

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

March 2011

AVETRA News

From the President

Greetings to all AVETRA members!



Welcome to the new year of continual assault by the environment on the worlds we thought we had established. A reminder perhaps of the fragility of our grip on this world, and the transience of our materiality. For those members with families and friends who have suffered the storms, flood, cyclones, fires and quakes, we wish you strength in your recovery. To our New Zealand colleagues we warmly support the action that has been taken to help and have been deeply affected by your loss.

It has also been a very surprising start to the year for AVETRA. Kevin Heys has been battling on your behalf to prevent the tax department claiming back taxes since our inception. The 'rattle of jailer's keys' has been heard in the distance for some time as Kevin placed himself as the responsible official on your behalf and waged a war of letters over many years. Now he has achieved success both for now, and for the future of AVETRA. We have achieved Charitable Status. This means you can contribute feely to AVETRA in the knowledge that you can claim your donation in next year's tax return! A big thanks to Kevin for many hours of somewhat apprehensive work on our behalf!

With considerable work from Erica Smith and Ruth Wallace we have collected a great deal of information to respond to the Productivity Commission's draft report on the VET Workforce. First, the response shows what a considerable body of work has been accumulated by AVETRA members. Second, we are trying to assert that the report should focus more on the evidence presented in such research studies. Third, we highlight the rather deafening silence in the report about VET and teaching degrees. Living in the shadows of degree-based School and Higher Education sectors, it seems ironic that the aspirations for the VET workforce are so limited. It seems evident that the VET sector will be vital for skill growth and renewal for some decades and that this will require increasingly capable VET people to manage course development, lead institutions and to develop their reflective capability by engaging in research projects. It seems that the AVETRA network and degree-based development programmes are major components of such VET workforce development.

Finally, how good it is to kick off this year with three of our major contributors awarded nationally. Their success is well deserved from a lifetime of advocacy and making yet another effort, time and time again, to support research and the VET sector. Berwyn Clayton as our 'VET queen' takes out the NCVET VET researcher of the year award; Elaine Butler has been selected by the minister to be on the Australian Government delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women; while Stephen Billett gains one of the first 4 year Future Fellowships from the Australian Research Council (ARC) designed to keep and develop excellent researchers for Australia. What is

particularly noteworthy for the field of vocational education research is that this was the only Future Fellowship awarded in the discipline of education. Hence, although the standing of Australian vocation education research has long been acknowledged internationally, this award indicates its standing with the field of education in Australia, where it has struggled to have the same standing as other sectors. Congratulations to them and a thank you for their efforts to keep our research sector in the spotlight!

So set your targets. We need researchers in our community to follow in these footsteps and move our community onwards. Perhaps this is good time to review what your research goals are – what is your VET project? What are the critical questions we need to know the answers to? What research questions should we be focusing on if we want to make a difference - if we want to produce evidence that policy makers will have to accommodate?

The New Year is always a good time to reset our strategy.

I wish you all good researching!



*Llandis Barratt-Pugh
President of AVETRA, Edith Cowan University, March, 2011.*

AVETRA News

AVETRA 2011 Conference news

The AVETRA (Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association) 14th Annual Conference will be held on 28-29 April 2011 at the Rendezvous Hotel in Melbourne (pre-conference workshops on 27 April at Victoria University).

Themed *Research in VET: Janus – reflecting back, projecting forward*, the conference will be structured around the following broad 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.

Pre-Conference Workshops will be held on 27 April 2011.

During the following two days the conference will be packed with addresses from keynote speakers, some refereed papers, workshops, symposia, the welcome reception and the conference dinner.

Early bird closes 15th March, 2011 – so hurry! Also, a **special offer** for full-time students has been announced – register 3 full-time students and they receive a 25% discount! Conditions apply – please contact the conference secretariat at - avetra@conferenceaction.com.au

Sponsorship opportunities are still available. For more information, including details on sponsorship, registration and keynote speakers, visit <http://avetra.org.au/annual-conference>

AVETRA member news



Two distinguished AVETRA members have been recognised for their contributions to research and their communities.

Elaine Butler - has been chosen as one of three extraordinary women to represent the Australian community on the Australian Government delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The priority theme is access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work. The Minister for the Status of Women, Kate Ellis, praised Elaine's advocacy and research and is an excellent representative for Australia.



Stephen Billett - has received one of the inaugural Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellowships for the next four years. The Future Fellowships aim to promote research in areas of critical national importance by giving outstanding researchers incentives to conduct their research in Australia by attracting and retaining the best and brightest mid-career researchers.

President of AVETRA, Llandis Barratt-Pugh congratulated Elaine and Stephen for this much deserved national recognition of their considerable and sustained research talents and for continuing to place VET research at the fore-front of the government agenda.

Phil Loveder, NCVET

Journal ranking survey

The on-line survey of AVETRA members of their views about the ERA and AVETRA journal rankings has concluded, with 50 participants. I would like to thank AVETRA members for their interest in this survey which has yielded some very interesting results. The results will be communicated to AVETRA members when they have been fully analysed.

Erica Smith, University of Ballarat

A MINUTE WITH Berwyn Clayton



Berwyn Clayton is the Director of the Work-based Education Research Centre at Victoria University. She has over 25 years experience as a practitioner-researcher in the VET sector. A founding member of AVETRA, Berwyn was the Association's president from 2000-2004. In 2001 she was made a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators for her services to education and vocational education research and in 2011 has received the NCVET Researcher of the Year Award.

I first got interested in VET research in the mid 1980s when I was involved in an initiative to address student attrition from courses at Bruce TAFE in the ACT. I learned at that time just how effective research could be in supporting policy renewal and improvements in teaching and administrative practice.

Two people who inspired me most to conduct research were Martha Kinsman, Associate Director, Canberra Institute of Technology and Peter Thomson, the deputy at the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development (now NCVET). Both actively supported my research development and provided me with the essential opportunities to 'do some research'.

The areas of VET research that interest me most are the VET workforce and its work, VET pedagogy, organisational capability and professional development.

Methodologies that I have used are generally qualitative; however I also have undertaken a number of studies using mixed methods. Words and pictures seem to work well with many end-users, while others prefer something more concrete. Together they can be a quite powerful tool in influencing thinking.

The most interesting piece of VET research I conducted was on cultures and structures in Australian RTOs. Undertaken as part of the *Supporting VET providers in building capability for the future* consortium research program, this research revealed to me just how incredibly fascinating and complex the organisations are which operate in our sector. Our research also highlighted how people struggle with this complexity and achieve great things despite it.

Currently I am researching professional obsolescence – defined in simple terms as the loss of once-held knowledge and/or the failure to keep up to date with new knowledge and skills as they emerge. It is a particular issue for people working in fields where technological change is constant. Our research team is interested to investigate how particular professions and knowledge-based organisations deal with the problem as the topic is directly related to the maintenance of vocational currency for teachers working in VET.

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

Interconnected tertiary education – Stronger pathways across Higher Education and VET for increased participation, Crowne Promenade Hotel, Melbourne, 30-31 March, 2011

With large-scale changes imminent, this conference will discuss challenges, share success stories and create visions for the future of tertiary education in Australia.

The program will include:

- Up-to-date information on how TEQSA and the Australian Qualifications Framework Council are working to strengthen pathways between VET and Higher Education
- How different stakeholders define an interconnected tertiary education system and plan to make the most of the current good will around collaboration
- Ways to overcome division in the tertiary education system in order to support diverse student pathways, increase regional participation and develop sustainable partnerships
- Methods for working with industry and community; aligning pathways with outcomes

More information available at - <http://www.interconnectededucation.com>

The 9th Annual Higher Education Summit, Sofitel Hotel, Brisbane, 27-29 April, 2011

With the sector-wide changes imminent, the agenda focuses on the key issues impacting the sector such as the student demand model and the solutions and strategies to prepare for these changes. Details at: <http://www.highereducationsummit.com.au>

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 – www.vta/vic/edu/au/?Name+Events+State+Conference

VET Teaching 2011 Conference, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, 24 – 25 May, 2011

This year's celebration of the VET professional provides opportunities for practitioners to once again promote their successes, network with peers and engage with fellow practitioners on key issues impacting on the VET workforce and the place of VET in the tertiary sector. Further details at: <http://www.vetteaching.com.au>

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'. Full details are available at www.innovative-apprenticeship.net, or contact Erica Smith the Australian INAP network co-ordinator on e.smith@ballarat.edu.au or (03) 5327 9665.

AERC Conference, Toronto, Ontario Canada June 10 -12, 2011, Pre-Conferences on 9 June, 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.

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

2011 Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) Annual Conference, 'Lifelong learning and community development', Glasgow, Scotland, 29 June – 1 July, 2011

The FACE 2011 conference is hosted by the Centre for Research and Development in Lifelong Learning at the University of Glasgow. The four key themes of the conference are:

- Higher Education provision and its contribution to community development: contributions may be economic, social, health-related, environmental or cultural, or a combination of one or more of these. 'Community' in this context may vary from one small discrete group through to a whole region.
- *Aimhigher* and its Legacy: whilst this is a particular concern in England, papers are invited also from other parts of the world where there are similar initiatives: these may take the form of reflective pieces from an external perspective.
- The role of Qualifications Frameworks and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) within community settings.
- Universities and their regional and local role within contracting economies.

Abstracts of up to 200 words (in the case of roundtables up to 1000 words) should be sent via the submission form by **28th March 2011**. Further details can be found at: <http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk/conferences.html>

Australian Literacy Educator's Association National Conference 8-11, July, 2011

A conference designed to support educators to meet the literacy challenges and opportunities of a networked, multilingual and culturally diverse literacy landscape. Further details at: <http://www.alea2011.com>

20th National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference (No Frills), North Coast TAFE, 13-15 July, 2011

Sponsored jointly by NCVET and North Coast TAFE, this annual conference is considered one of the best value events on the research calendar. It provides an excellent forum for those in vocational education and training research to network, present and discuss papers on current or recently completed work. Further details at: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/events.html>

7th Research Work and Learning Conference, Shanghai, PRC, 4-7 December, 2011

More information about this conference will be available shortly at: <http://www.rwlecnu.org>

2012 RC33 Eighth International Conference on Social Science Methodology

The RC33 Eighth International Social Science Methodology will be held in Sydney, Australia. The dates for the conference are 9 - 13 July, 2012. Details at <http://www.acspri.org.au/conference2012>

Recent Publications

Whiteness at work in vocational training in Australia. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2010. Vol 125, Spring, 41-51, Sue Shore.

This chapter explores how socio-historical, occupational and organisational discourses structure vocational opportunity in racialised ways and how this manifests in the everyday practices of vocational educators. The findings pose challenges for the content of undergraduate programs for vocational educators.

Responding to changing skill demands: training packages and accredited courses. NCVET, Josie Misko, 2011

This report looks at whether vocational education and training (VET) is equipped to meet the changing needs of the modern workplace. It finds that regulation and business needs drive changes in the way the training system operates. The system has advantages and disadvantages: it has strong mechanisms for identifying industry needs but too much bureaucracy and unnecessary detail, which makes it difficult to respond quickly and easily to emerging trends. Adaptation of the system is one thing, but if it is to be effective it requires an increased emphasis on good teaching, learning and assessment practice. It also requires employers to ensure that employees acquire the new skills by encouraging a workplace culture that is conducive to training.

Lost talent? The occupational ambitions and attainments of young Australians. Joanna Sikora and Lawrence J Saha, 2011

This study, which defines the lowering of educational or occupational ambitions by high school students as 'lost talent', looks at the extent to which talent loss occurs among high achieving students and the consequences of this on later occupational attainments. The results indicate that there is a moderate, although not negligible, rate of talent loss.

The report also highlights the importance of young people, particularly young women, having occupational plans. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2313.html>

We are always keen to highlight research being done by our members. If you would like to have a piece of research featured – please get in touch with either Sarojni Choy or Phil Loveder.

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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