# Strategy in higher education: Reshaping perspectives

Marian Mahat

# Overview

RATIONALE

CONTEXT

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

RESEARCH METHODS

FINDINGS
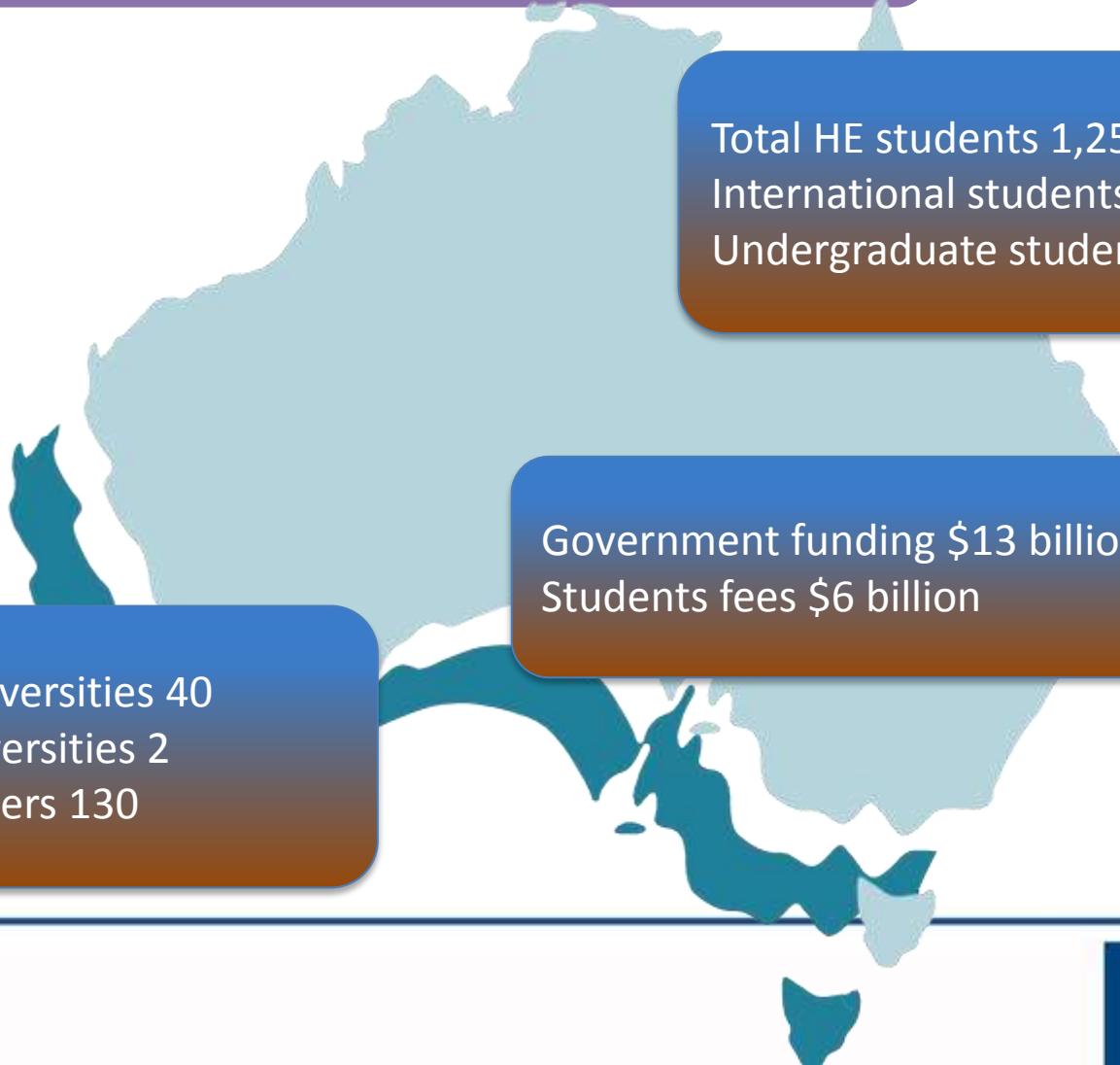
DISCUSSION

IMPLICATIONS

# RATIONALE

- Strategy does not apply to a substantially public and more institutionalised sector such as higher education (Amaral, Jones, & Karseth, 2002; Gumport, 2001).

- Strategy is not achievable in complex, loosely coupled organisations such as universities (Leslie, 1996; Musselin, 2007).

- Strategy is not achievable in organisations functioning in regulated contexts given the extent of regulatory control of competitive dimensions (Mahon & Murray, 1980, 1981; Smith & Grimm, 1987).

- Key issues shaping higher education drive institutions towards new forms of management forcing them to make strategic choices in order to make use of their resources effectively and efficiently (Ernst & Young, 2012; Mahat & Coates, 2014; Parker, 2012).

# RATIONALE

In what ways are medical schools distinctive from each other?

How does performance affect strategic positioning in medical schools?

# CONTEXT

Total HE students 1,257,722
International students 325,961
Undergraduate students 836,350

Government funding $13 billion
Students fees $6 billion

Australian universities 40
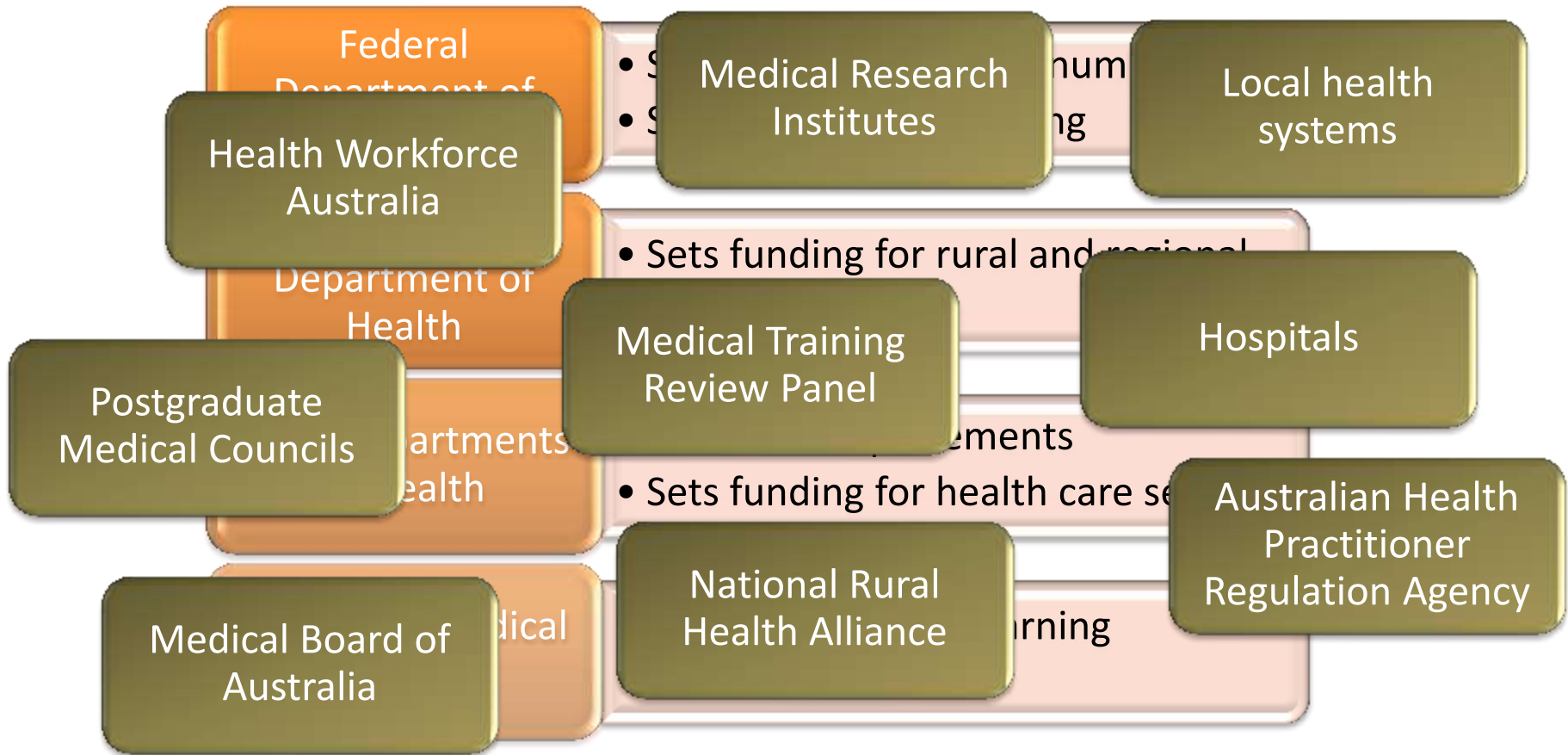Overseas universities 2
Private providers 130

# CONTEXT

Governance and internal structures differ between medical schools.

Medical students 16,837
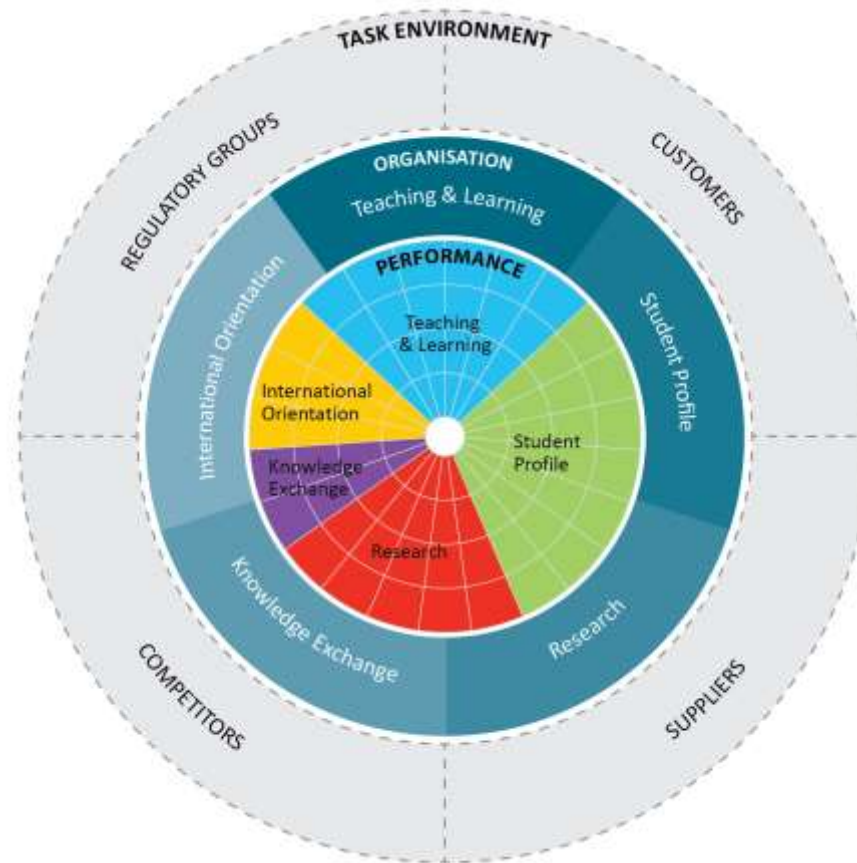Domestic students 14,384
International students 2,453

Some medical schools combine a number of different foci including dentistry within the medical school framework.

18 medical schools located in 40 universities

# CONTEXT

Federal Department of
- S... num...
- S...

Health Workforce Australia

Medical Research Institutes

Local health systems

Department of Health

- Sets funding for rural and regional

Medical Training Review Panel

Hospitals

Postgraduate Medical Councils

...artments ...ealth

...ements

- Sets funding for health care se...

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

Medical Board of Australia

...dical

National Rural Health Alliance

...rning

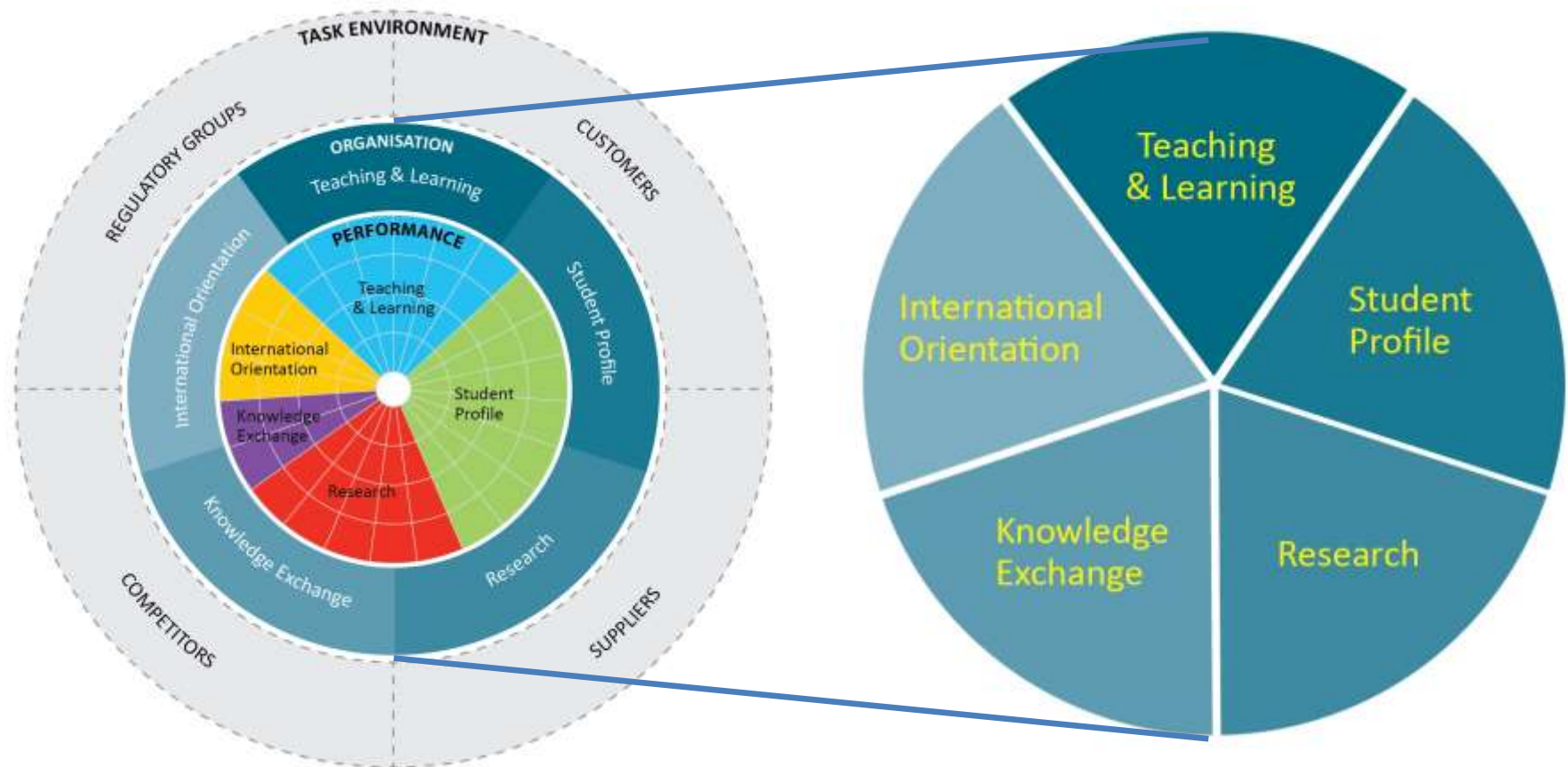# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Strategic positioning in higher education is the process through which higher education institutions locate themselves in specific niches within the higher education system (Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011).

(see examples of Coates et al., 2013; Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013; Kim & Mauborgne, 2005; Lukas et al., 2001; Mahat et al., 2014; Mahon & Murray, 1981; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Popielarz & Neal, 2007; Purcell et al., 2011; Tan & Litschert, 1994; van Vught & Huisman, 2013; van Vught et al., 2010)

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

| Medical school rankings | Teaching and Learning | Research | Knowledge exchange | International Orientation | Student profile |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic ranking of World Universities – Clinical Medicine and Pharmacy | | √ | | | |
| Find the best - medical school | √ | | | | √ |
| QS World University Rankings by Subject – Medicine and Life Sciences | √ | √ | | | |
| The Guardian League Table for Medicine | √ | | | | |
| THE World University Ranking by Subject – Clinical pre-clinical & health, Life sciences & Physical Sciences | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| U-Multirank Field based – Medicine | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| US News & World Report – Best medical school | √ | | | | √ |

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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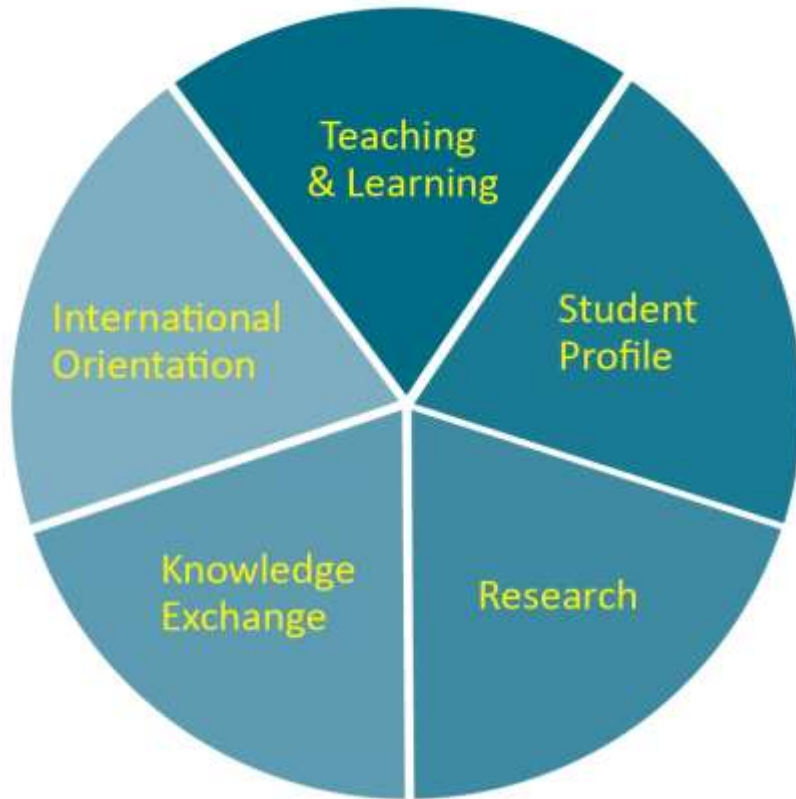


- Five dimensions of activities

- Adopt strategies which emphasised some dimensions at the expense of others in order to avoid becoming 'stuck in the middle' (Mahon & Murray, 1981)

- Locate themselves in new and emerging distinctive market spaces or "blue ocean" (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005)

- Locate themselves in niches through focusing on such attributes such as commitment to diversity (Morphew & Hartley, 2006)

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
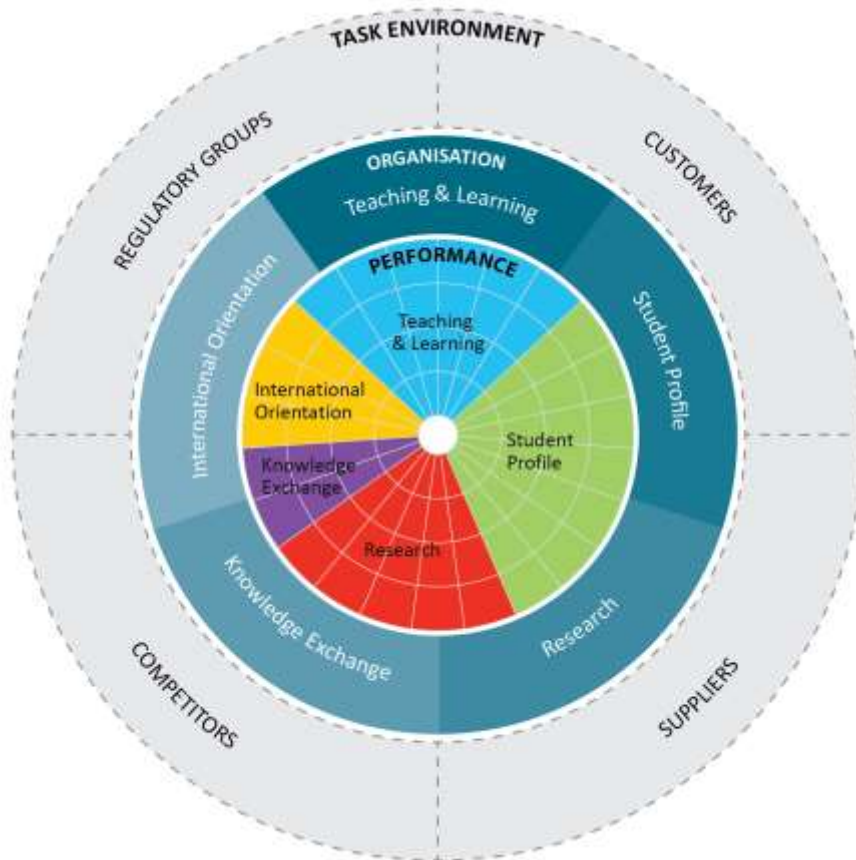


Visual representation of performance is important for supporting strategic decision making at all stages of the strategy process (Eden & Ackerman, 1998; Foil & Huff, 1992; Lohse, Biolsi, Walker, & Rueter, 1994; Morgan, 1993; Tan & Platts, 2003; Tufte, 1990).

Visualisation techniques have many cognitive and operational techniques, e.g. focuses attention, provides overview of complex data etc. (Tan & Platts, 2004).

A number of techniques used to visualise performance in a strategy process, e.g. performance profiling, strategy charting, performance ranking, benchmarking (Tan & Platts, 2004; van Vught & Huisman, 2013).

## Authors

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# *Profiling diversity of Australian universities*

## Executive summary

There is a good deal of consensus that institutional diversity in higher education is a good thing. Simply put, systems with more diverse institutions perform better than systems with less diverse institutions. Yet the overall diversity of Australia's higher education system remains unclear. Significant questions and opportunities remain
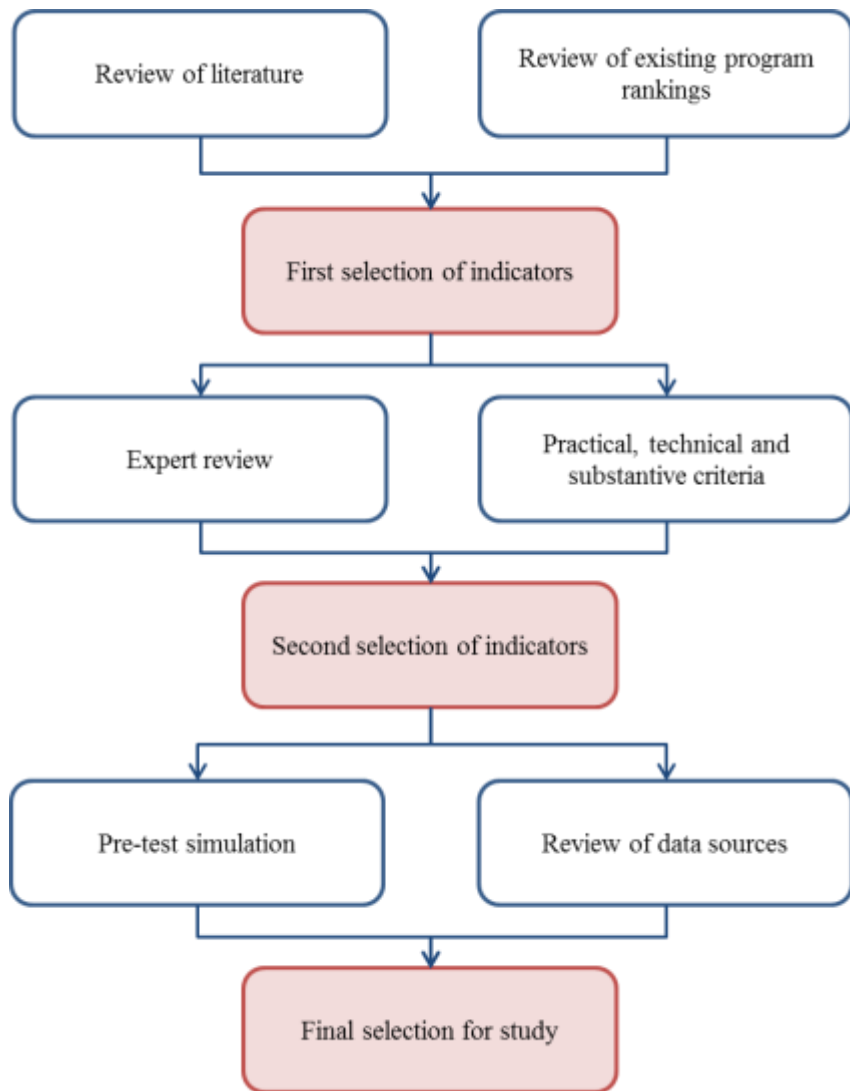
Through a rigorous process of validation, a number of indicators were removed, adapted or included to suit the medical school context.

A final set of 23 indicators of performance were selected based on criteria of practical consideration, technical consideration and substantive consideration.

The evaluation of each indicator was both theory- and data-driven.

# RESEARCH METHODS

- **Qualitative method**
  - 6 case study medical schools
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - 21 academic and professional staff
  - Thematic analysis of interview data

# RESEARCH METHODS

M1
Under 10 yrs
Small

M2
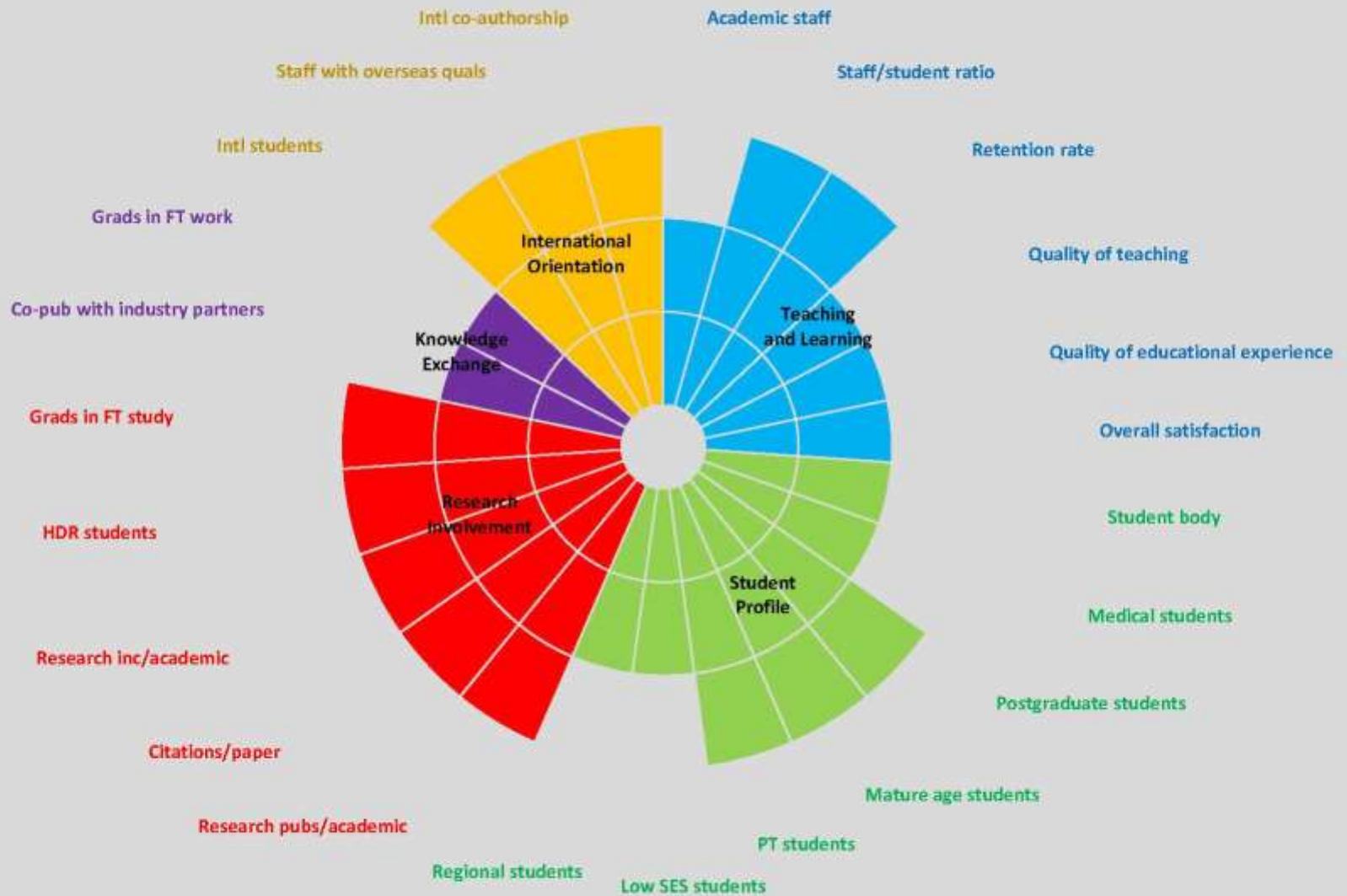Under 10 yrs
Small

M3
Above 50 yrs
Large

M4
10 - 50 yrs
Medium

M5
Above 50 yrs
Large

M6
10 - 50 yrs
Medium

# RESEARCH METHODS

- **Quantitative method**
  - Analysis of performance of all 18 medical schools
  - Each medical school benchmarked against all others and placed in first, second, third or fourth quartile for each indicator, depending on performance
  - The output was compiled graphically into a profile for each medical school

# Median Medical School

Intl co-authorship

Academic staff

Staff with overseas quals

Staff/student ratio

Intl students

Retention rate

Grads in FT work

International Orientation

Quality of teaching

Co-pub with industry partners

Teaching and Learning

Knowledge Exchange

Quality of educational experience

Grads in FT study

Overall satisfaction

Research Involvement

HDR students

Student body

Student Profile

Research inc/academic

Medical students

Citations/paper

Postgraduate students

Research pubs/academic

Mature age students

PT students

Regional students

Low SES students

# Strategic positioning

- Australian medical school system is bipolar in nature: research and teaching and learning

- Medical schools emphasise some dimensions at the expense of others

- Some medical schools attempt to position themselves in 'blue ocean' (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005)

- A number of features, location, age and size, are seen as distinctive.
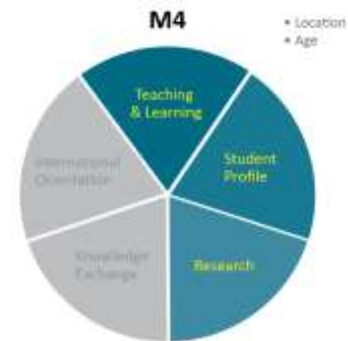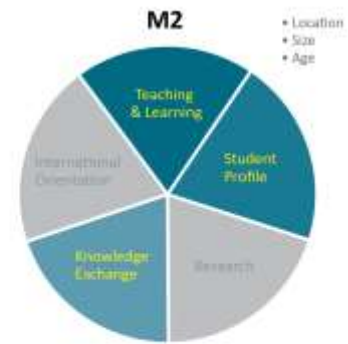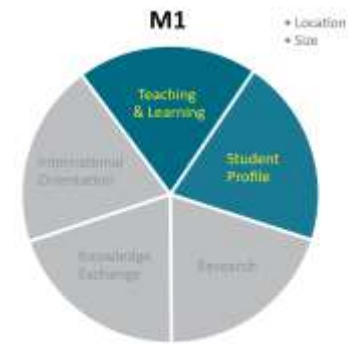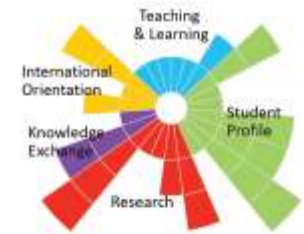
# Performance

- As a visual tool, it lets medical schools analyse strengths and weaknesses; direct discussions and more focussed planning; focus resources and investments; outline priorities…etc.

- A poor performance on one measure or activity may lead to strategic decisions aimed at effecting improvements, if it was considered to be of strategic importance to that medical school.

- The key to executing strategy is to have staff in the medical school understand it; and that a visual mapping tool could be used effectively in the strategy formulation process.

# Medical schools in context

- Performance of medical schools is quite aligned and consistent to the strategic positions of medical schools.

- **Medical school M1**: Its performance in teaching and learning and student profile seems to be quite consistent to the position it has defined for itself.

- **Medical school M3**: Its performance across all five dimensions seem to correspond to its strategic position within the system.

- **Medical school M6**: Participants perceived its position to be focused in teaching and learning; research and knowledge exchange, however their performance in these dimensions did not seem to measure up.



Medical School – M1

Medical School – M2

Medical School – M3

Medical School – M4

Medical School – M5

Medical School – M6

**ENVIRONMENT**

Medical School – M3

Medical School – M6

Medical School – M1

Medical School – M4

Medical School – M2

Medical School – M5
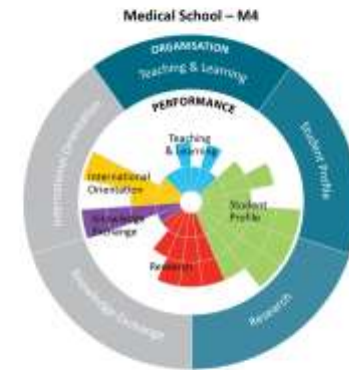
**Strategic positioning is possible in a highly regulated institutionalised setting**

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

## Strategic leadership and management

- Emergence of professional middle management
- Expansion and diversification of roles

## Mission diversity

- Differentiated goal-oriented funding framework
- Align with broad social, economic and health development objectives

# IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

## Power approach
- Bases of power in organisations

## Strategy, structure and performance
- Structural configurations of medical schools

**Mahat, M. & Coates, H. (2015) Strategic Planning and Institutional Research: The case of Australia**

Institutional Research and Planning in Higher Education

Global Contexts and Themes

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