

VET
Research
Mentoring

AVETRA

Australian Vocational Education and Training Researchers Association

The AVETRA Research Mentoring Network

Mentors Briefing Manual

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The AVETRA Research Mentoring Network

Section 1: Briefing for Mentors

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1 - Definitions of the Program

Purpose of the relationship:

Mentoring

Mentoring is a partnership that provides people with the opportunity to share their professional experiences, skill and networks for personal growth.

AVETRA Research Mentoring

The aim of the VET mentoring relationship is to support communities of practice scholarship holders develop, complete and write up their VET research project.

2 - The New Researchers Scheme

The NCVER Program

NCVER are currently funding a program to build researcher capacity in the VET sector. The primary objective of this programme is to build the research skills of practitioners by supporting their progress as they produce and present VET research studies, so they may gain, manage and present NCVER research projects in the future.

The program consists of three core initiatives.

- Victoria University will host a *community of practice* for specifically selected new practitioner researchers.
- AVETRA will develop a *mentoring network* to support the practitioners involved in those communities of practice.
- The University of South Australia will promote *academic scholarships* that encourage VET practitioners to access Honours and Masters research training with a focus on VET research projects.

The New Researcher Scheme – VU - CoP and AVETRA Mentors

The NCVER New Researcher scheme is aimed at individuals who would like to develop research skills in the workplace education and training area.

Participants propose a small research project that is supported by their organisation and learning about research by carrying out the project during the year. They may present their findings at a national conference.

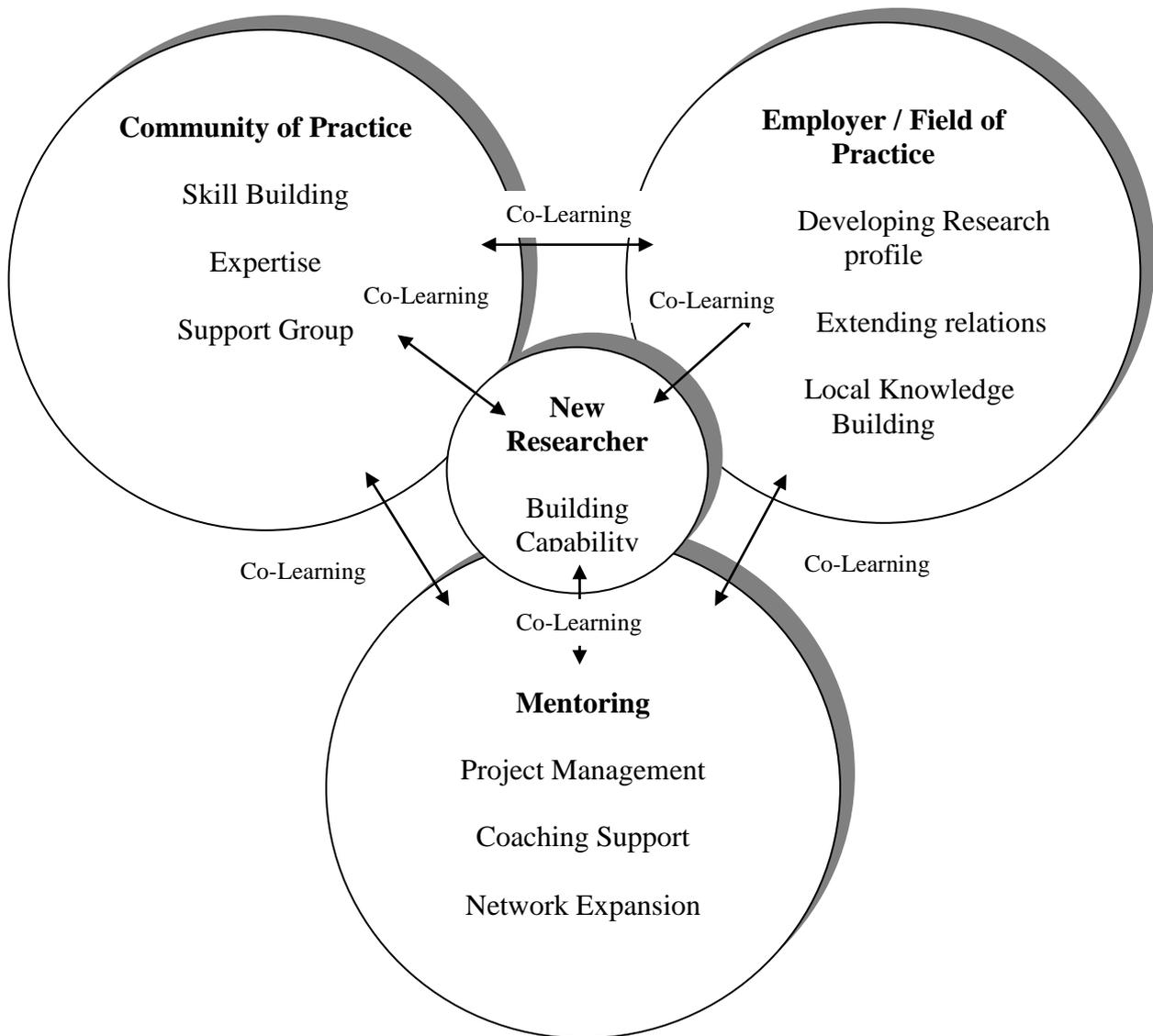
NCVER funds the participants to attend a two-day workshop to kick-start the activity and the participants form a collaborative virtual community of practice.

Each participant is assigned an experienced researcher as a mentor.

The aim is for the participants to learn about the research project by doing a project themselves. *It is learning from action*, learning about the complete process. The heart of the scheme is in the participants' project action rather than an emphasis upon the final product.

The diagram that follows shows the linkages between the VU community of practice, the AVETRA mentors and the new researchers' employers in supporting the new researchers research projects.

The Relational Framework – Building VET Research Capacity



The AVETRA Mentoring Network

AVETRA is developing a mentoring network that supports new practitioner researchers, specifically those practitioners involved in the communities of practice. NCVER are funding this scheme so the mentors can support their new researchers through four contact meetings a year (where possible) as they complete their first research projects.

AVETRA has gathered a pool of diversely experienced and located mentors experienced in supervising higher degree students, or with specific experiences as researchers in related discipline fields.

This is an opportunity to harness the expertise we have gained in the VET research field and to ensure that it is fed back into the network that will emerge in the next decade.

The Purpose of the New Researchers' VET projects

Scholarship holders will complete a modest research project during their year's scholarship.

Learning about the processes of research will be achieved by completing the project.

The project will be an action research experience where they will both progress their research project and learn about the dilemmas of research simultaneously.

Completing the project is important both in terms of achieving a final outcome, and in terms of the new researcher's learning in passing through all of the stages of a research project

The new researchers will be supported by the community of practice and their mentor, and may present their project at a VET conference or forum.

The Role of the CoP at VU

The new researchers attend a workshop at VU in April/May, and over two days are inducted into the research process, literature searching, project question focusing and given materials to guide their projects which include a basic text on researching in Post-Compulsory education and the work of Creswell on mixed methods.

Funding the New Researchers

The scholarship funding of \$4k for each new researcher is used to support their project, attendance at workshops and conferences, and half of the payment is held until project completion.

The employers of the participants also contribute not just in kind and support, but by giving additional financial support to the researchers.

3 - The Mentoring role

To be placed on the mentor register, mentors will have **experience** in supervising Higher Degree research students and/or have track record of managing VET research projects for NCVER.

AVETRA has built a **register** of potential mentors to support the scholarship holders within the NCVER communities of practice. The location of the mentor and the needs of the new researcher will be primary criteria for mentor selection. Both mentor and new researcher will have to agree to any proposed mentoring partnership.

The **aim** of the mentoring relationship will be to support the scholarship holder develop, complete and write up their VET research project. The scheme will be based upon four meetings a year between the mentor and the new researcher.

The mentoring **contract** asks the mentor and new researcher to simply confirm the following annual objectives;

- Contact details
- New Researcher details
- Four provisional meeting dates agreed
- Objectives agreed – from suggested list
- Roles performed by mentor – from suggested list

In each year of the scheme mentors will be paid an **honorarium** on the completion of the mentoring contract.

Each new researcher will have different needs, so the **mentoring role** may include being a teacher, guide, motivator, coach, advisor, sponsor, role model, referral agent, door opener. The activity may include:

- Plan personal research development program – guidance
- Plan research processes – goal setting
- Support reflection about research experiences – sounding board
- Review research progress – critical friend
- Offer alternative solutions to research issues – options for problem solving
- Respond to questions about research activity – knowledge development
- Offer advice about research actions within area of expertise - offer knowledge
- Indicate key sources of advice within the research network – expand network
- Introduce new researcher to cross institutional network colleagues – referral agent

- Indicate how to access key sources of research knowledge – open doors
- Offer advice about accessing further research training - suggestions

Selection of mentors

- The **location** of the mentor and the **needs** of the new researcher will be the primary criteria for mentor selection.
- The relationship must be new researcher driven and mutually agreed by the new researcher and the mentor.

4 -The New Researchers - Project Management

Successful Completion

It is very important to frame the mentoring relationship on the objective of project completion for two good reasons:

1. Taking the project all the way through to completion, write up and publication engages the new researcher with each phase of managing research.
2. One of the most important skills the new researcher must learn is to complete on time. It is a critical test upon which accessing further funding is balanced.

The Mentoring Relationship

In May of each year the new researchers are paired with a mentor for the year ahead. The new researchers have the benefit of two days within the VU community of practice. Their mentors will be a source of advice and support for each stage of their research projects. We ask the mentors to have at least four face-to-face formal sessions with the researchers and use telephone calls and e-mails for regular contact.

For the new researchers their project is the vehicle for their learning throughout the year. Each stage will be part of the learning process. Mentors help the new researchers think decisions through and guide them to sources of knowledge they may need. Practically, mentors review and critique the project specifications, the literature reviews, the data collection proposal, draft analysis and draft write-ups. It is expected that the new researchers learn as the project progresses, and that they present and publish the results of the studies to the VET community.

This is not higher degree supervision. It is about supporting the first steps in a modest locally focused project that is supported by the researcher's employer. The most important issue is that the project is simply a vehicle for the new researchers to learn about the research process. It is vital that we guide them through each phase to complete the process of learning.

We will organise teleconferences to bring the mentors together and share dilemmas and practices.

Managing the Mentoring Relationship

Some key learning issues about the mentoring process are worth reviewing from our experiences so far.

Early contact – Successful relationships begin with a formal early meeting where the researcher is able to put the draft specification of their project before the mentor for discussion. Mentors are urged to initiate an early first meeting and to get their new researcher to table the most up-to-date project specification as the basis for that meeting. The formal contract should be completed at that meeting.

Regular meeting dates – At the first meeting, it is a good idea to pencil in the next three dates for meeting and review the timeline for the project using the guide attached to this mail.

Early intervention – If at any time the researcher is falling well behind the draft timeline for the project it is important to alert the AVETRA Facilitator of Mentors and VU to the situation. It is important that the researchers get to the data collection phase before potential subjects of the research disappear over the Christmas/holiday season.

Responsiveness – Experience has shown that a brief early response to the researchers is the most effective supporting action. Mentors have often focused on quick and focused responses to the researchers rather than more detailed responses weeks later.

Knowing what the outcome looks like – Copies of completed projects can be found on the NCVET website. Here are a few examples

Regan's paper <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2196.html>

Mark's paper <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2198.html>

Simon's paper <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2217.html>

Sheridan's paper <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2236.html>

Knowing what the mentoring role is about – While a mentoring role is about supporting, planning and providing network links for knowledge building, other actions could include:

- Critiquing and developing the project specification.
- Focusing effort on a 'doable' project
- Planning the timeline for the year ahead.
- Responding to research and personal dilemmas.
- Suggesting relevant and basic literature sources
- Recommending network contact for field research.
- Suggesting the formats of instruments and target numbers for the limited data collection.
- Helping to structure an interim project report for the new researcher's employer.
- Suggesting possible analysis phases.
- Discussing and suggesting the structure of the project write-up.
- Reviewing draft material.
- Advising on the use of the NCVET template.
- Advising on the structure and goals of conference papers for AVETRA (April) and NCVET No-frills (July).
- Acting as a first editor for these papers
- Managing the balance between the completion of the project report and the desire to present at a conference.

Ensuring the new researcher's institute or employer is happy with the draft text.

The Initial Meeting

It is important to establish the basis of the relationship. Mentors are not able to do the project or carry out a program of research instruction. They are able to help new researchers plan and reflect, act as a critical friend and give support, and point them in the right direction to explore the knowledge sources they require. It is good idea to begin by reviewing the possible roles and negotiating where the emphasis of interaction should lie.

Project Management Support and Expertise

- Plan personal research development program – guidance
- Plan research processes – goal setting
- Support reflection about research experiences – sounding board
- Review research progress – critical friend

Technical Coaching

- Respond to questions about research activity – knowledge development
- Offer advice about research actions within their area of expertise - offer knowledge
- Offer alternative solutions to research issues – options for problem solving

Network Expansion

- Indicate key sources of advice within the research network – expand network
- Introduce new researcher to cross institutional network colleagues – referral agent
- Indicate how to access key sources of research knowledge – open doors
- Offer advice about accessing further research training - suggestions

The following checklist could be used to establish the relationship focus.

What are your priorities for the mentoring relationship?

Rank the following: 1 is Essential 5 is Optional

Name:

Project Management Support and Expertise

- Plan research processes – goal setting
- Support reflection about research experiences – sounding board
- Review research progress – critical friend
- Discuss relevant concepts and theories – knowledge development
- Planning personal research development program – guidance

Technical Coaching

- Respond to questions about research focus and activity – Clarifying direction
- Offer advice about research actions within area of expertise - offer knowledge
- Offer alternative solutions to research issues – options for problem solving
- Offer advice on learning sources for data collection:
Interviews, Observation, Questionnaires, and Record Scanning protocols
- Offer advice on learning sources for statistical analysis and interpretation.
- Offer advice on learning sources for qualitative coding, thematic and grounded analysis
- Offer advice on learning sources for conceptualising practical and theoretical conclusions
- Offer advice on learning sources for structuring text and reviewing

Network Expansion

- Indicate key sources of advice within the research network – expand network
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Scoping the project

The new researchers draft a brief for their project when they apply to NCVET for the scholarship. This brief will have been developed at and after the community of practice workshop at VU. The new researcher should be asked to forward the most up to date specification for the research project to the mentor in preparation for the first meeting. This brief forms the basis of the first detailed discussion to scope the project into a manageable study that can be completed within a year. The process could begin with a focus on the purpose and research questions that will drive the study. The following template could be used for project planning.

Focus						
Study Title	<i>A study of the subject – content - variables</i>					
Study Purpose Aim	<i>The purpose of this study is to (process and outcomes)</i>			<i>Problem - why do it</i> <i>Justification – why needed</i> <i>Significance - what produced</i>		
Literature Review	<i>What areas to be covered? Core area Associated areas Associated theory - The gap –</i>			<i>Conceptual/theoretical research framework</i>		<i>By Month</i>
Research Approach	<i>Rationale for approach - population - subjects - unit of analysis</i>					
	<i>What is wanted from whom or where – to answer each research question? What questions?</i>				<i>Quantity</i>	<i>By Month</i>
Research Questions Objectives	<i>RQ1 What's happening?</i>	<i>RQ2 What's produced?</i>	<i>RQ3 Stakeholder feelings?</i>	<i>RQ4 What can improve?</i>		
Scanning records						
Observation						
Questionnaires						
Interviews Focus groups						
Analysis	<i>Read Reduce Vignettes Tabulate Explore divergence/uniformity Model - Answer research questions</i>					

Write Up	<i>Abstract Intro (Problem Justification significance). Lit. Concept Frame Method Findings Interpretation Conclusion - value of study</i>		

Project schedule

Month deadline	Stage	Action	Support/Materials
May	Scoping and focusing project statement.	Revisit, refine, reduce and focus logic of purpose, questions and data collection brief.	CoP workshop. Initial mentor contact.
June	Complete scoping and focusing project statement. Ethics clearance. Draft lit review plan.	Basic statement of intent and review of ethics of actions.	First mentor meeting. Agree the project statement and key intent of the project.
July	Complete Lit review.	Scope relevant issues. Collect and sift literature. Annotate references - Link references - Write argument Link in literature.	Refer to mentor any literature dilemmas.
August	Study method.	Draft conceptual frame – Purpose and Research questions. Agree data collection process with employer (interim report).	Second mentor meeting. Discuss finalised plan after literature input.
September	Data collection.	Plan collection – Plan protocols. Pilot - Make contacts. Collect data - Write up process.	Discuss the ‘doability’ of the proposed data collection.
October	Complete data collection. Plan Analysis.	Read all data. Write up findings in summary Draw out key issues and explore, model and make qualified statements. Focus in on key contribution.	Third mentor meeting. Discuss analysis process options and plan the action.
November	Complete analysis. Write up –Drafting.	Draft abstract and subheads Set page/word limit for sections	Final mentor meeting Discuss write up process
December	Report template.	Move draft into NCVER template and finetune	Read a completed NCVER paper from last year.

		Edit from review comments	Sent to mentor for review.
January	Paper Completion.	Distil study to ten pages	Send to mentor for review.
February	Presentation.	Produce power-point key issues Produce script	Send to mentor for review.
March- May	NCVER review of paper	Review and amend paper. Send draft paper to Institute, Mentor, Mentor Director and CoP.	Mentor support during the review process.

Publicising the Research

Mentors should encourage the new researchers to publicise their projects within their organisations. There are several reasons for this:

- to gain profile for themselves
- to legitimise their projects and help data collection
- to publicise research activity in general!

Interim report for employer

New researchers often drastically reshape their projects in the first few months. It is strongly suggested that when the project has been shaped and data collection is ready to begin, the researcher produces a short interim report on progress and actions for data collection so that the institute/employer is updated about the direction of the project.

This will avoid issues of presenting a final report to employers a year later when the nature of the study has changed and produced results not anticipated by the employer.

Completing the project

The final act in the relationship is getting a draft to NCVER. Mentors may wish to guide researchers to present their paper at the AVETRA April conference or the NCVER July conference. This will be the first time the participant has written up such a study and will need advice about structure and length. Make sure that your researcher is familiar with the use of tracked changes.

The complete NCVER ‘Working Paper’ template is downloadable from the NCVER website as indicated below and the referencing guidelines are important as well. Most new researchers will need help in using the auto contents capability of the NCVER template. Supporting the participant during this period is vital as they may never have been ‘reviewed’ before and experience the usual traumas! All researchers are provided with the NCVER Template and author’s guide.

NCVER Template - NCVER author's guide and referencing guide:

http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/information/templates.html#Paper_template.

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/information/authorguides.html>.

A following suggested structure for the reports is supplied to the researchers.

ABSTRACT

Start with the clear purpose of your investigation. Detail the stages of the study – and the outcomes.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Start with the clear purpose of your investigation indicate the research questions

Introduction to the issue

Significance of the Problem

And then Re-state the Purpose of the Study

Assumptions and limitations of the study

Definition of Terms

Abbreviations

Briefly introduce the reader to the Organisation of the rest of the Study

2.0 THE LIT REVIEW

Introduction tell them the structure of the chapter

Use your lit review.

Close with a summary.

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN and METHOD

Introduction – what is coming

Purpose of Study and research questions again

Type of Investigation – broad phases of study

The focus of your Analysis

Time Horizon for study - diagram

Practical limitations

Selection of Population Sample (s) Who

Instrument Development How

Pilot Testing What

Data Collection – detail of phases

Focus and process of your analysis

Validity and Reliability issues

Summary

6.0 DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction – what is coming

Discussion of Findings – what you gathered – overview - sample comments with no interpretation – just the story from them...

Then - Interpretation of Findings – what the data tells us – what are the key findings.....

Answer your research questions at the end.

Summary

7.0 CONCLUSION

Summary of Research – repeat the story of what you have done

Then tell them the key contribution your study makes.....2 or three points

Recommendations for practitioners

Recommendations for Further Research

8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reviewers of reports written by the researchers in the program are given specific instructions which include:

- The Communities of Practice participants are novice researchers who have received funding from NCVET to investigate a workplace issue. They have learnt about research techniques through collaborative activities with experts, peers and mentors. Their research will be published as "Occasional papers".
- We are looking for constructive criticism to improve the paper. Please ensure that your comments are able to be fed directly back to the researcher/s.
- Your comments will remain anonymous
- Areas to focus your attention to:
 - interest to audiences
 - plain English writing (not too academic or containing too much jargon)
 - logical flow and argument
 - data analysis – is it sound?
 - validity of findings
 - conclusions are based on the evidence presented

Please ensure that your comments are constructive and able to be fed directly back to the researcher(s).

1. Comments on the title

Reviewer comments

2. Please use the following criteria to assist with your review, rating the report using a 5 point scale (1 being poor/no and 5 being excellent/yes).

❖ Is the aim of the research clearly stated?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Is a suitable context for the research provided?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Does the research address the research questions?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Is the research methodologically sound?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Does the report need further explanation of the methodology, or limitations of the methodology?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Are the findings clearly identified and valid?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Is the information in the report structured logically?	1	2	3	4	5
❖ Is the report written in clear, direct, plain English?	1	2	3	4	5

Reviewer comments/clarification in relation to the above assessment

I think the researcher has.....

3. Please comment on the substance of the paper, including any major areas of weakness and any aspects which could be addressed to improve the paper.

Reviewer comments

The researcher has

4. Any further comments on the paper?

Reviewer comments

I think the researcher has

Support documents (where relevant)

Support documents provide additional information and are supplementary to the main report.

1. Do you have any general comments about the support documents?

Reviewer comments

[Researcher response to reviewer's comments](#)

Researcher response

5 - Ethical Considerations

NCVER reviews the initial research proposals to ensure that the projects are ethically sound and takes overall management responsibility for the scheme.

It is important that each mentor reviews the issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and data storage with each new researcher.

The researchers have been given a copy of the ethical guidelines in a following section and can use the proformas to secure participant.

Ethics sign off

Currently NCVER vets the ethical implication of the projects at the selection stage.

If mentors have any concerns about the projects they should be raised with the Mentor Director who will complete the sign off on the projects using the AVETRA code of practice and NCVER guidelines as the guiding principles.

Where new researchers are working within an institution they should follow the protocols recommended by that institution of ethical clearances.

The AVETRA code of practice has been viewed by previous mentors as an effective tool for discussion and decision making.

<http://avetra.org.au/about-avetra/code-of-practice>