



Call for Expressions of Interest

Research Insight Topic: 'Centres of Excellence'

Funding Available: Maximum \$25,000

BACKGROUND

AVETRA has been engaged by the Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) for a two-year programme to commission Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) researchers to produce 'Research Insights' that translate research findings and evidence to a policy facing output. Several Research Insights will be commissioned in a range of VET topic areas aligned with the strategic objectives and priorities of the vocational education and training system in Victoria.

The partnership between VSA and AVETRA aims to inform policy activity with relevant research evidence, build policy translation capability within the VET research community and build connections between VSA staff and VET researchers. This in turn aims to create opportunities for applied VET researchers to engage directly with policy-makers and influence policy development.

FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH INSIGHT

The Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) is seeking to commission a research team / researcher to provide research insights about national and international best practice in the design and implementation of 'centres of excellence'. Centres of excellence have previously been established in Victoria in a number of different contexts including the Holmesglen Tunnelling Centre of Excellence, Kangan Automotive CofE and Health and Community CofE. More recently, they have been included as a policy initiative under the National Skills Agreement that would:

- provide national leadership in the delivery of skills, education and training
- bring together employers, unions, universities and other education and training providers to develop and implement real work and practical solutions to meet skills needs
- support industry and enrich students' learning experience through applied research and problem-solving programs
- Enable innovation in the delivery of tertiary education, such as the development and delivery of higher apprenticeships in areas of high skills need
- disseminate best practice across the TAFE network, and
- enabling organisational innovation and teaching and training excellence.¹

With the proliferation of activity associated with the establishment of centres of excellence (or entities that use the nomenclature of a 'centre of excellence') across many fields and sectors there is a risk that the term may lose specificity and key factors or criteria associated with their successful implementation may be lost. This project therefore aims to build understanding and

¹ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/resources/tafe-centres-excellence>

provide advice to policy-makers and project design and implementation staff regarding the varied conceptualisations of centres of excellence. It will also provide foundational data and evidence to inform the development of an applied research framework for Victorian VET Providers (aligned with Action 18 in the [Victorian Skills Plan for 2023 into 2024](#)). The primary output of the research will be an organising framework or model that presents the different conceptualisations of centres of excellence in a structured manner. The presentation of case studies that show how centres of excellence have been implemented in practice is also desired, incorporating insights on:

- the different types of centres of excellence that exist
- the key attributes of centres of excellence and the criteria that define them
- the types of partners and partnerships that exist within centres of excellence
- the potential functions and operations of centres of excellence e.g.
 - the conduct of applied research
 - the implementation of innovative solution for industry
 - the strengthening of student learning experiences and outcomes.

Examples of centres of excellence can be drawn from across the post-secondary education sector and / or from related industries or fields.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Objectives

This research insights project seeks to:

- Examine available academic and grey literature to identify different models for ‘centres of excellence’ that are in use in the tertiary education landscape (and related fields), considering such factors as:
 - How a centre of excellence is defined
 - The roles that they play in their respective sectors
 - Who the major stakeholders are and how they work together
 - What different types of partnership models exist
 - What models work best to meet desired outcomes
 - the longevity of different models of centres of excellence
- Identify key principles and criteria that could be used to guide the identification of opportunities for, and the design and development of ‘centres of excellence’
- Develop an organising framework or model that presents the different conceptualisations of centres of excellence in a structured manner
- Identify potential models and approaches that could be contextualised and implemented into the Australian and / or Victorian VET system.

These objectives develop the general principles of the partnership between the VSA and the Australasian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA). These principles include enhancing capacity and capability across the VET system, including the VET research community and VET policy-makers.

SUGGESTED APPROACH

Given the prior research and knowledge in this area, the VSA considers that a review of academic and grey literature would be the most appropriate approach for addressing the research insights. The VSA remains open to recommendations from AVETRA and or the research team / researcher on alternative approaches.

Case studies highlighting the different models used to identify, design, establish and operate ‘centres of excellence’ should also be considered. Please note, however, case studies are for illustrative purposes.

TIMEFRAMES

The research insights project should be finalised within 10 weeks of the start date. The activities listed below should be completed by the suggested date. If it is not possible for the research team / researcher to complete a specific activity by the indicated date, the team coordinator should communicate with the contact point, as soon as practicable, to explain the reasons for the delay and propose an alternative date.

Milestone	Date due/completed by
Call for expressions of interest	May 6 th , 2024
Close of expressions of interest	May 24 th , 2024
Successful applicant notified	May 31 th , 2024
Project start date	Week of June 3 rd , 2024
Interim literature review delivered	Friday August 2 nd , 2024
Briefing presentation by research team (plus delivery of verbal feedback from VSA)	Week of August 9 th , 2024 TBC
Delivery of VSA written feedback (if needed)	1 week after briefing presentation
Final literature review delivered	August 30 th , 2024
Project completion and acquittal	September 27 th , 2024

DELIVERABLES

The selected researcher/researchers are expected to deliver the following products by the date specified above:

- **Interim literature review:** this deliverable will be provided to the VSA (as a Word document) in a format agreed to by AVETRA, the VSA and the project team during the course of the project
- **Briefing presentation:** this deliverable will be provided to the VSA as a face-to-face (or online) presentation supported by a set of PowerPoint slides in a format agreed to by AVETRA, the VSA and the project team during the course of the project
- **Final literature review:** this deliverable will be provided to the VSA (as a Word document) in a format agreed to by AVETRA, the VSA and the project team during the course of the project.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for submitting an expression of interest all applicants must be:

- A current paid member of AVETRA
- Resident in Australia
- A valid work permit or visa for employment in Australia

Practitioner and early career researchers are strongly encouraged to apply. Research teams, including researchers at mixed stages of their research career and/or across research contexts and disciplines are encouraged to apply. Any applicants with significant financial or personal relationship with AVETRA, VSA or NCVET should state any conflict of interest within their application and seek advice from AVETRA before applying. AVETRA welcomes enquiries and applications from researchers with a disability who make need and seek reasonable adjustments to enable their applications. Please contact to discuss.

The following are not eligible as named researchers on applications:

- Researchers currently employed by government departments (including statutory authorities, VET or tertiary sector regulatory authorities or other government operated research departments)
- Current ISSI Fellows (Former fellows who are 6 months or more past the end of their fellowship are eligible to apply as long as the Research Insight being applied for is not duplicating previous or existing deliverables a part of the fellowship)
- Researchers currently holding Category 1 research grants (including ARC grants, NMRHC grants or commissioned research funds from NCVET)
- Researchers already awarded funding through this scheme are not eligible to be a named chief investigator on a second project within 12 months of completing the first project. Previous named chief investigators may be named as partner investigators on a subsequent application.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Expression of interest will be selected on the basis of evidence provided to demonstrate the following selection criteria:		Weighting
1	Experience relevant to the project focus and objectives	20%
2	Understanding of the relevance of the topic to VET policy	20%
3	Methodological design for completion of the research insight output	20%
4	A realistic timeline and budget	15%
5	Skills in writing in plain English for stakeholders	15%
6	Effective management and contingency plan	10%

PREPARING AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Expressions of interest should be prepared using the template below. The following evidence should be attached in support of the application:

- CVs for all named researchers
- A gantt chart of the proposed plan of work for completion of the project
- A project budget.
- The names, contact email addresses, and phone numbers of two **referees** who can speak to the experience of the named lead researcher.
- Two examples of writing by the named lead researcher.

INDICATIVE BUDGET

The maximum budget available for this research project and the completion of all the deliverables is \$25,000 AUD. This amount includes all the costs associated with the delivery of the research insights project.

If the proposed budget addressing this brief exceeds fifteen percent (15%) of the indicative budget, the proposal needs to provide reasons as to why a higher budget is required to address the research objectives adequately.

DISSEMINATION AND FURTHER PUBLICATIONS

The VSA will make the decision regarding the timing of any dissemination of the Research Insight. If and when approved for dissemination, the Research Insight will be published on the AVETRA website and linked on a dedicated AVETRA-VSA partnership page on the VSA website. Both AVETRA and VSA encourage and support wider dissemination of insights emerging from activities within the partnership. Should the authors choose to prepare any additional

publications or dissemination arising from the research (e.g. a conference paper, journal article), the researchers should discuss this with AVETRA and VSA to determine the appropriate form of attribution for the funding.

DISCLAIMER REGARDING CONSIDERATIONS EMERGING FROM THE RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) provides financial support to AVETRA under a grant agreement to support AVETRA members' research activities. Although the VSA is providing financial support for this research, the research is not a statement of Victorian Government policy. The Victorian Government provides no endorsement of the research's content, recommendations, or findings. By sharing the final research insight, VSA makes no representation about the Victorian Government's intention to implement any recommendations or findings identified in the research.