

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The recent AVETRA Conference held in Canberra provided a wonderful opportunity for VET researchers to link with colleagues from across Australia and a number of other countries from around the world to reflect on the current state of VET research and to think about what might lay ahead for the sector. It also prompted me to reflect on some of the 'growing edges' for VET as a field of research at a time when evidence-based approaches to policy and practice are ever present and growing in their ability to shape what is possible in public policy terms.

A quick scan of the papers presented at the conference offers a useful snapshot of the issues that are occupying the attention of researchers. These issues are wide ranging – encompassing long standing and important issues associated with the nature and diversity of VET learners, VET pedagogies, the initial and ongoing development of VET teachers and leaders and work-based learning.

However there was also evidence of an expansion of VET research agendas into new areas associated with the changing policy environment. The AVETRA conference provided ample evidence to support the interdisciplinary character of VET research noted by Winch (2012) as covering such diverse fields as the sociology of work, economics and educational research.

The conference also highlighted the 'wicked problem' (Australian Public Service Commission 2007) that the policy-research-practice nexus continues to provide. We were reminded of the challenges that face researchers in attempting to provide an evidence base which is able to keep pace with policy developments. The capacity of researchers to look 'over the horizon' and be able to name the research questions that are of merit and which will have the purchase to shape policy and practice thinking is more pressing than ever.

Another side to this dilemma is the need for the research community to bring quality research to the table – by that I mean research that is of high quality along a number of dimensions as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 278-280). These include objectivity/conformability; reliability/dependability/auditability; internal validity/credibility/authenticity; external validity/transferability/

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fittingness and utilisation/ application/action orientation. The issue of what counts as quality research is an important one in an environment where strong advocates of evidence-based policy making can create 'hierarchies' of evidence which privilege certain world views and ways of knowing over others. This is of particular importance in VET where the role of practitioners as researchers needs promoting for its ability to bring the 'voices' of practitioners from all contexts (the classroom, the workplace, enterprises, industries) to current debates. High quality research by practitioners can provide policy makers and other stakeholders with access to the professional knowledge and insights into practice from people who, more than any others are central to the 'success of the [VET] enterprise' (Goodson and Hargreaves 1996, p. 24). It is important that we are able to see the world from practitioners' perspectives as well as those of researchers, policy makers, politicians and other stakeholders.

A final issue that the conference prompted me to reflect upon is the importance of knowledge brokerage or the development of knowledge exchange strategies as mechanisms for encouraging interactions between researchers and end users (including policy makers, practitioners, industry etc.). There is a need to build bridges between the different cultures that exist between researchers and the various end users of VET research in order that the goals to which research outcomes might be directed are mutually understood. This, in turn, will enable the development of action which 'facilitates the identification, access, assessment, interpretation and translation of research evidence which can then be utilised in decision making' (Dobbins et al. 2009).

I believe that this triumvirate of issues – the changing and interdisciplinary nature of VET research, the challenge of building the research-policy-practice nexus through promoting the conduct of high quality research that brings a range of perspectives to the table and development of knowledge exchange and brokerage as integral parts of dissemination practices in the sector – provide a useful way to consider how we might collaborate through AVETRA to shape this very exciting future that we face.

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Building a database of resources for early career VET researchers

Ever wondered how to begin research, or how you yourself got started on your research journey? If so, you are not alone! Many early career researchers in the VET sector have been expressing the need for some means of readily accessing resources that would help them get started.

AVETRA acted on this expressed need, and in 2011, called for expressions of interest for a project to build such a repository. The Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work at the University of SA took up this challenge, jointly funded by NCVET and AVETRA. We commenced the process of building this repository, to provide VET researchers with resources at the point when they needed them (i.e. 'just-in-time' and 'when needed' resources). I say 'commence' as it is just the beginning of this process that can keep on building (and culling and updating) over the years ahead.

Our approach has involved two main processes: asking people and locating print/web resources. First, we sought assistance from both new and experienced researchers. We interviewed 10 'early career' VET researchers, whom we knew had participated in NCVET's Community of Practice Program (www.ncvet.edu.au/research/opportunities.html#Community_of_practice_scholarships_for_VET_practitioners), researching their needs and identifying resources that they themselves had found useful as beginning researchers. We also interviewed AVETRA Executive members

about resources that they knew about, had used and/or had written. In addition, we made three general calls for resources to all members via the AVETRA email list during August 2011.

Second, we combed websites searching for already existing research resources which we could reference, and for papers relevant to research methods that had been presented as conference papers or published as journal articles. Examples of conferences were AVETRA, NCVET ('No Frills') and AARE, and of journals, the *International Journal of Training Research*, *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, *Journal of VET and Journal of Further and Higher Education*. A very important and relevant site was VOCEDplus, while such general sites as nzresearch (<http://nzresearch.org.nz/>), Commonwealth of Learning (www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=347) and university websites (e.g. www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/methods/) were other places to find useful and accessible materials.

Our task was to source and compile VET researcher support materials for an additional section on the AVETRA website. The identified resource documents were to be put into PDF format, except for those that could act as templates for research use in Word format, and then uploaded by the AVETRA webmaster. We particularly focused (within the limited time and finance available) on sites that we knew would have relevance to VET, and that would furnish informative materials,

guidelines and ideas to inform early career researchers about the development and management of VET research projects. These materials would, we believed, be the most valuable as basic tools, and would provide a platform from which they could build their projects and their own self-development as VET researchers.

The repository on the AVETRA website can be found in the red bar at the top of the AVETRA homepage (<http://avetra.org.au/>) – 'VET Research Tools'. We have clustered the resources in three sections: 'The Research Process', 'Researcher Capability' and 'Links to Websites'. Each of these sections contains either documents that can be downloaded or websites where resources can be found on those particular topics. Researchers are therefore able to 'dip into' whatever they feel they need at any point in time.

Now that we have made a start, I would strongly encourage readers to consider whether they have other research resources or know of further websites that would be valuable additions to this repository, and to contact me so that they may be considered as additions to the AVETRA website. I would warmly welcome such contact from you.

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Stephen Billett receives the Ray Barker Award for Distinguished Service to VET"

Vale John Stevenson John Stevenson 1946-2012

John Stevenson started his professional life with the unusual task of working out why it wasn't possible to make Coca Cola from North Queensland sugar without the drink going cloudy. At that stage John was a research scientist with the Sugar Research Institute in Mackay. He spent six years with the Institute but it is his time in education where his legacy is most clearly seen.

I met John Stevenson when we were both appointed to positions at the then Brisbane College of Advanced Education in 1989. With the amalgamation of the Mt Gravatt campus into Griffith University in 1990, the issues of establishing research activity and a research culture were raised and a number of academic staff with research experience presented their research to colleagues and worked with them, often as doctoral supervisors. John Stevenson was one of these.

John was quietly passionate about research and that it should be conducted in a rigorous manner. This came through in his work and in all his many presentations. His starting point was cognitive psychology with an emphasis on information processing theory, which he used as the lens to examine learning in a variety of workplace settings. This starting point was added to with research drawing on sociological, philosophical and activity theory. The common theme of learning was explored across a wide range of areas through his own research and the research of his doctoral students. These included workplace learning, school education, law education and religious education, to name a few. This last topic may seem at odds with John's determined atheism, but for him it was simply another aspect of human experience and learning and thus worthy of study.

John was unfailingly generous in helping others to develop their research capacity. The number of nationally competitive grants awarded to him as first named investigator was comparatively modest, but the number of applications by others that were successful because of his help was considerable. His help to colleagues went beyond grant applications and included assembling research teams that acknowledged people's strengths and provided opportunities for members to extend their research capacity and generate publications and skill in working together. John always had a large number of research students but these didn't stop

him from providing considerable help to students outside his area where he had no formal supervisory role, in areas such as drama education, mathematics, applied theatre and primary education, again, to name only a few.

John was an educational leader who felt that leadership should be based on scholarship and the quality of ideas rather than position or authority. He was a quietly-spoken man who rarely raised his voice or used his position to create change, but he did raise many new ideas. Of the many positions he was appointed to most were foundation appointments with at least twelve that I could identify in that category. His foundation Chair in Adult and Vocational Education was one of the first in Australia and this was followed by his Directorship of the Centre for Skill Formation, Research and Development which he established, along with the conference on post compulsory education and training. Over the fifteen years PCET ran it brought many leading overseas researchers to Australia and provided a valuable platform for researchers in adult and vocational education to share their ideas and to collaborate. With the push for fewer, larger research centres John established the Centre for Learning Research and laid the foundations for the current Griffith Institute for Educational Research.

In 2007, John was Deputy Dean Research in the Faculty of Education, with responsibility for formulating the Faculty's response to the Federal government's Research Quality Framework (RQF). John approached this task with his customary scholarship and imagination and it quickly became clear that had the government not changed hands later that year that the University's response to the RQF would have drawn heavily on his work.

John's legacy is his work on the concept of adaptability, the nature of learning environments to meet the needs of a changing world and the firm belief in the importance of scholarly research that anyone who worked with him gained from the experience.

**Associate Professor
Howard Middleton PhD
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Career Pathways for Women and Girls: Emergent and Non-traditional Occupations and Industries

WAVE undertook the Career Pathways for Women and Girls: Emergent and Non-traditional Occupations and Industries project in conjunction with economicSecurity4Women.

The project resulted in a series of papers looking at the context of viable work for women in Australia. These include

- industry profiles currently available which include gender statistics,
- profiles of women in non-traditional fields of work who shared their experiences and perspectives via a small survey,
- WAVE policy recommendations to promote viable work options for women and girls,
- And information which may support career advisors and employers

All the documentation and copies of reports and attachments are available on WAVE's website: www.wave.org.au

I'm happy to answer any queries

Elaine Butler
National co-coordinator:
WAVE council member:
economicSecurity4Women (eS4W)



JOIN AVETRA at:
www.avetra.org.au

The practical realities of skills for innovation

Innovation has been heralded as the way of the future. An accepted view among many commentators is that unless firms are constantly searching for or implementing new ideas and innovative activities they will not be economically successful in the short or long-term. A recent NCVER study of 30 Australian firms across wholesale and retail trades (including firms involved in manufacturing these goods), financial services, and biotechnology industries, however, indicates that this rhetoric seems not to be the case in practice. Firms are far more pragmatic in their approach to innovation.

New or fresh ideas are fundamental to innovation, but there are limitations of focussing too much on creativity and idea generation at the expense of thinking about the hard work that is required to commercialise or implement the new idea. This makes sense as the great majority of patented ideas do not get off the ground commercially. For our study we used the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of innovation as ‘the development, introduction or implementation of significantly improved goods, services or processes’. We found that it was tied up with the economic realities of increasing revenue, containing costs, and responding to internal and external business environments. In some cases a publically promoted vision provided direction for change as firms tried to adopt new ways of working that would align with the image they were trying to portray. More often than not innovation was also driven by a champion who had the commitment, credibility and resources to drive change. The availability or building of new and more powerful information and telecommunications technology (often outsourced to specialist professionals) helped firms to automate administrative and project management functions and facilitate online business interactions both with clients, government agencies and suppliers. For all firms this has been a crucial innovation in recent years. The quest for revenue growth often meant searching at home or abroad for new or different commercial opportunities, as well as the latest trends. Trade fairs, conferences, and external and internal workshops were frequently used to gather information on what was happening in the outside world including overseas. Adequate funding and resources was fundamental to support participation in such activities as well as any subsequent re-modelling of products and services,

workstations and infrastructure. Access to subject-specific knowledge and expertise of internal or external experts was essential to the generation of new products, techniques, and practices. Improved processes were also driven by the need for firms to remain compliant with existing and new legislative requirements and codes of practice, with respect to consumer protection, occupational health and safety, and environmental issues (including the introduction of concepts of green buildings and lean organisation concepts).

Most firms understood that meeting customer needs was vital to their sustainability and growth. It required the collecting and analysing information of customer wants, preferences and aspirations, to inform current practice as well as to provide feedback to local or centralised research and development functions. Some of these market research activities were undertaken on a large scale in large firms in the financial services and wholesale and retail industries (including banks, general insurance and superannuation companies, pharmaceuticals, and large department or speciality stores). In this respect firms are generally refining practices that have worked for them in the past or which have worked for their competitors. Some firms with in-house marketing departments prided themselves on the application of more sophisticated evidence-based approaches to product and process development. In small companies marketing continued to be done through referrals, word of mouth, newsletters, advertisements and informal networking with clients. In both large and small firms there is the use of external advertising firms.

What does this mean for VET? Our interest in innovation was motivated by the need to understand how the VET system can prepare individuals with the skills and knowledge required to participate in a changing workplace. We found that for the retail, wholesale and financial services sectors the skills that are most important for innovation at the present time and in the future are business management, finance, marketing and project management skills. These results support the findings of the ABS Business Longitudinal Survey. For firms in

the retail and whole sale trade sector the next most required skills were transport, plant and logistics, for financial services it was the support of IT professionals and IT technicians. The key skills for biotechnology firms were engineering, scientific and research skills and advanced project management skills. For these firms the next most important were finance and marketing skills associated with the need to get the product out to the public as well as being able to access adequate finance along the way.

Other recent research by NCVER has found a link between innovation type and skills utilised. Where an innovation activity in marketing used a combination of discipline-specific skills and IT skills, the development of innovative organisational processes drew from a used a much wider variety of skill and knowledge areas (including engineering, IT, project management, business management and finance skills). This was also confirmed in our research.

Our study found that firms are not turning to VET graduates when they looking for individuals with the skills and knowledge required for promoting products and services; analysing and managing business operations, processes and projects; accounting and auditing books; building statistical models to predict growth and risk; and developing IT systems and databases. They are also not looking to VET for engineering or scientific skills. These they source from university graduates, or in rare cases students still in university studies. Firms do look to VET to generally source skills typically associated with vocational training (including, trade and IT technician skills, bookkeeping skills, and financial planning skills).

Managers may sincerely believe that the development of high-level theoretical, analytical and problem-solving skills can only be learned in universities, or they may not know that some occupationally-specific and generic management skills are also offered by VET. University education has traditionally been the source of more advanced and complex skills (including high-level mathematics, statistical modelling, software and design engineering, scientific research, and mechanical engineering), but there are also VET diplomas or advanced-level diplomas to be gained in areas like accounting,

Leadership talent management in the Australian rail industry

Research Report

Leadership talent management is a little understood phenomenon in the Australian rail industry context, but its importance is now recognised in business success. Leadership underpins sustained business productivity in complex, difficult and changing environments such as rail, resulting from deregulation, restructuring and global financial instability. Ageing workforces with specialised rail industry knowledge and expertise, occupy the largest proportion of leadership roles; being difficult to replicate or replace as they retire. Studies described in the literature, portray *talent management* in the context of multi-national and trans-national companies but there have been few Australian studies, and particularly not in specific industry contexts. Little is known about the way that leadership is valued, identified and developed in these kinds of environments where diversity is increasing in people, processes and practices. This study, therefore, set out to draw lessons from the wide experiences of current Australian rail industry managers, to inform future workforce development policy.

A qualitative approach was undertaken in three Australian rail organisations where semi-structured interviews were conducted with four levels of managers. This was undertaken in-house, to observe the culturally specific contexts within each organisation, and the socially constructed reality of individual manager's perceptions and relationships with other people. Content and thematic approaches were used to analyse, interpret and triangulate information from three sources which were compared and confirmed for credibility and criticality with other rail industry reports and literature. Integrity of the research approach and findings were confirmed and approved by the CRC for Rail Innovation (CRC for Rail Innovation, 2011).

Findings indicate that Australian rail organisations have traditional bureaucratic structures, a directive approach to leadership based on safety requirements and the biggest pool (73 percent) of managers located at the front-line without formal management qualifications or sustained exposure to leadership development activities. However, frontline leaders hold special, tacit knowledge considered as a strategic or competitive advantage. This knowledge of customers,

and of other relational, stakeholder and business know-how, is the key to ongoing, business continuity in new knowledge-critical environments where rail organisations are now operating. Consequently, leadership talent management strategies require new mindsets to include and tap the latent potential of all leaders, from the front-line up through other levels of management, in the organisation.

This research is casting new light on how talented leaders are trained and developed, especially how developing potential leaders from within the enterprise consolidates valuable human organisational assets to prepare for future challenges, rather than hiring new leaders from outside. In smaller organisations and countries like Australia where the potential pool of new leaders is finite, 'manufacturing talent locally' has a profound impact on both individual engagement and long-term organisational human capital retention. The study has shown how establishing clear and well-articulated strategies to identify and develop leaders for key roles at all levels of the organisation, increases the knowledge base and intellectual capital of the organisation as an inimitable enabler of operations in a fast-paced, global business environment.

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marketing, financial planning, business management, project management, and transport and logistics. Units of competencies that directly target generic skills for innovation, and short courses or training program that can be customised for firms wanting to change organisational practice are also available in VET

Innovation may be the way of the future, but one needs to be more circumspect of applying this rhetoric in practice. VET providers may also need to make employers aware VET can help them improve products, services and processes. This is the challenge.

This article is based on a more detailed report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations by Josie Misko and Lisa Nechvoglod.

Dr Josie Misko, Senior Research Fellow, NCVET



Ray Smith receives his award for the Best Paper at the AVETRA Conference

Janene Piip – a CRC for Rail Innovation PhD candidate based at the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work, University of South Australia.

Adults returning to study VCE Mathematics: lifelong learning, transition and engagement, and the adult learner

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education by Research, Monash University, April 2011

Open access to the eThesis is available via the Monash University ARROW Repository: <http://arrow.monash.edu.au/hdl/1959.1/488332>.

Summary

This study investigates the experiences of adults returning to study mathematics in an adult learning environment. Current government policy aims to increase school retention rates, and the proportion of low socio-economic status school leavers who successfully make the transition to higher education (Skills Victoria, 2010). The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system in Australia has a long history of providing adults who experienced school as problematic with a 'second chance' to complete their general education in a post-school setting. This study seeks to improve understanding of how these policy goals might be achieved, and to contribute to pedagogical debates on

how we meet the needs of learners who have experienced social, economic and educational barriers (Kell, 2010).

The study explores the factors that influence persistence and non-persistence of second chance learners who chose to study a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Year 12 Mathematics subject at a suburban TAFE Institute. Year 12 Mathematics presents a significant hurdle for students who may have had a disrupted education, yet is needed for progression into many study and career paths.

This study used qualitative semi-structured interviews to gather insight into the educational experiences of the three participants who were all enrolled in Year 12 Mathematical Methods. Two participants were early school leavers, who left school before completing Year 10; the third was a school completer returning to study to pursue an alternate career path after ten years in the workforce.

The study highlights how the interaction of affective, cognitive and conative factors can influence a student's successful reengagement with a 'hard' Year 12 Mathematics subject. Each of the participants reported a positive attitude towards mathematics as a discipline.

However, there were significant differences in work habits (Corno, 2004) and approaches to learning, of the students who did or did not persist in the subject. The data analysis suggests that one's self-theory of intelligence may influence one's ability to study effectively (see Dweck, 1999). Experiential learning in the work place, and through extra-curricula activities, may also assist

some older students to develop an incremental mindset and a strategic approach to learning.

“Current government policy aims to increase school retention rates and the proportion of low socio-economic status school leavers who successfully make the transition to higher education.”

Roy Thomas Smalley

TAFE Association in Victoria Wins National Award

Victorian TAFE International (VTI) is an incorporated association representing TAFE institutes and dual sector universities in Victoria, which undertakes international education. International managers from 16 independent and competing entities meet 6 times each year to undertake professional development activities.

In 2011 members embarked on a never before attempted program of cross-institutional collaboration. Rather than just attend workshops and seminars, members agreed to work together using their own collective expertise to build a new resource of good practice in international VET for all members to use.

The resulting collaborative document is called *Best Practice in Agent Management: A Guide for Education Providers*. It is a collaborative project sharing best practice in education agent management across 12 Victorian TAFE Institutes and 4 dual sector universities.

VTI Executive Officer, Dr Kate Dempsey researched, interviewed and worked

with international managers in the TAFE institutes to put together the good practice document on behalf of the VTI.

International managers tend not to see themselves as researchers and were surprised to find in the end that they had produced such a comprehensive research document.

Both the document and its genesis are unique in Australia. The document is the result of generous collaboration and the sharing of intellectual property and best practice initiatives by 16 educational institutions in Victoria. This level of collaboration is rarely seen in Australia. Each participating institution provided samples, suggestions and ideas to the document.

The document is more than 100 pages in length and offers Criteria for Assessing, Managing & Evaluating Agent Relationships, details of VTI members Best Practice Initiatives in Agent Management and more than 40 pages of checklists, templates, samples, policies and the like

that providers may use in dealing with education agents.

Research in VET can come in many forms and the collaborative document was recognised in October 2011 as a unique achievement. It won the IEAA (International Education Association of Australia) Excellence Award for Best Practice/Innovation in International Education. This award recognises the work of an individual or team who have contributed to international education through a groundbreaking development.

It is clear to VTI now that winning an award raises the profile of research activities significantly. The best practice document has now been included in the National Archive and VTI is embarking on further collaborative works.

Dr. Kate Dempsey
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A case study exploring the experiences of teachers in developing confidence in their teaching skills and the role that continuing professional development has played in the acquisition of this confidence. What has worked for them and why?

VET research and its relationship to policy formulation

Australia is looking for a model of Vocational Education and Training (VET) teacher development which ensures that there are enough people with a sound industry background willing to teach in the VET sector, who can deliver professional teaching to a large variety of students. The problem arises around how we can ensure that VET teachers develop their skills and knowledge further in order to be able to take on more responsibilities and develop their professionalism.

In Australia the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to VET sector teachers has never been addressed in a cohesive manner by government or individual VET organisations.

I have used a Case Study approach to examine how VET teachers have developed their confidence in their professional teaching skills and also to gain insight into how they have felt about

this development pathway and whether the available professional development options have been adequate. This study focussed on teachers who have been teaching in a rural area for most of their teaching careers. This group are particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to any type of higher level teacher training or informal Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

My aim was to gain insight into how these teachers felt that their initial qualification prepared them for VET teaching, and the reasons for their decisions about either gaining a further qualification or continuing to develop their teaching through ongoing professional development. In this way the data has been used to contribute to the interrogation of this theoretical framework as discussed in the literature. VET teachers who teach at a rural campus in Victoria have found Cert IV to be suitable beginning level qualification; however the

delivery of that qualification by the TAFE sector was inadequate to fully prepare teachers for the start of their teaching career. This study found that delivery of this qualification should be improved and a mentoring system for beginning teachers implemented. The case study also indicated that CPD which is structured to build teacher skills and workforce capability and is recognised as building professionalism may create incentive and guidance for teachers to build their skills and confidence.

The VET workforce's capability would be continually enhanced if such a career structure could be provided. This would contribute to supporting the growth of the VET sector and provide a career structure which recognises the professionalism of Vet teachers. This recognition would in turn encourage recruitment of teachers from industry.

Jennifer Aitken Advance TAFE



Erica Smith receives her Berwyn Clayton Award for Distinguished Service to AVETRA

Understanding the dilemmas of teachers of international students in VET

On the classroom floor, in the Vocational Educational colleges, teachers- new and senior, casual and permanent, working in TAFE or private Registered Training Organizations are, as usual, preoccupied, often in isolation, sometimes with others, about the decline in standards. For example, they are concerned about how to provide for the more deserving students; how much to yield to individual or organized public pressure for relatively greater emphasis on recruiting more students at the expense of the professional, personal and ethical principles and other aspects of education like social well-being that have little or no monetary value. In some organizations the very real fear of job security pushes directly on teachers to adopt a non-responsive- “deaf ears and blind eyes” approach to colleagues’ seemingly

insupportable practices. Many of the problems that VET teachers face are at their root the same, yet people rarely help one another.

This paper summarizes my Masters research entitled, *Understanding Teacher Dilemmas in providing quality education to international students in VET in Brisbane*. Early findings are reported in the AVETRA paper: *The voice of VET teachers: Teacher dilemmas and its implications on international students, teachers and VET institutions*. The paper draws attention to the voices and experiences of teachers, who are key stakeholders in the sustainability and future growth of VET. The research participants were 15 teachers from several Australian public and private VET institutions. The method

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involved responsive interviewing and inductive data analysis to identify and categorize teachers' dilemmas. The research shows that VET teachers experience various inter-related professional, educational and personal dilemmas. These dilemmas result from ethical tensions teachers experience in their interactions with international students, teaching colleagues and their employing institutions. The dilemmas are often influenced by current economic and political conditions of international education. The dilemmas raised in the study by 15 VET teachers might be familiar to other teachers in VET and universities but to date they have received limited attention by researchers. This study's findings indicate significant implications for teachers, students, VET institutions and the government at a time of rapid economic, political, cultural and educational change. They contribute evidence for ongoing review and development of student enrolment and teacher employment in the culturally diverse VET sector, and thus further goals of educational equity and quality learning experiences and outcomes.

Sonal Nakar
Masters student, QUT

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The master artisan

The issue of 'trade skill shortages' have made VET stakeholders look at the reasons why young people may not find traditional trade occupations attractive, and consider the role that negative perceptions of trades may be having on trade apprenticeship uptake.

This has led to a funded research project, *The master artisan: a framework for master tradespeople in Australia*. Research was supported by the NCVET Community of Practice, commissioned by Swinburne University of Technology, and published by NCVET in 2011.

Although master trade programs and qualification structures exist in Europe, the concept of a qualification for trade mastery is largely unknown in Australia. For this reason, the research endeavoured to answer a variety of questions in an Australian context including: *How do we define a master artisan/tradesperson? Would the introduction of a master trade program contribute to the status and effectiveness of Australia's skilled labour force? And what skills and attributes should a master artisan possess?*

The impetus for the research is the assumption that improving pathways for trades and craftspeople will lead to improved opportunities and higher levels of attainment. The report suggests that establishing pathways to formal recognition of trade mastery will contribute to increased esteem and desirability of trades as a vocational choice.

The research was conducted through literature review and two focus groups; comprised of senior industry participants and vocational educators involved with the training of tradespeople and apprentices.

Although the participants expressed support for the Master Artisan qualification concept, what also emerged was a strong theme relating to the erosion of trades, professional trade identity and the decay of trade frameworks in Australia. This situation is evidenced by a number of related issues, such as: the removal of the declaration of trades from legislation, the absence of trade credentials such as trade papers, blurring of the boundaries between skilled trades and other AQF level 3 qualifications and the establishment of Certificate 3 'trade qualification' courses that do not mandate apprenticeship.

Given this situation, the industry representatives provided support for the master artisan concept in the hope that it may inspire a move toward a more robust trade training framework that resonates with an aspiring labour market.

Assuming that the issues identified in the research can be addressed, the researcher is of the view that establishing a high-end master trade education program as a pathway with a destination that recognizes, encourages and celebrates skilled tradespeople is likely to improve the image and retention of good people in the trades. It is anticipated that extending existing pathways toward meaningful progression may also have the effect of reinvigorating those trades currently suffering as a result of being undervalued and/or perceived as undesirable career options.

The master artisan: a framework for master tradespeople in Australia report can be downloaded from the NCVET catalogue. A 32 minute audio visual overview of the research history and findings can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpQINB6FU9I>

Presentations based on the research will be presented at the AVETRA Conference Canberra (11-13 April) and the 2012 No Frills NCVET research conference Adelaide (11-13 July) 2012.

Karen Lesley O'Reilly-Briggs



Jennifer Davids was presented with the NCVET Early Career Researcher Award"