

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

**March 2012**



**AVETRA News**

**From the President**

Greetings to all AVETRA members!



For the last time as President I have the pleasure of addressing you as valued research colleagues and association members.

I had no idea back in 1998 that by signing a membership form I would be part of a network that would grow and prosper, be part of a research area that would establish international credibility, or that would be instrumental in providing me with a most stimulating and supportive knowledge environment. Looking back, AVETRA has provided me with an intellectual home within Australia and collegiate relations that introduced me to so many new spaces across the land.

I have been lucky to have such an opportunity and be part of a very enthusiastic team. Managing and leading 'virtually' has been a new experience with the executive spread across four time zones for much of the year. I would like to assure you that each member of the executive has taken on their allocated portfolios with great dedication and used their own and stolen time to keep AVETRA moving and thriving.

The past two years have been successful in terms of increasing membership levels to new highs and running even more enjoyable and profitable conferences to make the association secure. However, we have also used more funding than ever to increase member services. OctoberVET has expanded and been joined by regular research teleconferences. The conference manual has captured 14 years of learning for those who will take on organising roles in the future. We have had our first development workshop for experienced researchers and made five formal submissions to government inquiries that impacted on VET research. A-Newsletter, Research Today and our International Journal of Training Research (IJTR) have each been fuller and more frequent than before. Our members have now mentored nearly fifty new VET researchers and we have added to our awards the Journal Article of the year. Our charitable status has both secured our foundations and generated an additional income stream along with increasing copyright payments from our journal and conference proceedings. We are in good shape financially and even better shape socially!

On a personal note, the past two years have been very exciting and without doubt a highlight of my working life. While paid work was often a challenge, the regular contact with the executive members as they tackled an ever-expanding AVETRA business portfolio made the association live, and it has been a true pleasure for me. I have felt I was part of a vibrant network of professionals and making a worthwhile contribution and I would encourage you to think about taking a role in the association in the future.

It is your association and it binds across this great continent and keeps alive a research area we each have been drawn to and believe in – now, that is worth working for. AVETRA needs you – and some more of your colleagues!



*Llandis Barratt-Pugh*  
*President of AVETRA, Edith Cowan University, March 2012.*

## **AVETRA Member News**

### **Professor John Stevenson - Vale**

Early this year we learnt of the sad loss of Professor John Stevenson, a prominent VET researcher at Griffith University and a long term AVETRA member. He was the founding editor of the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research, which was published by NCVET from 1993 through to 2002.

Professor Stevenson was recognised for his contributions to cognitive psychology with a particular focus on information processing theory and gave a new insight to learning in the workplace. His long list of publications in the field of adult education and learning, focusing mainly on adaptability and the nature of learning environments to respond to a changing world, are examples that demonstrate his commitment to quality research.

Through his leadership as the foundation Chair in Adult and Vocational Education, and the Director of the Centre for Skill Formation, Research and Development he brought many leading national and international researchers together to collaborate and engage in conversations, debates and research in adult and vocational education. Professor Stevenson established the Centre for Learning Research and laid the foundations for the current Griffith Institute for Educational Research.

Professor Stevenson is sadly missed by Griffith University as well as the wider VET community.

*Sarojini Choy, Griffith University*

## **AVETRA members selected for prominent national working groups**

AVETRA is proud to learn that Professor Stephen Billett is a member of the Education and Human Society Research Evaluation Committee (REC) for the 2012 round of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative. Similarly Professor Victor Callan is a member for Business. Congratulations to both AVETRA members on this major achievement!

*Sarojini Choy, Griffith University*

## **Research and VET News**

### **A MINUTE WITH Erica Smith**



**I first got interested in VET research** when I was working as a TAFE teacher in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I taught unemployed young people on labour market programs, and taught communication skills to pre-apprentices and apprentices. I began to wonder about work placements as I found that our labour market students often faltered when undertaking them. In a previous career as a human resource manager in the retail industry, I had hosted school students on work placements, so I had experience from both sides of the issue. So I decided to research the topic.

**Two people who inspired me most to conduct research** - Richard Sweet was, at that time, kind enough to talk to me about work placements and to offer me contacts in the 'TRAC' program when I approached him, so that I could build a small research project. TRAC was the forerunner of VET in schools. When I took an academic appointment at Charles Sturt University, where I began as a part-time Associate Lecturer, Doug Hill provided me with great encouragement, finding me a source of funding for a quasi-research project and encouraging me to publish from my TRAC research. As a beginning researcher (at the age of 40 in my first academic appointment), I found it amazing that these senior people were kind enough to help me on my way, and took my ideas seriously. Both people have continued to help me over the years. I know I am not allowed to nominate three people, but I do remember Stephen Billett chairing the session at which I delivered my first conference paper with great sensitivity, making me a bit less scared than I otherwise would have been.

**The areas of VET research that interest me most** was my PhD, which was completed in 2000, and was on young people's learning from their first year of full-time work. What I learned from the young people led me into two major research areas: apprenticeships and traineeships; and students' part-time working. I have undertaken a series of projects on student part-time working and the way that this has altered the 'school-to-work transition'. In the area of apprenticeships and traineeships I am the co-chair of an international apprenticeship network called INAP (International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship). This group, managed from the University of Bremen, has grown enormously from a small base, and provides a wonderful opportunity for

researchers from many countries to share knowledge about apprenticeship policy and practices that benefits not only the scholarly field of knowledge but also policy and practice in their home countries.

My research in this area has greatly benefited from NCVER funding. My earlier research in competency-based training has converged with my other, later, research interests, so that I now undertake a lot of research relating to workers gaining qualifications through their jobs. I have also undertaken quite a bit of research in higher education. As the 'tertiary sector' has moved Higher Education and VET closer, this research has been increasingly valuable from a VET point of view, as well as being of interest to me in gaining a deeper understanding of my own field of practice.

**Research methodologies I use** - I don't have a particular methodological bias, but I probably use qualitative methods more than quantitative. I am not a statistical expert, so my quantitative work is basically confined to descriptive statistics. In most of my major, and sometimes minor, projects, I use both methods. The old saying that quantitative methods are used to find out what is happening, and qualitative to find out why, rings very true to me. As I have become more experienced I find an increasing weight of obligation to try to represent people's experiences and viewpoints in an accurate and respectful manner. Since becoming an academic I have periods of 'return to (the VET) industry' as a State ITAB manager and an RTO manager, and these wonderful learning experiences have, I believe, added greatly to my research skills and insights.

**The most interesting piece of VET research I have conducted** - This is a tricky one! I find all of my research interesting. I love to get inside a company and talk to workers and managers about training. I also love talking to people operating at national policy level, as they have so many insights from their vast experience in so many settings. I am constantly surprised by people's generosity with their time and knowledge and their honesty as they talk. I often reflect on my previous projects where completely unexpected findings have overturned my pre-conceptions. Perhaps the piece of research from which I learned most was a mid-1990s national project that I managed, for the then Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), on the implementation of competency-based training. As a relatively green and junior person, goodness me did I learn quickly about VET politics! I also learned a great deal from the DEET contact person about how to manage a research project. I think he left DEET to go into horticulture; I am sure he is good at that too! I have benefited from many generous and talented research partners over the years.

**Currently I am working on** - I am currently managing two Linkage projects funded by the Australian Research Council. These projects are quite long-term; one lasts for three years and the other for two. I have industry partners for both projects, which I find terrific as it helps to keep the research grounded in what's useful and topical. The first examines the skill in jobs traditionally seen as unskilled or low-skilled. The second looks at the training offered by enterprise RTOs. These projects were both bubbling in my mind for years before I gained funding for them and are both areas in which I have a very strong interest, as

both relate to the way in which training can improve people's life chances, as well as making an economic contribution.

Another research-related activity is a new 'PhD masterclass' for senior VET managers which I am managing at the University of Ballarat. I am very privileged to be working with nine highly experienced VET people who have decided to undertake doctorates, and the amount of expertise in the room at our first workshop recently was quite astounding.

*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

**15<sup>th</sup> Annual AVETRA Conference 'The value and voice of VET research – for individuals, industry community and the nation'**  
**Rydges Hotel, Capital Hill, Canberra, 12-13 April, 2012**



The early bird registration for AVETRA 2012 has now been extended to **31<sup>st</sup> March 2012!**

Also, the Non Member One Day early bird registration fee has been **reduced to \$390.**

In addition to this, we are happy to provide organisations a group discount when sending 10 or more staff members to attend the AVETRA 2012 Conference for one day.

Don't forget to register for the Gala Dinner – it is one the highlights of the AVETRA Conference. The evening will be held in the beautiful Hall of the Australian National University. This is an evening of award presentations, good food, wine, networking and entertainment. This year we are happy to announce that Paul Martell will be the dinner entertainment. Paul is a multi-talented performer who adds impact to any occasion and who is guaranteed to entertain see - [www.paulmartell.com.au](http://www.paulmartell.com.au)

Further details, including the **AVETRA 2012 Registration Brochure** and provisional program, social events and accommodation options can all be found at: [avetra.org.au/annual-conference](http://avetra.org.au/annual-conference)



**Training Providers Forum 2012, Burswood Entertainment Complex, Perth, 12-14 May, 2012**

The Training Providers Forum 2012 is a two day conference aimed at all those involved in workforce development and the delivery of training. The Forum program will include presentations with the latest information and workshops showcasing examples of good practice in training and workforce development.

There are two forum themes:

- Trends and key issues in workforce development and training
- Training pathways for learners

Latest Forum program and registration information is available from [www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/training](http://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/training)

### **3<sup>rd</sup> World UNESCO Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in 14-16 May, 2012 in Shanghai, PRC**

China is planning the third World Congress on TVET for April, 2012. The previous congresses were in Melbourne, Australia and Seoul, Korea. More details available at: [www.unevoc.unesco.org/archev.php?type=Events](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/archev.php?type=Events)

### **Victorian TAFE Association State Conference 2012 'TAFE - Leading Skills Enrichment', 17-18 May, 2012 , Hilton on the Park, East Melbourne**

The Association holds an annual conference for TAFE Board Directors, CEOs and senior managers. These conferences provide challenging and topical programs and speakers, and include open forum sessions that enable the Association to hear the views of its members and the effect key issues have on them. The conferences also provide an excellent opportunity for informal networking by TAFE Board Directors and senior management.

Further information at: [www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=Events\\_State\\_Conference](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=Events_State_Conference)

### **World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics – World Congress 2012: Driving the Global Economy, Halifax Nova Scotia, Canada 26-29 May, 2012**

The World Congress which is held every two years is a global networking opportunity for education and training leaders. This year's Congress will focus on:

- best practices in leadership and transformation
- pedagogy for a new global generation of learners
- quality assurance
- standards across borders
- inclusion of Indigenous and marginalized peoples

The World Congress is held once every two years. Don't miss this global networking event. The Congress program and online registration are available at: [wfcpc.org/2011/10/world-congress-2012-driving-the-global-economy](http://wfcpc.org/2011/10/world-congress-2012-driving-the-global-economy)

### **The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) 31<sup>st</sup> Annual conference, Wilfred Laurier University/University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada 28-30 May, 2012**

The 2012 Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) is being hosted at Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Waterloo in Waterloo.

More information and a draft program are available at: [www.casae-aceea.ca](http://www.casae-aceea.ca)

### **2012 RC33 Eighth International Conference on Social Science Methodology, 9-13 July, 2012**

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>



### **Adelaide, 11-13 July, 2012**

Co-hosted in 2012 with TAFE SA, the 21<sup>st</sup> staging of NCVER's popular annual conference will be an opportunity to celebrate, collaborate and connect; and as it's their big anniversary, they plan to add some 'frills'.

Eminent international and national keynote speakers include Dr David Finegold, Senior Vice President for Lifelong Learning and Strategic Growth Initiatives at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

The conference program will be staged at TAFE SA's Adelaide City Campus and Adelaide College of the Arts on Light Square in the heart of the Adelaide CBD. Special conference events will be held at other locations around Adelaide.

Further details at: [www.nofrills.ncver.edu.au](http://www.nofrills.ncver.edu.au)

### **TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) Annual Conference, Perth, 6-7 September, 2012**

The annual TDA conference will be held at the Perth Convention Centre this year and is the annual showcase for Australian TAFE institutes, providers of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education courses to thousands of Australian and overseas students.

Further details will become available at: [www.tda.edu.au](http://www.tda.edu.au)

### **Adapt International Conference on Productivity, Investment in Human Capital and the Challenge of Youth Employment, Bergamo Italy, 16 – 19 October, 2012**

The conference aims to contribute to the current debate around tackling the youth unemployment problem through a more comprehensive approach and an interdisciplinary and comparative framework.

In particular, papers dealing with the following topics are welcome:

- Education and school-to-work transition: to understand the role of educational systems, apprenticeships and traineeships and other educational tools for youth employability.
- Industrial Relations: to analyze how collective bargaining could ease the integration of young people in the labour markets.
- Labour market institutions: to stress to what extent employment protection legislations, tax systems, unemployment benefits and labour market policies (among others) affect youth employment outcomes.
- Demographics and welfare system: to examine to what extent the ageing of the workforce affects the current and future youth population in terms of labour market conditions, access to training and pension systems.

Those intending to participate should submit an abstract (max 1500 words) by 1<sup>st</sup> June to [info@adapt.it](mailto:info@adapt.it). Adapt Scientific Committee will select up to 10 papers and the winners will be granted reimbursement of travel (up to 300€ for EU citizens and up to 800€ for non-EU citizens) and hospitality costs for the days of the conference. The list of accepted abstracts will be published online on or after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012.

For information about the submission of papers, please contact [info@adapt.it](mailto:info@adapt.it). Full details relating to the Conference are to be posted on the ADAPT website [www.adaptbulletin.eu](http://www.adaptbulletin.eu)

**Research Learning and Work Centre (RWLC) – 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Researching Work and Learning, University of Stirling U.K. 19-22 June, 2013**

This international conference is concerned with such questions as: What knowledge, which actors, and what parts of the environment are most visible? What and who remains invisible? When do actors become aware of invisible infrastructures? And what research methods and analytical approaches can make the invisible visible?

With power and gender as cross-cutting themes, the conference will cover the following: a) Learning, Organizational Change and Organizational Development b) Professional Practice and Learning c) Leadership Studies in Work and Learning d) Labour and Trade Union Studies in Work and Learning e) Trans-nationalism, Migration, Work and Learning f) Community, learning and social innovation g) Learning Theory, Skills and Work h) Identity, Work and Learning i) Difference and diversity in workplace and learning j) Vocational Education, Labour Markets and Learning k) Policy Studies, Work and Learning l) Unpaid Work and Learning m) Historical studies of Work, Learning and Social Change.

The deadline for submission of abstracts is **1 October 2012**, and applicants will be notified of acceptance by 30 November 2012. Full details of how to submit proposals, along with further information are available at: [www.stir.ac.uk/schools/education/researching-work-and-learning](http://www.stir.ac.uk/schools/education/researching-work-and-learning)

If you have any queries, please contact RWL at: [rwl2013@stir.ac.uk](mailto:rwl2013@stir.ac.uk)

## Recent Publications

### **Measuring work disincentives: taxes, benefits and the transition into employment, 2011, Michael Dockery, Rachel Ong and Gavin Wood, Perth, Centre for Labour Market Research.**

Disincentives to employment participation arising from the tax-benefit system have been a major concern for welfare reform. Data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia [HILDA] Survey are used to generate and test the robustness of three commonly used disincentive measures for non-working Australians: effective marginal tax rates, replacement rates and participation tax rates. The results of transition models suggest financial disincentives as measured in the current period have a large effect on employment outcomes one year later, and the replacement rate is the preferred measure for modeling disincentives facing the unemployed. While attracting most attention in the welfare-to-work debate, effective marginal tax rates are found to be an inappropriate measure of work disincentives facing the non-employed.

*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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