knowledge and case studies. (H31)
- It comes down to individual educators and their choices of materials and case studies. (H22)
- I developed my own subjects. (H5)

The impact of a ‘teacher bringing their own background to the teaching’ will be explored later in this chapter when the qualifications and industry backgrounds of the respondents are discussed in terms of the impact they have on PR education. Based on views represented by the quotes above however, this study shows that PR educators have considerable autonomy to teach whatever they choose to teach within the subjects or units they are responsible for. This appears to challenge the previous data in which respondents claim to be restricted in what they can teach due to PRIA accreditation. It is possible that both of these perspectives are valid and that they can co-exist. Primarily, this is because the PRIA accreditation issues are largely levelled at the structure of the degree and therefore pertain to the subjects, the ‘five

courses', that have to be taught and not what the content of those subjects should be. Respondents have claimed considerable freedom to determine content for themselves. However, whether or not it actually occurs or is the intention of the accreditation process, some respondents do believe that they must teach specific content prescribed by the PRIA and some believe that the industry panel advising their course is determining subject content. How this is perceived in the VET sector is determined in the next section.

CONTENT OF COURSES – VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The six VET respondents all answered this question and the responses fell into two categories – one suggested the course content was industry-based and the other suggested the course content was determined by the individual teacher. Responses that described courses as industry-based included a reference to a course being based on industry projects and students creating booklets and events in a dedicated agency space (V1) and a description of a course that, because of its PRIA accreditation, has a reference group of industry professionals who advise on industry's requirements of the course (V2).

As one respondent reported, teachers have 100% influence to shape the content of the course so the content is whatever the teacher decides it is (V5) and another said the content of their course is adapted and interpreted by the teachers (V6).

There are a number of observations that can be made about these responses. Given that the design and content framework of VET qualifications are prescribed by the federal government, unlike HE qualifications, the extent to which the responses to this question reveal the influence of individual teachers could be seen as surprising. One of the consequences of teachers deciding to teach whatever they choose is that the educational outcome is not consistent with other VET courses, despite all of them being nationally accredited and designed to have the same outcomes.

Another is that if the teacher is out of date from a theory or practice perspective, or has never worked in the Public Relations industry, then the objective of the course, that of teaching current industry skills, is not being met. The above comment about an industry advisory panel setting the industry requirements for the course because of the PRIA accreditation, echoes the same situation in the HE sector, as was discussed previously. If the objective of having an industry advisory panel is to ensure that a course is industry current and relevant, why this cannot be the remit of VET PR educators who are supposed to be industry current themselves is unclear.

V1 and V2 both referred to the industry basis of the content of their courses but interpreted it differently. According to Maglen (cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix-xi), VET courses are designed to directly enhance the skills, knowledge competencies and capabilities of individuals required for undertaking gainful employment. They exist to ensure industries have the skilled employees they need (Bradley et al. 2008; Buchanan 2011; Clemans 2010; Tovey & Lawlor 2008; Wheelahan 2011). VET courses are inherently skills-based and employment-focused. V1 embraced that philosophy, citing the 'real work' theme to the course content. V2 seemed to value the 'real work' aspect of the course but also highlighted that it was more than that and it also "tests students' conceptual and strategic thinking ability", stating that it was not 'just' an applied course.

It is clear from the data that in both VET and HE, individual educators are deciding for themselves what content they will teach. Overall, one third of respondents from both sectors, representing 12 of 45 (26%) of HE respondents and four of six (66%) of VET respondents, claimed that they decided what to teach. Some of the VET respondents' comments were that:

Content was created by previous teachers and (he/she) adds her personal experiences and insights. (V3)

That it is based on the curriculum "but individualised" (by teachers). (V4)

That it was “100% the influence of the teacher to shape the content of what is taught, so the content is whatever I decide”. (V5)

That content is “adapted and interpreted by teachers”. (V6)

Some of the HE respondents’ explanations of their role in content development included that it was “written by me based on my experiences and reading” (H34), that his/her “own research informs my teaching” (H44) and “I shape my own teaching” (H10).

Irrespective of the sector, this has the potential to impact on the nature and direction of courses, especially where biases based on industry experience or academic qualifications exist. It also has the potential to impact on the quality of the courses because of educators’ out-of-date industry knowledge or lack of experience in academia restricting their access and inclination to draw on the discipline’s academic body of knowledge.

The industry backgrounds and teaching qualifications of those making these decisions will be discussed later in this chapter, as will the respective roles of the two sectors. That will provide context for further understanding the perspectives of both the HE and VET respondents.

CONTENT OF COURSES –THE ROLE OF TEXTBOOKS

Continuing on the theme of how content is developed, respondents were asked what they considered to be the role of textbooks in their course. They were asked specifically which textbooks they prescribe, if any, and why. The flexibility provided by using Grounded Theory enabled the researcher to follow up with some of the respondents who stated that they did use textbooks and to ask them to discuss their views about whether or not it was important to them that they used Australian texts and if so, why?

The role of textbooks in VET

None of the VET respondents prescribed textbooks and therefore there were no compulsory textbooks being used in VET PR courses. Five of six (83%) either recommended textbooks to students or drew on them for teaching and they all claimed to use only Australian texts, despite one that was mentioned actually being American. Those textbooks specifically mentioned were:

- Tymson, C , Lazar, P & Lazar, R 2002, *The new Australian and New Zealand Public Relations manual*, Tymson Communications, Australia
- Chia, J & Synnott, G (eds) 2012, *An introduction to Public Relations and Communication Management*, Oxford University Press, Australia
- Johnston, J & Zawawi, C (eds) 2004, *Public Relations theory and practice*, Allen and Unwin, Australia
- Newsom, D, Turk, J & Kruckeberg, D 1996, *This is PR – the realities of Public Relations*, Wadsworth, USA (American)
- Mahoney, J 2009, *Public Relations writing in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Australia
- Harrison, KJ 2001, *Strategic Public Relations – a practical guide to success*, Vineyard Publishing, Australia
- Sheehan, M & Xavier, R 2014, *Public Relations campaigns*, Oxford University Press, Australia

The level of the course had some bearing on the use of textbooks. In the view of V5, textbooks were not required in the Certificate IV in Business (Public Relations) but were used at diploma level. V2 believed that Tymson, Lazar and Lazar was a good introductory text and that Johnston and Zawawi was good for second year.

The role of textbooks in HE

Of the 43 of 45 respondents who answered this question:

- 28 (65%) prescribe textbooks for at least one of the units in their course
- nine (21%) do not use textbooks at all, and
- six (14%) do not prescribe texts but may recommend some or consider using them as part of a broader approach to learning resources.

The comments in support of using textbooks typically centred around the respondents' point of view that textbooks were providing a theoretical basis for teaching and learning (H22, H18). There is little evidence in the data to support this as the texts listed could also be seen to be functionalist (H40 raised this specifically) and also providing only scant theoretical chapters, of which there is no data that proves or otherwise that those chapters were referred to. Others thought that textbooks should be used so students are putting together a professional library they can refer to when they are in practice (H3, H5, H36) with H36 suggesting that all students should own a general PR text, a style guide and a textbook on PR writing.

Of those who didn't use textbooks at all, the reasons included:

Textbooks are too narrow and we use readers but readers are too easy (meaning students are handed research rather than having to do it themselves). (H6)

It is difficult to get them (students) to read anything. (H4)

The views of those who don't prescribe textbooks but may use and recommend them along with other resources can be summarised by H32 who stated:

You can't just use a textbook. (You) need other resources like the PR Report, the PR Wire, PRSA, anything Asian, Sriramesh on intercultural issues and Vercic, who is Slovenian. We do use texts though. Chia and Synnott, Kim

Harrison's book, Jim Macnamara, Jim Mahoney, Cutlip, Center and Broom, Fraser Seitel, Lattimore, Jacqui L'Etang and Pieczka, Anne Gregory, Ralph Tench. But we need an Australian perspective for a teaching context. We need examples that speak to us (as Australians).

H11 added that in his/her course they also used a course material database to give broader readings including individual journal articles. H44's view is that textbooks "make life easy but none really adopt the discourse and scholarship perspective". H42 cautioned about the potential consequences of basing too much course content on textbooks:

We need to discriminate about books. I have written many chapters for textbooks and a good text is helpful but some are (just) disparate collections of writings of the editor's friends. A reflective text is good. Tench and Yeomans is the most thoughtful. Others you need to question the writers' perspective, such as Chia and Synnott. They are advocates for PR, not critical of PR. What are they not saying?

Origin of textbook

Sixteen respondents of 43 (38%) had views about whether the origin of textbooks was important. Of those, nine (56%) favoured Australian texts for a variety of reasons and seven (43%) either were not in favour of Australian textbooks or would only use them along with texts from other parts of the world.

Some of those who favoured Australian texts did so for functionalist purposes, because they believed they best matched the needs of students learning to practise PR in Australia. Their perspectives included that PR is different in different countries and we teach Australasian PR (H18) and that Australian texts are important because "we live and work in Australia" (H43).

V4, H41 and H17 all have Australian-only policies on textbook selection and V4 stated that they “use Australian-based textbooks only – Macnamara, and Tymson and Lazar”. H41 said that they “steer away from US books”.

The five most commonly used Australian textbooks in HE were:

- Tymson, C , Lazar, P & Lazar, R 2002, *The new Australian and New Zealand Public Relations manual*, Tymson Communications, Australia
- Johnston, J & Zawawi, C (eds) 2004, *Public relations theory and practice*, Allen and Unwin, Australia
- Sheehan, M & Xavier, R (eds) 2014, *Public Relations campaigns*, Oxford University Press, Australia
- Chia, J & Synnott, G (eds) 2012, *An introduction to Public Relations and Communication Management*, Oxford University Press, Australia
- Harrison, KJ 2001, *Strategic Public Relations – a practical guide to success*, Vineyard Publishing, Australia

All five of these texts were also used in VET PR courses, that are between one and several AQF levels lower than bachelor degrees. As well as the differences in academic level, this also raises the issue of perceived differences in purpose and in styles of teaching and learning in the two sectors and how the reality that both are using the same textbooks can be explained.

Regarding the use of Australian texts, one respondent’s view was that there was no need to use them as Australia is no different from the USA and Australian textbooks are TAFE level not university level (H16). Given the previous observation, this provides further data that raises questions not just about the role and selection of textbooks but of fundamental matters pertaining to the purpose of the two sectors and the role of PR courses within them.

Another respondent had a 'no US textbook policy' as a political statement and looked to books from other parts of the world for a global perspective (H45). H28 was not as strong with his/her anti-US sentiments but had concerns about them, stating that he/she was not anti-US texts but ambivalent as the case studies are so US-centric that they are meaningless for students. The respondent said that he/she used Johnston and Zawawi, and Sheehan and Xavier but believed there is a dearth of Australian textbooks and that they are what students want.

The five most commonly used non-Australian texts in HE were:

- Tench, R & Yeomans, L 2006, *Exploring Public Relations*, Prentice Hall, UK
- Newsom, D, Turk, J & Kruckeberg, D 1996, *This is PR – the realities of Public Relations*, Wadsworth, USA
- Regester, M & Larkin, J 2005, *Risk issues and crisis management in Public Relations: a casebook of best practice*, 4th edn, Kogan Page, USA
- Cutlip, S, Center, A & Broom, G 2006, *Effective Public Relations*, Pearson International, NJ
- Lattimore, D, Baskin, O, Heiman, S, Toth, E & Van Leuven, J 2004, *Public Relations – the profession and the practice*, McGraw Hill, USA

The role of textbooks

The answers to this question about the use of textbooks provided some of the most animated responses of all of the questions asked. This was another personal observation made by the researcher during the data collection. The responses were also among the most opinionated and political in the whole study. Compared to other questions, textbooks appeared to be the topic that most educators had a strong view on.

When the VET and HE responses are combined:

- 55% of respondents prescribe textbooks
- 23% of respondents recommend textbooks (but do not prescribe them)
- 18% of respondents don't use any at all (20% of HE courses)

A number of themes emerged from the data about the use of textbooks. These included why those who prescribe textbooks do so, why those who don't use them at all don't and why some only use them along with other resources.

The finding that 65% of HE respondents prescribed a textbook is not the most interesting finding as this could be seen to be a reasonable assumption about university education. It is more revelatory to learn that 35% of HE respondents did not prescribe a text at all and that half of those did not use textbooks in their teaching.

Based on the assumptions about skills development and a practical focus in VET courses, it would be unsurprising if none of the VET courses prescribe textbooks. Yet five of the six (83%) recommended textbooks and drew on them in their teaching. When compared to the 20% of HE respondents that didn't use textbooks at all, when the HE sector is assumed to be theory-based, this is noteworthy. It may be able to be explained by these respondents using readers and journal articles instead of textbooks but there is little evidence to support this in the data. It is more realistic that where textbooks were not prescribed, neither were any other readings or references to theory and the courses were skills-based instead. Based on the researcher's experience teaching in both sectors, none of the findings are surprising, except perhaps that none of the VET courses actually prescribed a text.

Perceived criticism of textbooks was another theme that developed and respondents noted that some were functionalist and non-critical and some were merely compilations of friends' (of the editor's) writings (H42). The data also showed that of the respondents who used textbooks, some favoured Australian textbooks, some

used a combination of Australian and international and some were not in favour of textbooks from the USA for different reasons.

This study has not focused on the role of textbooks apart from asking one question to the respondents and as such the review of literature did not specifically address this element of a Public Relations course. However, as part of the section on the history of Public Relations in Australia, there is reference to Potts' 1976 book *Public Relations practice in Australia* which Potts wrote to provide an Australian perspective to Australian PR students and practitioners. Then-practitioner Laurie Kerr wrote a chapter in the book entitled 'The skills and training of a Public Relations practitioner', by which he meant an Australian Public Relations practitioner. This was the first insight for Australians on the subject. It provided what H32 called a resource that "spoke to Australians" and many of the respondents would say the need for this continues.

The following section builds on the previous discussion about Public Relations courses by looking at who is teaching in them.

PROFILE OF AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATORS

This section provides an overview of who is teaching Public Relations in Australia in both the HE and VET sectors, based on the 51 interviews that were conducted with PR educators around the country. It covers information including demographics, qualifications and industry background as well as contextual information about where the courses they work in are located. VanSlyke Turk (2006, p. 5) contended that a downside of the popularity of PR as a vocation in the UK at the end of last century was that everyone wanted to get into PR courses and that led to courses being taught by faculty not properly credentialed to teach the subject. That meant that people who did not have a PhD or research experience, without actual practitioner experience, or both, were employed as PR educators. The information presented in the following section about the qualifications and experience of the respondents

enables an opinion to be formed as to the extent to which VanSlyke Turk's comment about the UK is or was applicable to the Australian context. The following section also provides an account of the individual views of the respondents about what they consider their role as a PR educator to be, whether they consider Public Relations to be the right name for the discipline and whether from their perspectives Public Relations is a profession.

This study also wanted to discover the level of academic qualifications held by people teaching in Australian Public Relations courses, and in what academic discipline they held those qualifications. This section presents the qualifications of HE and VET educators separately because of the different academic requirements to teach in the two sectors.

Sector and region educators employed in

Among the information this study sought to determine was where PR is being taught in Australia, in which sector and in which locations. As shown in the chart below, Figure 1, of the 51 respondents, 45 (88%) were employed in the HE sector, at 17 universities and two dual sector institutes across the country.

The remaining six educators (12%) were employed in the VET system. All were employed at publicly-funded TAFE institutes.

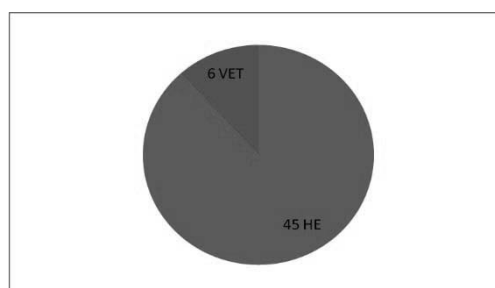


Figure 1: Respondent sector of employment

The 51 respondents were located in five states and two territories and were employed at both metropolitan and regional locations.

Figure 2 below shows that 38 (75%) were located in capital cities and 13 (25%) were based outside of a capital city.

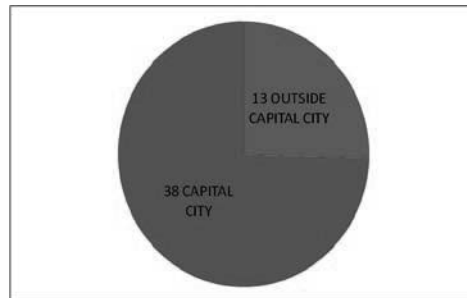


Figure 2: Respondent employment location

It is worth noting the extent to which PR education has grown in the HE sector and the number of PR educators employed at so many universities in Australia. However, the opposite seems to be the case in the VET sector with very few VET institutes teaching Public Relations. There has been a significant decline since the first qualifications were established in what is now called the TAFE or VET sector in Australia, in the 1970s. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this study. However, one can conjecture that the proliferation of industry-focused PR courses at non-Group of Eight universities or what have been described as “vocationally-oriented second tier institutions” (Fitch 2014c), has contributed to this. Consequently, PR education has moved away from VET and found a new home in HE. It also raises the possibility that HE PR courses are fulfilling the role of preparing graduates for work in the PR industry by teaching skills; a role once held more firmly by the VET sector.

Mode of employment of PR educators

Of the 45 HE respondents, 40 (89%) were employed full time, two (4%) were employed sessionally and three (7%) were employed part time. Of the six VET

respondents, four (67%) were employed full time, one (17%) was employed part time and one (17%) was employed as a sessional teacher.

As shown in the chart below, Figure 3, of the 51 respondents, 44 (86%) were employed full time (FT), four (8%) were employed part time (PT) and three (six per cent) were employed as sessional teachers.

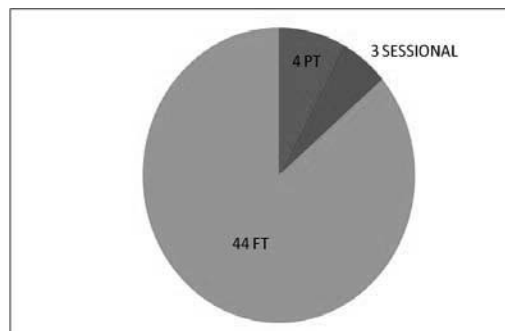


Figure 3: Respondent employment status

Given the references in the data to PR courses employing a lot of sessional educators, these responses reveal that this data was gathered predominantly from full time, permanent educators and should be analysed through that lens.

These findings show that there is a gap in the data collected and the views of Public Relations educators who are employed as sessionals have not been captured to any significant degree. This is an outcome of the sampling approach taken to identifying respondents for the study which saw some key participants identified at the outset with the remainder allowed to 'snowball' by way of referrals from earlier participants. The impact that this had on few sessionals being identified either by the researcher or the early participants is that due to the initial criteria including being a professor of Public Relations, an author of a book about Public Relations or an academic who publishes in Public Relations education, sessionals were unlikely to meet these criteria and were therefore largely left out of the sample. These same criteria likely presented a false picture of the number of PR educators with PhDs, as shown in the

next section. This is because the sample was not random nor representative. The use of purposeful sampling and the desire to include professors and associate professors, who are more likely to have PhDs than lecturers, has probably shown that the proportion of PR educators with PhDs is higher than a representative sample would reveal.

Qualifications held by PR educators in HE

As shown in Figure 4 below, of the 45 HE respondents, 25 (55%) have a PhD and of the 25 PhDs, 17 (68%) are in either PR or Communication. Another way of considering this is that 17 of 45 (38%) HE respondents have a PhD in either PR or Communication. Of the 45 respondents, 20 (45%) do not have a PhD in any discipline.

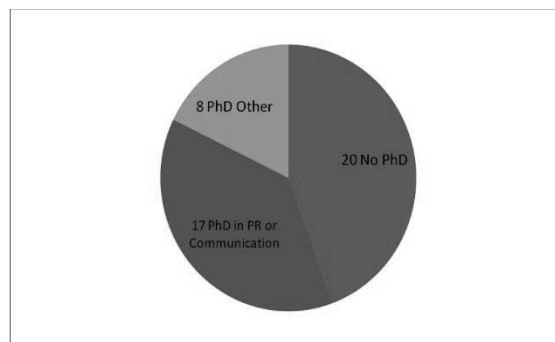


Figure 4: Respondent qualifications - HE

This means that at the time of the fieldwork, 45% of people teaching PR in Higher Education in Australia did not hold a PhD, the qualification usually required, or thought to be required, to teach at universities. Interestingly too, 17 of the 45 HE respondents (38%) have a PhD in either PR or Communication. It is a reasonable extrapolation that the number of HE PR educators without a PhD in any discipline is relatively higher than would be the case in many other academic disciplines in universities. This could be for two main reasons: (1) Public Relations is a comparatively new academic discipline as noted earlier in Chapter Two, hence there are fewer highly qualified academics in the area, and; (2) the nature of Public

Relations as a discipline with close links to industry makes it easy for universities to staff their courses with ex-practitioners without PhDs. Indeed, as the data shows, it is common for universities to attempt to play to the industry-relevant strength of their PR courses by employing former industry practitioners to teach in them and, typically but not always, former industry practitioners do not have PhDs.

The following quotes from respondents allude to how acceptable it is to teach in a university PR degree if you don't have a PhD but you do have industry experience. These ideas will be discussed more fully in the following pages.

H44 is the only full-time lecturer in his/her course along with 12 to 14 sessionals who are "mainly practitioners with masters or PhDs" (H44). H4's course employed:

four full time academic staff and heaps of sessionals. The full timers have to have a PhD as a minimum but a master degree is OK. Two have PhDs and two are enrolled. All four have industry backgrounds and that is described as being 'great for credibility with students'.

The general practice that (most) university lecturers are PhD-qualified is not supported for the PR discipline by this study. The key findings from the data about the qualifications of HE PR educators are that 45% of them do not have a PhD at all and 62% of them do not have a PhD in Public Relations, Communication or a related field.

Qualifications held by PR educators in VET

Educators in the VET sector need to meet a different expectation than in HE in terms of the qualifications they hold and for this reason the data from the VET respondents is being presented separately from that of the HE respondents. All of the six PR VET educators hold the VET teaching qualification, the Certificate IV in Teaching and Assessment, or its equivalent, or they would not be allowed to teach in the sector. They are also required under the Australian Qualifications Framework to have a qualification at the same level that they are teaching at, meaning that if they are teaching in a diploma course, they need to have a diploma themselves. All of the VET

respondents meet those requirements and for comparison to the HE educators, the VET respondents were asked about the HE qualifications they hold. As the chart below, Figure 5, shows, of the six educators employed in the VET sector, three have bachelor level degrees and two have post graduate qualifications. Only one of the five educators with a Higher Education qualification is qualified in Public Relations or Communication.

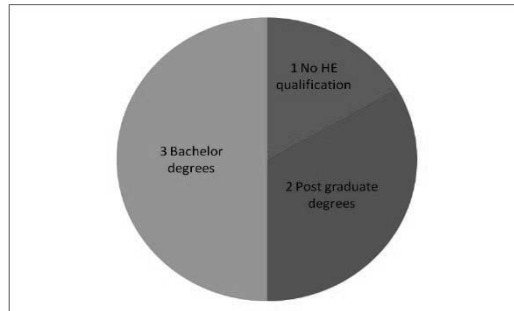


Figure 5: Respondent qualifications - VET

Titles and roles of educators in Higher Education (HE)

As this study sought to understand who was teaching PR in Australia, one of the questions asked was what title each respondent held. As Figure 6, below, shows, the 45 HE respondents represented the top four academic levels (B, C, D and E). Of these, 14 (31%) were lecturers, 16 (36%) were senior lecturers, seven (15%) were associate professors and four (8%) were professors. Additionally, one title was nominated as ‘deputy dean’ and another as ‘senior teaching fellow’.

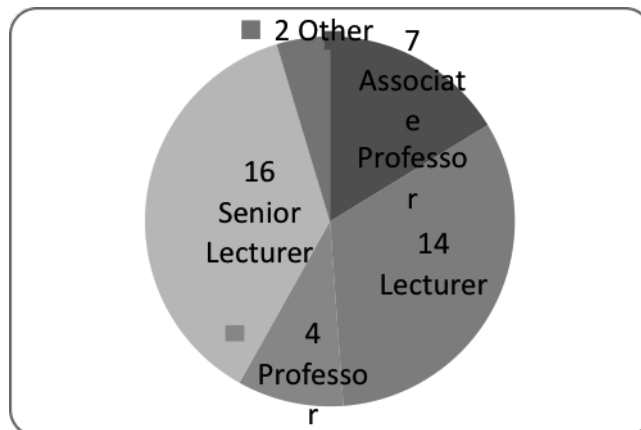


Figure 6: Respondent academic level

This data demonstrates that the study is based on interviews with PR educators at most levels of academia. Given that Public Relations is an emerging academic discipline, the fact that this study captures the views on Public Relations education of as many as four professors and seven associate professors highlights the significant contribution it makes to the field, as this is the first time such a study has been conducted.

Titles and roles of educators in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The study also sought the titles of the PR educators from the VET sector. The job titles used in the VET sector are different from the HE sector and are presented separately in Figure 7 below. Two of the six (33%) VET respondents were program managers, one an education manager, one identified as a teacher and another as a lecturer. The other was a sessional teacher.

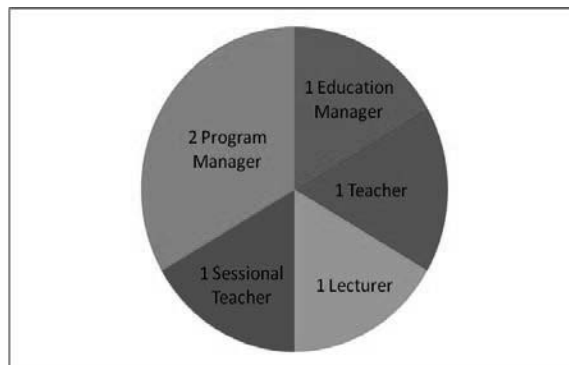


Figure 7: Respondent job title

These findings reveal that the titles of educators in the VET sector are not consistent across the country and are nominated at the discretion of individual institutes. Given the reputation of the practical basis of the VET sector, the title 'lecturer' seems like an anomaly.

Each respondent was also asked if they were the leader of the PR course. In some cases, being the course leader could give an educator more influence over what is

taught, how it is taught and by whom so this capacity to shape the courses they teach in could have significant impact. Therefore, it was important to understand that of the educators interviewed, 19 of 45 (42%) HE educators, irrespective of their titles, were the leaders of the PR course. Their titles included discipline leader, program manager and course coordinator. Three (50%) of the VET educators led their courses. This breakdown is shown in Figure 8 below.

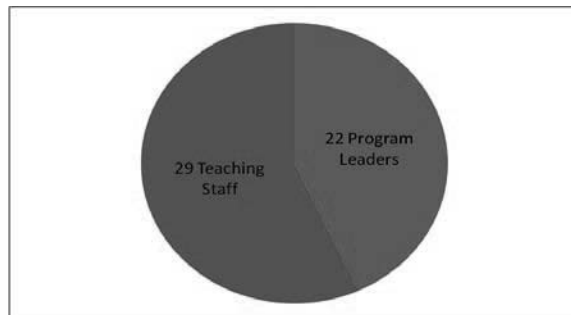


Figure 8: Respondent program role

Gender and age of educators

As shown below in Figure 9, of the 51 respondents interviewed, 29 (57%) were female and 22 (43%) were male. Given the very high percentage of PR students who are female, as was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it could be expected that the ratio of female to male PR educators should favour females more than the figures presented here show. Equally, the PR industry is a female-dominated one. Of approximately 2000 members of the PRIA, 73% are female (PRIA 2018). Therefore, the relatively high proportion of males in PR education, while still a minority, seems inconsistent with other data.

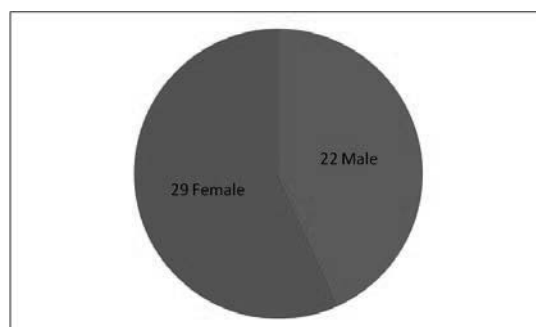


Figure 9: Respondent gender

However, when the age of educators is also examined, a possible reason for the comparatively high number of men in PR education emerges (see Figure 10 and Figure 11 below). Of the 22 male educators, nine (over 40%) are 56 years old or older and a further 11 (50%) are between 46 and 55 years old. Of the 29 female educators, six (21%) are 56 years old or older and 18 (62%) are between 46 and 55 years old. Five of the nine male educators who are 56 years old or older have a similar profile. They have all been teaching for between 10 and more than 30 years, all have more than 30 years industry experience and none of them have a PhD.

Of the six female educators over 56 years old, five have a similar profile. Three have been teaching PR for over 20 years and all have been teaching PR for more than 10 years. All have a PhD. All of the educators who are over 56 years old work in the HE sector. The male educators are older than the female educators, fewer of them have PhDs and they have worked in the PR industry (outside of academia) for much longer.

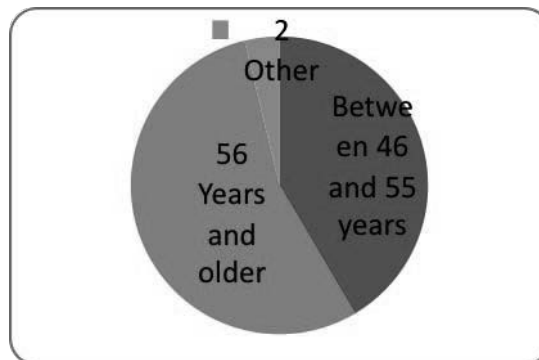


Figure 10: Age of male respondents

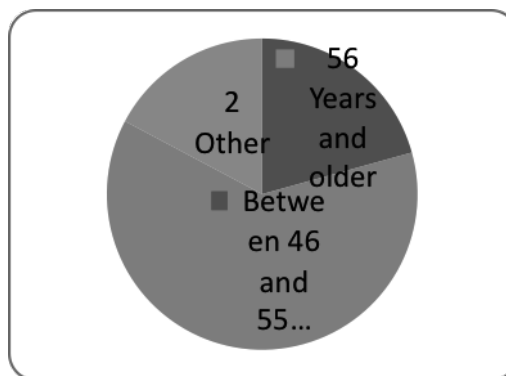


Figure 11: Age of female respondents

As described in Chapter Two, PR education developed in Australia from the 1970s and there were no PR academics then so educators were found among practitioners in what was then a male dominated industry. That there were more male respondents who are older, who had been recruited to education from industry decades ago when educators were needed and practitioners were mostly male, helps to explain why there is a larger proportion of male respondents than would be expected in a female dominated industry. It is possible to predict that the gender ratio of PR educators in the future will better match the industry which is populated by 73% females and the PR student cohort which respondents cited as being at least 80% female.

With the increasing requirement for HE educators to have PhDs, the high proportion of female PR students is likely to produce a female bias in the number of graduates with PhDs in Public Relations and who consequently enter the PR academy. Although not a gender issue, a point of pause here is the issue of PR students continuing their studies and gaining PhDs. With the entrenched vocationalism in PR programs that is seeing an industry-orientation and a job skills-basis in PR degrees, rather than a theoretical, academic basis, what will encourage PR graduates to consider pursuing PR academia? This is an important issue for the PR industry and the academy. This study shows that to improve its status as an academic discipline, PR education needs more PhD graduates, more PR educators with PhDs and more PR PhD holders undertaking more original research. The vocational focus of PR education, or students learning about the practice of PR, is less likely to develop PR scholars than students learning about PR in a more scholarly, theoretical way. It could be seen that this vocational approach to teaching PR in a degree structure is overshadowed by how the other subjects in the degree, outside of the PR major in degrees that are structured in that way, are taught if it is that they are taught in a scholarly way, especially when those subjects are in the majority. Students' engagement with these other subjects in their degrees, especially if they are non-vocational in content and delivery, could

provide the scholarly basis for them to pursue higher research degrees and it is possible that those degrees could be in Public Relations. Nonetheless, this is an issue that warrants further investigation to ensure that there is an academic pathway that will provide the PR academy with the educators and researchers it needs. This issue is heightened when the ages of PR educators is outlined below.

Figure 12 below shows the breakdown of ages of HE respondents with both genders combined. Two (four per cent) were under 35, four (eight per cent) were aged between 36 and 45, 24 (53%) were aged between 46 and 55 and 15 (33%) were aged between 56 and 65 (including three who did not answer but were known to be in that age category).

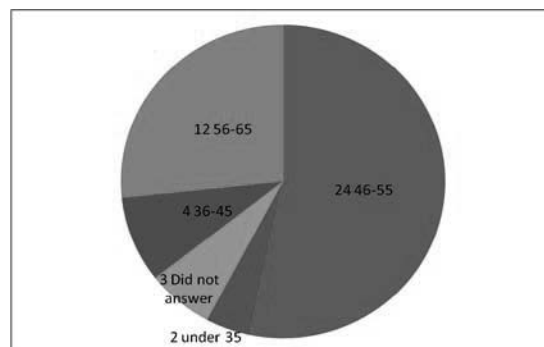


Figure 12: Respondent age breakdown - HE

Figure 13 below shows that all six of the educators employed in the VET sector were between 36 and 55 years old. Two (33%) were aged between 36 and 45 and the remaining four (67%) were between 46 and 55 years old.

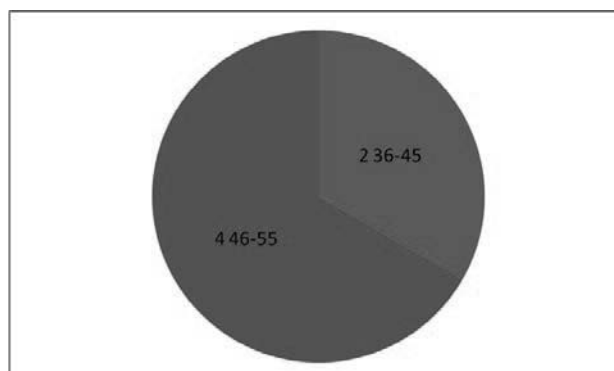


Figure 13: Respondent age breakdown - VET

To enable analysis of responses based on years in teaching or years in industry or away from industry, it was important to determine the ages of respondents. To see if there was any difference in age between PR educators in HE compared to VET, the data was presented separately.

The data about the age (ageing) of educators in HE reveals three key findings: (1) fifteen HE respondents (30%) are 56 or over, (2) twenty-four (53%) are between 46 and 55, which means in total, 83% of HE respondents are 46 years old or older, and (3) only two (4%) are 35 and under. The VET educators are younger, with all of them being aged between 36 and 55. The approach, mentioned previously, that was taken in the 1970s of employing ex-practitioners to teach PR because there were no academically qualified PR educators, is no longer an option given the growing requirement of new university lecturers being employed to have PhDs. It is possible that, 50 years after PR education in Australia commenced, PR academia has not developed to the point that it is producing enough of its own academically qualified PR educators.

Number of years spent teaching in Higher Education

To determine whether the number of years of teaching had any impact on respondents' views about various aspects of PR education, or for ex-practitioners, whether the impact of time away from industry did, it was important to capture data about their tenure in education.

As shown in Figure 14 below, of the 45 HE respondents interviewed, eight (18%) had been teaching PR for less than five years, 15 (33%) had been teaching it for between six and 10 years, eight (18%) had been teaching it for between 11 and 15 years, eight (18%) between 16 and 20 years, five (11%) between 21 and 30 years and one (2%) had been teaching PR for more than 30 years.

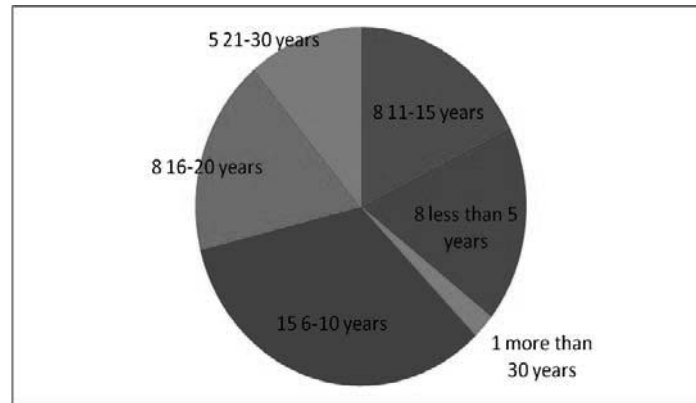


Figure 14: Respondent teaching experience - HE

These findings show that almost half of the HE respondents had been teaching Public Relations for more than 10 years. Where educators have PhDs, they are employed because of that qualification and any industry experience they also draw on could be seen to be an advantage, irrespective of when they worked in industry. Where educators do not have a PhD and have thus been employed on the basis of their industry experience, the data shows that it has been between 10 and 30 years since they worked in the industry. As a consequence, where they are teaching vocational skills, without a sustained commitment to ensuring they are kept up to date, it is possible that these educators are bringing potentially out-of-date industry skills and knowledge to their teaching. This could be exacerbated in the case of respondents who claimed that little had changed in the industry since they worked in it (in some cases for decades). The respondents' thoughts about these issues are discussed in the next section.

Number of years spent teaching in VET

Figure 15 below shows that of the six VET respondents interviewed, two (33%) had been teaching PR for less than five years, three (50%) for between six and 10 years and one (17%) had been teaching PR for between 11 and 15 years.

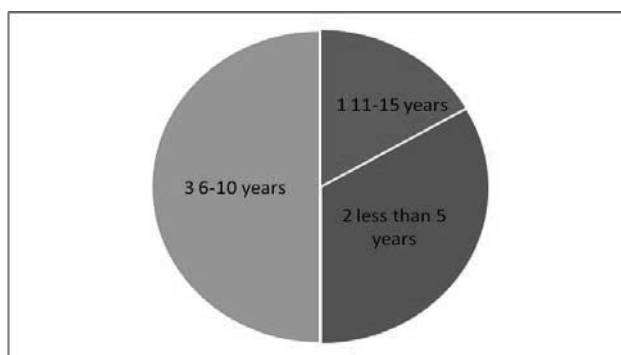


Figure 15: Respondent teaching experience - VET

As VET sector teaching and learning is based on teaching skills for employment and teachers are in fact employed due to their current industry skills and knowledge, it could be considered that if someone has been teaching full time for more than 11 years and perhaps has not made a significant commitment to ensuring their skills are current, they are no longer qualified to teach in VET. This is due to that sector's requirement for educators to have industry currency. The same could be said, but not to the same extent, for teachers who have been teaching and out of the industry for between six and 10 years. Just as in some parts of HE, where Public Relations industry experience is thought to be valued and educators are employed because they have it, especially when they do not have a PhD, it is imperative that industry experience is kept current.

PR industry experience of HE PR educators

It is possible that PR educators who have worked in the Public Relations industry could hold different views about PR education than those PR educators who have not. As such, this study sought to identify how many respondents had industry experience, how much they had, and how long ago it was that they attained it. PR academics who described themselves as 'critical scholars' for example, and those who believed that the academy should lead the industry in Public Relations education, are a different group of thinkers about Public Relations education than those who, perhaps, are ex-industry and are functionalist in their views. This is not to say that ex-

industry practitioners necessarily become functionalist educators but it was to determine this that respondents were asked if they had PR industry experience. These approaches are discussed throughout this chapter.

Figure 16, below, shows that of the 45 HE respondents, 40 (89%) had industry experience either as a paid professional or in some cases via pro bono work, in PR or a related field. In some cases that experience was very minimal, for example, one year working in local government PR.

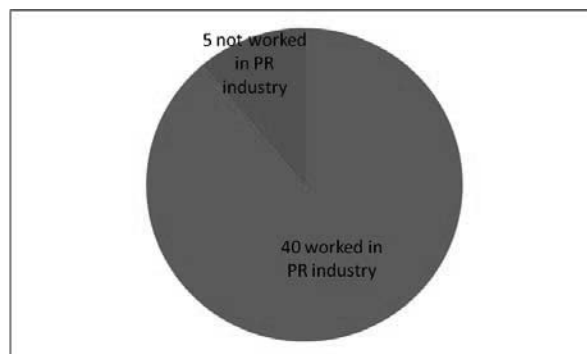


Figure 16: Respondent industry experience – HE

As mentioned in the previous section, the recency of an educator's industry experience could also be a factor in determining what he or she decides to teach and how they go about it. This is particularly relevant in courses that teach skills development. As such, respondents were asked how long it had been since they worked in the industry.

As shown in Figure 17 below, 10 (33%) of respondents had worked in the PR industry in the last five years and 35 (67%) of HE PR educators had not worked in the PR industry for between six and more than 30 years.

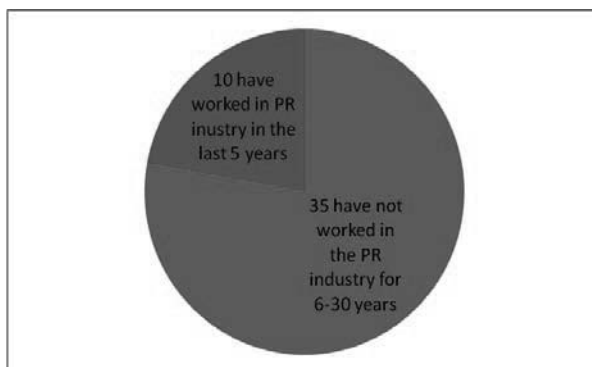


Figure 17: Respondent experience recency - HE

PR industry experience of VET PR educators

As shown in Figure 18 below, four of the six (66%) VET respondents had relevant industry experience, two in PR and two in a related field. None of them was currently working in the industry and only one had worked in the industry in the past five years.

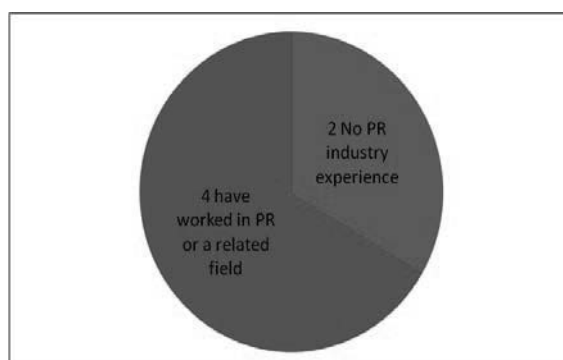


Figure 18: Respondent industry experience - VET

These findings are significant. For the HE respondents, as discussed earlier, if they had a PhD and were employed based on that qualification to teach in an academic setting, then it could be seen that industry experience is irrelevant or deemed to be a bonus on top of the PhD. If, however, HE respondents had been employed based on their industry experience, without holding a PhD, and their industry experience was a long time ago, a significant commitment is required to ensure they are basing their teaching of skills on the needs of the contemporary industry, not the industry at the time in which they worked in it. For the VET respondents, as one of the tenets of a

VET education is being taught by industry professionals with ‘currency’ who also have the required teaching qualification, then having no industry experience is inconsistent with the sector’s ideals. Just as a PhD is typically thought to be a requirement for a teaching position in a university, and 20 of the 45 HE respondents (44%) did not have a PhD, the data shows that five of the six (83%) VET teachers don’t satisfy the requirements for that sector either. This is important to discussions later in this chapter that examine the characteristics of university courses and VET courses, and these characteristics are deemed to include the ‘requirement’ that VET courses are taught by teachers who are ‘industry current’ and the ‘convention’ that university courses are taught by people with PhDs.

Membership of PRIA by HE PR educators

It was important to understand what percentage of PR educators in Australia are members of the industry peak body, the PRIA, given the links between an industry body and education that were discussed in Chapter Two.

Figure 19 below reveals that 31 of the 45 (69%) HE respondents interviewed are members of the PRIA, including eight who were fellows of the institute and one who was a past national president. Twenty-three (31%) were not members. These proportions of sentiment toward the PRIA, as demonstrated by joining it, are consistent with the views of respondents about the impact of PRIA accreditation on course structure that were discussed earlier in this chapter. The majority supported and valued PRIA involvement and a minority regarded it as restrictive and unwelcome.

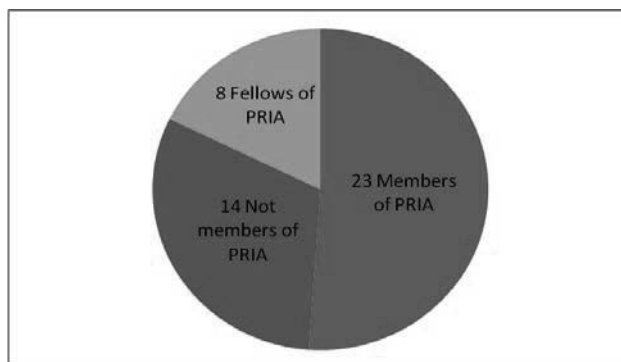


Figure 19: Respondent PRIA membership - HE

Membership of PRIA by VET PR educators

Figure 20 below shows that two of the six (33%) VET respondents were members of the PRIA including one who at the time was a member of the Victorian board. Four respondents (67%) were not PRIA members.

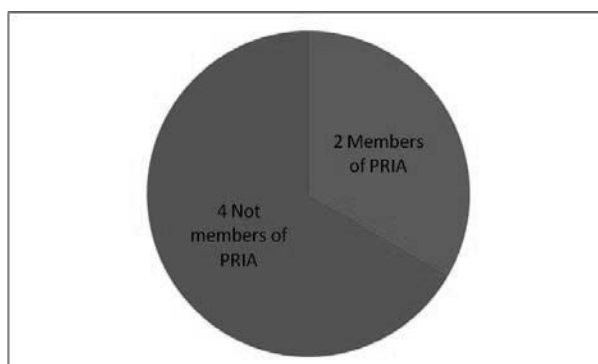


Figure 20: Respondent PRIA membership - VET

Looking at PRIA membership across all 51 respondents interviewed from both sectors, 33 (65%) are members and 18 (35%) are not members. While it can be argued that 65% of respondents being members is positive, the 35% who have elected not to be part of the industry body for the field they teach in is not negligible. It is difficult to draw a clear conclusion from this but it may be that the status and influence of the PRIA itself is not at a level that makes membership vital. This study

questions whether Public Relations is the right name for the discipline and the low number of courses that purport to be PR courses that do not use the term in their titles is one factor in determining that. It is also possible that the term 'Public Relations' in the title 'PRIA' is increasingly redundant and weakens the connection between the industry and the academy. If this is the case, this could in some way contribute to what is not a high rate of PRIA membership among the respondents. As we have seen earlier, less than four per cent of practitioners in one state have the term 'Public Relations' in their title (Bartlett & Hill 2007) so why would they join the PRIA? Equally, why would educators who teach in a course called Bachelor of Communication join a body called the PRIA?

Opinion about whether 'Public Relations' is the right name for the discipline

As mentioned in Chapter Two, there has been discussion and disagreement around settling on the right name for the discipline of Public Relations since after the First World War.

Of the 29 respondents to this question about whether or not Public Relations is the right name, 16 (55%) believed that Public Relations was the right name for the industry, 10 (35%) thought that it was not and three (10%) were ambivalent. For various reasons, including simply dismissing it as an 'old chestnut', 22 (43%) respondents did not answer this question. It appears that there is still no consensus about whether 'Public Relations' is the right name for the future of the industry.

This was such a highly contested question and it is about an issue as central as the name of the academic discipline and the industry. Therefore, it is useful to include a large number of the responses to demonstrate that even though the majority of respondents who answered this question (actually a minority of only 31% of all possible respondents) agreed that Public Relations was the right term, many of them were less than enthusiastic about it. Some of the responses reveal interesting thoughts on the subject. Throughout this thesis the terms 'PR' and 'Public Relations' have been used interchangeably but this particular question was framed around the

term 'Public Relations', not 'PR'. This was made clear to respondents. Responses here are cited as each respondent said the term – either 'PR' or 'Public Relations'. Some used both.

Some of the responses that are indicative of those who believe Public Relations is the right name for the discipline include, the emphatic:

I think it is the right name. It has a long history. (H33)

Public Relations is the robust umbrella term, a good term. (H5)

Yes. PR is the right term, because of publics and relationships. (H26)

Some were just accepting of the title rather than enthusiasts for it and their views included:

It is OK. You can easily explain it. (H29)

The term is inadequate but useful. (H42)

Some respondents conceded there were negatives associated with the term despite believing it was the right term. Their views included:

It is the right term but it comes with baggage. PR is the right term but comes with history. I sometimes say PR *and* communication. Our job is to do a PR job on PR to increase understanding (of it). (H10)

The only justification for using the term is that it is used overseas. There is too much baggage here. It is a recognisable term but we grapple with it. Does the term PR contribute to its (that of Public Relations) 'air-head' reputation? (H4)

PR is the right term but people don't use it in industry. The term is derided. (H38)

We are doing ourselves a disservice by trying to invent a new term. (H28)

Public Relations is a fine term and that we need to invest new meaning in it and 're-spin it!' (H44)

Two respondents believed it was the right term, but only if it couldn't be changed:

I would change it to Public Relations and Communication Management and would change it to add Communication Management not to drop Public Relations. (H32)

Keep PR unless we can change it to something else – Communication? Corporate Communication? (H8)

The view of H6 could be seen as the rally cry for the term Public Relations:

Yes Public Relations is the right term. Might not be sexy. Might be misunderstood. If you give it up you put your hands up in defeat. Why not fight for it? There is an academic body of knowledge.

Those respondents who did not believe that Public Relations is the right term for the discipline can be divided into two groups – (1) those who felt passionately that it was wrong, and (2) those who just preferred something else.

The following quotes are representative of those from the first group who passionately disagreed with the term. A number of them have been included and they are quoted verbatim to communicate the conviction of their views:

Public Relations is the wrong term. I loathe and detest it. The PR term is not helpful. It has become pejorative. PR is not a single thing. We stay with it (the term) because it does what it needs to do. There are other career pathways and job titles and that is OK so 'Public Relations' will do (as a term). Ethical graduates and professional leadership can improve the reputation of PR as a profession. (H39)

The term Public Relations is irreparably damaged. There has been no effort to rehabilitate it. I use the term Communication. Public Relations (the term) is hardly used in Europe at all. They favour Communication Management. (H30)

PR has a stigma and is misunderstood and I don't want to have to explain it. (H9)

No, the term has too many negatives and doesn't fit PR practice. (H11)

I am not a fan of it. The literal form (of the term Public Relations) is open to too many misinterpretations. Only six per cent of PRIA members use the term 'Public Relations'. I prefer 'Public Relations and Communication Management'. (H31)

Among the second group, the responses included:

Is PR the term going to survive? It should be called Strategic Communication not PR. PR is the old-fashioned term, Corporate Communication, etcetera, are better, more modern. (V6)

I prefer 'Relationship Management'. (H43)

We should change the name to Strategic Communication and improve the reputation of PR. (H16)

The term PR is tainted and I prefer 'Communication Management'. (H45)

As shown in Chapter Two, Edward Bernays chose to call his work 'publicity direction' because of his dissatisfaction with the terms of the time, including 'press agency' and 'publicity' (Bernays 1952, p. 78). In the early 1920s, he began to describe what he did as 'counsel on Public Relations' (Bernays 1952, p. 82) and this led others to start to use the term 'Public Relations'.

It is of note that we are now well into the twenty-first century, yet still grappling with issues that Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays were dealing with a century ago. Bernays

(1952, p. 78) did not enjoy what he considered to be the negative connotation of some of the early terms for Public Relations and experimented with different terms that he hoped would bestow on it a “greater dignity”. The same desire for dignity still exists. Yet the majority of respondents were still in favour of the term ‘Public Relations’, and some enthusiastically so. This is surprising given how rarely the term is used in corporate Australia and indeed in the titles of university Public Relations courses.

The key finding here is that 22 (43%) of the potential 51 respondents did not care to engage with this topic, only 16 (31%) cared enough about it to answer the question in the positive, and the remainder were not in favour of the term ‘Public Relations’ at all. Although the term is used by the industry body, the PRIA, as has been previously stated it is not used very often in organisations and job titles. It is also not used by most courses that claim to be in fact Public Relations courses. There is not a lot of support for the term, despite a majority of actual respondents to this question agreeing it was the right name for the discipline.

Respondents’ thoughts about whether PR is a profession

Six (11%) respondents gave no answer to this question including one who said “don’t care, doesn’t matter” (H44). Of the 45 responses to the question, 23 (51%) believed that Public Relations is a profession and 22 (49%) did not.

Among those who believed that Public Relations is a profession, seven respondents (H19, H29, H23, H16, V2, V4 and H26) were emphatic in tone but answered simply ‘yes’. V3 said that Public Relations is a profession to be proud of and H39, while saying yes, also hedged his or her bets, stating:

PR is a profession, not in the traditional sense but yes, it has ethics, its own theories, emerging theories, is reflective and critical so it meets the definition of being professional. It is an evolving definition.

H7's point of view looked at the discipline and the industry from the perspective of the academy but using a vocational measure, and stated:

Yes PR is a profession. We are graduating the quality of students required by a profession.

The 49% of respondents who did not believe PR to be a profession typically used other descriptors for it, including that it is a "family of practices" (H4), "a craft" (H2), "a practice" (H6), and "a proto-profession" (H1). V6 said that it is "a discipline that should be part of the profession of management" and H10 described it as "not a profession by the strict definition but we teach the professional practice of PR".

Reasons for these and others' perspectives included "a profession has strong ethical framework requirements" (H6), "a lack of individual accreditation. There is no separate accrediting body" (H28) and "in the UK they have a legislative framework (that we don't have here) so it is a profession there" (H43). H1 believed that "there is not enough theory for it to be a profession."

H38's view is that "we should aspire to being a profession but it is not a full profession by some definitions. A professional is just someone who is not just in it for the money. You just don't give advice people want to hear". H45 blames the PRIA for PR not being a profession, saying that "based on the traditional definition, Public Relations is not a profession. Anyone can call themselves a Public Relations practitioner so PR is not a profession. It is an industry and an occupation but it is unable to regulate itself. The PRIA has failed to achieve that."

This rejection of PR as a profession is not surprising because, as seen in the previous section, the term Public Relations is barely used, if at all, in organisations, whether to describe a department, a function or a person's title. Communication, or the plural 'Communications' and its abbreviation 'Comms', has become the norm. The PRIA has either not sought to or has not been influential enough to affect the decline in usage of the term in organisations or for courses in Higher Education. As a result of these

issues, it is not unusual that respondents' views about the professional status of Public Relations would be mixed given the term 'Public Relations' is rarely used.

The age group of the respondents, as described earlier in this chapter, is likely to be a factor in many respondents believing Public Relations is an appropriate term for the discipline and whether or not it is a profession. The majority of respondents would have started their careers when Public Relations was a more commonplace term, as the researcher did. As such they could feel a greater (and longer) connection to it and, perhaps, the notion of its status as a profession, than those who have come in to a discipline widely known as 'Communication/s'.

Many respondents' views were in agreement with Toth and Aldoory (2010, p. 4) who declared Public Relations "a global profession". Much like Kruckeberg (1998, p. 235) who considers Public Relations "professional" but not yet a profession and prefers the term "professional occupation", some other respondents who agreed that Public Relations is a profession or perhaps more accurately 'professional', also included some sort of disclaimer in their response. For example, H24 said "yes, it is a profession" but also said "but it is also a craft as there are things you need to be able to do". H8 stated that "yes PR is a profession but I have never had the term in my title (when in industry). People avoid it". This view is consistent with many of the issues raised in the above discussion about whether or not Public Relations is the correct name for the discipline and also with the question as to whether it is possible for something to be a profession while there is so much uncertainty about what it can be called.

H9 continues the theme of the uncertainty about the name of the discipline by saying that:

Irrespective of what it is called, it is absolutely a profession as it has a lot of the hallmarks of a profession. It is a profession because it has an industry body that benchmarks and checkpoints, because it is taught at universities and is a senior management function.

V1 was another respondent who stated that PR was a profession but added the disclaimer "...but it needs an industry body that requires a governing body. There is no accountability though and you need that to be a profession, like the CPA (Certified Practising Accountant)". V1 is pointing out here the absence of one of L'Etang's criteria for a profession that was cited in Chapter Two: "an occupational organisation testing competence, regulating standards and maintaining discipline"(2003, p. 50). V5 believed "PR is a profession; however, it is being diluted by integration. The interdisciplinary approach waters it down".

H5 stating that "people don't have to join the PRIA to work in it (the Public Relations industry)" and pointing to that lack of regulation of Public Relations practice as a reason it is not a profession was in line with the thinking of Bernays who said in 1989, albeit about Public Relations in the US, that:

any plumber or car salesman or unethical character can call themselves a public relations practitioner. Many who call themselves public relations practitioners have no education, training, or knowledge of what the field is (cited in Seitel 2017, p. 44).

The role that education plays in Public Relations being a profession was referred to by two respondents. In Chapter Two, a number of perspectives about the role of education in a field becoming a profession were put forward. Heath's view (2006, p. 429) was that a standardised approach to education has a pivotal role in the establishment and existence of a discipline or vocation being recognised as a profession. Fitch (2014b, p. 623) sees Public Relations education as a "professionalisation strategy for a professional organisation" referring to the PRIA. H44 linked education to the notion of professionalism by stating "it can't be a profession without degrees". H31 said that "the existence of full professors adds to the prestige of the profession but the term 'Public Relations' holds us back a bit". At the time the fieldwork for this study was conducted, there were only four 'full professors' of Public Relations in Australia, and they are all respondents to this study. To extrapolate on H31's view, the profession of Public Relations being established on

the existence of so few professors is not conclusive, but perhaps it could be said that without their existence any claims to professional status would be even less conclusive.

There was little consensus about the use of the term 'Public Relations' to describe the discipline, and the respondents were also divided on whether they consider Public Relations to be a profession. These are both key outcomes of this study and the connection between them should be considered. Can something that does not have a name that everyone can agree on be a profession? If so, what is the name of that profession? These questions are unanswered by this study but set up new research possibilities.

PURPOSE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSES

This section builds on the foundations in Chapter Two that discuss *'The distinctive purpose of Higher Education – the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake'* and *'The distinctive purpose of Vocational Education – teaching skills for employment'*. Those sections explained why we have two post-secondary education sectors in Australia and grappled with why we have Public Relations courses offered in both of them. Understanding the purpose of both the sector and of each individual course provides parameters for how Public Relations education could be understood. If the purpose of a PR course is to be vocational, that is to assist students to develop the skills they will need for employment, then the elements of such a course are likely to be very different from a course that is academic in purpose and aims to educate for the sake of education.

Respondents were asked what the purpose of 'their' course was. Later in this chapter, those responses will be compared to their thoughts about the distinctive characteristics of the HE and VET sectors and if and how those environments impact on the purpose of the courses they work in or lead. The responses to this question

also provided an insight into how many respondents understood the purpose of the sector they work in.

Questions about the purpose of PR education are inextricably linked to what respondents considered to be their role as PR educators. This is also examined later in this chapter. It provides useful background to their responses to later questions about what they considered to be the distinctive characteristics of courses in their sector – whether they considered that university courses are inherently knowledge-focused and VET courses are inherently skills-focused.

Purpose of course – vocational or academic?

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the purpose of the course they worked in. To provide context to considering the views of respondents, it is useful to review some points from Chapter Two about the respective purposes of the two sectors – HE and VET.

There are two academic schools of thought on the purpose of universities. This was examined in detail in the literature review in Chapter Two. The first sees the role of universities to be to “provide a liberal education for their students and engage in research aimed at increasing society’s depth of understanding about the world” and having no connection to the employment of its graduates (Langtry, cited in Coady 2000, p. 88). The second school of thought is that universities have always had a “dual purpose – vocational training and education for its own sake” (Graham 2005, p. 28). This latter way of thinking is much less visible in the literature, highlighting that while there are two schools of thinking on this subject, the most commonly held view is that which favours the education of the ‘whole being’ over a focus on vocational outcomes. Importantly, Graham’s view is also that an attempt to be ‘dual purpose’ and to deliver both education and training at universities damages the value of each approach. It is critical that this rider should be considered as part of this discussion. The purpose of VET is less contested. Most scholars agree that it is about “learning for earning” (Norton Grubb, cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996, p. 30). VET is “education

and training designed explicitly with paid employment as the objective and in this way distinguishes itself from education which is justified for its intrinsic value” (Maglen, cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix, x & xi).

Notwithstanding the two schools of thought above about the purpose of universities, the findings revealed that the HE respondents consider there to be three distinct purposes of universities. These are:

1. in line with Langtry’s provision of liberal education without concern for employment outcomes
2. Graham’s dual purpose – vocational training and education for its own sake, and
3. purely vocational, preparation for employment.

Twenty-four respondents (65%) fell into the second school of thought mentioned above. They indicated that the PR degree they worked in was both academic and vocational in purpose. Typically, the response was ‘we try to do both’. These respondents didn’t “see them as either/or” (H33). This differs from the literature in that the most significantly held view supports the first approach above. There is an important distinction between the data and the literature review that helps to explain some of the lack of accord between the two. The literature is discussing Higher Education degrees generally, in terms of why they exist, and the respondents were being asked to specifically consider the purpose of the degree in Public Relations that they teach in or lead, in terms of why it exists.

Some respondents categorise the degree that they work in using the term ‘industry degree’, a type of HE qualification that distinguishes itself from a general (non-vocational) Arts degree or a degree in History, for example, and justify its dual purpose in that way. That distinction is based on this nature of degree preparing graduates for an industry, Public Relations in this case, and it is the vocationalism embedded in their approach that sees them described as ‘industry’ degrees.

Respondents who discussed the industry focus of their courses in this manner included H29 who said his/her degree was clearly academic, but that it “also provides the opportunity to see what is in industry...as we are here to prepare future PR practitioners so they understand it (Public Relations) comes from something solid – the body of knowledge – and the importance of it”. H4 had a similar perspective, saying that his/her course has an academic orientation but that students come for industry engagement and vocational outcomes. H4 attempted to grapple with what he/she called a “tension between the expectations of the students and what a Higher Education degree really is” (referring to universities not existing to teach job skills for graduates who will then meet the needs of industry). Others differentiated their university, rather than their degree, from the elite, traditional institutions in the Group of Eight, Australia’s leading research universities. Those respondents justified the dual purpose of their universities, that is, the inclusion of the teaching of vocational skills in their degree, by acknowledging that they are not in fact a leading research university and that their view is that their university exists to provide the labour force for industry. H29 also did this, comparing his/her university to another and describing a course from the other as “just academic”, as if to suggest that it was inferior to an industry degree in terms of preparation for employment.

There is a risk that some of the views of HE respondents about their degrees being ‘industry degrees’ and focused on preparing students for employment in the PR industry could sustain Fitch’s description of where Public Relations degrees have been traditionally taught – in “vocationally-oriented second-tier institutions” (Fitch 2014b, p. 623). By conceptualising PR degrees as ‘industry degrees’, perhaps the universities that teach them will continue to be considered as such. Equally, by definition, ‘industry degrees’ signify HE and VET encroaching on the domain of the other. A possible outcome of that approach is that the corollary to Buchanan’s description that “TAFEs turn themselves into little downmarket universities”(Buchanan 2011) is that universities become ‘second rate trade schools’. Another caution of embracing the notion of an ‘industry degree’ being a legitimate approach to Higher Education is

the possibility that some universities, according to respondents and to scholars (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 6; L'Etang 2008, p. 249), are delivering them, including degrees in Public Relations, not because of their academic status but because of a belief that they are 'cash cows'.

Conversely, there were five (11%) HE respondents who described their PR degree as purely academic in purpose and as such not focused on preparing students for work in the industry but instead focusing on the provision of a liberal education without a focused and specific concern for employment outcomes.

However, closer analysis of the four descriptions of the purpose of their courses suggests that the respondents are not actually describing courses that are not vocational in intention. For example, even though H28 nominated his/her degree as wholly academic, he/she also described the course as "being in transition from being vocational to academic in orientation but (still) with a practical focus". Similarly, H5's course aimed to offer foundations for a career "in or near PR" and explained the non-vocational aspect as the degree not just being about ensuring graduates are employable but also providing them with the appropriate personal development as well.

The perspectives of 11 (24%) HE respondents fell into the third category, describing their PR degree as purely vocational in purpose, a position for which there was no support in the literature. Their responses included that their degrees were:

Vocational! The course is structured with embedded theory and academia but we focus on graduate capability. We focus on real work. (H16)

Vocational because employability is used as an indicator of success. (H42)

These respondents did not see their degree as academic in purpose at all. According to earlier discussion about the purpose of the two sectors, it could be said that their degrees fit more closely with the philosophy of the VET sector. This figure will give

context to a number of poignant discussions later in this chapter about many of the themes explored in this study.

Of the six VET respondents, five (83%) reported that their PR course was purely vocational in purpose and one reported that the PR course he or she worked in was both vocational and academic in purpose. The latter reference to a partly academic focus could be seen to be a surprising response given the distinctive purpose of vocational education being teaching skills for employment. The five respondents who described their courses as purely vocational did however describe an objective that fits comfortably into the reason that the VET sector exists.

There are a number of noteworthy findings based on this line of enquiry. The view expressed by 11 (24%) HE respondents that their degree was purely vocational is surprising given the discussion in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two about the two schools of thought about the purpose of Higher Education being the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake along with preparing students for work in industry. The literature review did not reveal any support for the idea that Higher Education's goal was purely vocational, hence the surprise that as many as 26% of respondents expressed this view (Collini 2012; L'Etang 2003; Markwell 2007; Newman, cited in Boschiero 2012). Some of the responses from HE respondents that are completely contrary to the two main schools of thought about the purpose of HE included one who said that the purpose of the course that he/she taught in was:

to produce beginning practitioners with technical skills to do beginning jobs but with the thinking skills to develop their careers. (H36)

Despite also valuing the development of 'thinking skills', the focus of this response on technical skills development, and the absence of any reference to the acquisition of knowledge, means it would sit comfortably in the VET sector. This is not to say, however, that there is not 'thinking' in VET courses, just that what they have in common is the teaching of technical skills for employment without a focus on the

acquisition of knowledge. Another HE respondent stated that the purpose of the course he/she taught in was “to produce graduates who have a fully rounded experience of Public Relations ready for a career in a public communication role” (H41). H18 said that he/she hoped to produce graduates with a strong understanding of PR theory and practical skills to carry out a role and to produce work in line with the expectations of industry.

Each of these responses is inconsistent with the discourse in Chapter Two about the philosophical underpinnings of HE. For example, there is a significant disconnect between H18’s objective of producing graduates “to produce work in line with the expectations of industry” and Spies’ (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000, p. 20) objectives for universities to guide students through a process toward the goals of:

“A search for welfare

A search for truth

A search for order and freedom

A search for what is good, and

A search for beauty.”

Robinson (2006, n.p.) believes that (university) education is about educating the whole being. This is contrary to the views of H18, H41 and H36 who favour skills development for employment. H7 tempered his or her view by stating “too much technical training at the expense of academic thinking and analysis is the pendulum swung too far”).

Another finding is that although five (11%) HE respondents described their PR degree as purely academic in purpose and as such not focused on preparing students for work in the industry, their justifications for those views revealed that their courses really were a hybrid of academic and vocational. Like 24 (53%) other respondents, their courses were not actually wholly academic as they claimed. Some respondents

have self-identified as teaching in wholly academic courses when they also claim that they are vocational.

The standout finding from this data is that even though the findings show that 29 (64%) HE respondents claimed their courses were both academic and vocational in purpose and five (11%) claimed to be wholly academic, the responses of those 11 per cent fit more accurately into the category of both academic and vocational. This means that objectively the courses of 34 (75%) HE respondents, not 29 (64%), are both academic and vocational. When the 11 (24%) respondents who described their degrees as wholly vocational are also taken into account, it is clear that HE courses in PR are, to varying extents, vocational in purpose.

This finding goes a long way to answering some of the study's key questions about whether university and VET PR courses are academic or vocational, what the similarities and differences between courses in the two sectors are and what the role of an academic versus a vocational orientation is. As such, it is a useful foundation for the specific answering of the research questions in the following chapter. This finding demonstrates that from the perspectives of the respondents to the study, most university PR courses are at least partly vocational in their purpose, that is they are focused on preparing students for work in the Public Relations industry, and some are entirely so. They focus on teaching skills for employment and meeting industry needs and therefore are not inherently theoretical. The finding supports the idea that VET PR courses are at least in part inherently practical, focusing on developing skills for employment. Now that the purpose of PR courses in Australia has been established, this provides a good foundation for the next section which examines what the respondents consider that the purpose of PR courses should be.

Respondent views about whether PR courses should be vocational or academic

Separate from the discussions about the focus of their courses, some respondents outlined their own thoughts on whether PR courses should be taught from an academic or vocational basis. There were not enough of these responses to provide meaningful analysis, however the perspectives of some of the respondents on the 'right way' to teach PR courses add to this study.

The views in favour of teaching Public Relations with an academic orientation and drawing on the academic body of knowledge included the following two perspectives from HE respondents:

University courses should be based on an academic body of knowledge so that students can develop their analytical and reflective skills; so they can gain a comparative, contextualised understanding of the field through the study of world-wide research; to allow them the possibility of progressing to higher degrees. [Compared to a TAFE course] in a uni course using applied learning it would be systematically and constantly referring back to published academic materials, there would be more emphasis on research and the development of theoretical understandings. In a university course there would be a balance between theoretical and contextual understandings, research and skills development. (H21)

By definition a university must have a theoretical foundation on which the practical can be built (so the courses at his/her university are academic). (H38)

The views in favour of teaching Public Relations with an industry orientation and incorporating case studies, industry speakers and the advice of industry advisory panels included these two from VET respondents:

Teaching aligned to industry is the priority. (V2)

Our students are work ready. Our course gives students the work skills they need to start careers. (V1)

Their perspectives are unsurprising and entirely consistent with the reason the VET sector exists. Conversely, the following two perspectives from HE respondents shed a different light:

PR is not an academic discipline so of course it should be taught with a vocational focus. (H3)

Our course is, and should be, vocational. It develops PR professionals. (H13)

These two views could sit comfortably with the perspectives of their VET contemporaries above as they clearly articulate that PR should be taught vocationally.

Some HE respondents thought PR courses should have both an academic and a vocational outcome. Their views included:

It is important for university PR courses to do both – be led by teaching and practice. PR struggles for academic legitimacy. Deal with that through scholarship. But bring in speakers (from industry). Always encourage reflection. Consider using guest speakers as a way of analysing ethical practice. We could introduce work-integrated-learning in a theoretical framework. (H45)

The two – the practice and education – need to work together a lot more, but that is hard. Practitioners want to get on with it and academics seem too slow. We bring practitioners into class but we are using them less and less. The profession won't survive without a layer of theory. PR needs to embrace theory and research. (H32)

Respondents from both sectors, to varying degrees, support teaching Public Relations with an industry orientation for vocational purposes. This will be explored further in the next section.

Respondent views about the purpose of the course they teach in/lead

This interview question built on the two previous questions. Having asked respondents whether their course was academically or vocationally-focused, then asking them what in their opinion the focus of their courses should be, the next question asked them to consider why their courses exist – specifically what their purpose was. This question was intended to draw out broader answers than simply a choice between to teach with an academic or a vocational orientation. It also sought to explore issues including why their institute taught Public Relations at all.

The overwhelmingly key theme arising in response to this question was that most respondents, irrespective of whether they work in HE or VET, believed that the PR course they teach in exists to prepare students for employment. Twenty-three (52%) HE respondents believed that the primary purpose of their course was to prepare graduates for a career in Public Relations or an allied industry. A significant number of responses is provided below to demonstrate the extent to which HE respondents consider that their courses are ‘industry degrees’ that exist to prepare graduates for jobs in industry. The responses to what was regarded as the purpose of each respondent’s course included:

Giving students some skills to start a career. (H1)

Giving people some knowledge and skills that equip them for the future and keep them off the dole. Also, to produce students with some basic literacies and capabilities including critical analytical skills, knowledge in terms of context and communication theory and contextual studies. (H4)

To provide a good grounding for careers in PR and semi-related disciplines that PR skills can be used for. (H31)

We provide a sound basis for a first job. The content is based on textbooks and industry experience (of the lecturers) and advised by the industry panel. We teach a good set of motor skills with lots of practical examples involving

teamwork and creating a real working environment. A (mock) agency is key to that. Lecturers should come from industry and continue to work in industry after they start teaching and their industry experience gives their students a great deal of confidence when they go into a job. PR is not an academic discipline. We use case studies in our teaching. Lawyers, for example, need to look at case studies, same for PR. I can't envisage a (PR) course that wouldn't use case studies and (industry guest) speakers. (H3)

Preparing graduates for a career in PR and embedding skills to (enable them) to work in a range of organisations with the core foundation and knowledge they need. We want them to be thinking beyond just doing a communication function. We want them to be wondering how they will contribute to the evolution of PR. (H39)

All six of the VET respondents also stated that their courses existed to help graduates get jobs. Some of their views included:

To give students work skills they need to start careers. We aim to make them work ready. (V1)

The development of enough practical skills (for students) to get a job. (V4)

Training young people to get a job in industry so they walk into industry and be ready. (V5)

Another small group of respondents, all from HE, believed their courses existed for something other than preparation for work. These views included "to provide general education" (H1), "for personal development" (H5), "to produce students with some basic literacies and capabilities, critical and analytical skills" (H4) and "to develop citizens who can be social innovators and play a vital role in society" (H44).

While not the key theme to emerge from the responses to this question, the view that many Australian PR degrees exist purely to generate income for the universities that run them was commonly held.

Responses that were typical of this view included:

Our course exists for revenue flow and as PR is a niche course that is attractive to students. (H1)

It is important for the university to have vocational degrees as this is an 'applied' university. Our purpose is to make money for the university. (H44)

Our course makes money for the university. (H31)

The key findings are that courses in both sectors exist for two reasons – to prepare graduates for jobs in the PR industry and to make money for the institutes that run them. The first finding as it pertains to courses in the VET sector is predictable and appropriate, given that people tend to expect that TAFE courses are inherently practical and focus on developing in their graduates the skills they need for employment. It is also entirely consistent with the literature that categorises VET courses as being primarily concerned with “learning for earning” (Norton Grubb, cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996, p.30) or teaching the ability to perform a series of tasks in the workplace (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, pp.36-37).

The first finding as it relates to courses in the HE sector contrasts with one of the schools of thought from the literature about the purpose of universities being to develop the whole person without vocational intent. Given the previous findings about the respondents' views about the orientation of their courses and what they considered the orientation of their courses should be, this earlier discussion about education philosophy and higher order ideals about how Public Relations should be taught can be largely set aside to consider this question. When respondents were asked not for their educational preferences or an account of whether their courses focused on the academic or the vocational, and just asked about the reality of why their courses exist, overwhelmingly they answered that it was to produce graduates with the skills they needed to get a job in the Public Relations industry.

With respondents stating that their university course exists primarily “to equip graduates for industry” and “to prepare students for work in PR”, this is in contrast to the ideals of a university education that describe providing students with a liberal education removed from a focus on employment for its graduates (Langtry, cited in Coady 2000, p. 88) which was the view of the dominant school of thought as identified in the literature review. The respondents’ view is also not aligned to the idea that a university education provides graduates with a “habit of mind formed that lasts through life” and develops attributes that include freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom” (Newman, cited in Boschiero 2012, p. 1).

One respondent described what graduates needed, quite differently from Newman’s view, as “the ability to confidently apply for a graduate PR position and they need the skills and knowledge to do that and these include writing, interpersonal skills, empathy, communicating with and understanding people, strong research skills, analytical skills and nous “(H22). One of the characteristics of a modern university education, according to Collini (2012, p. 7), is the provision of an education that is something more than professional training. Walker’s belief (2006, p. 4) is that a “democratic society requires an educated citizenry blessed with virtue as well as wisdom and knowledge” and as university becomes a mass education movement, not an elite one, this moral role of universities to be more than just teachers of work skills becomes more important. These ideas were not part of how most respondents described the purpose of their course.

The ‘dual purpose’ approach mentioned previously about the role of university education having two purposes – “vocational training and education for its own sake” (Graham 2005, p. 28) “catastrophically blurs” the roles of education and instruction and diminishes what ‘philosophical education’ and ‘mechanical instruction’ individually offer (Graham 2005, p. 27). Graham values the distinctive purposes of the two sectors – HE as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and VET as teaching skills for employment – and considers that when an institute tries to do both, the integrity of both is lost. These findings demonstrate how aligned the espoused

purpose of the HE and VET courses are in their determination to equip graduates with skills for jobs. It is perhaps cautionary to view this similarity between courses in both sectors as a potential loss of the distinctive capacity of both sectors.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the HE sector has come under increasing pressure from government to develop 'graduate attributes' in HE students and achieve measurable levels of graduate employment. This means that government no longer funds universities in the spirit that Bertrand Russell favours, so that they can help to create 'wise citizens of a free community' (Russell, cited in Chomsky 2000, p. 38). University graduates need to get jobs and universities need to demonstrate that they have equipped them with the skills to do that. To apply Carter and Gribble's definition of Vocational Education and Training (cited in Tovey & Lawlor 1994, p. 10), that it is not a sector per se but "any learning activity which contributes to successful economic performance and tangible economic and social gains", the HE sector can be seen to now be mandated by government to provide Vocational Education and Training and measured on how well it does it. Universities are now advertising their position on league tables of graduate employability rankings as a student recruitment exercise (Top Universities 1994-2018).

There is a significant difference in the literature about the purpose of universities compared to the literature about the purpose of the VET sector in terms of their inclusion of the topic of graduate attributes. Literature on the purpose of universities rarely discusses graduate attributes, the qualities (and skills) that individuals with degrees from a particular university have been educated to possess, yet literature on the purpose of VET is almost always centred on students developing employability skills (Blunden 1997; Misko 1999; Seddon 2011; Tovey & Lawlor 2008; Wheelahan 2011). Literature does confirm though that both sectors are under more pressure to prove their value with measurable results (Guthrie 2011, n.p.).

Graduate attributes, or learning outcomes, have become increasingly, although not entirely, employment-focused and linked to the industry attached to the area of study. For example, the 2018 Deakin University handbook lists eight learning

outcomes. Seven of them are generic and include 'problem solving', 'team-work' and 'critical thinking'. The other one is 'discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities' which is explained as follows:

can be defined as a set of understandings that is more granular than broad knowledge of a field. It's the sort of knowledge that is specific to the discipline or profession and defines a specialist in the area (Deakin University 2017).

That universities now publish the graduate attributes that they design their degrees and other programs to develop in their graduates can be seen to be shaping the beliefs of some respondents. This, along with many universities aspiring to produce graduates who are 'employable' and 'job ready', sees some respondents regarding the purpose of the course they teach in as being about the preparation of graduates who will be measured on how employable they are. Some respondents linked the importance of graduate attributes and employability measures to the purpose of their course, believing that their course needs to be vocational in intent so that it can adequately prepare graduates for jobs. This is summarised by these two quotes from HE respondents about what they considered to be the purpose of their degrees:

Vocational! The course is structured with embedded theory and academia but we focus on graduate capability. We focus on real work. (H16)

Vocational because employability is used as an indicator of success. (H42)

As discussed above, graduate attributes are mostly non-role specific. Therefore, the notion of having to develop them in graduates to explain why a university degree should be vocational is flawed. It is possible for universities to fulfil a desire to connect students and graduates with work by facilitating opportunities for them to get industry experience and exposure that can provide them with the desired "confidence to enter employment" (Gill 2016, p. 20) without them teaching industry skills and focusing on making graduates 'job ready'. Gill points out that a challenge for universities producing 'work ready' graduates is the risk of "weakening the theoretical and principle-base" to education and notes that in Australia the transition

from advanced education to professional employment is typically managed through work-integrated-learning (WIL) such as internships and professional projects (Gill 2016, pp. 20-21). As discussed in Chapter Two, this can be achieved without universities compromising on the goals of the distinctive purpose of HE – the cultivation and care of the community’s highest aspirations and ideals (Collini 2012, p. 86) – and leaving the VET sector which exists “to provide people with training that leads to jobs” (Robinson 2006, n.p.) to teach industry skills. At best, using as an example the Deakin University graduate attributes listed earlier, where one of eight is vocational and the other seven are generic personal development or ‘life world’ qualities (Habermas, cited in Light, Cox & Calking 2009, pp. 46-47), a portion of the content and focus of a university degree that is linked to an industry could be vocational. The other attributes and outcomes can be developed as a consequence of acquiring a liberal education aimed at increasing (student by student) society’s understanding of the world and removed from teaching skills (Langtry, cited in Coady 2000, p. 88). The graduate attributes of a number of universities were examined in Chapter Two. Using one of them as an example – Deakin University which has eight graduate attributes, seven are generic and one is skills-based – and applying a ratio of seven generic qualities to one set of vocational skills to its PR degree, the outcome of a university education could be considered using a fractional basis. In this case, it would be seven parts “a habit of mind formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom” (Newman, cited in Boschiero 2012, p. 1) and one part the ability to write a media strategy.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from these findings.

Firstly, according to the perspectives of HE respondents, HE PR courses are similar in intention to VET PR courses in that their primary purpose is to prepare graduates for employment in the PR industry. This brings into question the perception that university courses are inherently theoretical and focused on gaining knowledge, which is the significant but not exclusive outcome of the literature, and that VET courses are inherently practical and focused on building job skills. In fact, these

findings demonstrate that respondents do not describe this as being what is occurring and that no such difference exists. Another key proposition of this study is that, from the perspectives of the respondents, PR courses in both sectors focus primarily on skills development for employment.

Secondly, HE courses preparing students for employment, which is the traditional domain of the VET sector, leads to a blurring of the sectors. A consequence of that for society is the loss of the inherent value created by the two sectors fulfilling their purpose. It is difficult to determine whether this blurring of the sector objectives is “catastrophic” as Graham believes (2005, p. 27) or if it is simply an evolution that re-imagines HE as a VET provider and perhaps inevitably leads to the decline of the notion of education for its own sake. The blurring of the sectors results in each sector doing what the other sector has traditionally done but without having the appropriate staff and ethos to do so. Consequently, neither sector is performing as well as the other does in fulfilling its political purpose.

HE EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A UNIVERSITY COURSE IN PR

This section looks at the views of HE respondents about what defines a university course in Public Relations and the following section outlines their VET counterparts’ views about what defines a VET course in Public Relations. Given the perspectives of both groups in the previous sections about what the purpose of PR courses should be and how they categorise the orientation of the course they work in, the responses to these questions were intended to provide context about educators’ understanding of the two sectors to better understand the views outlined earlier. These findings are also likely to provide additional data about the similarities and differences between HE and VET PR courses and whether university courses are inherently theoretical and VET courses are inherently practical.

Three key themes emerged from the responses provided by HE respondents about what they consider to be the distinctive characteristics of a university course.

According to them, courses should:

- develop critical thinking skills
- be based on theory-based learning, and
- offer a theoretical foundation for a career in the Public Relations industry that is different than that provided by the VET sector.

HE respondents said that they should “develop critical thinking skills” (H2), “teach critical analytical reflective thinking” (H4) and “teach students to think” (H8).

One perspective that university courses have theory-based learning as their foundation was based on using the respondent’s course as an example. H1 stated that his/her course was based on critical cultural and political understandings, pointed out that their students learn to be able to assimilate PR activity into current affairs and understand how PR fits into how society operates and the ethical implications of how PR affects society. H35 also stated that his/her course was focused on providing a comprehensive education, and listed in order how his/her PR course could be described:

- 1 grounded in theoretical understanding
- 2 educate rather than train
- 3 broad, not just about Public Relations
- 4 should broaden the horizons of the students
- 5 should be about engagement with subject matter not just acceptance of it
- 6 should be about ‘think not just do’
- 7 should be adaptable.

The perspective of H37 partly supported that of H35 but also embraces the role of technical skills development in a degree. It attempts to navigate a perceived need for theoretical and mechanical instruction in HE PR courses and is cited in its entirety because of the contribution it makes to the discussion:

Irrespective of the field they are studying at uni, all students should learn critical analysis, self-reflexivity and to understand 'why'. In the case of studying PR, students bring little knowledge of PR with them so they need to learn what it is and how it works. They also need knowledge of what to do – technical knowledge, how to write a campaign, take a brief, have knowledge of budgets, working through processes like ROPE, learn the theory of PR. They need enough understanding and knowledge to do some technical work and some managerial work. They need enough critical skills to do some communication management, which is basically good practice underpinned by theory. (H37)

H36 concurs with this perspective and adds that in HE this is all done “with a theoretical framework around all of it, unlike TAFE which doesn't do theory”. This was among a number of responses that drew attention to the theoretical basis of their course by stating that it was unlike what occurs in the TAFE courses or the VET sector. These included:

Industry wants job ready practitioners and TAFE can do that. Uni provides knowledge, theory, evaluation and the critical thinking skills that can enable career progress. At TAFE they say 'this is how you do this, you copy me'. A uni degree has more regard than a TAFE qualification. (H11)

They do some good work at TAFE and have some well-qualified people. But university PR courses are self-accrediting, critically reviewed, arts-based and PRIA accredited. PR uni courses need to include persuasion, essay writing, theory and research, including teaching how to research and theories for research. Students need to learn argument. (H13)

At university you learn to look at things from different vantage points, for example, you write a release then reflect and look at agenda setting, management objectives, civil impact on society, government perspectives. Universities produce graduates who can deal with uncertain, fuzzy situations, learn to be strategic thinkers and problem solvers. University produces managers and TAFE produces technicians. (H39)

Observations made by the researcher about how the different ways the responses to this question were given, was an outcome of the use of Grounded Theory that enriched this data. This question was mostly answered in an abstract way, where the respondents shared their philosophies about universities that were mostly lacking from their other responses. This can be explained by the previous questions being interpreted as being specific to their course and this question being interpreted in a way that had nothing to do with their own course but was calling for their individual opinion about what the distinctive characteristics are of some other hypothetical university PR course. Responses were mostly given starting with 'they', whereas the previous questions were mostly answered with 'we'.

HE respondents believed that university PR courses were concerned with critical thinking, theory and having a focus on preparing students for the PR industry but in a different way from how they imagined the TAFE sector might carry it out. It was observably important to them to make that distinction from TAFE/VET, especially as many of them went on to say things that demonstrated, by their own admission, that they had no knowledge of the sector at all. One respondent, before critiquing the VET sector, even asked "What does VET mean?" (H44) before going on to say:

We (universities) do what TAFEs don't do, we draw on our research to inform our teaching and we also research in teaching and learning, the scholarship of it. A research/teaching nexus is critical but it can't be completely divorced from practice. (H44)

These findings show that even though respondents described university PR courses using typical HE language – ‘critical thinking’, ‘theory-based’, ‘research’ and ‘strategic thinking’ – most of the characteristics that they credited to university courses were still couched in terms of occurring to prepare graduates for employment in the industry. Despite the answers to this question being quite different in style and content from the previous questions about the purpose and orientation of their own courses, what unites them is the overwhelming view that in Public Relations, the overarching distinctive characteristic of a university course is that it prepares students for the industry it serves. These responses are consistent with the idea that HE courses are dual purpose and HE PR courses exist not only to provide theory-based education but also to prepare students for careers in PR or elsewhere. They also support the notion introduced earlier about them being ‘industry degrees’ which can be imagined as a hybrid of an ‘academic degree’ and a VET course. The data shows that HE PR courses mainly focus on developing vocational skills but in most cases, according to the view of the respondents, with some degree of theoretical underpinning.

VET EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A VET COURSE IN PR

This section outlines the views of the six VET PR educators interviewed about what they regard as the distinctive characteristics of a VET course in Public Relations.

The responses unanimously indicated that the distinctive characteristics of VET PR courses, by design, are about being linked to industry, about industry, to prepare students for work in industry.

The quotes below reflect their views:

The vocational focus burns in my brain. Students respond and enjoy hearing about teacher experiences. (V3)

The essence of a VET PR course is the exposure to industry practices and the fact that the teachers teaching PR are still working in the PR industry (so their ideas and practices are current). (V4)

TAFE courses have links with industry, hands on application of the learned information and a real focus on applying that knowledge. Our students can do a social media plan for an organisation. Can a uni student? (V5)

V5's perspective offers a moment of pause because, according to the findings of this study, the answer to the question about whether or not a university student can do a social media plan is a resounding 'yes'. If the university student's PR teacher has a relatively recent industry background and therefore the skills to write a social media plan themselves as well as to teach how to do it and, given their autonomy to decide content, also deems that that particular skill is important, then yes an HE student will learn how to 'write a social media plan for an organisation'. Given that the focus on technical skills development in HE PR degrees is almost identical to that of VET PR courses, it can be assumed that students from both are learning similar skills. V5 is using what HE is perceived not to be, to define what VET is. HE respondents also used the same approach to demonstrate that, from their perspective, that HE is something that VET is not.

This was also apparent in the VET respondents' consensus about the 'work-based' VET style being a key characteristic of VET sector courses. Responses included:

Like all VET courses, (ours) features work integrated learning, working with clients, current PR practitioners working on real projects with students, creating booklets and events and having a dedicated agency space to do real projects. They (students) do group assessments, project work, folios of work, develop a website, make presentations to clients, write long referenced reports and 20 hours in the workplace. (V1)

Work-based is the VET style. Close contact between students and teachers is part of how we teach. We reflect on workplace experience and put that back

into our teaching. We have a workplace focus not an academic one. All our teachers are industry experienced. Students learn the discipline of PR by working on live problems for organisations. We are not restricted to the lecture and tute model. (V6)

There is an overlap between the VET respondents' views about the purpose of VET being to prepare people for industry and those from HE who say exactly the same thing about the purpose of the HE PR courses they teach in. There are also parallels between what the VET respondents and the HE respondents said about preparing graduates for work.

The findings about the distinctive characteristics of VET courses are entirely consistent with the literature. They exist to teach skills for employment. The data about the distinctive characteristics of HE courses professes to be aligned with the views of Markwell (2007), Dee Fink (2003), Dewey (2007), Chomsky (2000) and others who support philosophies of educating the whole person and education and knowledge for its own sake. However, on closer analysis of the actual content of the HE responses, they align more closely with Graham (2005) and Gould (2003) who believe that universities exist to provide education *and* professional training despite Graham's warning that they do this at the cost of the value of both activities.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this data is that, irrespective of the language used by the respondents in both sectors, according to the PR educators interviewed for this study, most PR courses in VET and HE primarily exist to prepare students for employment in the Public Relations industry. Only 11% of HE respondents considered their PR courses to be purely academic and not vocationally-oriented. All VET PR courses are intended to be industry-focused and vocationally-oriented and the study confirmed that this is how those who work in them see them too.

The following section drills down a bit further from gleaning respondents' perspectives about the purpose of their sector and their course to what they consider their own role as a PR educator to be.

RESPONDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ROLE

The responses to the question '*What do you consider to be your role as a PR educator?*' were mixed but 26 (approximately 50%) respondents across both sectors considered their role to be vocationally-oriented, to produce 'job-ready' or 'work ready' graduates for the PR industry. Analysis of the data did not show any discernible difference in responses linked to the sector that the respondent worked in. For example, H1 said his/her role was to impart vocational knowledge and noted "that isn't found in journals" and V5 considered his/her role to help students get a qualification and a job. H28 also regarded his/her role to be "to prepare work-ready graduates for careers" and added that:

As an educator I am there to nurture and guide students, to develop (their) understanding of PR from a low base and to counter misconceptions, to promote ethics and truth in PR, for example, hospitals and charities use PR well, to encourage some students to do honours (need to develop their writing and research skills) and to promote PR as a profession. (H28)

H28's consideration of encouraging students to do honours was the only reference in the data from the entire study to this pursuit of any path that might lead to developing the next generation of PR academics and researchers. While there was robust opinion throughout the data about the need for more PR research, more people with PhDs in PR, more PR educators having PhDs, H28 was the only respondent to express a view that he/she was doing something about it. In the previous discussion about the ageing profile of respondents, especially in HE, H28's consideration that he/she has a role in encouraging students to consider a research focus rather than an industry one is welcome. As per the earlier discussion, with the

focus of Australian PR education being preparing graduates to work as PR practitioners, where will the PR researchers that the academic discipline and the aspiring profession need so keenly come from?

Other categories of responses about what respondents considered their individual role to be included:

- Being an evangelist for the PR industry
- Being a critical scholar
- Being a passionate and professional educator
- Engaging in research and keeping industry-current

A few respondents saw their role as an evangelist for PR as a career or as being part of correcting or improving the image and reputation of Public Relations as both a vocation and an academic discipline. H35 used the adage about education that 'the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled' to explain that the role of educators is to get enthusiasm from students not just absorption. He/she also pointed out that, as PR is misunderstood, it is the role of PR educators to get it right and to show the world [what PR is and can do]. H37 held a similar view, stating that the role of PR educators was to try to ensure the vision gets to the students, via the academics who teach. He/she said the role is to get students to understand the power of PR and what they can do with it, to clean up the negative image of PR, to "preach it". H37 noted that educators have to be the evangelists because industry practitioners don't have the credibility or the time to work on cleaning up the image of PR.

The following response was the only one to emphasise the need to be a critic of the discipline or to adopt a 'non-positivist' or 'critical' view about the role of an individual PR educator:

To convey the complexity and intellectual challenge of the work. To portray [Public Relations as] a field of excitement but with challenges needing to be navigated. Vocational outcomes are OK but some students actually want to know of its complexity, contradictions, etcetera. I need to be a 'critical scholar' and there is the tension (with that of) slagging off the field and recognising (that) students want to be in PR. We need to (show them the way to becoming) reflective practitioners not just reproducing (the existing practitioners) that we have too many of. We need to ask students 'what kind of practitioner are you going to be?' We need them to (know and understand) the consequences of the practice. I am not a Grunigian. I cannot teach that PR is the best thing. I need students to be more realistic about the work and its downsides. (I see my role as an educator as being) a 'critical' but not hostile voice encouraging students to question their moral positions. (H42)

Some respondents described their role as being 'educators not industry trainers' and some of those saw their role as "helping students find their passion whether or not it is in PR" (H2) and "to mentor students to get them to learn to think strategically" (V6).H11's impassioned view is worthy of quoting in full:

We have to be educators. We have to teach them [students] something but they have to learn how to do it themselves. There is an intellectualisation, an interpretive step (but we have) fallen into the trap of being prescriptive. I don't give sample assignments or templates as it restricts creativity and prevents students from having to think. It prevents them from feeling discomfort.

There were also a couple of responses that focused on their need to engage in research and to stay current and connected to the PR industry (H9 and H38).

These findings are consistent with the broad ranging opinions among scholars as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading '*Perceived roles of educators and practitioners*'. Clemans (2010) opined that in the context of Public Relations

education and training, a VET PR course should develop a student's 'craft knowing' and an HE PR course should develop a student's 'critical knowing' of the subject matter of the discipline. Based on Clemans' view, the six respondents who work in the VET sector should have answered by discussing the teaching of skills for work and the 45 respondents who teach in the HE sector should have answered from the perspective of teaching critical thinking skills (Clemans 2010).

This was not the case as, as stated above, approximately 50% of the respondents, from both sectors, took a particularly vocational-focused approach to answering the question, explaining their role as essentially helping to prepare students for work. This differs from Pohl and Vandeventer's view (cited in Heath 2001, pp. 357-358,) that "academics do not consider themselves responsible for job training" as clearly half of the respondents to this study actually do. The other types of responses either adopted a 'positivist' or 'functionalist' approach to discussing Public Relations, which sees PR viewed as a neutral object of study and focuses on the motivations of organisations practising Public Relations, their goals and the effects of their activities (Grunig & White 2013, p. 41). Positivism as it refers to Public Relations, is typically non-critical of Public Relations practice and assumes that PR deals with planned, controlled and pro-active activities (Wehmeier 2006, p. 213). It is a key idea of The Excellence Project, a study funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) that looked at Management and Public Relations practices in 321 organisations in Canada, the UK and the US in 1990 and 1991 (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 2013, p. ix). In contrast to the more questioning 'critical' school, 'positivism' essentially champions the role of Public Relations practice in the world. Other responses could be seen to be championing the virtue of education itself. Those that were not vocationally-focused tended to be proselytising the idea of education for its own sake, rather than focusing on PR education or training. As such, some of those responses could be seen to be answering a question about the role of educators holistically rather than the role of PR educators specifically.

Some of the respondents referred to PR educators as 'we' and others to them as 'they'. As the researcher is obviously aware of who was interviewed, before the respondents were de-identified it was possible to match the responses to the interviewees. By doing this the two different perspectives are easily explained by the academic seniority of the respondent. Those referring to PR educators as 'they' either no longer teach or teach a relatively small amount compared to other interviewees, due to them holding managerial or course leadership roles. Of those who no longer lecture, some are engaged with PR students by way of PhD supervision. It could be seen that they are in fact talking about what they consider others should be doing rather than acknowledging any such role for themselves. It is important to note however that to be eligible to be part of this study, all interviewees had to identify themselves as 'PR educators'.

In the next section, the relationship between the industry and the academy and the respondents' perspectives on what it should be, and why, are explored.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY

This section examines two key and interrelated themes. The first is how the PR industry and the PR academy are linked and what impact that has on PR education from the perspectives of the respondents. It also explores what the respondents believe the relationship between the two should be and why. The second theme is the relationship between education and the professionalisation and professionalism of Public Relations.

The connection between the PR industry and the PR academy

This question was a long and broad ranging one – *'Do you believe that PR educators should align to the PR industry and incorporate case studies and guest speakers and the like or should PR educators draw purely on academic research and established texts? Should teaching lead practice or practice lead teaching?'* The researcher was

endeavouring to determine what the relationship is and might be between the PR industry and the PR academy, if there is one at all.

The responses to this question fell into three broad categories that incorporate the themes of the questions.

1. Both
2. Both but PR educators should draw to varying extents on industry content and practice should lead teaching
3. Both but PR educators should draw to varying degrees on academic research and established texts and teaching should lead practice

Both

Of the 28 responses to this question, seven (26%) fell into the first category. Those respondents were from both sectors and they believed that PR courses should be both industry-focused and theory-based. These included the following two responses from VET respondents:

Both as you don't learn academia in the workplace (so need to learn it while studying). (V6)

Students need to know the theory behind what they are doing. (V4)

HE responses included H5's perspective that it was a false dichotomy to choose between industry and academia as you need both to be relevant. This response serves as a meaningful summary of the views in this category. Other data-rich perspectives included:

PR courses should be focused on both the needs of industry and on academic theory. Students like guest speakers, etcetera but without a basis of academic research they can't understand, critique or apply industry knowledge. When

industry people do come in (to speak), we have to put an academic context around what they say as it's not always good. (H20)

Uni education teaches students to think but teaching should lead practice should lead teaching, like a circle. One informs the other. Theory goes over the head of students if you can't relate it to something real. We need to include theories of human communication, all the communication theories as a foundation subject. Teach Grunig, propaganda and persuasion, rhetoric, Aristotle on discussion and debate, ethics, stakeholder theory, agenda setting, semiotics and Habermas. (H8)

It should be a balance of both. PR teaching in Australia is in its infancy and still establishing itself in the world of academia. The PR discipline is fighting for status as a real discipline with a real body of knowledge and we should be connecting it to academia and society. We should showcase the mistakes (of the industry) not just present slick case study success stories. The case studies we present should be more than good news stories. (H19)

Both but PR educators should draw to varying degrees on industry content and practice should lead teaching

Nine responses (32%) fell into this category. Typical responses were:

I wouldn't like to choose. It's a bit like Sophie's Choice, but with a gun to my head I would go with industry. We have a moral obligation to help people to get jobs. Students are not here to learn for the sake of knowledge. (H38)

Aligning to the industry and drawing on industry resources and people but it is possible that I hold this view because of my ignorance of what is available in the journals as even though I am a PR educator, because I am from another discipline I am not a PR scholar. (H21)

PR is a 'doing' profession so I think courses should be based on industry. We love guest speakers and practical things. (V3)

Both but PR educators should draw to varying degrees on academic research and established texts and teaching should lead practice

Nine respondents (32%) believed that PR courses should be more academic and less vocationally-focused and that the PR academy should take the lead over the industry in building the discipline and vocation of Public Relations.

The following responses were among them:

Academics have more credibility and need to use it to lead the industry who may not have the knowledge of what PR is and how it works. We need to have the conversations to lead and shape the industry, to contribute to what PR should be. We can't teach out of a vacuum. We need a body of knowledge to be a profession... Even teaching 'how to' still needs standards, the more discussions, the more debates, the better. Ethics will only be informed by discussion. Practitioners won't have the inclination to do this work. Academics can lead the profession. Industry people have their thing to do, we have ours. We should be encouraging accreditation, leading conferences. We currently have the situation where there is an academic stream the day before Public Relations conferences, separated from industry. The whole conference should be led by academics, we should merge industry and academics and all share our information. (H37)

Teaching should lead... but we need to tread a line between being guided by the industry and being led by the educators. (H43)

H37, above, articulates a way forward for PR educators to show the leadership the PR industry – the PR profession perhaps – appears to need. In advocating for conversation between practitioners and educators, H37 is demonstrating that PR will not fulfil its potential as a well-regarded and understood profession if left to the industry or the academy to pursue that agenda independently. H37 is saying that while the academy can and should step up and lead it because academics have the skills and the capacity to do so, they cannot do it without the industry. H43's

perspective appears to concur that the academy should lead the industry but is mindful too that it needs to be done in unison with the industry.

This question also investigated whether Public Relations education has changed since its beginnings in the 1970s and then the 1980s, a period described by Fitch (2014b, p. 623) as marked with “contested and diverging understandings of public relations education, as either suitable training to meet industry requirements or as a theoretically informed academic discipline offering a broad generalist education”. Not all of the respondents enjoyed this question and many found it frustrating or hypothetical, not grounded in reality. In fact, for various reasons, including that they are not currently teaching or they did not like or understand the question, 23 respondents (45%), did not respond. However, of the 28 (55%) respondents who did, and who are quoted above, only one actively reacted to it – challenging its legitimacy and criticising the researcher. H15 rejected the premise completely, noting that it was “a false choice demonstrating no understanding of education”. He/she said that “education is about witnessable behavioural change, about (students) making a change in their life, (education) changes the way they are thinking. Guest speakers (from industry) can waste precious time if they are not good.” Beyond the use of speakers, H15 did not comment on whether PR educators should align to the industry or teach using academic resources such as texts and academic journal articles.

Fitch’s account of Public Relations education in the 1980s as being uncertain whether it should be “training to meet industry requirements” or an “academic discipline offering a broad generalist education” (2014b, p. 623) could be equally applied to Public Relations education this century.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE PR INDUSTRY

The following section is about whether there is a role for Public Relations education in the professionalisation of the industry and if so what it is. It explores whether

education makes a contribution to Public Relations as a discipline and vocation and whether it has an impact on it being seen as, or aspiring to be, a profession.

Respondents were asked what they thought the role of education is in contributing to the professionalisation of Public Relations. This was a question that respondents dealt with enthusiastically.

Five key themes about the role of education in the professionalisation of the industry emerged from the data and, with the exception of the first theme which was the view of only seven (13%) respondents, they each attracted a similar amount of support.

These are:

- Public Relations is already a profession
- Education will shape PR as it becomes a profession
- Education will provide the ethical framework and theoretical basis required for PR to become a profession
- Education will provide the graduates that a profession requires
- Education will help to improve the reputation and status of Public Relations.

Public Relations is already a profession

Respondents interpreted that the question implied that Public Relations is yet to become a profession (and that is a legitimate criticism of the question) and rejected the premise, saying “it is already a profession” (H32), “PR is a profession and PR education is increasing the professionalisation of PR” (H16) and “the sociology of professions is out of date – stuff from the 1800s. If someone is prepared to pay you and most big organisations have a senior PR team, then it is a profession.” (H25)

Others described the role of education as vital, noting that it was “how we have become a profession and will cement it as a profession” (H41) and that “PR is a profession already but education is at the core of making something professional. It is

the body of knowledge that defines and underpins the profession” (H18). H16 suggested that while Public Relations has positioned itself as a profession, it still has a way to go, saying that “fellows of the PRIA have different sections at conferences and educators are excluded. There is not a community of practice and education needs to be seen to be part of the profession for that to occur”. This echoes H37’s earlier comments and he/she is also quoted in the following section.

Education will shape PR as it becomes a profession

These perspectives assumed that the respondents did not accept that PR was already a profession. One response was representative of the opinions about how education will help to shape Public Relations as it becomes a profession. H37 said:

Public Relations education is everything if PR is going to be a profession with boundaries about who can enter it. Educators will be at the forefront of championing the body of knowledge, regulations, ethics and agreeing on what the profession is to be called (Public Relations or something else). The PR educator’s job is to find out what needs to be done and to lead the contribution, to have the conversations that will shape the profession.

Education will provide the ethical framework and theoretical basis required for PR to become a profession

H45 believes it is HE specifically – not VET – that will provide the theoretical framework for PR to become a profession:

PR is trying to adopt the profile of being a profession but is not there yet. It is a university qualification that defines people as professionals. People don’t graduate from TAFE courses as professionals. Education has a role in dealing with the ethical and professional issues of practice, the ‘way of thinking and knowing’ that is part of being in their field.

H35 stated that it is:

education that turns the practice of Public Relations from a technical to a strategic level of professionalism, research builds the body of knowledge in which a profession sits and allows for ethics issues to be discussed.

Education will provide the graduates that a profession requires

H7's view introduces this theme well:

I believe that education has a significant role in professionalising Public Relations and that is by graduating the quality of students required by a profession.

H8, H17 and V4 all believe that what a graduate has learned in their studies will contribute to the quality of the professional work that they do. Their views were:

[Students] would be better practitioners tomorrow because of the theoretical learning. (H8)

Our job is not just teaching. Our job is to give students opportunities to practise ethical decision making, dress codes, organisational hierarchies, CSR from a PR perspective. (H17)

Education is vital to understanding what PR is and the difference it makes. (V4)

Education will help to improve the reputation and status of Public Relations

A number of respondents said that the role that education could play in the professionalisation of Public Relations is in providing part of the substance required to improve the way people understand it as a discipline and a vocation, and consequently to improve its status.

H23 noted that "education provides the raw materials but practitioners need to lobby to change how PR is perceived as a profession" and H19 believes that the way to do

that is “to improve the understanding of what PR is and improve the knowledge base. To critically review and analyse what is being done and said. To inform practitioners on trends, evolutions, etcetera”.

It is appropriate to finish this section with one of the most often cited comments (outside of this study) about the irony of the status of the Public Relations industry. H10 stated that:

Our job is to do a PR job on PR and increase people’s understanding of it. PR is not a profession in the strict definition of the word but we teach the professional practice of PR. PR is the right term but it comes with history. It has baggage. I sometimes say PR *and* Communication (to boost the reputation of Public Relations).

The role of education in professionalism

The Global Alliance of Public Relations Associations’ protocols consider that Public Relations is a profession because its members have “mastery of a particular intellectual skill through education and training” (Theaker 2001, p. 68), supporting the idea that Public Relations is already a profession.

The view about the role of education in Public Relations becoming a profession is consistent with that of Heath and Coombs (2006, p. 429) who stated that “part of becoming a profession is standardised education/training”. H37 agreed with Kruckeberg (1998, p. 245) who argued that by claiming it as a profession, scholars can be part of providing Public Relations with “its own set of curricular needs and professional values”. This is consistent with the notion that education will shape PR as it becomes a profession. L’Etang (2003, p. 47) doesn’t totally agree that education will shape PR as it becomes a profession but does acknowledge that education is a tool which can help achieve that status. Her views are reflected in much of the discussion in Chapter Two about the distinctive purpose of HE and VET PR courses.

The contribution of qualifications in Public Relations to it being a profession was referred to multiple times. H2 and V2 described this well. H2 said that “anybody can say they are in PR without having any qualifications and that is a problem” and V2 believed that “the days of people being able to get into PR with no qualifications should be over and education is the only mechanism for doing that. There is still a view that anyone can do PR or Comms”. Others (H36 and H22) agreed with V2 but their approach was that the qualifications in PR that are required are strictly university qualifications. H36’s perspective summarises the point that graduates are starting to shape the industry and adding to its professionalisation. H36 also noted that university-educated practitioners will be dominant in the future. H22 notes that:

because you can do a degree in it, PR is taken more seriously. If it was only taught at TAFE it would likely be less regarded, not have the same status as it does now. It is a relatively new profession and needs to grow into its skin.

Another decade of PR education (at universities) will help.

The views expressed in this section support the notion that education in the form of qualifications will continue to professionalise Public Relations. That education will ultimately contribute to Public Relations meeting the traditional criteria of a profession and be widely regarded as one is a clear finding on this theme. This section serves as a logical forerunner to the following discussion about issues and challenges in Australian PR education as it raises potential aids or impediments to that goal.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

This section presents the respondents’ perspectives on a broad range of topics about the issues and challenges facing PR education in Australia in both sectors. It draws on the unique views of PR educators employed in a range of roles in both sectors around the country. These issues and topics include:

- The role of work-based learning

- Preparing graduates for globalisation
- PRIA course accreditation
- Quality of teaching
- Issues with teachers
- Issues with students
- Issues with the education system or sector
- The status of PR as an academic discipline
- The reputation of the PR industry
- The content of the courses themselves

The role of work-based learning

Many respondents – 40 (90%) HE respondents and five of six (83%) VET respondents – believed that a PR course has to offer students some connection to work, whether real work experience or an internship or similar, or working on real industry case studies or live clients. From their perspective, effective ways of providing that to students included everything from students “actually doing work” (H15) to “including case studies and live projects in courses” (V4) and “internships” (H11). Increasingly, this type of activity is called ‘work-integrated learning’ or ‘WIL’. There was no difference in the importance placed on it between respondents from the two sectors. Other views which focused more on industry engagement or industry relevance included that courses should:

(Include) industry engagement, practice underpinned by theory. Students must see it as relevant (so) need to connect it to students’ demographic. Need to help people understand industry, using good examples and case studies. Students learn better from case studies. (H9)

(Focus on) thinking, theory and analysis. Industry relevant using an advisory committee. Internships are good but we have distance issues and lots of international students so there are logistics issues. A PR project where they run a campaign for a client they get. Enough assessments for learning and skills development in writing, public speaking and interpersonal skills. All in an industry context. (H7)

These findings showed that respondents from both sectors value WIL in the form of internships or 'actual work' as being valuable parts of a Public Relations education. Respondents from both sectors also value teaching and learning 'in an industry context' whether as advised by an industry advisory panel or by using 'live case studies'. Another key conclusion from these findings is that in some ways contemporary Public Relations education has evolved since its beginnings and in other ways it is very much the same as PR education in the 1970s and 1980s.

One way it has changed since last century is the addition of internships and other work-based elements in PR programs in both sectors. The early PR qualifications, while being industry-focused in terms of being "suitable training to meet industry requirements" (Fitch 2014b, p. 623), were, as observed by the researcher, delivered in a traditional class-room based style largely by practitioners and ex-practitioners learning to be educators. Industry experience, or work-integrated learning, was not part of PR courses at that time. One way that current PR courses have not changed since the 1970s and 1980s is that they are just as focused on preparing graduates for jobs in industry now as they were then.

Preparing graduates for globalisation

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the role of PR education in preparing graduates for a global world. Some respondents answered the question as posed and others interpreted it as being about what their role as individual PR educators was in preparing students for globalisation. Others talked about what they were doing to bring impacts of and notions about globalisation into their teaching.

Some respondents lamented that they or their institutes were not doing enough to do so. Thirty-eight (75 %) respondents answered the question and all, whether or not they or their institution was engaging with this, believed there was a role for Public Relations education to prepare graduates for globalisation. Thirteen (25%) rejected the question as irrelevant and did not answer it.

Following are the views of some of the respondents who believed it was an important question and sought to answer it using examples of what is occurring in their courses to focus students on issues of globalisation affecting their future practice of PR.

H24 gave a considered and thoughtful response about the importance of bringing globalisation into PR education:

We teach multi-cultural communication as a unit to give it focus and highlight its importance. Students work on Skype with other students overseas. (We) leverage master's international students' experience. (We) ask them to tell us how certain things would be done in their country. There are 5000 Norwegian students in Australia at any one time. We could make an effort to learn their ways. We could encourage people to think beyond the technology and look at the issues, for example the outcome or the impact of technology not the tool of technology. We, not just Australians but all PR educators, have a tendency to teach PR as if it was a unitary concept across the world, whereas in reality we know that it varies enormously, for example in many Asian countries from my personal experience and, I believe, also in many Middle Eastern countries. Sometimes we focus on more obvious differences, for example the practice in some Asian countries of paying journalists to attend press conferences, but I am not sure that we give proper acknowledgement to the fact that many students attending Australian universities to learn PR will be going home to countries where much of what we have been teaching is just simply irrelevant, or at very best 'aspirational'. That could be excused, or maybe explained, by saying that it is part of promoting 'Western ideas' and democracy and that is a legitimate outcome if other countries choose to send their students to

Australia. But is it in the best interests of global understanding of the public relations industry?

H38's geographic location, that sees "their students and customers as Asian" is highlighted as being a reason that his/her university values the preparation of students for globalisation and said that preparing students for the realities of globalisation is one of their top priorities and it is embedded in everything they do. They also have a separate international PR unit. The following quotes provide the best representation of the wide-ranging responses about the importance of exposing students to globalisation:

Within university courses, theoretical units on the notion of globalisation and multi-culturalism, teaching influence, belief and argument, encouraging (students) to be alive to the impact of the smart phones in everyone's hands (in terms of how people can communicate), understanding local issues while working for (a multi-national organisation such as) Coke. Encourage them (students) to be aware of the world around them, look more broadly, teach them to ask 'what can I learn from that?' (H36)

By teaching cross-cultural communication. There is too little language studies at this point of history. (We encourage students to) think about work beyond Melbourne and Australia. Go to London, New York or Mumbai for work. Go to finance capitals if that is what you like. Students are driving this question (and we need to continue to find ways to answer it). (H5)

You don't have to cross borders to practise globalisation. In every unit we have some scholarship from another country. The philosophy we are trying to embed in our degree is that PR is different in different countries. (H45)

Technology and its role in connecting a globalised world was another theme to emerge from the data. V2 insisted that technology-based communication is a vital part of a globalised world and as such believed it is critical that PR students and PR educators keep up with technology. V2 said that students need to understand about

the people they are communicating with, understand specific needs of target groups and develop skills to identify difference between target groups.

Amongst the respondents, there were educators who believed that globalisation should have been underpinning PR education at their institutes, or that it “is absolutely critical” (H11), “critically important” (V6) and “not optional” (V5) but that they were in fact either doing too little or not doing anything at all to embed issues around globalisation into PR teaching at their institutes.

A couple of respondents focused on what they as individual PR educators considered that they do, or could do, to increase the global thinking in the PR courses that they work in. An example was:

Pursue international teaching opportunities. By rethinking and internationalising our curriculum. It is Western-based and needs to change. Increasing social media and technology in teaching and changing teaching practices to give a more global outlook and collaborating with international students. (H14)

The mixed reaction to this question from respondents was a noteworthy outcome in itself. The 38 (75%) respondents who answered the question did so with an enthusiasm and breadth of responses perhaps unseen in any of the other questions. They did not merely discuss what they considered the role of PR education to be in preparing students for globalisation, as asked, but they also described, in many cases in great detail, what their university or institute was doing in this area, discussed why they believed it was so important, highlighted the impact of technology and outlined the opportunity that it created. A couple of them outlined what they do or recommend other educators do to better enable them to prepare students for globalisation. It was certainly a question that elicited passion and thoughtfulness from those who responded. However, thirteen (25%) respondents dismissed the topic and did not answer the question. Given the tremendous insights provided by those

who did respond, it could be said that those who did not see the value in the question appear to be out of touch.

In Thomas Friedman's seminal book on globalisation titled: *The world is flat: a brief history of the twenty-first century*, published in 2007, he boldly stated that, on the basis of global movements for employment, amongst other factors, 'the world is flat' (Friedman 2007, pp. 30-31). The degree to which borders have opened and the world has flattened even more since, as well as becoming less western-centric in that time, is significant and in another decade when the current students and graduates are developing their Public Relations careers, having prepared for globalisation will likely look like a good idea.

Core concepts that can be taken from these findings about how PR courses can do that can be summarised by revisiting one of the responses to this question. H35 said that what was already being done in his/her course was "teaching students to be critically aware of what is going on around them", "internationalising the curriculum. In our case that is more than just putting in a few international case studies but rather by looking at how PR is practised around the world. Students research particular countries, not the US and the UK" and "using various ways of making the best use of the international students we have in the course and integrating their knowledge".

The responses to this question demonstrate that:

- many PR educators are already aware of the importance of preparing students for globalisation and have good practices in place to do so, including five of the six (83%) VET educators
- some educators are aware of its importance and are doing their best to embed ideas and practices into their courses, and
- as many as 25% of educators did not believe they needed to even engage with the question.

The latter were obviously the minority and the majority agreed that contemporary PR courses should be preparing students for a 'flat world'.

Quality of teaching

Respondents were asked how well they considered that Public Relations was being taught:

- At their university or TAFE institute
- In their sector
- Nationally
- Internationally.

Respondents only answered from the perspective of their university or institute, saying they did not know or had never thought about PR teaching anywhere else. Eight (16%) respondents answered the question simply by saying they did not know anything about how well PR was being taught anywhere. They either "didn't know" (H44 and H26), "weren't sure" (H13) or didn't "really know enough about what is happening" (H38) to comment. Very few respondents had a view about how well Public Relations is being taught beyond their own teaching of it and H4 stated that it was "a loaded question as it is hard to know or measure".

Sixteen (32%) respondents thought Public Relations was being taught well at their institute or university. There was still a range of opinions about how well they rated teaching at their institutions however. Responses that indicated PR teaching was being done really well included:

Very well at our university. We have strong industry input. Our campus is a long way from the CBD so increasing the students' exposure to the city would improve what we are doing. We do this by way of internships and getting them to do practical things but we could do more of it. I think PR is taught

very well in most Australian unis. There is a uniformity about the what and the how that is taught and there is a lot of innovation in PR teaching. I don't know about teaching overseas. (H18)

Damn well at our university. We rank well on our uni's 'graduate qualities', we are delivering what industry wants, so that is a measure of success. Our graduates are our best marketing tool and they are passionate about their degrees. I am in the (PRIA) National Education Committee, looking at (course) structures (at other universities) and they look good but I don't know how well they are being delivered. PR teaching and education is improving as research quality is improving and those academics are providing the theoretical base for the courses. (H35)

Another perspective was that the quality of PR teaching is good, rather than 'really good' as expressed above, but there were some concerns. These included:

In Australia, PR is generally taught well to undergraduate level for students to get entry level employment but it is a limited view to just prepare students for corporate or professional jobs. Need to include social justice, health, community, political, campaigning, uni politics and campus experience. Advocacy is missing and globalisation is missing at undergrad level. Internationally, in some cases PR is being taught better than in Australia. In the US at post grad level they focus on research and we follow their framework. The UK and Europe are more corporate-focused. (H6)

As a member of the PRIA education committee, I reviewed the structure and content (of accredited courses around the country) and thought most courses were pretty well done. They need flexibility and appropriate level content. (H31)

Nine (18%) respondents did not believe that the quality of PR teaching was high. The first two responses, below, describe the quality of PR teaching through a vocational lens, with H3 echoing earlier concerns that lecturers from industry who are teaching

work skills based on their own experience in the industry are thought to be out of date and consequently teaching out of date skills:

As a new member of academia and with the other foot in industry, I have a unique viewpoint. PR teaching is too steeped in academia and theory and not enough real world application. (H22)

It is poor. Lecturers are not working in the field and have a dated view of the industry. (H3)

Conversely, H42's view is that teaching is too industry focused and vocationally-based and this perspective is in line with previous data that shows that HE PR educators are as intent on teaching vocational skills as their VET counterparts. H42 stated that

There is lots of 'how to'. Positivist, functionalist. We are underestimating the intelligence of students.

This was a question that elicited a wide range of responses. Some respondents seemed affronted that the researcher would dare ask, as if to ask was to criticise what is happening or raise the possibility that PR is not being taught well. There was observable reluctance from four (8%) respondents to be seen to be unsupportive of their colleagues or the academy and by them choosing to not answer, this was avoided. Some had no idea and no interest and had never wondered. Others straightened their backs and sat forward in their chairs as if they had been waiting for someone to ask them.

Essentially, there were four categories of answers to this question:

1. I don't know
2. PR teaching is excellent
3. PR teaching is good but I have some concerns
4. PR teaching is poor

As there were a lot of responses in each category and a range of opinions within them, it is necessary to reproduce enough quotes to be fairly representative of the views expressed.

That professional educators have no opinion about the quality of the teaching around them and do not look to the world to see what they can learn and how they can develop themselves in their vocations seems at odds with the very notion of being a 'professional educator'. Perhaps however, as suggested earlier, it was not that they did not know but that they preferred to not comment than to join the category who felt that teaching was not being done well.

Of those who regarded PR teaching as being done excellently, the thread that connects their comments is that they felt that they had the endorsement of industry, by way of PRIA accreditation and by their graduates getting jobs in the PR industry. As such, those respondents are determining the quality of academic and vocational teaching of PR by saying that it must be good as the industry thinks it is. This was the case in both sectors. To a large extent, both sectors were regarded by the people who teach in them to be doing a good job and this is because the courses are deemed to be industry-relevant. This notion presents a different perspective to the questions about whether university courses are inherently theoretical and separate from industry concerns and whether VET courses are inherently practical and focused on industry. The responses do not draw specifically on those factors but are united by reference to industry support. Irrespective of the basis of the course, it appeared that, from the point of view of respondents, being industry-focused was not enough. There was also a desire to wear the PRIA accreditation as a mark of the industry's approval of their course and of the quality and relevance of their teaching.

Two responses summarise some of the suggestions that were made to improve the quality of teaching. These focused on the need for content that was more than just what was required to prepare students for jobs, greater flexibility and course content matching the level of the course. An example of the latter would be having more sophisticated learning tasks and concepts at bachelor level than at certificate level.

The latter echoes H26's concern that some PR degrees could be "three levels of AQF 5". This means that the three years of a degree should meet the criteria of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) by being taught at level five in the first year, then six in second year and level seven in third year. H26's concern is the perceived absence of the higher-level learning material and the likelihood that this is not being well led in PR education.

H6's issue about the "lack of social justice, health, community, politics, campaigning, uni politics, advocacy and globalisation at undergraduate level in today's PR degrees" raises concerns not only that university courses are not inherently theoretical but also that the absence of this broader context of content focuses them, by omission, purely on Public Relations practice. This concern is strengthened by some of the responses from the category of respondents who do not believe PR teaching is high quality, including the emphasis on content being "positivist and functionalist" (H42) and therefore practice-oriented.

For some, this practice-focused functionalism represents poor quality and for others it is the very definition of quality, depending on their perspective about the purpose of PR education. The data shows that it also depends on their individual backgrounds and qualifications. With the researcher's knowledge of the identities of the respondents, it can be seen also from the responses to these questions that those respondents with PR industry backgrounds prefer the latter. For them, PR courses in Australia should have "real world application" (H22). For respondents with an academic rather than a professional background in PR, the opposite is true and they tend to eschew what they describe as the "positivist, functionalist" approach (H42).

Issues with educators

When asked about any issues or challenges in Public Relations education, some respondents discussed their concerns with aspects of teaching and some mentioned issues with educators themselves. Of those who talked about teachers, some referred to teachers as 'they', despite being PR educators themselves, and some referred to

PR educators as 'we' and discussed issues and ideas for PR educators including themselves. This is consistent with the handling of questions, discussed earlier in this chapter, about the role of PR educators. In the previous case, respondents also referred to 'we' and 'they' because of the seniority of respondents. Those who were senior enough and were no longer teaching because they had taken on senior academic management roles, used 'they' and those still actively teaching used the inclusive 'we'. The following discussion commences with issues facing PR educators and then goes on to issues and challenges involved in teaching Public Relations specifically.

There was concern about the "de-skilling of PR teachers" (H36) which two respondents saw as PR educators either not having any Public Relations industry experience or not having *current* Public Relations industry experience. H36 said that PR educators are "academics but have had no professional practice" and H37 was concerned that although "PR academics often have a depth of industry experience, (it) is no longer current". Both respondents seemed to be indirectly suggesting that Public Relations should be taught by someone who has been in professional PR practice, irrespective of their academic credentials, and that the best suited educators have current industry experience to draw on. Because of the lack of industry experience among some PR educators or the fact that it has been so long since educators have worked in the industry, H36 said it was necessary "to get practitioners in to speak to students" to ensure they have access to the latest trends and practices in industry.

Another trend among issues raised about challenges around PR educators that could potentially affect PR education was PR educators not having a 'united front'. They felt that they were not being seen as an important or influential group of people or as a group of educators who collaborate and support each other. H32 said that:

We need to become 'masters of communication' in an academic sense and grow scholarship. We need a more supportive environment so that we are a profession that matters. And educators that matter. Peer review needs to be

more mentoring, supporting, growing. We should be embedding [into what we teach] the career context of the profession. What are the possibilities [for graduates]? Get them to think about what they might be able to do. As educators we need to be flexible and adaptable and believe in ourselves as PR educators [and the value of PR]. We should keep the name Public Relations and add Communication Management to it.

H11 agreed, stating that “PR educators are not seen anywhere. They are not a voice. No one is championing PR as a discipline or PR educators as a force.” Some of H32’s concerns echo issues around what is being taught and the lack of status enjoyed by Public Relations both as an academic discipline and also as a vocation. H10’s views are consistent with those, and he/she poses the following question:

How do we come together as a group of educators with a range of different perspectives and present ‘here is what PR is’? As researchers and educators, where do we fit? Arts? Business? We publish in all sorts of journals but where should we be? I find my natural home in Business.

H11’s concern was the “blurring between claims made by Marketing and IMC about what we do. We need to maintain our space.” H19 agreed, stating that as “academics are the mentors of the profession, [we] need to be working with the principals in PR, in consultancies, government and in mid-management”, to develop their own understanding.

Another theme that emerged from the data was that PR educators expressed a desire to come together as a group more frequently. Respondents said one of the obstacles to doing that was simply that “PR academics have formed their own circles – cliques within a small network” (H31) and challenged all PR educators to break down the silos and get together to discuss PR education. H34 suggested that “a forum to discuss the findings [of this study]” be held as “PR educators should get together more.” H43 said that “we should have a full day of presentations [by PR educators] at the Asia Pacific Forum”. H43 was suggesting that would be good for the status of the

PR academy as well as being a great opportunity for what H31 calls “having collegial discussions about PR education with people from other universities – friendly competition”, noting that he/she “would like to compare how things are done, which texts people are using, etcetera.”

When asked what they considered to be issues or challenges facing Public Relations education, a number of respondents mentioned teaching itself. They cited a range of different aspects of concern. H27’s issue with PR teaching is the rapid pace of change. He/she went on to say that he/she was challenged by the “need to teach with current examples” and that “there is curriculum development to do and texts to update” and all “while being entertaining”. H9 also said that to be effective, lecturers have to be entertainers now.

Issues with students

The following comments discuss the role that current students play in the delivery of Public Relations education in Australia.

Responses to this question fell into three broad categories. The issues with PR students were:

- the same as students in other disciplines today; they work often full time and see themselves as customers of the institution
- that policy changes see students of all academic abilities engaging with tertiary studies
- the image of the PR industry attracts students who are misguided about the nature of the discipline.

In the first category, a number of respondents referred to the new reality that full time university students typically work many hours each week and as H26 noted “the full-time student is a thing of the past”. Other respondents observed that “students are not as engaged as they once were because they are working” (H33) and that

“students work almost full time and attending uni is a transaction. They have limited engagement with uni. Minimal.” (H28) H28 also observed that the notion of “students as customers influences how we teach – (we need to) make it relevant to them, snappy. Students don’t read.” H4 called current students the “short attention span and instant gratification cohort!”

As a result of the impact of the Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008), the second category can be described as students who previously would not have been able to get into university because of lower academic achievement but who are now enrolled (H8). This development has contributed to what H24 identified as a decline in “the standard of students”. The consequence of this according to H24 is explained in the following quotation:

We have students graduating but who are not ready or skilled enough for a PR job, although the good students are fantastic. We don’t counsel students out [of the course and therefore the industry]. The problem this causes is that students need to be able to see the consequences of *doing* but they are not doing enough research to understand what they do in context. It is not just about academic skills but developing meta-cognition and the challenges students are facing not necessarily having the ability to do that are compromising education outcomes.

One respondent pointed to what the researcher calls ‘the Ab Fab factor’, so called due to the television comedy called ‘Absolutely Fabulous’ and known popularly as ‘Ab Fab’. The program portrayed Public Relations as a fun and glamorous occupation and these “misconceptions of the industry, positive and negative” (H8) meant courses were not attracting the right type of student who has an accurate perception of what Public Relations is.

The conclusions that can be drawn from these findings are that students are an important part of the teaching and learning dynamic that ultimately impacts on the quality of PR education. The first two categories of responses are not discipline-

specific. Across all university and VET courses, students typically have significant commitments to employment that mean they are unable to focus fully on their studies, as educators, or even possibly students themselves, may prefer. Equally, changes to policies have meant that the way education is charged for now allows students to consider themselves as customers who are buying an education service from an institution. This has altered the traditional relationship between educators and students and at its worst could be seen to resemble a 'commercial exchange'.

The second category, whereby arguably less academically-capable students are at university when perhaps once they would have not been admitted, means that the overall academic standard can be seen to have declined and therefore impacted the quality of graduates.

The third category is discipline-specific and that is how the inaccurate image of Public Relations has seen students enrol in PR courses in both sectors that are unlikely as a result to meet their expectations. This will be explored further later in this chapter as part of a broader discussion about the reputation of PR.

Limitations of the education system or sector

The main limitations in the HE sector were thought to be about the poor academic status of Public Relations as an academic discipline and the concern that it was being taught in HE for commercial reasons and/or to meet industry needs.

Three (7%) HE respondents believed that PR should not be taught in HE. H36, for example, questioned whether the teaching of professions in general belongs in universities and asked whether Public Relations should be taught in academia or TAFE. Although this is a small percentage of respondents, the boldness of the view warrants some discussion. It is consistent with Mackey's views on the question of where PR should be taught (2001, p. 2) that were discussed in Chapter Two. Mackey does not see Public Relations as a vocational subject nor consider that it should be taught exclusively in the VET system but he is so critical of the vocationally-focused

way that Public Relations is currently being taught in HE that he questions “if it should legitimately occupy a place in university teaching and research at all”. Mackey argues for Public Relations education in HE to be taken more seriously as an academic discipline and advocates for the ‘intelligent integration’ of Politics, Literature, Religion and Philosophy with a better understanding of Public Relations (2009, p. 9).

Another concern of the respondents who did not believe Public Relations should be taught at universities was that it was currently being taught as a ‘money spinner’ (H19 and H33), consistent with Public Relations courses being described, both in Chapter Two and earlier in this chapter, as ‘cash cows’ (Hatherell & Bartlett 2005, p. 6; L’Etang 2008, p. 249). H19 also stated that universities were teaching PR to fill an industry or societal need. Whatever the reality, H19 stated that the lack of support for PR academics (because of the low status of the academic discipline and because it is seen as a vocational, and therefore unimportant or unwelcome, course in HE) stifles course quality.

The main limitations in the VET sector included issues raised about how the VET sector itself undermines course quality, the lack of status afforded to VET PR courses given the quality of the graduates it produces (V2), a lack of funding was a problem with “cuts causing problems and the PR course may not run if numbers are too low” (V3) and “marketing has dropped off”. (V4)

V4, perhaps referring to the aforementioned ‘Ab Fab factor’, also cited a “lack of understanding of what the PR industry is” as a barrier to quality Public Relations education in the VET sector.

The two sectors appear to be affording Public Relations education similar challenges. The perspectives of respondents from both sectors are concerned about a lack of status of PR courses, arguably reflecting the lack of status of Public Relations as a vocation and insufficient support, financial or other, for the courses themselves. This is discussed further in the next section.

Responses to this question demonstrate again that there are shared experiences and concerns for respondents irrespective of which sector they teach in and courses from both sectors have more in common than not.

The status of Public Relations as an academic discipline

Of all of the responses in this study, the topic that inspired the most emotion was the status of Public Relations as an academic discipline. When asked to raise issues or challenges facing Public Relations education, its lack of status as a discipline was the most commonly mentioned, with the most passion and frustration and without prompt.

This was a marginal issue in the VET sector but of the 45 HE respondents in the study, 22 (49%) raised the low status and positioning of Public Relations as a discipline at universities as a major issue.

Responses fell into two main categories:

1. That Public Relations has no or little academic status
2. The role of research in achieving the desired status

The lack of academic status was described in various ways. Respondents talked of feeling “embattled and defensive” (H38), being “marginalised in academia” (H14) and of Public Relations being “in danger of becoming a ghetto in academia” (H45). H35 believed that PR is not recognised as an academic discipline and there was a lack of understanding about what the PR industry is and what PR research is. Respondents also discussed the fact that “PR is a fledgling academic discipline” (H23) with “no academic home” (H28) and that it is fighting for recognition and funding as it is not yet established as a credible academic field (H14). Some believed that research is the solution to this lack of status, and the quote below is demonstrative:

PR needs a strong theory base to stand up in the academic world. We don't have our own field of research – we're in Marketing! There are not enough

professors (of PR). You need at least 10 in the professoriate. Educators need to look at the whole spectrum of PR. Practitioners have their own world. There are 7000 PR practitioners in Australia and there are only 300 PRIA members. We should have an education centre - the Australian/Asian PR Research Centre to focus on Communication Management and PR (to capitalise on the demise of Journalism). (H32)

There was considerable agreement on the suggestion that the way to improve the status of Public Relations as an academic discipline was to produce more academic research in Public Relations, echoing the view of Grunig and White (2013) that “until recently public relations has been a field without a body of knowledge” (p. 29). H5 stated that Public Relations courses should be more scholarly and theoretical despite being a relatively new body of research and H2 believed that the discipline needed to produce more Australian PR academics with PhDs. Another respondent believed the way to increase both the status of PR and the number of PhDs in the discipline so PR theory would be taken seriously was to get academics from other disciplines to come to PR (H34). This was not a particular concern of the VET respondents.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the findings from the HE respondents on this topic is that, consistent with previous comments about PR courses being seen as university ‘cash cows’, PR is not a highly regarded academic discipline. This is also consistent with previous commentary about it still being an emerging academic discipline. It is useful to remember that ‘Public Relations’ was not known as a phrase in Australia in the 1930s, an industry body, the PRIA, was not formed until the early 1950s (Potts 1976, pp. 335-336) and although the date is contentious, the first Public Relations course did not commence in Australia, arguably, until 1971 (Potts 1976, p. 24). Consequently, Public Relations as an academic discipline in Australia is not yet 50 years old, nor 100 years old in the US where it started (Bernays 1952, pp. 83-84). Hence it has the status of an ‘emerging discipline’ at Australian universities that date back to 1850 (University of Sydney 2017) and at American universities that date back to 1650 (Top Universities 1994-2018). That it does not have a ‘home’ faculty is also

not surprising as the respondents themselves, in earlier questions in this study, demonstrated that even they could not agree if it should be in Arts, Humanities, Business or other, despite just over 50% believing it should be in Business.

Another clear conclusion is that to establish PR as a valued and respected academic discipline, PR academics need to do more original academic research to expand its body of knowledge and also increase the number of Public Relations academics who have PhDs.

The last two points about research and qualifications can be seen to be actions that only PR academics themselves can undertake. They considered the reputation of the discipline to be a barrier to the quality of PR education but it is possible, as advocated for by those quoted above, that they have the best opportunity to make the change that is required. If those PR academics without PhDs earned them and those whose publication records are limited, committed to more original PR research, than this would contribute to solving some of these issues in HE. This opportunity is consistent with that identified in the 1990 IPRA guidelines for PR education that PR educators without PhDs had not been required to do research and were therefore teaching skills courses with little relationship to basic research (Theaker 2001, p. 71).

The next section looks at the respondents' views about the status of the PR industry and how that impacts on PR education.

The reputation of the Public Relations industry

The responses to questions about whether the term 'Public Relations' was the correct one for the industry and for academia revealed an antipathy to a question that the industry and the academy have long grappled with. Twenty-two (43%) respondents rejected or dismissed the question as unnecessary, boring or repetitive and simply did not answer it. It could be deduced that that was because the question has been asked so many times before and that group of respondents just wanted to move on. Of the 29 who did answer, two (7%) were ambivalent, 11 (38%) did not think it was the right

name and 16 (55%) thought Public Relations was the right name. Responses from all three categories were mixed in their enthusiasm for and commitment to their viewpoints. One said it was “the right term but it comes with baggage” (H10), another that it was “inadequate but useful” (H42) and another that it was “the right name with a long history” (H33). It was not just the use of the term to describe the vocation that troubled respondents. The fact is that after so many years of PR being practised in Australia, decades after the industry body, the PRIA, was formed and despite the existence of many worthy academic definitions, there was still no united view or mutual understanding about the term ‘Public Relations’. Its status was also raised as an issue, as it has been in responses to previous questions. The respondents’ concerns were threefold:

- that no one can agree on what Public Relations is
- that no one can agree on what it should be called
- that whatever it is called, its reputation is poor.

Defining Public Relations

In March 2012 at the World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne, Australia, a definition of Public Relations was announced that was the result of global consultation with Public Relations academics and practitioners and represented consensus and agreement on how contemporary Public Relations could and should be described. The definition is:

Public Relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics. (Global Alliance 2016)

There have been academic, or theoretical, definitions of Public Relations since the earliest days of Public Relations practice in the United States (Bernays 1952, p. 82)

when Bernays, grappling with the changing practice, described the vocation as it was in the 1920s and 1930s thus:

Advising the client on the development of attitudes, directions and even policies that he should follow in order to build goodwill with the public and to realise his social objectives more effectively.

These two definitions of Public Relations, despite having been created 80 years apart, have much in common and there are of course many others of merit. Yet, with no shortage of definitions, somehow Public Relations is deemed 'difficult to define'. One respondent, H16, stated that what PR is, is still nebulous and that's a problem. H18 described what he/she saw as:

confusion about what Public Relations is and its role in Business and society, so the challenge is to get students to understand the focus of PR, getting people outside industry to understand what PR is, for example the PRSA have just released a new strategic definition of PR in the USA.

V1 described the issue as "the industry is lacking definition and direction and the PRIA has lost its way" suggesting perhaps that it is not the lack of a theoretical definition that is a problem but a lack of unity about how people practise Public Relations. Perspectives from other respondents agree with V1. Many also allude to confusion in the broader world about what Public Relations is, suggesting it is not simply that practitioners and the academy cannot unite behind a definition, more that even if they did, there is a lack of leadership in the industry and in the industry body on its behalf in communicating to society what Public Relations is. These perspectives included:

A significant issue is the lack of general education about what Public Relations is. School students and careers advisors don't know what it is. Journalists seek to call PR 'spin'...no one is saying PR is valid and important and all organisations can benefit from good PR. (H19)

V1 stated that the term 'Public Relations' had lost its way and the fact that industry people are calling it 'Comms' (not even 'Communication') is confusing people and affecting its status and value. H16 believed that the solution to that problem was to change the name of Public Relations to 'Strategic Communication' and that would also avoid the negative connotations of the term 'Public Relations'.

The reputation of Public Relations

H16 succinctly summarised the reputational issues that PR faces, stating that "the term 'spin' is a problem".

The perspectives of other respondents who were concerned about the poor reputation of Public Relations included:

The profile of Public Relations is an issue and I wonder if the profession is being seen as a course of choice and a profession of choice. (V2)

The issues are more fundamental and our profession needs to turn out people who are 'accredited', like being a CPA, a Certified Practising Accountant, and it is not. (H41)

Anybody can say they are in PR without any qualifications and that is a problem. (H2)

Every aspect of PR education is impacted by the reality explained in the previous discussion that Public Relations is misunderstood. This has been a significant challenge for Public Relations as a discipline or vocation and has arguably prevented its evolution to professional status and contributed to its struggle to find a 'home faculty' as an academic discipline.

There has also been no agreement on the name of the discipline since Bernays attempted to imbue it with dignity last century (Bernays 1952). Just as his concerns were about how the term used to describe the practice impacted on how people thought about its status or importance as an occupation, these same issues are still

behind the lack of agreement on the name of the discipline in Australia (and indeed, the rest of the world). But what practitioners and organisations choose to call the discipline of Public Relations is essentially outside of the scope of this study. It is central to this study however that the Public Relations academy has not been able to agree on a term and unite behind it. It is also central to this study that it is a significant factor impacting its status in education, particularly in the HE sector.

It is also a key outcome of this study that respondents are concerned, that whatever the discipline is called, it is misunderstood and this impacts PR education in a number of ways. It affects how courses are perceived in universities, how the PR academy believe they are regarded by their HE colleagues and the type of students that the courses attract as they do not necessarily have an accurate view of what they will be studying or the industry they will be potentially entering on graduation.

The lack of identity and clarity of the Public Relations industry, and Public Relations as a vocation, cannot fail to impact on Public Relations education, especially for the majority of respondents who consider that PR education exists to serve the industry by preparing graduates to enter it.

The content of Public Relations courses

Respondents had a number of perspectives about what is actually taught in Public Relations courses and, sometimes, why. There were a number of views about the failings of the content of courses.

There were two categories of issues impacting course quality. These were:

- the lack of consensus around key content issues within the academy itself
- the impact of the PRIA on what is taught.

The lack of consensus around key content issues within the academy could be seen in a number of ways. Respondents were concerned about issues including a lack of theory in HE courses and also a lack of critical rigour. One perspective was that there

is not a clear body of theory or at least not a sophisticated well-established body of theory about Public Relations (H11). Another was that:

There is a need to embed more history of PR into our courses – Bernays, Ivy Lee. More critique of practice and critical theory of PR in society. PR is interdisciplinary now and we should teach it that way. The focus of PR education should have three drivers – professionalisation, technology and globalisation. They are what it takes to be successful (in the industry). (H4)

The impact of the PRIA on what is taught was raised by a number of respondents. Some respondents believe that they were restricted in what they could teach because of the rules of PRIA accreditation of their course. Their main ideas are summarised by the following quotes:

There is a pressure to conform to (the requirements of the) PRIA accreditation and you have to be conformist to get the accreditation in the first place. (H31)

The PRIA involvement restricts the teaching of ethics to just looking at the PRIA Code of Ethics, when in fact more emphasis on ethics is needed and at an academic level that means more than just the PRIA version. We need to focus more on elements of persuasion and (the) psychology of behavioural change. (H7)

These two respondents, while explaining their perspective about perceived restrictions on course content as a consequence of PRIA accreditation, are discussing two different constructs of course content. H31's view is about the course structure and refers to the idea that a PRIA-accredited major is a version of the 'five course approach' (Toth & Aldoory 2010) and that it limits the range of PR subjects that can be taught. H7's comment is about the content of individual subjects and suggests that PRIA-accreditation is so prescriptive that it limits teaching about ethics to only the PRIA Code of Ethics. While there is support among other respondents for the former view about the perceived restrictions of the units/subjects that comprise a PRIA-accredited Public Relations major, H7's notion is largely contradicted by other data

that demonstrated that in some courses in both sectors, content was determined by individual educators. Nonetheless, there are clearly concerns among respondents about the impact of PRIA accreditation, both because of perceived content restrictions, as mentioned above, and also because of the view expressed in earlier sections that sees all PRIA-accredited degrees adopting the now conventional 'five course approach'. The five-course PR major has led to the PR streams of PR degrees being essentially the same.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was structured in five sections that presented, analysed and discussed the key themes of this study about Public Relations education in Australia according to the perspectives of PR educators. The sections looked at courses, profile of educators, course purpose, the relationship between academia and industry, and issues and challenges.

The first section presented the data on the Public Relations courses being run in both sectors in Australia and analysed and discussed a range of factors and issues that contribute to how they are delivered.

One revealing finding of this study was that 63% of the PR degrees that HE respondents worked in have a name other than Public Relations. A number of factors were discussed that can be attributed to the term 'Public Relations' scarcely being used in the names of PR degrees. These included the status of the Public Relations industry, the lack of agreement about whether it is the right term for the discipline, the relative lack of, and reference in HE to, an academic body of knowledge in 'Public Relations' and the variety of job titles PR practitioners use. This is the case in HE but contrasts with the finding that all VET PR courses have PR in the title of the course because of government rules.

There was a wide range of faculties teaching 'Public Relations' degrees including Media and Communication, Business, and Creative Arts, demonstrating that in both

sectors Public Relations does not have a consistent academic home and some universities offer PR courses purely because they are 'cash cows' – popular and therefore commercially successful. More than 50% of HE respondents believed PR should be taught in a Business faculty in universities and 66% of VET respondents favoured a Business setting as well. There was evidence that each respondent's own professional and academic background influenced their perspective.

PR courses had been running at the various institutes for between one year and more than 30 years. Public Relations has only been taught formally in Australia for about 50 years and has a very small academy compared to other disciplines.

Respondents identified four main categories of Public Relations students based on their views and knowledge about who enrolls in their courses. They were students wanting to get into the PR industry, both informed and misinformed, school leavers choosing to study at a particular institution rather than for a particular vocation and students wanting a job-focused course.

According to the observations of respondents, a desire that their course lead to a job was central to student motivation for enrolling in a PR course in both sectors, irrespective of how well informed the students were.

Respondents were asked what they knew about pathways into and out of their courses and links to the sector they did not work in, that is VET if they worked in HE and vice-versa. There was little engagement with this question and observably low knowledge of and interest in the subject, especially among the HE respondents.

Sixty-five per cent of HE respondents stated that the PR degree that they work in had both an academic/theoretical basis and an industry orientation. Twenty-three per cent stated that the degree they work in had a wholly vocational basis and/or industry orientation. Twelve per cent of respondents stated that the degree they work in had a wholly academic or theoretical basis that draws on the academic body of knowledge of Public Relations. Despite claiming their courses were wholly

academic, the latter group were also concerned that their courses were relevant to and well regarded by the industry.

An unexpected finding was that more than half of the HE respondents referred to the requirements of the PRIA's accreditation. These include needing an industry advisory panel to advise on content and industry relevance. Views were mixed as to whether the accreditation was helpful or too restrictive. This finding was unexpected because no specific question had been asked about it. Those with the latter view were concerned that it minimised the input of academics by giving up some decision making about course content to industry representatives and that PRIA accreditation criteria was leading to the creation of a national generic course. Conversely, other respondents revealed that they have considerable academic freedom to determine what they teach and this perspective challenges the perception of restrictions on actual content. The responses from the VET sector echoed the same dichotomy.

The role and use of textbooks was one of the topics to elicit the most animated and political responses. Twenty-three of 45 HE respondents (55%) prescribe a textbook and fifteen (35%) do not, with seven respondents (15%) not using textbooks at all. Five of six VET respondents used textbooks but did not prescribe them.

The second section provided a profile of Australia's Public Relations educators which included an overview of who is teaching Public Relations, looking at demographics, qualifications and industry backgrounds and the impact those factors have on delivery in both sectors.

Of the 51 respondents, 45 were employed in the HE sector and six were employed in the VET sector. They represented five states and two territories and both regional and capital city locations. All described themselves as Public Relations educators.

Twenty-five (55%) HE respondents have PhDs and 19 (68 %) of those PhDs are in either PR or Communication. Twenty (45%) HE respondents do not have a PhD in any discipline. All VET respondents held the compulsory Certificate IV training qualification and the other qualifications required to teach in the VET sector.

Of the 51 respondents, 29 (57%) were female and 22 (43%) were male. This is not as significant as the actual female dominance of the industry itself which is made up of 73% females. Of the 45 HE educators, 41 (91%) were over 46 years old. Four of the six VET educators (66%) were over 46 years old.

Almost half of the HE respondents had been teaching PR for more than 10 years. One noteworthy conclusion from this finding is that if they did not have PhDs and were therefore employed because they were former practitioners, without a commitment to keeping abreast of developments in the industry, they are at risk of having outdated views and industry skills. The situation in the VET sector is similar but educators had not been away from the industry for quite as long. Thirty (65%) HE educators were either members or fellows of the PRIA and 15 (35%) were not members at any level. The situation was reversed in the VET sector with approximately 35% of educators (two of six) being members of the PRIA.

Twenty (55%) respondents believed that Public Relations was the right name for the industry, 13 (35%) thought it was not the right name and two (5%) were ambivalent. A quarter of respondents did not even care to respond. It is an oft-asked question in the industry and respondents appeared to be jaded by it with some respondents suggesting the industry and the academy should be just 'getting on with it' (rather than debating what to call PR). Twenty-six (51%) respondents thought Public Relations was a profession and 25 (49%) did not, with that category favouring terms including 'craft', 'discipline' and 'practice.'

The third section presented the findings of questions put to the respondents about the respective purposes of the two post-secondary sectors in Australia by way of context for a discussion about the individual purposes of the courses the respondents work in. It then compared that to the philosophical purpose each respondent believed their course and their sector should fulfil.

These conclusions fundamentally inform the discussion about Public Relations education by providing data about the perspectives of the educators in both sectors

on what the purpose of their courses are and what they think they should be. This data is examined in the context of the discussion in Chapter Two about the Australian post-secondary landscape where the HE and VET sectors exist for different reasons. Twenty-nine (64%) HE respondents said their course 'tries to do both' – provide vocational training and an academic education. Their courses were both academic and vocational in purpose. Five (11%) said their courses were purely academic and not focused on preparing students for work. The remaining 11 (24%) HE respondents did not see their courses as academic at all. Their university degrees were completely focused on teaching skills for employment. Five of six (83%) VET respondents said their courses, consistent with the purpose of the sector, were purely vocational in purpose.

A conclusion from this data is the 'blurring of the sectors' (Graham 2005, p. 27). According to the perspectives of the HE respondents, 88% of the PR degrees they teach in or lead are at least in part vocational and therefore cross over into the philosophical domain of the VET sector which exists to teach skills for work in industry (Misko 1999). A consequence of HE assuming the role of VET is that the HE sector's capacity to fulfil its own sector's purpose is jeopardised.

In describing what they believe the distinctive characteristics of a university course are, HE respondents mostly talked about 'critical thinking', 'theory' and 'reflection', data that was missing from their own accounts of the vocational, skills-orientation of the courses they work in. There was some inconsistency between the HE respondents' espoused view about what they consider to be the role of a PR degree and the data in which they described those they teach in. The HE respondents did however demonstrate their view that they embrace notions of what university PR degrees philosophically exist for and draw on them as well as on skills development for preparing students for industry. Their VET counterparts believe VET courses in PR exist to prepare students for work. There is a striking overlap in respondents from both sectors who see their role as educators as being about preparing students for jobs in the PR industry.

Section four examined the relationship between the industry and the academy. It looked at how the PR industry and the PR academy are linked, demonstrating that there are formal and informal linkages, how these linkages impact Public Relations education and what each respondent considers the relationship and impact should be. The second theme in this section discussed the findings about what respondents considered is and should be the role that education can play and does play in the professional status of Public Relations.

It can be concluded from the data that respondents were uncomfortable discussing whether in Public Relations education, the academy should lead the industry or vice-versa. The responses fell fairly equally into three main categories – it should do both; it should do both but industry should lead, and; it should do both but the academy should lead. When asked about the role of education in Public Relations becoming a profession, seven respondents (13%) said it already had and it is a profession. All other responses agreed that education was key to professionalisation, saying it will shape it; will provide an ethical framework; will provide the graduates that a profession requires, and; will boost its reputation and status. That education will ultimately contribute to Public Relations meeting the traditional criteria for a profession and then be regarded as one is the clear proposition of these findings.

The final section in this chapter presented the wide-ranging findings on what the respondents considered to be the issues and challenges facing Public Relations courses in Australia. These were presented, analysed and discussed in the key themes that emerged from the data and included the role of work-based learning, globalisation, teaching quality and course content, the roles of educators and students, the sectors themselves, and PR as an academic discipline and as an industry.

Key conclusions from this section of the chapter which looked at topics raised by respondents when prompted with the question *‘What are the issues and challenges in Public Relations courses in Australia?’* included:

- That one way that PR courses have not changed since the first courses in Australia in the 1970s is that they are just as focused on preparing graduates for jobs now as they were then.
- The majority (75%) of respondents believe preparing students for the impact of globalisation on practice and on the world is important. They mostly have good practices in place to do so and it was becoming a core aspect of Public Relations education. Twenty-five per cent did not think it was important.
- Too few professional educators had knowledge of or interest in Public Relations education generally and the quality of PR teaching in their institution and beyond.
- The PR academy is not well enough united and therefore has little status or influence as a group. There are also not enough mechanisms for conversations between the academy and the industry.
- Misconceptions about what Public Relations is, and what practitioners do, mean the majority of courses were not attracting 'the right students for the right reasons'.
- The lack of status and positioning of Public Relations as an academic discipline in universities was the most emotional issue for respondents. It was described as 'marginalised' and 'in danger of becoming a ghetto' in academia and as having 'no academic home'. A key proposition is that research and more educators with PhDs must play a role in correcting this.
- That despite many worthy definitions of Public Relations existing, the reputation of what Public Relations *does* is affecting the perception of what it *is* and consequently its reputation.
- Despite many respondents considering they have the academic freedom to create and teach the content they choose, the perceived restriction of what must be taught in degrees accredited by the PRIA is an issue and an

unexpected proposition of this study. Some respondents point to a 'commoditisation' of PR degrees under the need to conform to the PRIA rules.

The following chapter (five) will revisit the research questions and draw on the findings and conclusions from the data to answer them. It will also discuss the implications of this study for theory, for PR education in both sectors and for the practice of Public Relations. It will explore the major lessons learned from the study as well as its limitations before making recommendations for further research, for the industry and for PR educators in both sectors.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide the conclusions from the first national study into how Public Relations is taught in the two post-secondary education sectors in Australia. In the previous chapter, the data gathered during the fieldwork was grouped in the themes that emerged from it and those themes will be drawn on to specifically answer the five research questions that were introduced in Chapter One. Ultimately the answers to those research questions will inform the study's conclusions.

This final chapter also discusses the implications of this study for theory, including education theories, and outlines some of the benefits of adopting a Grounded Theory methodology for the study. It considers how future researchers can draw on the outcomes of this study's use of Grounded Theory. The chapter goes on to explore the implications and opportunities for PR education in the HE and VET sectors and for the PR industry and the practice of Public Relations. The study's limitations are also identified including those that present as research gaps. These form part of a broader discussion about possible future research directions that flow from the outcomes of the study itself. A summary of the entire study is also provided and this leads to a brief conclusion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In this section the five research questions are re-stated and answered fully. The answers are formed from the data gathered by semi-structured interviews and personal observations during the field work and presented, discussed and analysed in Chapter Four, and compared with and in the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Research Question 1

In what way/s does the industry experience and/or academic qualifications of Public Relations educators influence the running/teaching of PR courses in Australia?

This question sought to explore what the professional backgrounds and academic qualifications of Australia's PR educators were and how respondents drew on their own backgrounds and lived experiences to design and teach in Public Relations courses. The findings showed that respondents drew heavily on both their industry experience and their academic backgrounds to determine their perspectives about PR education, including its purpose, to teach PR and to design and lead courses in PR.

Industry experience– vocational intent

Given that in the HE sector, 40 (89%) respondents have PR or related industry experience on which to base their teaching, as do five of six VET (83%) respondents, it is not surprising that they do exactly that. The industry background of the respondents manifests itself in a number of ways. Typically, respondents from both sectors who have industry backgrounds, and who then go into education, want to 'give back' to the industry they have come from. Consequently, they tend to take a positivist, functionalist and industry-focused approach to their teaching. They consider their role in PR education as drawing on what they did in the industry to shepherd new graduates into the industry 'job ready'. Twenty-three (52%) of HE respondents stated that the degree they work in exists 'to prepare graduates for a career in Public Relations or an allied industry' and believe it should be 'teaching skills for employment'. They largely described their own roles as PR educators to be "the educators of the next generation of PR professionals" (H22) and "to help produce graduates who understand PR and have the skills and attributes for work" (H14). Some respondents thought more boldly about their role, with one saying he/she was there "to stimulate graduates to go out there and change the world whatever field they choose" (H30).

The high number of HE PR educators who are ex-practitioners (40 or 89%), and the approach that they take to their teaching, has resulted in the 'entrenched vocationalism' in PR education that was discussed in Chapter Four. Ex-practitioner respondents are mostly not looking at PR through a theoretical or academic lens nor considering that they could be teaching the theory of PR not the practice of PR. They therefore are interpreting Public Relations practice to be the focus of PR education. As a result, PR education is mostly industry-focused and aims to provide suitably skilled and prepared graduates for the industry. It may attempt to do this in concert with teaching academic theory, and indeed 64% of respondents claimed to do both, but preparing 'job ready' graduates was still the goal.

It can be said that some respondents value academic theory more highly, and this is discussed further when respondents' academic qualifications are factored in. Nonetheless, the significant majority of respondents, even if they purport to include academic theory in their teaching, mostly do so within a focus of teaching vocational skills. Almost unanimously, because of their industry backgrounds, respondents have ensured that PR education is vocational in purpose.

Industry experience – vocational content

Another way that respondents draw on their industry experience is that they not only teach students what practitioners do, so students can graduate and take their place in the industry, but more specifically they teach students what they did when they were in the industry. In fact, as ex-practitioners, respondents are observably proud of the first-hand insights they can bring to their teaching. So, as well as the industry experience of respondents leading them to consider PR education as vocational in purpose irrespective of the sector, that experience leads to respondents designing PR education to be vocational in content as well.

As a consequence, it can be argued that PR education in both sectors is largely based on the skills and knowledge that PR educators learned when they were working as PR practitioners or in similar roles. Despite claims that HE courses are theory-based

‘because they are being taught at universities’, the data does not reveal any discernible difference between what is being taught in the two sectors nor how it is being taught. This can also be seen to be because the industry experience of the respondents is leading to them favouring the teaching of vocational skills. That respondents also had very little knowledge of the distinctive roles of the two sectors is another contributor to this outcome.

The timing of the industry experience of respondents also influenced the teaching of Public Relations in that respondents taught the skills and knowledge that they learned when they were in the industry, irrespective of how long ago that was. Given that 88% of HE respondents had not worked in the industry for five years or more and 33% had not worked in the industry for between 10 and more than 30 years, there are issues around the currency of the skills and knowledge being taught. The PR industry is dynamic and someone who worked in it five, 10 or 20 years ago will have developed different skills than are being used by practitioners now. This means that PR educators in both sectors are teaching vocational skills ‘in their own vision’, that is based on what they did individually as practitioners. Given the autonomy that respondents in both sectors claimed to have in deciding what and how to teach as the “content is based on what the lecturer chooses to write and teach” (H31), PR education can be seen to be largely the teaching of vocational skills. If respondents have not kept their skills and knowledge up to date, and there was little in the data that showed that they do, many of those skills could be dated.

Respondents drawing on their own industry experience to teach has continued the functionalist, or ‘how to’, approach to teaching PR that was first utilised in Australia when the first courses were developed in both sectors in the 1970s. Functionalist education sees students in both sectors learning how to write media releases and social media plans, to manage stakeholders (H22) and work with real clients (H43). Many HE respondents claimed their courses have a “strong research component” (H23) but H15 concedes the area is “under-theorised”. Despite claims from respondents about the academic nature of their degrees, the data showed little

evidence of an academic approach to PR education and almost none that demonstrated a critical approach to teaching PR. The “interrogation of the obvious” that H15 explained is the point of academic learning was largely absent from the perspectives of respondents about Australian PR education.

Because PR is being taught through a vocational lens, there is little evidence in the data of what H15 calls the “broad cultural knowledge” that university courses exist to provide. It can be seen that respondents are “not teaching them (students) to be academic but training them for the PR industry” (H25).

Industry experience – how respondents think about Public Relations

Another way that the industry experience of respondents shaped PR education is that if their experience was in the corporate sector then they tended to categorise PR as ‘corporate communication’ and a ‘management function’. If a respondent’s experience was in another sector, then he or she tended to consider PR to belong to that domain. The latter group described PR as ‘multi-disciplinary’, ‘inter-disciplinary’ or ‘bigger than business’. These perspectives informed the way the respondents understand PR and shape how they teach it.

The nature of their industry background also impacted on how respondents thought about Public Relations as a vocation and what they considered the role of PR education to be.

That teaching in HE PR courses specifically is affected by the industry background of HE respondents was further demonstrated by their preferences for where and how PR should be taught. If for example HE respondents’ Public Relations industry experience was in the corporate sector, they were among the 50% of respondents who favoured teaching PR from a Business faculty with a Business orientation.

Similarly, those whose industry background was not in the corporate sector and who did not identify as being from Business, considered that PR’s home faculty should be aligned to the sector from where they came. This leads to an overlap on how PR is

taught of the impact of respondents' industry background with that of their academic qualifications.

Academic qualifications

The nature of the academic qualifications of respondents, not just the level of qualification, also influenced how PR education was conceived of and taught. If the undergraduate or post-graduate degrees of HE respondents themselves had been in Arts, Social Sciences or Humanities then they favoured one of those faculties from which to teach Public Relations. Those HE respondents who held, for example, Social Science degrees, saw PR as a Social Science that should be taught from a Social Science perspective and from a Social Science faculty. It was the education and industry background of HE respondents that influenced their views and not the faculty that the respondents taught PR in. There was one exception in that respondents who taught PR from a Business faculty generally agreed that PR is a Business discipline that belongs in a Business faculty. There was no evidence other than the example of the Business faculty of a bias toward Public Relations belonging in its existing faculty at each respondent's university and, in many cases, the respondents disagreed with the location of the school or faculty their courses sat in. Respondents' views about PR education based on the nature of their industry experience and the discipline that they pursued academically, biased how they taught Public Relations.

The level of academic qualification of the respondent also influenced how PR was thought about and taught. Specifically, whether or not a respondent held a PhD, and in what discipline they held it, had an impact on their thoughts and actions in PR education.

As was shown in Chapter Four, 55% of HE educators had a PhD and of those 68% were in Public Relations or Communication. This means about a third of HE PR educators have a PhD in PR or Communication. Most pointedly, the data showed that it was whether or not PR educators had a PhD, more than their industry backgrounds,

which impacted most on the education choices they made and the teaching practices they engaged in. The HE respondents could be categorised into three groups –

- Those with a PhD who favoured wholly theory-based learning which includes those who considered their courses to operate in that manner and those who wished that was the case (approximately 12% of HE respondents)
- Those with a PhD who favoured teaching skills development for employment along with theory-based learning (approximately 40% of HE respondents)
- Those without a PhD who favoured teaching skills development for employment and adopting an industry-orientation for their courses (almost 40% of HE respondents).

The first two groups comprised the majority of HE respondents, that is, more hold PhDs than do not. It is having a PhD that led to them having a higher regard for and focus on theory-based learning, and some favour that along with skills development, more than their counterparts without PhDs. One of the few respondents from the first group stated that even though a purely academic approach was his/her preference the reality was that university PR courses were “just training” and “that is too dull for words” (H42). A respondent from the second group demonstrated the preference for theory-based learning alongside a vocational focus and skills development by explaining that his/her approach was to provide students with an understanding of what a PR practitioner is and does and to show students how to bridge theory and industry. (H29)

Those in the third group tended to base their teaching on their own practice of PR, like most respondents did, but without a focus on or basis of academic theory. They typically described the role of their degree as ‘training students for jobs in the industry’ and described their role as helping students to learn the skills and knowledge to apply for a graduate position (H22) and to ‘generate’ students with industry level competencies, skills and inter-personal skills (H15). This group was more focused on meeting the industry needs for trained workers and therefore valued teaching skills for employment and did not value teaching academic theory.

The study has shown that HE PR educators with PR industry background but no PhD taught the industry skills they used when they were practitioners. Based on their experience and knowledge, this was their measure of quality PR education and therefore they designed and delivered their courses in that mode. The study also revealed that ex-practitioners without a PhD had drawn less on academic knowledge than ex-practitioners with a PhD. It was extrapolated that that was because they had undertaken limited or no scholarly research during their careers and were therefore unaware of (in some cases) or did not value or consider relevant to their job-focused students, the body of knowledge that existed. Coupled with their desire to teach skills for work, this led them to not seek out and/or teach academic theory on Public Relations.

In the VET sector specifically, both the industry background and the academic qualifications of respondents influenced the course they taught in and led in a positive and appropriate manner. As discussed in Chapter Two, the distinctive purpose of VET is clearly and unanimously about teaching skills required for a particular vocation, informed by that industry and in some cases in partnership with the industry. Consequently, excellent and appropriate vocational PR education in the VET sector requires employing teachers with a PR industry background and the appropriate VET teaching qualifications to deliver contemporary vocational training. Based on these definitions and concepts, this study found that VET PR education was largely delivering on the promise of its sector. Five of six (83%) VET respondents were ex-practitioners drawing on their own industry experiences and skills to teach students to be job ready for the industry. Their approach to teaching PR in the VET sector can be summarised by the view of one respondent who noted that VET PR teachers have the industry background to match the subjects they teach and they have teaching qualifications (V4). They agree that the purpose of their teaching is to get students work ready (V1). Just as in the HE sector, however, due to educators having not worked for a long time in the industry, without a commitment to updating

their skills and knowledge, it is possible that dated skills are also being taught in Australia's VET Public Relations courses.

Research Question 2

Is there a conceptual and/or real difference between the way educators in the HE and VET sectors see their PR courses and how they subsequently run them? In other words, from the perspective of educators, are university courses inherently theoretical, focusing on knowledge acquisition, and VET courses inherently practical, focusing on skills teaching, as traditionally expected of the two sectors?

The study challenges conventional ideas articulated in the dominant school of thought in the literature about the role of universities being inherently theoretical and distinctively focused on the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Clemans 2010; Dewey 2007; Kessells & Korthagen 1999; Langtry, cited in Coady 2000; Newman, cited in Boschiero 2012; Robinson 2006; Spies, cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000; Walker 2006).

The views of the above scholars are that the distinctive purpose of university education is to facilitate the development of knowledge in students. Yet the perspectives of the respondents in this study show that instead of Public Relations courses in HE being about developing a liberal education, rather than a professional or vocational one, and skills being left for graduates to acquire on the job (Langtry, cited in Coady 2000, p. 88), HE PR courses are largely vocational rather than theoretical. It is important to note that these conclusions are drawn from the data from responses to questions to PR educators about PR courses. In the examples of questions to HE respondents, the questions were framed to be about the whole PR course in which they taught, including the PR major or sequence of subjects, not exclusively focused on it. As such, all responses are about whole degrees that are described to be Public Relations degrees. It could be though that respondents

interpreted the questions to mean just the PR major of the degree in those degrees that were structured like that. There is no data to suggest that, but it is possible that that is how respondents considered the questions and that they believe that PR subjects can be taught vocationally and the subjects that make up the remainder of the degree in which the PR major sits, can be taught in a more scholarly way and that will position HE as inherently theoretical and based on knowledge acquisition.

The study is inconclusive about whether VET PR courses are inherently practical and focusing on skills acquisition, as expected of the sector (Carter & Gribble 1994; Clemans 2010; Kearns, Bowman & Garlick 2008; Maglen, cited in Blunden 1997; Norton Grubb, cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996; Seddon 2011; Tovey & Lawlor 2008; Wheelahan 2011).

Higher Education

The study found that only 11% of HE respondents claimed that the course they worked in was wholly theoretical. This reveals that little more than one in 10 university Public Relations courses could be described as 'inherently theoretical' and therefore meeting society's expectation of HE as described by scholars including Spies (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley, 2000), Collini (2012) and Scott and Dixon (2008).

Sixty-four percent of HE respondents stated that their course was based on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills, which could be interpreted either as straddling the roles of both sectors, or as a reflection of the school of thought in the literature that sees HE having a dual purpose, or both. Nonetheless, this aspect of the study demonstrated that there were "tensions around what should be taught in a public relations degree – what the balance should be between theoretical and practical elements of courses" (L'Etang 2013, p. 45) and this in itself is a key conclusion of this study.

Even the 11% of HE respondents who claimed their university courses were wholly academic expressed concerns that their courses were also relevant to and well-

regarded by industry. Despite their courses being based on theory, respondents did not want them to be independent of the industry and in fact gaining its approval, either by graduates getting jobs in the industry or from the PRIA course accreditation, was seen as a mark of course quality.

Consequently, the study found that despite many respondents claiming their course had some theoretical basis (11% solely theoretical and 64% theoretical and vocational), it was largely found that this meant there was an academic basis to a course that existed to provide skilled graduates to industry, not for its own sake. The increasing emphasis on graduate employability in the HE sector was also seen by respondents to be a reason that they should be producing 'job ready' graduates. Further, they interpreted 'employability' as limited to skills that prepared graduates for their vocation at the exclusion of the development of personal and professional qualities that are not industry-specific and are more consistent with traditional ideals discussed in Chapter Two about the purpose of a university education.

Respondents' emphasis on developing vocational skills and knowledge to embed graduate attributes and improve employment outcomes could be seen to be misguided as graduate attributes and employability skills are largely a by-product of a university education generally, not just the outcome of any job skills training that is part of that university education. This misdirection of emphasis has reduced the theoretical and knowledge basis that is part of the distinctive purpose of university courses.

Vocational Education and Training

VET is designed to be inherently practical, to develop skills for work. Consequently, VET courses are designed to directly enhance the skills, knowledge competencies and capabilities of individuals required in undertaking gainful employment (Maglen, cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix-xi; Misko 1999). This is typically how people think about what VET is for and why it exists (AQF 2016). This study found that it was an accurate understanding of the role of VETPR courses as the majority of VET respondents stated

that their courses were practical in nature and industry-based. Respondents described the content of their courses as being “based on real industry projects” (V1), conceivably to ‘guide the hand to develop skills’.

However, as one of the six VET respondents described his/her VET course as being “not just an applied course” but a “higher level course that tests students’ conceptual and strategic thinking ability” (V2), this means that while there was a majority view that VET PR courses were just practical, there was a minority view, in fact a singular view, that showed that they can and do also teach theories and concepts. This minority response was noteworthy as it challenged the conventional thinking about the purpose of VET courses being purely practically-based.

The study does not support that universities are meeting the historical ideals of fulfilling their traditional roles of being the teachers of episteme, or ‘the knowing why’, and TAFE institutes in the VET sector are purely the teachers of techne or ‘the knowing how’, as they were established to be (Clemans 2010). There is not a significant difference between the ways respondents from the two sectors saw their courses in terms of existing to prepare graduates for work in the PR industry. In fact, where there was any difference, it was minor as most respondents from both sectors, however they conceived of the purpose of their course, believed it existed to serve the PR industry. Most courses in both sectors therefore are run by respondents who design them and teach in them to ensure a well-trained labour force exists for the PR industry.

Research Question3

What are some (if any) of the similarities and differences between the way in which PR courses are run/taught in the two (HE and VET) sectors?

As already outlined, a major finding of this study is that there was no clear distinction between how PR is taught in the VET and HE sectors. This question is being answered on the basis of the point raised earlier that it is possible that respondents considered

the interview questions to be focused purely on the teaching of PR subjects in a major or other sequence of subjects rather than the whole course. Therefore, the answer is framed around similarities and differences between PR majors in university degrees and PR subjects in VET courses.

As discussed in answer to Research Question Two, the commonly held view that university courses are, or should be, inherently theoretical and focused on the creation and teaching of knowledge (Collini, 2012; Scott & Dixon 2008; Spies, cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000; Walker 2006) and that VET courses are inherently practical and focused on building skills (Langtry, cited in Coady 2000; Misko 1999; Norton Grubb, cited in Selby, Smith & Ferrier 1996; Seddon 2011, Tovey & Lawlor 2008; Wheelahan 2011) is not upheld by this study. Indeed, the study found that PR teaching in both sectors is largely done by ex-practitioners who take a skills-development approach, with a view to preparing graduates for employment in the PR industry. The study did not identify many differences between how PR education is delivered in the two sectors.

Similarities

A key conclusion of this study is that PR majors in degrees and PR subjects in VET courses are fundamentally the same. There are similarities of

- Purpose
- Content
- Identity issues
- Educators
- Students

Purpose

Forty of 45 (88%) HE respondents and five of six (83%) VET respondents stated that the purpose of their course was either purely vocational or at least in part vocational and intended to prepare graduates for employment. This study supports Graham (2005) and Gould (2003) as the findings showed that 64% of HE respondents said that

“they tried to do both”, meaning providing vocational training and providing education for its own sake. Courses in both sectors were, in the majority, industry-oriented and focused on skills development for work. As a key conclusion, this study also supports Graham (2005, p. 27) whose view is that:

the distinction between study in and for itself and study for the purpose of acquiring a skill or for training is what originally marked the difference between universities and polytechnics (VET institutes) and this has been lost to the detriment of both sectors.

Content

Apart from course framework restrictions brought about by PRIA accreditation in terms of subject selection and the requirement to have and be advised by an industry panel that was mentioned by 23% of HE respondents, educators in both sectors reported having considerable autonomy. They could decide for themselves (“we have 100% influence as the teacher to shape the content of the course” – V5) what the content of the course they were teaching in or leading would be. This had the potential to impact on the quality of the courses, especially where biases based on industry experience or academic qualifications existed. A consequence of this applied to courses in both sectors. As outlined earlier, respondents had not worked in the industry for many years. Forty of 45 (88%) HE respondents who had industry experience had not worked in PR for five or more years and five of six (83%) VET respondents who had industry experience had not worked in the industry for five years or more. Those who were basing the content they were teaching on their own experiences, and this was the case in both sectors, were likely to be teaching students out-of-date vocational skills.

In terms of content, both sectors had similar engagement with PR textbooks. Neither sector wholly embraced textbooks. In the VET sector, none of the respondents prescribed texts but they mostly all recommended and used them. In the HE sector, the majority of respondents did prescribe texts but as many as 15 out of 45 (35%)

either did not use texts at all or only recommended them to students, rather than requiring them to buy and use them. A significant similarity between the courses in both sectors, and especially noteworthy because of the difference in the levels of the courses –Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in VET and Bachelor and Master in HE – was that all those who used texts referred to the same five text books. These were: Tymson, Lazar and Lazar (2002); Johnston and Zawawi (2004); Sheehan and Xavier (2014); Chia and Synnott (2009); and Harrison (2001). So, despite the purported differences in purpose and teaching and learning styles of the HE and VET sectors, as outlined in Chapter Two, PR students enrolled in either, where textbooks are being used, are being referred to the same five textbooks. All five are Australian texts. Some were described by respondents as ‘functionalist’, ‘technical’ in nature and ‘non-critical’. Apart from being introductory level, there were four reasons given for these books being used in both sectors. These were that they were Australian resources that “spoke to Australians” (H32), that Australian texts were thought to be better value for money (H19), that they were suited to the Australasian practice of PR that was taught here (H43, H35, H4, H28, V4, V3) and that they, because they were Australian, were an anti-US statement (H45).

Identity issues

Issues around the identity and status of Public Relations as an academic discipline and as a vocation that, according to many respondents, existed in both sectors, shaped the decisions that were made by respondents who led and taught in PR courses in both sectors. The perspectives of respondents in both sectors were that the two sectors had a number of similarities of issues of identity and status and that these issues impacted on PR teaching and course leadership. The issues that both sectors shared included:

- Public Relations did not have an obvious ‘academic home’
- They could not agree what the discipline should be called in an education context
- They could not agree on what it should be called as a vocation

- In both sectors, Public Relations education had an identity crisis.

There was a lack of agreement in both sectors as to which was the most appropriate faculty or school in which to teach PR. In HE, it was taught in 16 different faculties including Arts, Business and Marketing, and in VET, it was taught in Business, Business and Management and Creative Industries. In both sectors, respondents could not agree on where it belonged or whether it was a Business discipline or a creative one. Respondent views ranged from “PR is a management discipline” (H28) to “(It) should be in Arts/Humanities. It is not a business or formulaic process” (H1).

The findings also show that another similarity between PR courses in the HE and VET sectors was a lack of agreement about what to call the discipline of PR, that is, what PR courses should be named. Degrees taught by HE respondents at 12 of the 19 (63%) universities involved in the study are called something other than ‘Public Relations’, including Bachelor of Communication, Bachelor of Arts (Communication) and Bachelor of Strategic Communication. Courses in VET all have the specialty ‘Public Relations’ in brackets in the title due to them being named by the government rather than the respective institutes. However, of the six VET respondents, only one enthusiastically believed that Public Relations is the right term for the vocation, two thought it would probably be replaced with Communication or Strategic Communication and three did not care. It is reasonable to extrapolate that if the VET educators were required to name the courses, just like in the HE sector, there would be no consensus.

Given that VET respondents could not agree on what the vocation or discipline should be called, the findings show another similarity between PR courses in the two sectors as HE respondents could also not agree on what the vocation of Public Relations should be called. Overall, across both sectors, 55% of the only 57% of respondents who cared enough about this issue to agree to answer it, believed Public Relations was the right name for the industry. Their reasons included its “long history” (H33), because it is a “robust umbrella term” (H5) and because of “relationships and publics” (H26). Others “loathe and detest” it (H39).

These similarities between PR education in HE and VET are significant conclusions from this study. The result of the lack of agreement in both sectors on issues as central to Public Relations education as what the name of the vocation should be, what the name of the courses should be and what faculty they should be taught from means that both sectors were focused on preparing graduates for work in an industry where only four per cent of people used the term 'Public Relations' in their titles (Bartlett & Hill 2007, p. 1). This apathy toward the term was explained by some respondents as because "it is derided" (H38) and it is "tainted" (H45). Despite this thinking and these identity issues in both sectors, what unites the sectors is that they agree they are preparing graduates for the PR industry.

Educators

Another similarity between the sectors in how Public Relations courses are run is that course leaders in both sectors have employed a majority (89% in HE and 66% in VET) of ex-practitioners as educators.

Another similarity in terms of how PR courses are taught in the two sectors is that they were largely taught by females. Female educators were in the majority in both sectors, representing 57% of all respondents, 55% of HE educators and 66% of VET educators (four of six respondents). This feminine majority was not just a similarity between the sectors but was also consistent with the female dominance of the industry demonstrated by 73% of members of the PRIA being female (PRIA 2018). It also corresponds with the feminine majority of students the courses were attracting, as discussed in the next section. When the age and number of years teaching of male HE respondents is factored in, the reason the percentage of female educators isn't closer to that of the industry and the student cohort is revealed. A number of male HE respondents are older than 56 years and have been teaching PR since the industry was male-dominated and the discipline was young and in need of educators. The next generation of PR educators will likely reflect the female dominance of the industry.

Finally, the study found another similarity between the sectors in how their PR courses are run and taught and that is that their heritage informs their purpose and approach. Both sectors have been offering Public Relations courses (arguably) since the 1970s and have in common that they are still teaching courses to train people at the technician level, just as was the case when the first courses commenced in the 1970s (Morath 2008) .

Students

There was a significant crossover between the profile of students who enrolled in PR courses in both sectors, despite there being a range of types, including:

- Informed students who want to get into the PR industry
- Misinformed students who want to get into the PR industry
- School leavers who want to attend a particular institute (in either sector)
- Students wanting a job-focused course.

Across all four categories above, in both sectors, students were mostly female (at least 70%) and typically had “fallen into (studying) PR without knowing what it is” (V3) with some sort of expectation that they will get a job at the end of their studies.

Differences

The perspectives of the respondents revealed that there were very few differences between how Public Relations courses were run and PR is taught in the HE and VET sectors. However, there were some differences between the sectors and these were in:

- Staff qualifications
- Profile of staff
- Staff membership of PRIA

Staff qualifications

One difference between the way PR courses were run in the two sectors is based on the respective qualifications of the teaching staff. In one sector, course leaders had

employed educators that were all appropriately qualified to teach in the sector and in the other they had not. All of the PR educators employed in the VET sector held the qualification required to teach there, that is the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as well as industry experience in the subject area in which they teach. In contrast, in the HE sector²⁰ (44%) HE educators did not hold a PhD, the qualification thought to be required to teach in that sector.

Profile of staff

Another difference between the two sectors was the profile of teaching staff. HE educators were older than those in the VET sector. Only nine per cent of HE respondents were under 35 and 35% were 56 or over. All of the VET educators were between 36 and 55. Only 16% of VET respondents had been teaching PR for more than 11 years whereas 49% of HE respondents had been teaching PR for 11 years or more, up to more than 30 years.

PRIA membership of staff

There was a difference in rates of PRIA membership amongst the educators employed in the two sectors. The majority, 69%, of HE respondents were members of the PRIA and the minority of the VET respondents, 33% were members.

Research Question 4

What role does an academic orientation, including the use of textbooks and journals and the academic body of knowledge in general, play in the makeup and running of Australian PR courses and how does this impact on the way teaching is done?

Only 11% of Australian PR degrees were thought by respondents to have a wholly academic orientation. This meant that the respondents claimed that the degrees functioned and were taught completely independently of the PR industry and expressly did not teach vocational skills. This claim was questionable but even if true

represents a small percentage of all PR degrees. However, a further 29 (64%) HE respondents said their course was both academic and vocational in purpose so there was some academic orientation and an academic basis to HE PR courses. There was also a quote from a VET respondent that suggested a more academic orientation of that sector than is typically expected, demonstrating that there was some interest in the VET sector of teaching from the academic body of knowledge, albeit from a textbook described by some respondents as ‘functionalist’:

We use Kim Harrison’s quite theoretical book for the diploma. (V5)

In fact, five of six (83%) VET respondents either recommended (rather than prescribed) textbooks or drew on them for teaching. In the HE sector, 29 (64%) prescribed textbooks for at least one of their units. Fifty-six per cent of all respondents favoured Australian texts and, as discussed in the answer to Research Question Three, supporting the fact that both sectors are teaching technical skills, the same five books, which are technical or ‘functionalist’ in nature – “they are advocates for PR, not critical of PR, what are they not saying?” (H42) – were the most used in both sectors.

There was some reference by a small number of HE respondents about the use of academic journals and the academic body of knowledge of Public Relations. For example, H32 stated that there was a need to use more academic sources than just textbooks, suggesting “using Sriramesh on cultural issues”.

Despite claims by 64% of HE respondents that their HE courses were based on theory and taught ‘critical skills’ as well as ‘vocational skills’, this is not the finding of this study. Respondents were asked what the course and subject content they teach was based on and answers, which included “textbooks, industry case studies and tapping into foundations of theories in texts and on the web” (H27), “case studies – current things, vignettes from the lecturer, current affairs and my own reading” (H28) and “we are an academic institute. We are driven by Chia and Synnott as our core book for theory and to look at PR’s place in the world, use my own (industry) experience

and look at social media” (H43), revealed very little evidence of respondents drawing on academic content in their courses. This response from H3 was representative of how Public Relations is being taught in the HE sector:

We provide a sound basis for a first job. The content is based on textbooks and [the] industry experience [of the lecturers] and advised by the industry panel. We teach a good set of motor skills with lots of practical examples involving teamwork and creating a real working environment.

This response evidences the use of academic theory, but represents a small minority of responses:

Lots of journal articles, we take a critical approach to PR, question the ethics of practice, look at good and bad examples of PR, question its role on society and foreground issues for the industry to consider. (H45)

Even if the claims of five (11%) HE respondents who described their courses as purely academic in focus could be evidenced, there is little in the way of academic orientation in Australian PR courses. Therefore, it would be difficult to describe HE PR education as focused on ‘pursuing knowledge for its own sake’ in line with the dominant school of thought in the literature discussed in Chapter Two. It could be said that there is some academic content and orientation in the courses represented by the 65% of respondents who claimed their courses were academic in focus and basis as well as teaching vocational skills for employment. There is however little if any evidence in the data collected to suggest the dominance of an academic focus over a vocational skills focus.

Research Question 5

What role does an industry orientation, including industry course advisory panels, case studies and industry speakers play in the makeup and running of Australian PR courses and how does this impact on the way teaching is done?

Five of six (83%) VET respondents said that their courses were “vocational”, a term they use with pride, and 40 of 45 (88%) HE respondents, with some but not all using the term ‘vocational’ but all intimating that their degrees were focused on preparing graduates for employment, said their courses were either wholly vocational (24%) or vocational and theory-based (64%). So, the majority of both VET and HE Public Relations courses had, at least in part, an industry orientation aimed at preparing graduates for work in industry to meet industry’s needs. This is entirely consistent with the purpose of the VET sector, “education and training designed explicitly with paid employment as the objective” (Maglen, cited in Blunden 1997, pp. ix, x & xi), and of society’s expectations of it. Just like in the VET sector, the course design, learning outcomes and teaching and learning practices in Australia’s Public Relations degrees also leaned toward an industry or vocational orientation. It may be that this applies more to the subjects in the PR majors or sequence of subjects but it is important to note that all respondents answered the questions as they related to the PR degree they taught in, not specifically about the PR major and at the exclusion of the remainder of the degree in which it sits. If this is the case and it is only the PR subjects that are industry-focused, leaders of PR courses are relying on those designing and teaching in other university subjects to provide PR students with the critical thinking and reflexivity desired in graduates who will make a broad contribution to society.

The impact of this on Public Relations education is two-fold:

1. Accepting that Australia’s PR degrees are mostly industry training courses, they prepare students for entry level ‘technician’ work in the PR industry, rather than equipping them with higher order thinking and analytical skills that will lead to reflective practice.
2. This focus in courses in both sectors on preparing students for work is depriving students of the benefits of a more academically-based theoretical education and depriving society, including the Public Relations industry, of university-educated reflective graduates with broad-ranging knowledge.

While many HE respondents claimed that their courses aimed to teach both skills for employment and academic theory, 88% of them, described their degree as being in part or wholly industry-focused. This means that in the context of whatever approach they are taking to the content they are teaching, whether it is skills-based or theory-based, they teach PR with a focus on preparing graduates to work in the PR industry. The impact of this industry orientation was seen in many of the HE respondents' description of the orientation of their degrees which included:

- We are an applied university. We prepare students for careers...job ready graduates. We have a moral obligation to get people jobs. Not here to learn for the sake of knowledge. (H40)
- We are here increasingly to teach technical skills and prepare work ready graduates for careers. (H28)

As these perspectives demonstrate, there was no discernible difference in the data between the orientation of the courses in the two sectors. The following perspectives of VET respondents were as proudly vocational and industry-oriented as those from HE respondents above:

- Our purpose is to give students work skills they need to start their careers. (V1)
- Definitely vocational. All our students get jobs. (V6)

The consequence of this focus in both sectors on serving industry and the impact that it has on PR education was that VET was delivering on its purpose and teaching technical PR skills to students who are then equipped for entry-level work in the industry but so was the HE sector and this was not traditionally its role (Collini 2012, p. 86; see also L'Etang 2003; Robinson 2006; Markwell 2007; Walker 2006). This can only partly be attributed to the focus on employability skills and graduate attributes in universities as these can be achieved by delivering an academically-focused education, not skills-based training. The emphasis on vocational skills development for industry could also be explained, as has been discussed earlier, by the industry

background of the educators making the teaching and learning decisions. For all of these reasons, there was a dearth of the philosophical and critical teaching about Public Relations and its place in the world that could have been provided by the HE sector.

Illustrative quotes from HE respondents included:

If we're not careful we will focus too much on theory and not enough on industry and organisational realities. (H29)

Indeed, H44 summarised a key finding of this study in relation to the academic orientation of Australia's PR courses in both sectors, but especially in the HE sector where an academic orientation is both traditional and expected:

There is not enough scholarship. (H44)

The impact that the industry orientation, given the purpose of VET, has in the VET sector can be seen to contribute to it fulfilling the objectives of the VET sector.

In the HE sector, given such a significant majority of courses are at least in part industry-oriented, the impact was that in most states students and society do not have the option of choosing a more academically-oriented Public Relations education.

One HE respondent described what teaching with an academic-orientation is like:

My own research informs my teaching as do academic journals in PR but as well as organisation studies, media, marketing and philosophy – Foucault and Bourdieu. We don't study Public Relations in isolation. (H44)

The impact on Australian PR education of not teaching like this in HE, that is, teaching with an emphasis on skills development, is that PR is being taught in isolation and arguably as 'training' not 'education'.

Ten (23%) HE respondents answered the question about how course content is developed by referring to the requirements of PRIA course accreditation and nine of those cited the industry advisory panel they were required to have as guiding course

content to meet current industry requirements. The use of case studies and industry speakers as a core element of course content in the VET sector can be seen as a desirable approach to teaching industry skills and preparing students for work. It is questionable if this is the case in the HE sector, especially if this is done at the expense of engagement with the academic body of knowledge of the subject that H21 demonstrates:

We don't use textbooks – (we have) lots of guest speakers looking at real examples.

H3's view that:

PR is not an academic discipline so of course it should be taught with a vocational focus

provides an insight into the industry orientation of PR courses. In VET, an industry orientation is ideal by the very design and purpose of the sector. In HE, an industry orientation, especially without evidence of a robust academic foundation, is not fulfilling all of the purpose of the HE sector, but, according to the respondents to the study, is nonetheless what is occurring in most of Australia's university PR courses.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Implications for Theory

Theory about Higher Education

In regard to theory pertaining to the role of universities in society, the study found that there is almost no evidence that PR education in Australia fits within the classic Greek idea of developing the whole person or of universities teaching Public Relations doing so “for the cultivation and care of the community's highest aspirations and ideals” (Collini 2012, p. 86; see also L'Etang 2003; Markwell 2007; Robinson 2006; Walker 2006). Only 11% of respondents made any such claim and even those were

questionable when their perspectives were analysed further and found to still have vocational links, including seeking the approval of industry. What these findings mean for existing theories about Higher Education are subject to nuance. It could be said that the theories are even more important in the light of these findings about how PR is being taught currently as they pertain to university education generally, not specifically to PR education in universities. That the findings contradict the theories may be a signal to those involved in HE PR programs that some of what they are doing is out of alignment with the theoretical basis of Higher Education. It could also be seen, however, that the implication for the theories is that they are outdated and no longer have a connection to contemporary universities. This would certainly be the view of many of the respondents to this study who described vocational goals for their courses rather than goals that pursue knowledge and development.

Existing theories about educating individuals were challenged by the findings that PR education in both sectors is defined by entrenched vocationalism, is mostly taught by ex-practitioners who typically base their teaching on the skills they learned when they were in the industry, and is part of an industry construct where a collaboration with industry could be seen as creating a situation where academic independence is at risk of giving way to the approval and accreditation of the industry. This approach is the antithesis of the classic Greek notions about educating individuals that were discussed in Chapter Two. It posits a new theory that in the case of how Public Relations is taught in HE, according to perspectives of the 45 HE respondents to this study, that Higher Education has moved into the VET space and is at least in part teaching vocation skills for industry.

Of the two schools of thought in the literature on the role of universities, the dominant one is that they exist to provide knowledge and to educate for education's own sake and the lesser one is that universities exist to do that as well as to develop in their students the skills they need to enter employment. The findings of this study give the thinking in the minority of the literature more credence and these theories are likely to find their support strengthening.

The study has provided further evidence for theories around universities existing in fact to be 'dual purpose', to provide vocational training *and* education for its own sake (Graham 2005, p. 27; Star & Hammer 2008, p. 237). Star and Hammer:

challenge the dichotomy that conceives of a fundamental disjuncture between the idea of universities as institutions of vocational education and the more traditional conception of universities as key institutions in the formation of reflective practitioners, social critics and good citizens (2008, p. 237).

Those invested in PR education should be cautioned that, as discussed earlier, the study upheld Graham's view that in trying to do both, universities have lost the distinction that once marked the difference between them and VET institutes to the detriment of both sectors (Graham 2005, p. 27). This is perhaps the most significant moment for pause in this study. It serves as a reminder to decision makers in PR education to be clear about their purpose, in terms of what the institute they work for is there for, what the objective of their PR course is and how the leadership and teaching decisions made in that course seek to fulfil that purpose. Is the intrinsic value of their sector being harnessed to achieve that purpose or has it been lost or reduced as a result of previous course and teaching decisions? Graham cautions essentially that there is value in why universities exist and value in why VET institutes exist and the risk is that value is lost or diminished in the pursuit of trying to achieve both. These findings mean that these theories have the potential to shape future discourse about Higher Education generally and its teaching of PR specifically.

Theory about VET

Researchers agree that VET has as its primary purpose the skilling of Australians for work (Misko 1999; Norton Grubb, cited in Selby Smith & Ferrier 1996; Tovey & Lawlor 2008) and the study's findings agree with this conception. Society typically expects that VET implements this goal in a purely practical manner rather than taking a theory-based approach. There was however some nuance in the data collected that showed that depending on the individual educator, this was not always the case.

Some VET respondents used textbooks, albeit largely functionalist texts that do not necessarily mean that teaching is based on theory but – importantly – they were also the same texts being used in the HE sector. The study was conclusive however that VET training in Public Relations was wholly focused on skills development for employment despite some reference to the use of textbooks. The sample size of VET respondents was also not significant and this finding needs to be considered with that understanding. It is unlikely that such a small sample will significantly challenge the validity of the theories about the purpose of VET. This study will do nothing in that space other than be seen to support that, in the significant majority, PR education in the VET sector is conducted in line with the expectations of the sector, that is to teach vocational PR skills to students with a view to them being employed in the PR industry.

Grounded Theory

The use of Grounded Theory made a significant contribution to the study in terms of approach, data collection and analysis. This has been identified and will be described as implications for Grounded Theory. Using mostly qualitative research meant that the study was able to generate data based on semi-structured interviews with respondents mostly in their professional environments, based on their own spoken words, and to be enhanced by the researcher's observations made while in the field. Using Grounded Theory specifically gave the researcher a lot of flexibility in the field to change the direction of the inquiry, to focus on interesting perspectives or observations when they were made and to change the order of questions in subsequent interviews to reflect new ideas and insights. Consequently, the study revealed the suitability of Grounded Theory as a methodology for this type of inquiry where theory is constructed as the data develops. Its successful use in this study strengthens it as a choice for future researchers and for this researcher conducting qualitative research in the future.

This study also demonstrated the suitability of Grounded Theory for gathering data from a large sample of respondents, allowing it to be brought to life based on what each respondent had to contribute rather than restricting the data gathering simply to asking the set questions in the required order. The study's use of Grounded Theory also revealed the contribution to the richness of the data that was made by the researcher's use of "writing theory" (Babbie 2009) or "memoing" (Birks & Mills 2015). This process involved the researcher taking reflective notes at all stages of the data collection and musing on them to help the sense-making process of constructing theory from the data. It was invaluable. The researcher was able to better connect themes and make meaning from the data as a consequence of having memos to assist with the data analysis.

Implications for PR education

The Higher Education sector

One implication of the findings of this study for PR education in universities, is that, teaching vocational skills for the PR industry is contributing to a number of reputational issues facing PR as an academic discipline. Higher Education has taken on the role of the VET sector and is teaching skills for work rather than, or in concert with, facilitating knowledge for development and growth. The study reveals a number of reasons for this occurring. These include employing ex-practitioners who consider preparing students for work in the PR industry to be their role, or at least the role of university PR courses, and not having a large professoriate or a majority of educators with PhDs or research experience.

Consequences of these findings, and therefore implications for PR education in HE, include PR having failed to find a legitimate home for itself in the university faculty structure and PR degrees having earned a reputation for being not 'academic degrees' but 'industry degrees'. These two findings are significant and have the capacity to limit the opportunity for PR to ever be well-regarded as an academic

discipline taught at top research universities. They also are likely to result in PR degrees never being perceived as anything other than 'industry degrees' taught not by research academics but by ex-practitioners teaching skills for industry.

Another implication for PR education in HE is that there is a perception now that PR degrees are offered at some universities purely because their popularity sees them as 'cash cows' for those universities. This too is unlikely to change. Compared to the dominant school of thought in the literature about the purpose of universities, the HE sector's approach to teaching PR is a long way away from its philosophical base. An implication for the sector is that university PR courses can be seen to be more aligned to VET PR courses, creating the impression that the universities teaching them are becoming second rate trade schools. (First rate trade schools would have qualified teachers with current industry skills and a curriculum and facilities designed to equip students for contemporary work. Universities have not equipped themselves appropriately to deliver VET, but the findings reveal that in the vast majority of PR degrees that is what they are endeavouring to do). By making skills development for work in industry such a significant plank in PR education, the HE sector is at risk of relegating PR degrees to their origins in "vocationally-oriented second tier institutions" (Fitch 2014b, p. 623) and if this occurs it is an implication for HE that would be difficult to shift.

The impact of PRIA accreditation of courses and its version of the five-course approach (Toth & Aldoory 2010; VanSlyke Turk 2006) is thought to have created a homogeneity among PRIA-accredited majors, that is they are essentially the same, all including the five courses (subjects) that the industry has agreed are essential, and mostly focusing on teaching the content of these subjects to equip graduates for work in the industry. This results in less choice for students and less opportunity for a university to differentiate itself in a crowded market (other than via the Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) required to be accepted into each course), for example in Melbourne, and pursue a competitive advantage. The implication of this, while student numbers are buoyant, has not been significant but should demand for

Public Relations courses and degrees in particular decline, this will be a limitation for individual universities in the first instance but with the capacity to impact on the entire sector in myriad ways over time. HE PR has chosen the 'industry degree' path for itself and is focusing what and how it teaches on preparing students to become the workforce of the PR industry. It is either not basing PR education in HE on academic theory linked to the established body of knowledge that is necessary for advancing Public Relations as an academic field of study (Vasquez & Botan 1999, p. 115), or only doing that to a limited extent along with teaching vocational skills. As such, PR education in universities and the educators who teach in university PR courses are at risk of never gaining the status or academic standing they desire.

A more significant implication for HE than the status or standing of Public Relations courses is the impact of the lack of consensus about what to call 'Public Relations' as a vocation and a discipline. This can be seen by the lack of support for the term among organisational job titles and of would-be Public Relations courses themselves. This splintering of the term, combined with the lack of leadership of the industry body generally, has seen a significant decline in the use of the term 'Public Relations'. Even though there is a 50-year academic body of knowledge in the name of Public Relations, the term is being replaced with what are mostly euphemisms for the ill-defined field of PR – Communication, Corporate Communications, Strategic Communication et al. A potential implication of these findings is the possibility that Public Relations degrees in HE will disappear altogether, buried in courses with other names.

The Vocational Education and Training sector

Notwithstanding the considerable implications for the HE sector of the findings of this study, as outlined above, the most significant implication for PR education is potentially in the VET sector. The VET sector could possibly suffer the catastrophe implied by what Graham (2005, p. 27) called the "catastrophic blurring" of the purpose of VET and HE. Universities having ventured into skills training for the PR

industry - perhaps because PR education has never been able to extricate itself from its foundations in technical institutes - are likely to increasingly usurp the role of 'industry trainer' from the VET sector. This may result in the VET sector no longer having a role in PR training as students look to universities for vocational PR courses.

Based on the findings of this study, it is not unreasonable to agree with Mackey (2001) that given the current focus on skills training in university PR courses even alongside theory-based education, perhaps Public Relations should not be taught in the HE sector alongside traditional academic disciplines including Sociology and Physics.

Implications for practice

The findings have shown that HE is striving to produce graduates who are 'job ready' and well-prepared for their first job in the PR industry. This could be interpreted as being a positive implication for PR practice and it is likely that many respondents to this study, those who value this vocationalist approach, would think so. But another implication for practice of these so-called job ready graduates is that they are not in fact well-prepared for practice. This is because the focus on technical skills development, often, according to the perspectives of many respondents, in the absence of theory-based knowledge development, does not prepare a graduate well to become a reflective practitioner. Even though 64% of respondents claimed to teach both skills for employment in the industry and academic theory, this figure was challenged in the analysis and it is thought that the number of respondents who work in PR courses that teach with a robust academic underpinning is very few.

This is a less than desirable outcome for both graduates and practice. Reflexivity is not known to be an outcome of vocational teaching. However, the field being populated by 'reflective practitioners' is important to Public Relations practice being well-regarded and eventually to it being unanimously thought of not just as a profession but specifically one that enjoys the respect of society. Reflective practitioners approach a situation in Public Relations practice with the capacity to

“think critically and strategically” (Toth & Aldoory, p. 2010) and to practise Public Relations in a “professional, ethical and socially responsible way” (Bernays 1952, p. 83). This is thought to be in contrast to only having the skills to perform a particular task or series of tasks that result in a particular and predictable level of performance in the workplace (Tovey & Lawlor 2008, pp. 36-37). If, as a consequence of most PR teaching focusing on skills development for employment, possibly at the expense of the development of critical thinking and reflexivity, there is an absence of these qualities in graduate practitioners, then this will have negative, if not destructive, implications for PR practice.

Another implication for practice is created by ex-practitioner educators who have not practised for many years and do not hold a PhD. In focusing on skills development and teaching the skills they used when they were practitioners, it is reasonable to question the currency of the industry skills being taught in those situations.

The findings showed that dated skills included approaching the media relations aspect of Public Relations practice from a traditional newspaper-led media basis rather than a web-based media one, for example teaching students how to write ‘press releases’ for a ‘press’ that was long ago replaced with a ‘media’ and that more recently incorporated web-based and social media. One HE respondent (H15) was teaching radio and television news gathering without the use of a smart phone which has become the primary tool in news media, especially in radio. The respondent was teaching a core subject in that university’s PR major and was an ex-media industry employee who did not have a PhD and was teaching skills from when he/she worked in the media 35 years ago. Even supporters of skills-based courses or courses that at least include some skills development would agree that this is not a good outcome.

While it is possible for educators to keep abreast of industry practices, respondents were asked about how the content of their courses was established and maintained and there was little in the data that suggested that respondents were engaging in continuing professional development, other than by ‘their own reading’. For example, one HE respondent said the industry hadn’t changed much in the 30 years since he

was in it. Another, who had been teaching at university for more than 30 years and was disengaged from how the industry now operates, was teaching a hands-on industry subject, consequently in a very out-of-date manner. If the implication of this for PR practice is looked at through the lens of these courses being designed and delivered to produce graduates for the PR industry, which the majority of respondents agreed was the intention, it is possible that graduates are being trained to be job ready but entering PR practice with skills and ideas that are based on outdated understandings of that practice.

The issues around the status of Public Relations as an academic discipline and the lack of unity and agreement about what the field should be called (of those who cared enough about this topic to answer it, 55% believed Public Relations was the right name for the industry and 43% did not) were also perceived to impact on the professionalism and reputation of Public Relations as a practice. The study did not find a lot of support for the term 'Public Relations' among respondents. The perception of the majority above is based on a small number of respondents. This is because, for reasons outlined in Chapter Four including that the question is oft-asked and contentious, most did not care to comment. Also, a minority of so-called PR courses actually had 'Public Relations' in their titles. It also found that this is consistent with the lack of the use of the term in the PR industry. The implication for practice, just as was outlined above for the implication for PR education, is that there are no sustainable foundations on which the industry can maintain the name 'Public Relations'. Because of this, it is unlikely that an industry called 'Public Relations' could continue to exist, especially as practitioners describing themselves as 'Public Relations' practitioners virtually do not exist already. Given the support in the data for an alternative term, it is likely the 'Public Relations' industry will be replaced by a 'Communication' industry, and with the right leadership, perhaps even a 'Communication' profession. Public Relations practitioners in corporate roles have already mostly been replaced by Communication practitioners. It seems unlikely that following that trend, and without the existence any more of degrees with Public

Relations in their titles, consultants and practitioners will continue to use the term 'Public Relations' consultant or practitioner to describe their work. This likelihood will increase as practitioners who entered the industry when it was more unanimously known as Public Relations are replaced by graduates and other new industry entrants who conceive 'Public Relations' as 'Communication' or 'Comms'.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited by the small sample size in the VET sector, as, for a variety of reasons including there being relatively few VET educators teaching Public Relations, there were only six respondents from that sector. This restricted the generalisations that could be made about that sector and reduced the researcher's ability in some areas to make meaningful comparisons between the two sectors. It can be estimated that at the time the data was gathered there were fewer than 20 PR educators in the VET sector so this study has incorporated the views and experiences of about 30% of them.

An extra dimension to the data and a fuller picture of Public Relations education could have been created if the study had gathered the perspectives of PR education of current PR students in both sectors. It could also have included the perspectives of recent PR graduates. That it did neither of these is a limitation of this study.

Although slightly outside of the specific area of inquiry of this study, that is, perspectives of PR educators about PR education, a complementary or perhaps parallel investigation that would have enhanced this study would have been a content analysis of the PR courses being discussed by respondents to this study. The reason why this study did not include content analysis of Australian PR courses as noted earlier, is that, essentially the study sought the perspectives of Public Relations educators on this matter, not an independent overview of content.

The absence of both the data from students and the course content analysis can be seen to be both limitations of this study and opportunities for future research. The latter is discussed in the following section for that reason.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study enhance the understanding of how Public Relations is being taught in Australia in both the HE and VET sectors. As the study focused on determining the perspectives of PR educators, it would be interesting to add those of three other groups:

- PR students in both sectors
- PR graduates, and
- Public Relations practitioners.

Further research could attempt to understand PR education in Australia from each of these perspectives and seek to determine each group's satisfaction with it. Further, as an examination of the PRIA's policies and practices in Public Relations education was outside the scope of this study, opportunities exist to explore those alongside the findings of this study in future.

It would also provide objective data to supplement the subjective views of the respondents in this study about what is being taught.

Another area of potential future research is investigating the extent to which PR courses are being taught in accordance with the AQF level that they correspond with. This would follow on from the pointed remark of one respondent (H26) who asked whether AQF approved PR degrees were level seven or three times level five, and the finding that respondents from both sectors were using the same five text books for courses ranging from AQF four (Certificate IV) to AQF nine (Master degree). Such research could make a considerable contribution to the effectiveness of Australia's approach to Public Relations education.

A comparative study of how Public Relations education is structured compared to more established vocations and professions, such as Accounting, Engineering and Law, is another possible area for further research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcomes and conclusions of this study, some recommendations for changes to Public Relations education in Australia are outlined below. Following are recommendations for:

- The Public Relations industry in Australia
- Australian HE Public Relations educators
- Australian VET Public Relations educators

The Australian Public Relations industry

The Australian Public Relations industry is in urgent need of leadership because it has left itself vulnerable to other fields making in-roads into its traditional domains and to critics who are filling in their own definitions of the industry and the practice (Hutton 1999, p. 199). In fact, Hutton (2001, pp. 212-214) believes that Public Relations is terminally threatened by its failure to “develop sophisticated and progressive theory” and “define its intellectual and practical domain” and to “regain control of its own destiny”. The Public Relations ‘industry’, ideally academics and practitioners working together, needs to decide if it wants to maintain the term ‘Public Relations’ and imbue it with new theory-based meaning that can unite the industry and the academy behind it. This action has the potential to protect the term ‘Public Relations practitioner’ from being used inappropriately by anyone without credentials who chooses to ‘put up a shingle’ and claim to be a PR practitioner. However, time is running out. Already only four percent of practitioners use the term ‘Public Relations’ in their titles (Bartlett & Hill 2007), courses in 12 out of the 19 universities involved in this study call their ‘Public Relations’ courses something other than ‘Public Relations’

and the academy is also divided over whether or not it is the right name for the discipline.

As the academy is also undecided about whether or not Public Relations is a profession, the industry, by way of its industry body the PRIA, has the opportunity to position it definitively as one. This could be done by committing to one name for the industry and discipline, for example 'Public Relations'. This would have the advantage of the name of the vocation, the academic body of knowledge, the industry body and the qualifications all being the same. Further, it should ensure that only appropriately educated and qualified people can join the institute and operate as professional Public Relations practitioners. Currently it is possible to join the PRIA without a qualification of any type (PRIA 2018). It is difficult to imagine it being possible to join the professional bodies for accountants, lawyers or doctors, or to practise in any of those fields, without a qualification of any type, much less one in the appropriate field. This change to the membership criteria would reinforce the role of education in the professionalisation of Public Relations, a notion which found a lot of support in this study. Perhaps aspiring PRIA members should have to sit and pass an entrance examination or interview as well, as has previously been the requirement. By following the lead of other professional bodies, for example those associated with Law and Accounting, the PRIA could also communicate to the broader society that only PRIA members are professional Public Relations practitioners. This would announce Public Relations as a profession in line with the definitions and requirements discussed in Chapter Two and help to position PRIA members as ethical professionals.

HE Public Relations educators

If the industry gets the leadership it needs, HE PR educators can get behind it by providing the pillars of professionalism that Public Relations requires from education. These include increasing the academic body of knowledge in Public Relations. This can be given an impetus by investigating the publication productivity of existing

Public Relations educators and encouraging more research. Another pillar is more people with PhDs, either in PR or in other disciplines, teaching in PR degrees. This can be pursued by encouraging PR educators without PhDs to pursue them and attracting new educators with PhDs in any discipline to teach and research in Public Relations.

If the industry does not get the leadership it needs from outside the academy, HE PR educators should 'unite and fight' and lead PR themselves. They could reverse the existing way of thinking about PR as a practice first and a body of knowledge second by demonstrating that the discipline can be interpreted first from a theoretical basis and then from a practical one. They could demonstrate that PR education does not need to exist as an instrument of industry nor be entrenched in vocationalism. PR education could be conducted in a more scholarly way to shape and guide PR practice rather than meet its needs. It can do this by developing new knowledge and bringing it into teaching and to the industry via graduates, but also directly by sharing their latest research with practitioners at conferences.

By standing apart from the industry body, or by working from within the industry body but as equal partners to practitioners not servants of them, the PR academy could lead the discipline itself and become the "standard bearer of the (Public Relations) education age" as Spies encourages (cited in Inayatullah & Gidley 2000, p. 20).

Given the view by some that the requirements of PRIA accreditation of PR courses are restrictive, that is that being a PRIA-accredited course places restrictions on course design, content and delivery, and thought to be a "marketing exercise with no intrinsic value" (H25), individual universities could stand independently of the PRIA, as had a Group of Eight university included in the study. They could design their own courses, completely removed from the 'five-course' model if they chose, and determine their own place in the competitive PR education marketplace, thereby providing a point of difference for prospective students. This could be done by researching in and teaching a Public Relations specialisation, for example in Business where the majority of respondents consider PR should be taught from, or in

Community Engagement or Sustainability or Fashion. This would enable one university's PR course to position itself as different from those at other universities and subsequently attract a new and different cohort of students. To further the impact of this, HE educators could publish more widely, again for example in Business or Sustainability journals. This would enable educators to share their research with a wider academic and industry audience, thereby improving the status of Public Relations as both an academic discipline and, consequently, as an emerging profession.

The PR academy could take a leadership role in Public Relations becoming a profession by creating a new type of PR graduate – an aspiring professional practitioner equipped for the future rather than a facsimile of those who have come before. By growing the knowledge of PR and the capacity to embrace new thinking, rather than drawing on potentially dated concepts and skills as has been discussed, and encouraging students to re-imagine what Public Relations is capable of rather than how it is or was practised, HE educators can help to grow a profession for a changing society.

VET Public Relations educators

It may be too late for VET to maintain a role in Public Relations education in Australia. Putting government policy shifts and their impact on the sector aside, the teaching of vocational skills in university courses could be seen to have usurped the legitimate and structural role that the VET sector has and could have continued to have. With some universities becoming 'second rate trade schools' (Buchanan 2011) by giving up, or never fulfilling, their academic role and taking over the vocational one teaching job skills, HE has potentially put the VET sector out of the Public Relations training business. That is a missed opportunity as VET could "own it" as Seddon (2011) suggests and it is recommended that this opportunity is not allowed to be lost. Leaving HE to lead the research and teach the theory, the VET sector could continue to fulfil its purpose of teaching the 'practical wisdom' of Public Relations and be

known and sought out for it. This would involve ensuring the industry-currency of its educators, making sure they are engaging in ongoing professional development to ensure they are up-to-date, engaging with the contemporary PR industry and embedding practitioners into the learning of VET PR students.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand Public Relations education in Australia from the perspective of those who teach in it. It sought the views of educators in both sectors of the post-secondary education system in Australia. The study's aim was to determine what was occurring in Public Relations education – how Public Relations was being taught; what the drivers were, who was making the decisions and what the concerns and challenges of PR educators in Australia were. It also set out to investigate the purpose of having PR courses in both sectors. This was done by reviewing published literature in the areas of the history of Public Relations, both overseas and in Australia, and the history and development of Public Relations education, also in Australia and overseas. Literature about the role of education in professionalising PR was also reviewed in addition to examining the purpose of the two education sectors – what they stood for philosophically, where they fitted into government policy and what each sector afforded those who engaged with it. These reviews provided a conceptual framework for analysing and understanding the data gathered in the fieldwork. The primary data was collected in two ways: semi-structured interviews were conducted nationally with 51 educators from both post-secondary sectors and personal observations (with note taking) were also made during the interview process.

Grounded Theory informed the study which saw the researcher conduct the fieldwork and to then make observations from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational data (Babbie 2009; Burns 1994;

Merriam 2009). In line with key aspects of Grounded Theory, an inductive approach was used to conduct 38 of the 51 interviews face-to-face, using a semi-structured style of interviewing (Kreuger & Neuman 2006, p. 153), ultimately helping to gather rich qualitative data.

The themes that emerged in response to the research questions included the impact of whether the course is industry-oriented or academically-oriented; the role of the educator and that of the student; the development and impact of resources including the use of case studies; textbooks and academic literature, and; the relationship between industry and the academy. This data was analysed and discussed and ultimately drawn on to answer the five research questions about:

- the impact on course quality of the experience and qualifications of educators
- whether courses in the two sectors fit within their traditionally prescribed roles
- the similarities and differences between the teaching in HE and VET courses
- the impact of an academic orientation, and
- the impact of an industry orientation on Public Relations education in Australia.

The education theories about the distinctive purposes of the HE and the VET sectors provided a framework that helped to interrogate Public Relations education in Australia. The study is significant because it provides insights into what is really occurring in Public Relations education in both sectors from the point of view of educators. It reveals that PR education in HE is usurping the traditional and philosophical role of the VET sector. Even in the courses that have a basis in, or reference to, the academic body of knowledge in Public Relations, they are mostly providing industry-focused vocational training.

The study is important because it signals to PR educators and the Australian PR industry that most PR education, irrespective of the sector in which it is taught, is in fact PR training preparing graduates for work in the PR industry. It was common for HE respondents to consider that the Public Relations education that students in their

courses were receiving was 'academic' or 'theory-based' purely because it was occurring in a university and not in the VET sector.

The study foreshadows the likely demise of Australia's two-sector approach to teaching Public Relations. The role of providing skilled staff for the PR industry has been assumed by the HE sector and as such could be expected to diminish the need for PR courses in the VET sector. If PR education in HE does nothing more than simply taking over the vocational training role and does not change to "signal something more than professional training" (Collini 2012, p. 7), the status of PR education, and specifically of Public Relations as an academic discipline, is unlikely to improve. This would be to the detriment of the ongoing attempts to professionalise Public Relations. It would also potentially limit any claim Public Relations might have to full professional status and to the elusive legitimate and well-respected permanent 'home' in universities. At worst, without urgent and sweeping action, Public Relations degrees will cease to exist and the academic discipline of Public Relations will be incorporated into broader degrees in Communication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1- INTERVIEW GUIDE

YOUR NAME

YOUR TITLE

MODE OF EMPLOYMENT (FULL TIME, PART TIME, SESSIONAL)

YEARS AT THE INSTITUTE/UNIVERSITY

COURSE YOU TEACH IN

SUBJECTS/UNITS YOU TEACH

WHO ELSE TEACHES IN YOUR COURSE – HOW MANY TEACHING STAFF, FULL TIME, PART TIME, SESSIONAL? WHAT ARE THEIR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS AND ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS?

INSTITUTE/UNIVERSITY

STATE

1. What are your professional and academic credentials? What professional/industry associations are you a member of?

(Please include number of years worked at various places and where you earned your qualifications.)

2. How would you describe the course/s you teach in terms of structure, cohort, purpose and teaching and learning practices?

3. What is the course and subject content you teach based on? How and when is it validated? Is it kept up to date, how and why? How is it evaluated and by whom?
4. What do you consider to be your role as a PR educator and the role of your course? Do you consider/evaluate its role in preparing students for work in the PR industry? Do you consider/evaluate its role in preparing students in other ways?
5. If yours is a VET course, how do students benefit from the style of teaching and learning and from the course content and structure? How are your students assessed? What are the distinctive characteristics of a VET course in Public Relations? (eg Do you subscribe to the view that VET courses are about practical skills development - teaching students to 'do' rather than think - and focus on job readiness?)
6. If yours is a university course, how do students benefit from the style of teaching and learning and from the course content and structure? How are your students assessed? What are the distinctive characteristics of a university course in Public Relations? (eg Do you subscribe to the view that university courses are about teaching students to think, or develop 'higher order' or 'critical' thinking, rather than do?)
7. What do you believe should be the relationship between PR educators and the PR industry (PRIA and individual practitioners)? Should teaching lead practice or practice lead teaching? If relevant, what is the nature of your relationship and that of your course/organisation with the PR industry and how is this demonstrated?
8. Do you believe that PR educators should reflect the PR industry? Examples of this might include incorporating case studies into teaching, inviting practitioners to address students on contemporary PR practices or having an industry advisory board for the course. Or should PR educators purely draw on academic research and established texts?

9. Please outline which teaching resources you use – generally, textbooks, industry projects, guest lecturers, etc, and specifically, please provide details (eg which textbook/s do you prescribe?)
10. Do you, or does your course, strive to produce vocational outcomes for students (often described as employability skills in the VET sector and graduate attributes in the university sector)? How does this shape your teaching and/or course design?
11. How well do you think Public Relations is being taught
 - At your institute/university?
 - In your sector (VET/HE)?
 - Nationally?
 - Internationally?Why and what are the drivers?
12. What, in your opinion and based on your experience, are the characteristics of a ‘best practice’ Public Relations course?
13. What do you consider to be the key issues/challenges facing PR education?
14. What do you think the role of Public Relations education is in contributing to the professionalisation of Public Relations?
15. Do you have any other comments?