

# A-NEWS

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



## AVETRA 'A-NEWS' NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2015



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## From the President

*Greetings to all our AVETRA Members!*

The timing of our national conference is yet again coinciding with a period of significant debate in the VET sector about the ways it might operate into the future. The recent raft of changes to further develop the market for VET are arguably some of the most significant that we have seen since the early days of the training reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Under these new policies, the market for VET has changed its nature and composition and become increasingly competitive and volatile as governments at both state and federal levels have sought to find the best ways to make the VET market 'work'. The impact of these changes on organisations and individuals has been significant. It is also presenting AVETRA with some challenges as we wrestle with finding ways to engage people with us at a time when their capacity to do so is being impacted by a range of factors including changing funding and work arrangements of many of our members and competing demands for their time and energy.

The level of sustained membership of AVETRA, while still viable, continues to be a concern. The Executive has been exploring a number of ways new ways to grow the Association and its relevance to what is now a changing VET landscape. These have included:

- The development of an organisational category of membership;
- devoting resources to the development of a new web site and a greater social media presence as a means of marketing the association in a more visible and relevant manner to wider audiences
- the development of new member benefits such as access to Webinars and other more personal ways of engaging with new members including greater numbers of state/regional based activities.

The current circumstances have also raised some questions around the sustainability of annual conferences and whether it is again time to consider reverting to conducting a conference every two years. This would be a significant move and would need to be considered alongside the development of a number of specific strategies to provide members with opportunities for engagement, networking and the development of a sense of connectedness with the Association and other members during the period between conferences. It would also have implications for the ways in which the Association might have to operate to manage the changes to our income that would flow from such a decision. While our AGM at the Conference in Melbourne will provide an opportunity for members to discuss these issues, wider consultation will be needed before any actions can be finalised. The Executive will be taking this on as a high priority in the coming months.

One action that has the potential to have significant benefits for members and AVETRA has been the work undertaken by the Executive together with Roger Harris, Berwyn Clayton and Steven Hodge to transfer the publication of the International Journal of Training Research from E-Content Management to Taylor and Francis from the beginning of this year.

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The significance of this change in publisher for our journal cannot be underestimated. Taylor & Francis is an international company which has extensive interests in publishing books and academic journals from a wide range of societies like AVETRA.

Having a partnership with a publisher of the caliber of Taylor and Francis will be of great value – it will offer a highly professional publication process and assist us in marketing the journal to an international audience. I would encourage you to take some time to explore the ways in which Taylor and Francis can work with you to assist in the dissemination of your research (see <http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/>).

*Michele Simons*  
*AVETRA President*  
*April 2015*

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## **A MINUTE WITH: Dr Craig Fowler, Managing Director National Centre for Vocational Education Research**



I have had the pleasure, and steep learning curve, of being NCVER's Managing Director since October last year. It's a wonderful opportunity to lead a team of talented people that are building on the company's reputation as providers of independent, high quality vocational education and training (VET) research and statistics.

My various past jobs help to explain my research perspectives that now guide my present role and responsibilities. I have been a last century chemist/biochemist with a doctorate in human genome (DNA) hyper-variation and a past research academic and university research administrator. I moved to a global-consulting firm for nearly a decade and spent more than a decade in the public service directly engaged in tertiary education policy. My training is rooted in the physical sciences yet my recent work has been in applied research focussed on public policy impacting national education and innovation systems.

This experience means I struggle with the 'cutting edge' metaphor oft linked to research; it's not a sharp divide. I would rather use a 'waves, beaches and sand dunes' analogy. Waves of broadly agreed foundational knowledge beat on the sand, where occasionally a big wave, built on earlier waves, breaks through dunes and exposes new findings and insights. This big wave may even overturn earlier 'foundational truths'. It's the 'damp zone' across the beach that is most exciting to me—the 'contested' ground of theory, observation and evidence, and their interpretation and sometimes dispute.

There is a complex interplay of a small length of DNA hosted in a genome, in cells and within tissues, all impacting on a larger body corporate. Similarly then there is like multifactorial complexity that drives the behaviour of students as they grapple with decisions about which training courses to undertake to achieve their employment aspirations, connect with preferred employers, and successfully negotiate a competitive labour market. All this occurs within a federated and somewhat mosaicked national skills system.

On a personal level, I have a strong interest in jobs for the future and the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as a pervasive underpinning force for economic productivity and job opportunity. I have equal interest in the multifaceted evidence pinned under the simplest of headings — 'quality of training'. This brings differing opinions dependent on four alternate lens-points of 'learner', 'trainer', 'employer' and 'funder'. From a public policy and funding perspective, we need research that provides evidence on how to achieve better applied practice about 'system junctions' and 'learner pathways'. The key touch points here are VET and schooling; VET and industry; VET and higher education; and VET and the work or welfare system.

With Australia's economy and labour market changing it is essential the national VET system responds through the scrutiny of evidence-based reform, by asking questions akin to an engineering paradigm: what does it do?; what must it do?; what else will do? and what does each cost? All this without overlooking, however, the many good elements of the present system. It provides thousands of people with better opportunities to get a job and advance themselves as they choose.

My now privilege is to guide and coordinate NCVER's contribution to national VET research and I strongly recommend readers examine NCVER's published 'Research Prospectus 2015/16'

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/priorities.html>] that frames our national research investments and our partnerships.

## AVETRA welcomes

### The Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy



Established in 2013 the Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy at Victoria University is an independent think tank that works to improve the connection between evidence and policy reform. The Institute actively promotes the principle that health and education are fundamental to individual wellbeing and to a prosperous and successful society. The Mitchell Institute's tertiary education program is setting out a comprehensive analysis of tertiary education policy and funding, to propose a better and fairer model for Australia. The Institute's work in this area is underpinned by the belief that tertiary education and training is a key enabler for meaningful social and economic participation and, as such, should

be accessible to all Australians.

Website address: <http://mitchellinstitute.org.au>

Recent publications and speeches from the Institute can be found at:

<http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/news/report-calls-for-student-tertiary-entitlement-rethink/>

<http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/opinion/why-the-higher-education-reforms-need-to-be-independently-overseen/>

<http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/media-releases/analysis-of-education-spend-shows-vet-missing-out/>

### Visiting researcher from BIBB



Dr Harald Pfeifer from the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in Bonn, Germany, is currently being hosted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Harald has been with BIBB for the last 10 years. Prior to this he worked for the International Labor Organisation (ILO) in Geneva. He has researched widely in the area of vocational education and labour market participation and outcomes for young people. He is particularly interested in how incentives and industrial awards impact on employer involvement in training. Currently he is working on a study which compares the VET systems of Australia and Germany with a special emphasis on employer investments in training. Harald says he is enjoying being in Australia, and has particularly loved the flora and fauna of South Australia, especially Kangaroo Island.

To find out more about Harald's research interests and publications visit: <https://ideas.repec.org/e/ppf11.html>

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## Policy updates and links

**Reforms to Higher Education and Research:** On 12 February 2015, the Senate referred the Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014 to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee for inquiry and report. The report is available at:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Education\\_and\\_Employment/Higher\\_Education\\_on\\_2/Report](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/Higher_Education_on_2/Report) Prior to this, on 30 January 2015, the Hon. Christopher Pyne MP (Minister for Education and Leader of the House) was interviewed by Peter von Olsen on The News Hour, Sky News where he discussed his vision for the Higher Education Reforms. A transcript of the interview is available at:

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/news-hour-sky-news-peter-van-onselen-higher-education-reform>

**Increasing the workforce participation of mature-aged workers:** Mature-aged workers are considered to be important sources of labour by governments. Speaking at a Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) forum in Melbourne the Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP (Assistant Minister for Employment ) emphasized the need for Australia to increase the number of mature-aged people in the workforce to safeguard its prosperity and ability to fund public services in the future. Referring to the Government's [Intergenerational Report](#) he noted that the number of Australians aged 65 or older was projected to more than double by 2055. The Assistant Minister also described a number of targeted programs introduced to raise the workforce participation of mature-aged workers. For example, the new Re-start program provides employers with a \$10,000 incentive if they hire and retain eligible job seekers aged 50 years or older. An eligible job-seeker is an individual that has been unemployed and on income support for six months. Employers can use the \$10,000 to help pay for training, reskilling or other workplace development activities.

<https://ministers.employment.gov.au/hartsuyker/australia-must-boost-older-workforce-secure-prosperity>

**Strengthening VET quality standards:** Ensuring the quality of the Australian VET system is an ongoing aim for government and its quality assurance agencies. Recently Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham introduced The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 into Parliament. He said the passage of this Bill would enable the Australian Government to create new quality standards to give a quick response to issues and problems regarding poor training provision. He also noted that if passed the new legislation would require anyone marketing a VET course, including brokers and other third parties, to clearly identify which registered training organisation (RTO) is providing the qualification.

<http://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/Media-Centre/Media-Releases/ID/2635/ACPET-codes-of-practice-and-ethics-launched>

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## Latest research news

Riphahn, R T and Zibrowius, M, 2015, [Apprenticeship, vocational training and early labor market outcomes in East and West Germany](#): Riphahn and Zibrowius study the returns to apprenticeship and vocational training for East and West German youths at age 25. They examine three types of labour market outcomes: non-employment, permanent full-time employment, and wages. They find strong positive returns both for apprenticeships and vocational training. They find no significant differences for different types of vocational training, and minor differences for males and females. Positive returns hold up even in poor labor market situations.

Noonan, P and Pilcher S, 2015, [Financing tertiary education in Australia: the reform imperative and rethinking student entitlements](#): In this paper the authors argue why student entitlement to education should also be extended consistently across the entire tertiary education system. The paper aims to establish justifications for a fairer and simpler financing framework that supports a tertiary education student entitlement for all school leavers.

Healy, J; Mavromaras, K G and Sloane, P J 2015, [Adjusting to skill shortages in Australian SMEs](#): This article provides new evidence from the Business Longitudinal Database to show that firms adopt a variety of strategies to address issues of skill shortage. These strategies vary by skill shortage types and firm characteristics.



This information comes from the considerable resources of the VOCEDplus data base, a useful starting point for new research projects or literature reviews. VOCEDplus is a free international English language research database for tertiary education, especially as it relates to workforce needs, skills development, and social inclusion. It encompasses vocational education and training (VET), higher education, adult and community education, informal learning, and VET in Schools. It contains over 65,000 records, many with links to full text documents. It is a good first port of call for domestic and international researchers when coming to speed with new topics. VOCEDplus is funded by the Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and is endorsed by the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre in Bonn, Germany. It is produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), based in Adelaide, Australia.

Click on the following link to start your search.

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



## **Australian Research Council (ARC) projects at Federation University, Australia**

*Professor Erica Smith.*

Federation University (FedUni) Australia is currently concluding two VET research projects funded by the Australian Research Council. These projects have been managed by Professor Erica Smith and more details can be found at

<http://federation.edu.au/faculties-and-schools/faculty-of-education-and-arts/research/fea-research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/current-research>

**'Recognising the skill in jobs traditionally considered unskilled'** is a Linkage project with three industry partners: Service Skills Australia, Manufacturing Skills Australia, and United Voice (formerly the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union). The project has been investigating unidentified and undervalued skill in people's jobs through research in nine occupations in service and manufacturing industries. It aimed to provide evidence that can be used to improve government policy, qualification-based training for work, companies' management practices that relate to skill, skill levels and the perception of skill. It was believed that these changes would provide individuals with better life chances and improve self-efficacy in the labour market. A national stakeholder meeting was held in February 2015 to discuss the research findings, which are now also being validated with a number of international VET researchers. The findings have been used for submissions to two VET Reform consultations. The research team is Erica Smith and Andy Smith at FedUni, and Ian Hampson and Anne Junor at the University of New South Wales.

**'How do qualifications delivered by enterprises contribute to improved skill levels and other benefits for companies, workers and the nation?'** This research is also funded through the Linkage program, and the industry partners are the Enterprise RTO Association and eight Enterprise RTOs. It has examined the role of employer-based qualifications training in developing the skills and prospects of the Australian workforce and the competitive capabilities of companies, focusing on Enterprise RTOs. The project has investigated the benefits and challenges for companies and for workers associated with training through Enterprise RTOs. It is also looking at the equivalence of workplace-delivered qualifications among companies with qualifications delivered in educational institutions. It is looking at whether Enterprise RTOs form an emerging, alternative employer-based VET system. Eight longitudinal company case studies and two surveys of Enterprise RTOs, as well as an international comparison with the UK have been carried out. The project is due to conclude mid-year 2015 with a national forum. The research team is Erica Smith and Andy Smith at FedUni and Arlene Walker at Deakin University.



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## National Project on Care leavers at La Trobe University

La Trobe University researchers recently completed a national project on improving the access and achievement of care leavers in Australian higher education. People who have spent time in care – including foster care, kinship care and residential care - rarely transition into tertiary education. This report advocates the establishment of a national framework for care leavers and includes 26 recommendations. While the report is focussed on higher education, the authors include recommendations relevant to VET. For example,

the authors recommend that state governments introduce fee waivers for care leavers studying at TAFE (at present only in South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia). The research was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and the report is accessible from:

<https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/research/research-reports/>

*Pictured above are chief investigators Dr Andrew Harvey & Dr Patricia McNamara, La Trobe University*

## Congratulations!!!



Dr Ruth Schubert has recently joined LH Martin Institute as Associate Director and Associate Professor. She joined the Institute in April 2014. Prior to that, Ruth was Director, Business Transformation with TAFE SA; a role responsible for the complete change process bringing together the three separate South Australian TAFE Institutes. Congratulations Ruth!



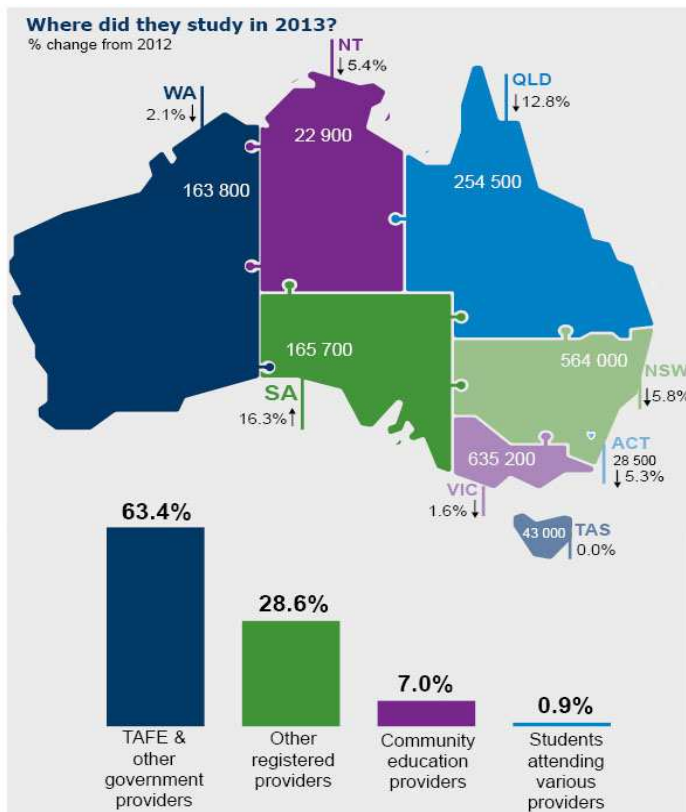
Dr Anne Jones, Professor Emeritus, Victoria University. Professor Jones joined Victoria University in November 2005. Her career has spanned an unusually broad mix of vocational and higher education leadership experiences in stand-alone TAFE institutes as well as in dual sector universities. Anne is a foundation member of the Work-based Education Research Cluster. She became Emeritus Professor in 2015. Congratulations Anne!

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## Latest national facts and figures from NCVER: VET participation

The NCVER Students and Courses publication is a source of information on national VET participation. Here we show data on state and territory participation in VET, qualifications being studied nationwide, top five fields of education, top three industry areas, and participation rates for the different age groups.

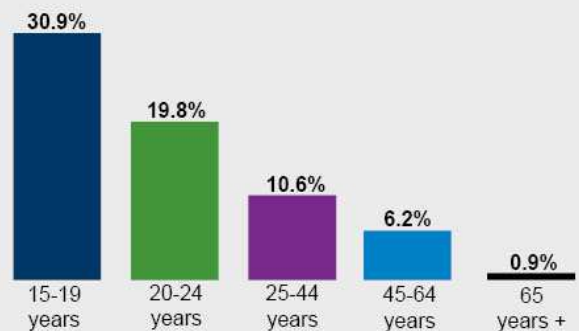
<http://www.ncver.edu.au/infographics/snapshotofvet>



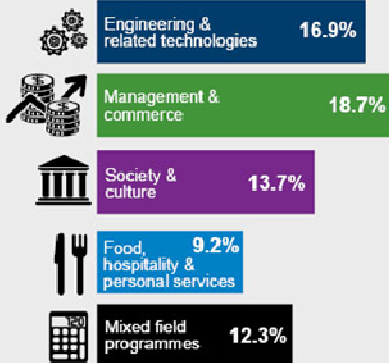
### What were they studying in 2013?



### Participation rates for 2013



### Top 5 fields of education for students studying in 2013



### Student numbers for top 3 industries 2013



Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013, National VET Provider Collection, Students & Courses, <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

## LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER

*AVETRA 2015 Conference  
Wednesday 8 - Friday 10 April 2015  
The Rendezvous Hotel Grand, Melbourne, VIC*

### ROD CAMM - KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Mr Rod Camm, CEO Australian Council for Private Education and Training Rod Camm has had a long career in the vocational education and training (VET) field. Prior to his appointment as Managing Director at NCVET he held the position of CEO of Skills Queensland. Before that he was Associate Director-General of the Queensland Department of Education and Training and CEO of Construction Skills Queensland. He has performed numerous executive roles across Australian government and has maintained a strong relationship with industry over many years. As well as being recognised for leading VET and industry policy and strategy, Rod has completed an Executive Masters in Public Administration and has gained considerable experience in industrial relations. Rod believes building employer confidence in VET sector qualifications is the key to sustaining a healthy future for the sector. He remains committed to ensuring greater uniformity between the states and territories to ensure there is high-quality

education and skills training throughout Australia and abroad.

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## JAMES AVIS - KEYNOTE SPEAKER

James Avis left school at the age of 16 and after working for the John Lewis partnership for a number of years, studied for

a degree in Management Science at the University of Manchester, Institute of Science and Technology. This was followed by an MA in Sociology and a PGCE (FE). He later taught Sociology at a College of Further Education during



which time he studied for a PhD at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. From FE he moved to Oxford Brookes University where he was course leader for Educational Studies. This was followed by a move to the University of Wolverhampton where he was Professor of Education Studies.

Currently he is Director of Research and Professor of Post-Compulsory Education and Training at the University of Huddersfield. His research interests lie in post-compulsory education and life-long learning. He has written extensively on the policy contextualisation of further education, having addressed curriculum issues, methodological questions, teacher professionalism, as well as the lived experience of teachers and learners. He has a keen interest in the political economy of this sector and its policy contextualisation. Recent books include *Issues in Post-Compulsory Education and Training*; *Education, Policy and Social Justice: Learning and Skills*; *Teaching in Lifelong Learning: a guide to theory and practice*.

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## TERRI SEDDON - KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Terri Seddon is a Professor of Leadership Studies at the Australian Catholic University. She has a long standing interest in research as a national and international scholar in VET. Terri has lead research projects and written on a range of topics including workplace learning, educational work in globalizing contexts and leadership in tertiary, adult and post-compulsory learning spaces. Terri is well known for her thought provoking presentations which offer new and unique insights into understanding VET in these challenging and changing times.

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## Upcoming Conference details and links

**VALBEC 2015 Conference:** 15 May 2015, William Angliss Institute, Melbourne, Convenor: VALBEC. The theme of the 2015 VALBEC conference, Streams of potential: what lies beneath, seeks to encourage exploration of the sometimes hidden elements that inform delivery of language, literacy and numeracy in a wide a range of contexts: community, workplace, accredited and pre-accredited programs. Further details can be found at:

<http://www.valbec.org.au/2015conf>

**National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference:** 14- 15 May 2015 National Wine Centre of Australia, Adelaide, Convenor: ACER. This year the theme is 'Equipping for the future: assess, train, learn'. Further details can be found at:

nallnac@acer.edu.au • <http://www.acer.edu.au/nallnac>

**24th National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills' Conference,** 6-8 July 2015, Sydney, Co-Convenors: NCVET, the University of Western Sydney (UWS), and TAFE NSW (Western Sydney and South Western Sydney Institutes). The conference will discuss three key areas vital to developing the VET system and meeting future skills demand: Youth: engaging, inspiring and supporting students to realise their potential; Pathways: transitioning through education and training into the workforce; and Skills: working with industry and employers to improve education and training: Further details can be found at <http://ncver.edu.au>

**Apprenticeship conference in Australia:** International Apprenticeship Research Network (INAP) conference, 1-2 September 2015: Convenor: Federation University, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. This will be the sixth conference since the first was held in Bremen, Germany, in 2006. INAP brings together researchers, practitioners, and government officials. Details about the INAP network can be found at <http://www.inap.uni-bremen.de/> A call for papers will be issued soon. If you would like to be kept informed please contact the organiser, Prof. Erica Smith, at [e.smith@federation.edu.au](mailto:e.smith@federation.edu.au)

**Adult Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference:** 24-25 September, Adelaide Zoo, Convenor: South Australian Council for Adult Literacy . The theme for the two day conference is Resilience, Risk, Preservation: the evolving world of adult literacies. Delegates will be exposed to informative presenters and a wide variety of topics, opportunities to meet with product and service providers and network with peers from across Australia. Further details can be found at: <http://acal2015.sacal.sa.edu.au/>

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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 providing leads or contributing to this newsletter, please contact Josie Misko - [josiemisko@ncver.edu.au](mailto:josiemisko@ncver.edu.au)*