

## **A MINUTE WITH Hugh Guthrie**

Hugh is a Principal Research Consultant at NCVER. He has been with NCVER for nearly 25 years now, having joined the organisation in 1987 from the Education Unit at RMIT University. He has 30 years experience as a researcher in the VET sector and was one of the founding members of AVETRA. He is about to take up a six-month position as a Research Fellow working in Berwyn Clayton's centre at Victoria University.

**I first got interested in VET research** in the early 1980s when I moved from Flinders University to RMIT. Funnily enough I applied for a job at the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, NCVER's predecessor, but was told I did not know enough about vocational education. WELL! Then I discovered this wonderful thing called TAFE on moving to RMIT, and worked on a range of research and evaluation projects as well as consultancies. Most were concerned with research which underpinned the development of teaching programs and curricula. It was fascinating.

**Two people who inspired me most to conduct research** were Norm Henry, the Director of the Education Unit at RMIT and Peter Thomson, the deputy director at the TAFE National Centre. Both were inspirational and it was Peter in particular who eventually had me head hunted to the National Centre. There, and over the years, I have had the privilege of working on a diversity of research projects related to the myriad of issues confronting the VET sector and the many who depend on it. This has been a rewarding experience because at NCVER you need to master breadth, not so much depth. That has a value. And I have met and worked with so many interesting people along the way.

**The areas of VET research that interest me most are** the VET workforce, its work and professional development as well as VET program design and the associated teaching, learning and assessment processes. More recently, I have got more involved in international education issues.

**Research methodologies I use are** generally qualitative, but I enjoy working with others to look at the richer picture mixing the methods can bring. Working at NCVER has helped me value the data that NCVER and other organisations hold, and how that can be mixed, matched and used. What I enjoy most are methodologies that help you take the pulse and judge the health of policy and practice. But that is the evaluator in me coming out!

**The most interesting piece of VET research I have conducted** is a hard call, but I think it would have to be the work on initial teacher training that has just been published. It has wound up being so timely, and it has been heartening to see the interest in it from its earliest days. It has also made me realise that we have still only just scratched the surface of how VET's teachers and trainers are recruited and developed. It also took me back to some work I was involved with in the early 1990s when the TAFE National Centre conducted a national review of TAFE teacher preparation and development.

**Currently I am working** with Berwyn to look at the feasibility of establishing a national VET professional body that was proposed in Leesa Wheelahan and Gavin Moodie's report on VET teacher quality, and the forms such a body might take.

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<http://avetra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/A-NEWS-NEWSLETTER-SEPTEMBER-20111.pdf>