

A-NEWS
The Newsletter of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association

December 2010

AVETRA News

From the President

Greetings to all AVETRA members!



We can close this year knowing that it has been yet another productive year for VET and VET research, with the spotlight for once shining on our territory.

The Productivity Commission and Skills Australia are undertaking major investigations of the VET sector as government seeks direction for what they have identified as a critical area of the economy as our resources boom continues. Skills and skilling are continually in the news. Using our AVETRA voice, we have tried this year to emphasise how important it is that any future directions for VET, action for VET and investment in VET is based upon the research that 'we' do for the sector. The many studies that we have all been involved in have generated a significant knowledge stock from which to draw evidence, and shape the future of VET. One of our primary external goals for this

year has been to continually remind those charged with re-shaping the VET sector that evidenced-based research should underpin any changes.

Australia is set to experience an explosion in the number and type of skilled workforce members it will need to achieve its economic goals over the next decade. Skills Australia estimates that there will be 9 million job openings in the next 15-20 years with half triggered by economic growth, and half by mature workers retiring. Skills Australia estimates that around 3.8 million additional VET and higher education qualifications will be needed as a result of retirements. On a personal level, employment in tertiary teaching will therefore be one of the highest growth areas, and is tipped to grow at 2.3% each year.

So the future looks positive. There will be significant growth in our sector and there is significant political interest in VET development. However in the short term I believe the year ahead will have a number of challenges for all us in our roles within the tertiary education sector. Many of us are braced for falls in international student numbers and the reshaping of quality monitoring within the system. I find that while the pressure of local issues can be very onerous at times, it is wonderfully refreshing to feel part of a wider network where we can share issues and ideas with colleagues nationally. I know many people have enjoyed the recent OctoberVET and Research Tele-Seminars that AVETRA has organised. Perhaps the most important thing about being part of such a community is gaining a wider perspective on the national VET issues and seeing more clearly our individual role in the wide world of Australian VET.

So, make plans to be in Melbourne for the national conference in April, and why not try and get a colleague to go with you and become an AVETRA member as well. We need to grow our community as the sector grows!

I wish you all good researching!



*Llandis Barratt-Pugh
President of AVETRA, Edith Cowan University, December, 2010.*

AVETRA News

AVETRA 2011 Conference news

The AVETRA 14th National Conference entitled: "Research in VET: Janus - reflecting back, projecting forward" will be held in Melbourne from 27 – 29 April 2011 at the Rendezvous Hotel, Flinders Street, Melbourne. The conference will be structured around the following themes:

- The tertiary sector – Rethinking pedagogies and pathways
- VET work and VET workers
- Reflecting back ... lessons for the future?
- Access and Success – learner engagement
- Skilling for a sustainable future
- New Researchers

Keynote speakers confirmed for the conference include:

- Professor Roger Harris, University of South Australia
- Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan, L.H. Martin Institute, University of Melbourne
- Dr John Rice, National Centre for Vocational Education Research
- Dr Gary Willmott, Institute of Adult Learning, Singapore

Further details of the program will be made shortly via the AVETRA website. Mark the dates down in your diaries!

AVETRA member elected to peak council

Associate Professor Michele Simons of the University of South Australia and AVETRA Secretary has been elected to the Board of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS).

CHASS promotes and provides advocacy services for the humanities, arts and social sciences. The Council serves as a coordinating forum for teachers, researchers, professionals and practitioners in the sector.

Congratulations to Michele on this achievement and for representing VET research issues in this important forum.

Building VET researcher capacity initiative to continue

NCVER's commitment with AVETRA to building research capacity in the vocational education and training (VET) sector has seen the establishment of a range of scholarships such as the Community of practice (CoP) scholarship for VET practitioners.

In 2010, NCVER undertook a review of its building researcher capacity initiative which found that the program has achieved a high profile among VET practitioners, however, more work needs to be done to find the best ways to engage new researchers and enhance the research capacity of the VET sector.

Recently, NCVER announced the program will be funded for a further three years until 2013.

To download a copy of the *Review of NCVER building researcher capacity initiative* visit www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2306.html

Please note: To download this report you will need to log into the NCVER website. Registration is free, quick and allows you to access reports and data; simply click on this [register](#) link and fill in the required information. You can also subscribe to receive free email alerts for selected or all of our releases. For further information, please visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/subscribe.html>

NCVER new researcher grants up for grabs

If you are working in the VET sector and you have a workplace issue to investigate - then consider applying for a Community of Practice (CoP) research scholarship.

Ten scholarships worth \$4,000 each are available for novice researchers to conduct a small-scale research project over 12 months. Successful applicants will learn about the research process, receive mentor support through the AVETRA network and join a community of practice with other new researchers.

Applications close **Wednesday, 16 February 2011**. For more information and to download an application form visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/opportunities.html>

A MINUTE WITH Sandra Cotton



Sandra Cotton is the Manager of Disabilities at Polytechnic West (PWA) and has a background in education, training and disability. She holds a Masters in Health Counselling. In 2005 she won a Foggarty Scholarship to complete her Graduate Certificate in Education in Learning Difficulties. Sandra received an NCVER scholarship and was an active member of the Community of Practice (CoP).

I first got interested in VET research during 2008

October VET conference hosted by Dr Llandis Barratt-Pugh. Views expressed at this conference support my conviction that sound practice in training must be underpinned by reliable research.

Two people who inspired me most to conduct research were Llandis Barratt-Pugh and my two consecutive directors at Polytechnic West, Blaire Marsh and Dr Sharee Hogg. Sharee Hogg was also very supportive throughout the process, acting as a critical friend. Most inspiring during the process was my Australian VET Research Association (AVETRA) mentor, Moira Watson. Her encouragement and advice were invaluable.

The area of VET research that interests me most is the re-engagement of those disadvantaged who are often community members with low educational levels and resultant lack of skills. Inclusive training has the potential to offer this group an alternative and a chance of a profession or trade.

Methodology that I have used is a qualitative with mixed methods for data collection. Students participating in the project completed a questionnaire, sometimes with the help of a scribe. Lecturing staff and support workers participated in focus groups and family and other key staff were interviewed.

The most interesting piece of VET research I conducted was as a new researcher with NCVET, investigating the strategies that assist with completion rates of apprentices with a learning disability. Feedback from the staff and students supported my assumption at the outset of the study but shed new light the matter. The level of interest from the staff involved was most encouraging.

Currently I am researching a toolbox of strategies that will assist the industry staff to make reasonable adjustment (supports) for students with disability. This is being carried out with a lecturer seconded from trade training. As a pilot at PWA, it is viewed with interest by other training organizations with intentions to share the finished product.

Each edition of AVETRA News will feature a special interview with a VET researcher. If you are interested in being featured or you know someone who might – please get in touch with either Sarojni Choy or Phil Loveder.

Conferences and other Events

Advance Notice of the 4th International INAP Conference (International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship), Beijing, 26-27, May, 2011

The conference theme is 'Ensuring Acquisition of Expertise: Apprenticeship in the modern economy'. Abstracts will be due by December 15th, 2010 and 2000-word summaries of papers by January 15th 2011. Full details will be available shortly on www.innovative-apprenticeship.net, or contact Erica Smith the Australian INAP network co-ordinator on e.smith@ballarat.edu.au or (03) 5327 9665.

Gaining the Edge – Outcomes, Equity and Innovation, Victorian TAFE Association, 3-4 May, 2011, Hilton on the Park, Melbourne

Details on the conference will be released shortly. Go to the following website for more detail - http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=Events_State_Conference

Human agency and biographical transformations - adult learning and education and life paths, ESREA, 3-6 March, 2011 University of Geneva

Recent evolutions in contemporary societies have provoked a number of profound transformations in adults' life paths. The traditional biographical standard based on a three-stage model seems to have become obsolete: (i) learning during childhood and youth, (ii) working and becoming parents during adult life, (iii) withdrawing from active life at retirement age : this simple structural model, containing only a small number of biographical transitions and life cycles, would appear to belong to the past.

New forms of contemporary biographies are characterised by numerous transformations, which are the result of the many tests and trials that the adult subject is likely to encounter in the course of his/her life. Transitions and bifurcations, linked to the many changes currently taking place in contemporary societies, may intervene at any moment. In place of any available models of the stable life path, there appear to be a number of hypotheses about transformations that are difficult to predict in terms of education, professional and personal life as well as a number of other existential considerations.

These biographical transformations require adults to develop new forms of human agency: in the contemporary social context, the subject's capacity to act and react is potentially decisive but unevenly distributed.

The 2011 conference in Geneva will attempt to explore contemporary transformations in life paths and the new forms of human agency that they demand of adults disposing of very unequal resources. It will also aim to deepen our understanding of how education and training, as a means of supporting potential agency, can accompany and provide support for the contemporary adult faced with multiple transformations.

Further information can be found at: http://www.esrea.org/life_history_network?l=en

2011 Call for Proposals, Toronto, Ontario Canada June 10 -12, 2011 Pre-Conferences on June 9th 2011

The 52nd Annual Adult Education Research Conference and the 30th National Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (Association Canadienne pour l'Études De l'Éducation des Adultes) will be a joint conference sponsored by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Deadline for receipt of proposals is the 3rd October, 2010.

Further details will be found on the AERC website at <http://www.adulterc.org/>, and on the CASAE/ACÉÉA website at <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/>

2012 RC33 Eighth International Conference on Social Science Methodology

The RC33 Eighth International Social Science Methodology will be held in Sydney, Australia. Tentative dates for the conference are 9 - 13 July, 2012, but these dates are NOT yet finalised.

More information will be available at <http://www.acspri.org.au/conference2012> by December 17, 2010.

Recent Publications

Skilling Australia for the future?: A study of quality assurance in Australia's Vocational Education and Training sector, Frank Wogbe Agbola and Kenneth Lambert, Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Vo 62, No. 3, September, 2010, pp. 327-349

This paper reviews the evolution of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia and examines what impact policy reforms have had on quality assurance in VET; identifying some challenges and opportunities facing the sector in the changing global economy.

Planning for Technical and Vocational Skills Development by Kenneth King and Robert Palmer, Fundamentals of Educational Planning No. 94 2010, 145 pp. Download electronic publication: www.iiep.unesco.org

The position of skills development on the agenda of policy-makers and development agencies improved markedly around the turn of the 21st century. This book tracks the ways skills have gained importance both in the developing and the more industrialized world. It analyses critically the multiple 'drivers' of skills development and the linkages of skills to the knowledge economy, growth, and employment in an increasingly competitive world. It also acknowledges the many modalities and delivery systems for skills development, arguing that this institutional diversity, often spread across several ministries and training authorities, has made it more difficult to give a national account of the skills development sector. The re-emergence of skills has triggered many reform initiatives associated with TVSD, some of which have become almost 'fashions' and are in danger of being adopted without sufficient evidence of their effectiveness. This work provides cautionary advice and fresh insights that planners will find rewarding.

VET leadership for the future: contexts, characteristics and capabilities by Hamish Coates, Lynn Meek, Justin Brown, Tim Friedman, Peter Noonan and John Mitchell

http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=higher_education

Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010. vi, 72 p.

This study examines leadership in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector and paints a picture of what VET leaders do, and of how they can do it best. The study reveals VET leaders view managing change as more important than teaching and learning, which are flagged as the least important facets of their work. VET leaders have the capacity to manage industry and clients, but need skills to deal with new complex contexts that juggle competition with regulation. The recommendations of the report for identifying and developing future leaders include better leadership training focused on concrete change management skills and reshaping the approaches used for leadership selection. Boosting development among emerging leaders is also identified, as well as providing more definition and structure to the profession of VET leadership.

Mind the gap: school leaver aspirations and delayed pathways to further and higher education by Tom Stehlik, Journal of education and work, Vol. 23, No. 4, September 2010, pp. 363-376

It is claimed that a 'gap-year' experience will help participants acquire 'soft skills' needed in the modern world of work, develop social values allowing them to better adapt to university life and ultimately become more attractive to employers. Reference to the literature and data from surveys of Australian school and university students addresses the 'gap-year' phenomenon and how it can be defined and theorised. The paper explores reasons why school leavers delay transition into further education and what they do instead, queries whether 'gapping' provides significant development of 'soft skills', and concludes that the 'gap-year' trend has implications for recognising work experience and informal learning in the workplace.

About AVETRA

AVETRA is the peak professional association for VET researchers. Its ability to be a sustainable and viable association depends on its membership. Members are urged to continue their membership and to encourage their colleagues to join AVETRA. AVETRA services include:

- An annual VET international research conference
- Two editions of *International Journal of Training Research per annum*
- The quarterly AVETRA e-newsletter with the latest news in the VET sector as well as VET research.
- The new *Research Today* publication twice a year.
- OctoberVET workshops organised by AVETRA members in centres as widely spread as Perth, Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.
- The AVETRA website with VET research links and information
- Awards for VET researchers including the joint award with TAFE Directors Australia, the Berwyn Clayton Award, The Ray Barker Award, and the AVETRA Best paper Award.

HELP AVETRA help VET research and join now if you are not a member. Full **\$160** (GST inclusive) and Student memberships **\$80.00** including GST are available.

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