

*The Newsletter of the Australasian Vocational Education
and Training Research Association*

AVETRA 'A-NEWS' NEWSLETTER – December 2020 **A Special AVETRA Executive Bulletin**



From the President



In this momentous year, AVETRA has been as challenged and transformed like countless other associations, organisations and institutions in Australia and around the world. A good question in this context is what these challenges and responses reveal. I confidently declare that AVETRA has emerged stronger and better from it all. But it is what this transformation reveals that is really worth celebrating. In any normal year – if there ever was such a thing – AVETRA finds a determined band of members and a group of executive volunteers from among them toiling to promote inquiry, understanding and appreciation of a field that is in constant need of independent eyes and minds. But in 2020 the association has revealed something else as well. It has demonstrated vast funds of goodwill – of members, the executive, the VET field more broadly – combined with ingenuity and resourcefulness, confirming the resilience of the core values of the association to question and share means and discoveries. The transformations demanded by the year have found in AVETRA a most capable voice for a sector sorely tested by the times.

There have been changes to AVETRA of a more prosaic kind as well. Prosaic, but no less significant, for it is the day-to-day work that puts the association in the strong position to respond as it has. The executive has been refreshed. Long-serving pillars of the executive have moved on, people like Kevin Heys and Erica Smith, leaving strength and stability for a legacy. We have new executive members and existing members in new roles to lead the association and chart a course through these challenging times. Our annual conference had to be postponed after so much work had gone into developing it. But the association was undaunted, finding new ways to reach out and continue its vital work in the sector. The contributions to this special edition of A-News detail some of these initiatives, initiatives like the VET researcher development webinars, the invigoration of OctoberVET, and the Research Today publication striking out in a new direction. AVETRA's academic journal, the International Journal of Training Research, is now under new leadership with Sarojni Choy and Selena Chan stepping into the roles so brilliantly developed by Roger Harris and Berwyn Clayton over many years. And even at this late stage of a long year there is another change to announce. Our new Treasurer, Damian Oliver, compelled to stand down due to requirements of high-level public service work, has had to be replaced in short order. I am pleased to share with you that Craig Robertson has volunteered to step into the Treasurer's role. Craig brings a wealth of experience to the role and to the association's executive.

So, as the year draws to a close, AVETRA's executive is whole and complete and ready to take on 2021. Going back to the vexed issue of the 2020 conference postponement, you will be aware that the conference will be fully online in 2021, running from April 19 to 23. The conference title, Recover, Rethink and Rebuild: All Eyes on VET reflects a conviction that vocational education will be a key engine of recovery for Australasian societies and economies. Regardless of vaccine development and role out and containment measures, the first part of 2021 is too uncertain to attempt anything other than a virtual event. But in true AVETRA style, we are taking these constraints as a prompt for innovation and improvement. The 2021 conference will be bigger than ever, with scope to bring you some of the most insightful speakers from the field and more members than ever will be able to participate. The executive is still putting the finishing touches to the organisation, including the important matter of what online platform and hosting arrangements will best facilitate our ambitions. However, we will be announcing a call for abstracts early in the new year. All those who were to present during the 2020 conference are guaranteed a place in the new program if they wish. But we will be open to new contributions as well. Given that VET has been so tested in 2020 it is likely that there will be a stream of new insights and questions that can find expression in the conference. We are very much looking forward to AVETRA's next conference. It will be our first communication in the new year to share with you guidelines for writing and submitting abstracts and papers. I hope you enjoy catching up with the unprecedented work of the association in this special edition of A-News, and on behalf of the AVETRA executive wish you a joyous festive season and a bright new year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Hodge". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Steven Hodge
President, AVETRA

AVETRA Committee Updates

Our AVETRA Executive has met regularly on a virtual basis all year - on a monthly basis until the commencement of the sub-committees in August when they moved to bi-monthly. Officers met informally on the intervening month to keep in touch with events.

In 2020, AVETRA Executive developed Sub Committees to amplify the impact of the executive. Each sub-committee has a convener from the Executive and has Executive members and other AVETRA members who have a particular interest. These arrangements will be reviewed in 2021 but currently the sub-committees are:

Events Sub Committee *Convener - Teressa Schmidt*

The Events Sub-Committee has overseen a very successful first digital October VET, including an email campaign. All recorded events are available on the AVETRA website <https://www.aveutra.org.au/pages/octobervet-.html>. They have been overseeing the plans for the 2021 Online AVETRA conference announced earlier this month: **Recover, Rethink and Rebuild: All Eyes on VET** which will be held 19-23 April 2021

Finance and Membership Sub-Committee *Convener - Llandis Barratt-Pugh*

It has been a very active time with three virtual meetings already and significant progress. Our membership drive, on the back of some very engaging webinar activity, has seen us with more members currently than we had in the past three years. Most importantly, we have gained our first 5 Institutional members, opening up a new and very welcome income stream for the association. Noting the pressure of our COVID world we have introduced the new reduced membership rate for casual employees. A survey has been prepared to gather members views of AVETRA services and direction. A recruitment drive is being made to all RTOs to become institutional members. We have refined the benefits of being an AVETRA member in a virtual working community, especially for networking and self-development. Never before has it been more important than to join and engage with a professional network as our daily social ties are rearranged.

Marketing and Engagement Sub-Committee *Convener - Jason Skues*

Successes of the sub-committee have included the securing of the AVETRA archives including conference papers, A-News and Research Today on the VOCEDplus database voced.edu.au Lots of discussion about revamping the current AVETRA website and plans are underway for further work in 2021. Work is being led in these meeting developing the AVETRA marketing and engagement strategy.

Research Dissemination Sub-Committee *Convener - Michele Simons*

The Sub-Committee was delighted to be able to commence work with Professor Sarojni Choy from Griffith University as the new Editor of IJTR. Sarojni will be joined by of Dr Selena Chan as co-editor. Sarojni and Selena are working with the current editors Roger Harris and Berwyn Clayton and with colleagues from Taylor and Francis (the publishers of the journal) to ensure a smooth transition for the new team in 2021.

Research Today for A-NEWS



AVETRA's Research Today magazine provides a twice-yearly summary of key issues and initiatives in the national VET research landscape. The October 2020 edition of AVETRA's Research Today showcased a changing format for the magazine. To complement the high level VET research forum of AVETRA's International Journal of Training Research, the new Research Today magazine has a focus on both applied research and VET practitioner-led research activity.

AVETRA recognises that there is a wide range of research activity across the VET sector that may be unrecognised as research or for the value creation it provides to business, industry, community and the VET sector itself. Research Today aims to showcase this exciting body of work, and propel and support new-career researchers in their pursuit of knowledge and skills creation and – importantly – application. The October 2020 edition of Research Today can be accessed here:

https://avetra.org.au/data/Research_Today_Oct_2020.pdf

Ahead of the next call for papers (for the May 2021 edition), AVETRA encourages all applied and practitioner researchers who might consider a safe forum to showcase their research, to contact the Research Today editor Andrew Williamson at andrew.williamson@holmesglen.edu.au

Please, please: if you think that your inquiry project might be of interest to others in the sector, get in touch and let's discuss!

AVETRA Researcher Series 2020

As Australia's peak national VET research association, AVETRA plays an important role in connecting early career and emerging VET researchers with peers and mentors. In 2020, they were excited to announce a new webinar series, aimed at connecting our membership from across Australia and providing an opportunity for engaging with key VET issues and researcher capability development. There have been fantastic connections made in these well attended webinars and a real sense of collegiality fostered. We are hoping to continue the series, in intensive mode at the 2021 conference and in the future and welcome any feedback or suggestions.

Researcher development

This webinar series focuses on building researcher capacity and offers an opportunity for early career, emerging and practitioner researchers to strengthen their understanding of the research process. For participants with a research idea in mind, the series offers an opportunity to grow a small-scale research project from conception through to dissemination, through each stage of the research cycle.

Researcher Development Series:

Webinar 1-The role of research for VET practice and policy

Webinar 2-Getting started with your VET research idea

Webinar 3-Designing a question for your VET research

Webinar 4-Thinking about your research contexts

Webinar 5-Collecting and analysing empirical data for your VET research

Webinar 6-Accessing and using secondary and public data

Webinar 7-Understanding the ethics of doing research with humans

Webinar 8-Sharing your VET research: writing for different audiences

The structure of this webinar series enabled participants to:

- Reflect on their individual development needs using the Researcher Development Framework;
- Hear from some VET experts on how their approaches to research;
- See a modelled process for formulating stages of research and interact with peers during a breakout room activity; and
- Learn about where to access literature and research reading resources.

We plan to run the Researcher Development series as an intensive each day of the AVETRA 2021 online conference!

Resources for your research



Don't forget that the VOCEDplus data base can be a useful resource when you are starting up new research projects or literature reviews. It can be accessed at:

<http://www.voced.edu.au>

The VOCEDplus Pod Network allows instant access to research and a multitude of resources in a convenient and efficient platform. <http://www.voced.edu.au/pod-network>

Link to the whole list of podlets: <http://www.voced.edu.au/podlets>

Link to the feedback form: <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/contact>

NCVER has developed another product to help you with your research work.

This is the VET Knowledge Bank.

Click here to start <http://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank>

A focus on Special Collections

The VOCEDplus [Special collections](#) are compiled by the VOCEDplus team to allow users to quickly browse sets of records within collections. A review of the structure and content of the Special collections has been undertaken, merging them into six thematic groups: Key research and policy by region; Program based collections; Organisation based collections; VET/Higher Education pathways; Thesis collection; and Key conferences.



New Titles in VOCEDplus

Browse all recent additions to the VOCEDplus database from the [New Titles page](#).

If you would like to know more about any Vocedplus services you can contact the team at

voced@edu.au

Reflections from Robin Shreeve



Robin is pictured speaking at the AVETRA inaugural VET Practitioner Research conference on 26/27 April 2018 in Melbourne in pre-COVID days.

Covid 19 and VET

The impact of CV 19 has been enormous. In Vocational Education and Training (VET) it seems to have super charged moves to online learning including many more virtual and augmented reality training resources. It also seems to have encouraged further the growth of micro-credentials and other short courses. Providers and learners have benefitted from increased government investment which will bring many more enrolments. VET teachers have responded by quickly adapting to new challenges. But is enough being done at the national, state, and local levels to support them? – I would suggest all these excellent new learning materials still need learner guidance from expert teachers. Is this disruption also an opportunity to renew the VET teacher workforce by bringing in some new teachers with contemporary industry experience as well as upskilling VET's existing workforce with both additional industry and educational expertise?

A bit of controversy

The background of leaders of education and training systems, how much does it matter? University Vice Chancellors are nearly always academics. School systems tend to be run by ex-principals and teachers. Yet VET systems and institutions are often but not always run by “generalist” executives who have little direct experience in VET teaching and learning. Does this matter? Are outside perspectives good or does it mean these executives tend to concentrate on issues like business development, management systems and marketing rather than teaching and learning? Why do VET systems go outside the sector more often? Is there a dearth of talent or has the casualisation of the VET teaching workforce meant fewer people get promoted internally? Is it a function of late entry into VET teaching because of the need for VET teachers to be “dual professionals”? I was a reasonably senior VET manager so I could said to be self-interested, but I would be interested in any research or views on this topic.

These posts were originally posted on Linked In for response and we invite your views in reply, so please write or post on Linked In on Robin Shreeve's posts or submit a response to lizzie.knight@vu.edu.au for possible inclusion in the next A-News issue.

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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 AVETRA e-newsletter with the latest news in the VET sector as well as VET research twice a year.
- 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 **\$180** (GST inclusive) and Student, Retired, Casual & Part time memberships **\$90.00** including GST are available. If you would like to subscribe for hard copies of the IJTR journal it is an extra \$20 per year.

Institutional membership is also available

<https://avetra.org.au/pages/membership.html>

We encourage you to get in contact with us about whether your institution is eligible for Institutional membership.

If you are interested in providing leads or contributing to this newsletter, please contact Josie Misko - josiemisko@ncver.edu.au