

# A-NEWS

The Newsletter of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association



## From the President

*Greetings to all our AVETRA Members*

Since our last newsletter, members of the Executive have been busy on a number of key initiatives for the Association. As well as our Annual OctoberVET events (which are reported on in this newsletter), some of our members based in Melbourne have been working on preparations for our 2015 conference. A call for papers has been made and early bird registrations are now available (<http://avetra.org.au/annual-conference>). The theme of the conference - *Walking the Tightrope: the Implications of Markets for VET for Research, Policy and Practice* – has been framed to invite papers, symposia and posters on a wide range of issues linked to the current market-focused policy settings and the implications they have for the sector.

Our annual conference in April will also offer opportunities for members discuss a number of the key reforms to the sector that are currently being debated and which will be the subject of consultations which will take place in 2015. AVETRA

will be making submissions to the VET Reform Taskforce on the priorities for VET reforms in 2015 and the review of Training Packages and courses. Full details of these consultations and how you can be involved can be found on the VET Reform website (<http://vetreform.industry.gov.au/>).

The Executive have also recently spent a good deal of time debating how we can improve the financial health of the Association. After considerable discussion it was decided to approve small increases in membership fees for 2015. This was not a decision that was taken lightly; however membership fees have remained unchanged since 2009 despite increases to inflation and rising costs. This increase will assist us to sustain our current member benefits including access to our journal which will transfer to Taylor and Francis in the New Year.

On behalf of the Executive please accept our best wishes for Christmas and the New Year and I look forward to seeing many of you at the AVETRA conference in Melbourne in 2015.

*Michele Simons  
President of AVETRA, University of  
Western Sydney, December 2014*

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## **Call for Nominations - AVETRA 2015 Awards & Scholarship**

Nominations are called for the following AVETRA Awards to be presented at the 2015 AVETRA Conference from the 8 – 10 April 2015:

- **Berwyn Clayton Award for Distinguished Service to AVETRA**
- **TDA/AVETRA Industry Innovation Scholarship**
- **AVETRA 2014 Journal Article of the Year Award**
- **AVETRA (Ray Barker) Ambassador Award**

Full details on how to submit a nomination for these important awards can be found at <http://avetra.org.au/awards-scholarships/current-year>.

There are also opportunities for members to nominate for awards connected with the Annual Conference. The award for Conference Paper of the Year and the Early Career Researcher Paper of the Year Award will be determined by a sub-committee of the Conference committee from the submitted abstracts. Please see <http://avetra.org.au/annual-conference/avetra-2014-call-for-abstracts> for more details on the abstract submission process.

Please take up the opportunity to apply for these awards and help us to celebrate excellence and achievement in VET research!

## **AVETRA Secretariat Opening Hours**

Please note the AVETRA Secretariat will be closed from 12pm on Wednesday, 24 December 2014 and will re-open at 9am on Friday, 2 January 2015.

We wish you a very happy and safe festive season and we look forward to working with you in the new year.

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## AVETRA Educator Hub

The Educator Hub is a project to support new VET researchers, VET educators who have an interest in the use of VET research, and those already involved in research. It is particularly aimed at those VET educators/practitioners who might be interested in 'practice-based research or inquiry'. The Hub is the initiative of a group of AVETRA members who wish to develop research capability more broadly. Further information is available on the AVETRA website: <http://avetra.org.au/>. To join the forum, click on the following link: [AVETRA Educator Hub](#)

The Educator Hub will operate as a national community of practice and provide opportunities for:

- \* learning about research and developing research skills
- \* networking with other interested VET researchers
- \* connecting with experienced AVETRA researchers
- \* discussing topical research issues and topics for research
- \* foregrounding inquiry as part of practice and providing a practitioner voice to policy

### How do you join?

- \* If you are already an AVETRA member then participation in the Hub and its activities comes as part of your membership. Let AVETRA know you want to be part of the Hub.
- \* If you are not currently a member, then you can join the Hub for a year at the special price of \$80, which can be taken off your full AVETRA membership if you join within this year (see AVETRA membership).

## OctoberVET 2014

This year we have a record number of OctoberVET events, with a number of states running several, and others connecting by videoconference. There were also a number of OctoberVET events in New Zealand this year, a great opportunity for AVETRA to expand its reach. Events mainly focussed topical issues such as apprenticeships and traineeships, literacy and numeracy development, engagement of young students in VET, VET innovation and building capability in the VET sector. A large number focused on building research capacity itself with new developments in research, what researchers learn, starting the research conversation and participatory action research.



Sydney OctoberVET 15 October 2014

Chris Corbel from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education presented a paper at the Sydney event at Randwick TAFE, entitled 'Building future capabilities for vocational education: Why high-level-teaching qualifications matter for TAFE teachers'. This was based on the outcomes of the Specialised Vocational Pedagogy Project; an initiative of the Australian Education Union and funded by the former Federal Department (see further details below).

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The project addressed the identified need for a high quality and well-resourced vocational education sector by considering the implications of *vocational disciplinary knowledge* and *specialised vocational pedagogy*. Vocational disciplinary knowledge is an important part of a VET teacher's knowledge base, but it is often assumed to be already fixed and in place, whereas it is in fact constantly changing. Expertise, not just competence, is required on the part of teachers and students to enable them to meet the challenges of industry and the economy.

Two groups of teachers trialed a professional development model based around two workshops. Teachers were well able to engage in a collegiate manner with disciplinary experts and research findings. The research findings addressed issues and problems that the teachers and their students encountered in workplaces.

The conclusions from the study indicated that the development of expertise requires the *capacity* in teachers and students to respond to opportunities and changing circumstances.

This kind of response requires a range of *capabilities*, which are a combination of personal abilities, social opportunities, and necessary resources. Providing these capabilities requires action not just from individuals, but from educational institutions, industry and policymakers.

Vocational disciplinary knowledge needs to be built into formal qualifications. Informal learning can only go so far – expertise requires the structured learning of the theoretical and practical knowledge of the vocational stream. The project indicated on a small scale the possibilities of a model based on the sharing and recontextualisation of vocational disciplinary knowledge, and that more work is needed on the underlying principles of the model and the project's interpretation and application of key concepts such as vocational disciplinary knowledge. Full details of the project can be found in the final report of the project, entitled *Building future capabilities for vocational education: Why high-level-teaching qualifications matter for TAFE teachers*, at [www.aeu.federal.org.au](http://www.aeu.federal.org.au)

Chris Corbel



**The Ballarat event** entitled 'New developments in research in Vocational Education and Training', was held at Federation University, Ballarat and had an impressive line-up of speakers, including students. The speakers were Robin Shreeve, Hugh Guthrie, Carolyn Johnstone and Dorothy Lucardie. Robin Shreeve launched the new VET teaching textbook, which has co-editors Liz Atkins and Ros Brennan-Kemmis from AVETRA Executive. There were 47 attendees from across the education sectors.

**The WA OctoberVET symposium** was held on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> at the Central Institute of Technology Perth. The theme was "Access" and what research findings have taught us about this issue within the VET sector. The group then enjoyed a 'research slam' (presentations done 'poetry slam' style), with four presentations from Llandis Barratt-Pugh, Gunn Dolva, Carmen Goodridge and Sue Thompson. At the end of the presentations, the group moved to an adjacent facility to view the Buddhist Monks who were making an intricate Mandala from coloured powders that finally would be just swept away. According to Llandis, the group: "watched and considered our contributions to VET research and VET training and learning and contemplated what we might leave behind".

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## **CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR THE: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRAINING RESEARCH (IJTR)**

The *IJTR* is the AVETRA journal –it is your journal. Please consider publishing in it.

Got a paper lurking in the pile on your desk? Or secretively hiding – out of sight, out of mind – in your desk drawer? Or slowly evolving in your brain? Then pull it out and consider publishing it! Remember Arthur Calwell’s post-WW2 catch cry, “Populate or perish”? Well, today in our field, it is “Publish or perish”!

These are some fruitful starters ...

Perhaps you have delivered a paper at a previous AVETRA (or any other) conference that was well received? Or you are researching for a higher degree and your supervisor has been exhorting you to publish? Or you have made a presentation at an OctoberVET or a similar occasion? Or you are doing some investigation in your workplace that might involve, for instance, an evaluation or a training needs analysis? These can often trigger thinking for starting a journal article for publication.

Develop these drafts a little more ...

For example, think about the relevant literature, the framework, method details, clear results and meaningful implications for policy and/or practice. Seek some help from somebody who has already begun publishing, read other articles published in the journal to get an idea of style and standard, peruse the front inside cover for the journal’s focus and scope, and study the inside back cover for author guidelines. Finally, get a critical friend to read it before you submit – they often see things that you don’t.

Note that articles may be submitted either to the Feature Articles section or to the Practice section. The Practice section takes shorter articles of a more practical and applied nature, and are often an excellent way to start publishing. If you feel more confident, try the Feature Articles section. Book Reviews are also welcome.

Then be bold ... and submit to the *IJTR*:

- before 31 December 2014: <http://jtr.e-contentmanagement.com>
- after 1 January 2015: via the Taylor and Francis website

**We would welcome a contribution from you.**

## **Apprenticeship conference in Australia September 2015**

The next conference of the international apprenticeship research network, INAP, will be held in Ballarat on September 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> 2015. Details about the INAP network can be found at <http://www.inap.uni-bremen.de/> This will be the sixth conference of the network since the first in Bremen, Germany, in 2006. INAP brings together researchers, practitioners, and government officials.

A call for papers will be issued soon and if you would like to be kept informed please contact the organiser, Erica Smith, on [e.smith@federation.edu.au](mailto:e.smith@federation.edu.au)

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## A MINUTE WITH David McLean, RMIT University



David McLean is the inaugural winner of the TAFE Directors Australia/AVETRA Innovation Scholarship, which has provided David with \$6000 to support his research project, and the opportunity to present this research at the AVETRA Conference in Melbourne in 2015.

Applications for next year's scholarship are due by 27 February 2015. See under Awards on AVETRA website. If you work in TAFE, this is a great opportunity. If you would like to help AVETRA establish further scholarships, please contact us.

**I am working to become a researcher because I'm interested in exploring the abstract angles of a problem and then as a practitioner to apply that knowledge in developing a solution or a different way of working.**

**This scholarship came at a useful time for myself and colleagues in RMIT's Business Enterprise Unit. We had** been exploring a range of new ideas that would better enable people in the health and community services industry to develop their capabilities as micro business owners. This scholarship gave me the capability to turn one specific idea that we were discussing into a research project that can be fully explored and shared with others. The idea grew out of a range of interconnected concepts sketched on a whiteboard that were able to be translated into the application for the scholarship.

**Changes are occurring so quickly in the VET sector,** we are always looking to innovate and develop new models to address areas of skills shortage and areas of potential growth. One constant opportunity for innovation that we like to pursue is how micro solutions can address macro problems. In this case, to support individuals starting their own businesses in the health or community services sector that would provide services to Australia's aging population and potentially to the NDIS. Sometimes enterprise creation is an overlooked but important part of vocational education. For many self-employment is the vocational outcome they want and a strong enabler to increasing activity in niche or growth areas.

**RMIT has** provided a great environment to undertake this project. As a fully tertiary university there is the opportunity for VE practitioners to work alongside their HE colleagues to explore ideas and learn more about the process of research and writing. I have joined in with a group of researchers that get together twice a week to write and discuss their work, that experience has been most enjoyable and useful for this project.

**I consider myself a very early career researcher,** and this scholarship has enabled me to work more collaboratively, and to talk to a wider range of people than I might otherwise have been able to. The scholarship has provided backfill for my role as a VE Manager so I can undertake the project during regular work hours. I'm most grateful for AVETRA and the TDA for the opportunity.

*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 Linda Simon.*

## How has Gen Y benefited from e-learning and the 1:1 laptop program at school?

### A Research report by

Catherine Ryan, from the  
Catholic Education Office, Sydney

“The benefit of E-learning is that it helps people that are not organized or the brightest people to understand or keep up with the class”

Respondent Quote

The VET in Schools (VETiS) program has been a great initiative in Australian education policy development in recent years. Schools have broadened VET choices available to young people, providing pathways that were not previously available. In 2009, the Rudd government rolled out laptops to all Year 9 students as part of the DEEWR Digital Education Revolution initiative, and repeated this over the next four years. VETiS students have indeed benefited from this program demonstrating an improvement in their organisational skills, qualification completion rates and application to their learning.

As part of research undertaken at a senior secondary Catholic school in metropolitan Sydney, 93 Year 12 students participated in a survey which focused on the uptake, use and impact of e-learning and technology in their vocational courses. Students at the school were well placed to comment on embedded technology in VET delivery, studying at least three vocational courses as part of their HSC. The survey was premised on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's E-Learning Benchmarking Survey which focuses on the use of technology in the VET sector. Once enrolled at the school, the students had 1:1 access to a laptop complete with appropriate software; web based learning management system and Google Apps including email.

Analysis of the data found that students were choosing courses and this school in particular to complete their HSC based on the technology available to them. More than 75 per cent stated that technology was a factor in their choice of school, courses and completing Year 12. The students were also affirming of their teacher's skill, knowledge and understanding of e-learning. Equally positive was their confidence in the schools capacity to provide a stable infrastructure, support and easy access to technology. By all accounts, the environment was rife for effective e-learning to take place.

Students were questioned whether e-learning had attributed to them achieving the vocational qualifications of the VET courses they were studying. As a cohort 35 per cent believed that e-learning had contributed 'a lot' to obtaining their AQF qualifications. Further analysis of the data by drilling down by course area, found some differences between trades (47 per cent) and non-trade VET courses (53 per cent). Students undertaking trade courses were less likely to attribute completion rates to engaging in e-learning.

Differences in the use of technology between the course areas, was predominately in the intensity with which e-learning is used in course delivery. Non trade course used e-learning substantially more in 'undertaking learning activities & assessments' and 'doing research'.

The technology rich learning environment allowed the students to be more organised. Through the electronic submission of work (68 per cent), doing research (63 per cent) or the ability to email their teachers (51 per cent) students kept on task and completed their assigned work. Comments such as *"it helps because I can do the same*

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work at home as well as at school” and “I couldn’t learn well with books and text books I never used to complete work. Now I use a laptop it keeps me interested and keen to do work” attest to the enhanced learning opportunities which technology has provided these students.

Students at this school are very fortunate to be able to study a range of vocational courses; utilising e-learning and technology in achieve success in these areas. The research found that because of e-learning the curriculum was more accessible to students; they were better learners after commencing at the school, had improved organisational skills, enhanced their work readiness skills and improved their use of technology.

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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 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 **\$180** (GST inclusive) and Student memberships **\$90.00** including GST are available.

*If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter, please contact Linda Simon - [lindasimon2@bigpond.com](mailto:lindasimon2@bigpond.com)*