

From the President

Greetings to all AVETRA members

The timing of our national conference is again coinciding with a period of significant change in the VET sector. The COAG Industry and Skills Council announced in early April that a number of committees including the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC), the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) and the Secretariat provided by the National Advisory for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (NATESE) would be abolished.

It is planned that the functions of these entities will be incorporated into structures within the Department of Industry. This follows the decision to replace the Standing Council for Tertiary Education Skills and Employment with the COAG Industry and Skills Council and coincides with the dis-establishment of the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency. As in the past, these reforms present both challenges and opportunities for the research community. There are challenges because reforms can disrupt research agendas in unplanned ways; opportunities also exist as we seek to understand how these changes will impact on the students, teachers, managers and leaders in the sector and the industries they serve.

AVETRA will continue to play a significant role in supporting the changes that arise from these reforms. These efforts will build on our recent contributions to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee and the Standing Committee on Education and Employment Committee of the 43rd Parliament's Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation which were led by Linda Simon and Kevin Heys. AVETRA members are also taking a leading role in informing the work being undertaken by the Queensland College of Teachers to develop professional standards for VET practitioners in Queensland.

AVETRA will be working hard to ensure that we take all the opportunities open to us to network and collaborate in ways to ensure that our expertise and knowledge is foregrounded as these and other changes unfold over the coming months.



Michele Simons

President of AVETRA, University of Western Sydney, June 2014

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Don't miss the 23rd National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference

Join us at this year's National VET Research 'No Frills' Conference from 9-11 July in Melbourne.

Highlights of the program include keynote addresses by Steve Sargent (President and CEO of GE Australia and New Zealand, and chair of the B20 Human Capital Taskforce) and Mark Burford (Executive Director, Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy, Victoria University). Both speakers are uniquely positioned to share their insights on issues critical to the VET sector.

Don't miss this opportunity to discuss and share information, in an informal atmosphere which encourages lively exchanges and offers valuable networking opportunities.

Co-hosted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and Holmesglen, the conference will be held at Hemisphere Conference Centre at Holmesglen's Moorabbin campus.

Register online at [NCVER's Portal](#)

ACE National Conference September 2014 - 'What counts as quality in education'

ACE National Office 1800 208 586
Email: ace@austcolled.com.au
11 - 12 September 2014
Close registrations: 8 September 2014
Members Price: \$700.00
Price: \$820.00

WHAT COUNTS AS
QUALITY IN EDUCATION?

Adelaide 11-12 September 2014



Get ready to get engaged and get together with other educators to discuss 'What counts as quality in education' at this year's ACE National Conference in Adelaide on 11 & 12 September, 2014. With Australia's new Coalition Government setting its education policies on a platform of 'quality' and all states now embarking on their own educational reforms, ACE will be holding a National Conference to discuss and make a clear statement about what 'quality' means to all sectors of education in this country. What are the drivers of 'quality' that will get us on track?

This National Conference will address some of the salient issues around: 'What is meant by quality in education?', 'How do we know whether we're achieving it?' and 'What are the actual drivers of quality?'

More information about the conference can be found at

<https://austcolled.com.au/event/ace-national-conference-september-2014-what-counts-quality-education>

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A MINUTE WITH Michele Simons, AVETRA President, University of Western Sydney



I first got interested in VET research in when I commenced my Masters study in the mid-1990s. Prior to that I had undertaken some social science research but when it came time to find a supervisor and a topic for my Masters I was ‘persuaded’ by Roger Harris that training reforms to introduce competency-based training into TAFE would be an interesting topic. This certainly proved to be the case!

Two people who inspired me most to conduct research were Roger Harris who was my supervisor for my doctoral work and Myer Kangan. Roger and I have worked together as researcher for around 25 years now. His energy and commitment to making VET better has been an inspiration. I have always had a strong affinity with Myer Kangan’s commitment to TAFE as the public provider of vocational education. I also admire Myer Kangan for his clear-sighted aspirations for TAFE as having status and standing with other sectors of education and the importance of learner-centred approaches to education that was as interested in the development of the individual as it was in the development of skilled labour for industries.

The areas of VET research that interest me most are many mostly related to learning in the workplace and workforce development – particularly workforce development for people employed in the VET sector. The VET sector is a very interesting context for studying the development of a workforce – mostly because of its dynamic nature and the way that it has to continually change itself in order to be able to deliver the skills needed for the wider Australian community. I am also fascinated by the workplace as a learning site and the ways in which work interacts to shape learning and how work can be better organised in order to support learning.

Methodologies that I have used are mainly qualitative or mixed methods approaches. I enjoy the challenge of designing questionnaires and using these to collect data; however I also enjoy the ways in which qualitative approaches – particularly interviews, focus groups and case study approaches – can allow you to gain real insights into areas of interest through the eyes of the important participants in the VET sector

The most interesting piece of VET research I conducted was a survey on careers in VET that was part of the Consortium program of research entitled ‘*Supporting VET providers in building capability for the future*’. The survey was a challenge to construct and collecting the data faced a number of barriers in relation to being able to assemble a robust sample for the study. The findings that were produced from this study represented the first real attempt to understand the careers of VET practitioners and have acted as a catalyst for further work that I have undertaken on educational leadership and the development of VET educators, managers and leaders.

Currently I am researching educators’ work and the notion of how we might build a sustainable profession. This research is aimed at developing better explanations for the persistent issues that arise with the nature of teachers and educators’ work, especially as they relate to building a profession which is able to sustain the contemporary educational practices needed to respond to the emerging policy agendas. I am also interested in how we might be able to improve the working lives of VET educators, managers and leaders and how to create spaces for their knowledge and expertise to be brought into policy making processes.

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 Roslin Brennan-Kemmis.

SKILLS RECOGNITION REVISITED IN THE RAIL INDUSTRY

Research report by Lisa Davies and Tom Short

**University of South Australia,
Education, Equity and Work Research Group**

New research conducted by the University of South Australia (UniSA) on behalf of the Cooperative Centre for Rail Innovation (CRC) is helping the rail industry to improve its workforce development strategies and practices. Under the general heading ‘Skills Recognition in the Australian rail industry: another way to reach career goals’ one three-year research project has developed valuable information and advice to rail employees who want formal recognition for their knowledge, skills and experience.

Skills Recognition (SR) processes, including Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) to gain a formal qualification are currently under-utilised in the Australian rail industry. Many rail organisations see merit in recognising the skills, knowledge and experience of current and prospective employees. However, in the rail industry, workplace education and training is highly regulated and accountable to varying local and national safety bodies across the relevant jurisdictions. The training and qualifications appropriate to safety-critical roles are closely aligned with these regulatory requirements, and rail operators must ensure that rail safety workers are competent as defined under these regulations.

The implications for Rail

Consequently, many rail organisations and their employees who are not fully informed about how SR processes are undertaken, perceive SR to be ‘too risky’ or ‘too bureaucratic’ in an operational culture of risk mitigation. Instead employees were required to undertake repeated retraining at considerable cost to their organisations in terms of time and money. The CRC research found that this requirement had also been shown to cause some resentment and frustration among highly skilled workers.

How the CRC research met the industry’s needs

The CRC research identified that SR can be just as rigorous and effective an assessment method as formal training. It was found that many of the perceived and actual barriers to the use of SR could be addressed with the development of a more harmonised skills recognition “framework” i.e. a repository or one-stop-shop of easy-to-access information about using Skills Recognition in rail, tailored specifically for the rail industry. This framework could then be shared by rail companies without each of them having to ‘re-invent the wheel’, undertake such processes inefficiently or not do anything because they were perceived to be too hard, time-consuming and expensive.

Lead researcher at UniSA, Dr Lisa Davies, reported that “we needed to produce something that could not only contribute to the industry’s goal of greater harmonisation, but also save costs to individual companies and increase employee engagement”. The research found that effective SR processes could also attract potential employees to the industry by offering the possibility of gaining formal qualifications, and this was vital in a sector which had an ageing workforce and a need to recognise tacit knowledge.

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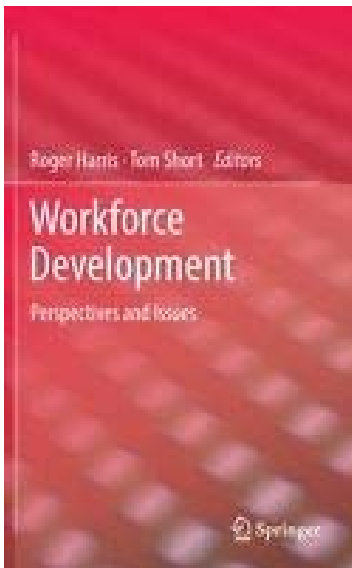
In human resource development processes, skills recognition assessments are also a useful part of training needs analyses and can identify where gap training is needed to top up skills without resorting the time, costs and reduced morale associated with repeated full training. Being fully informed about what SR is, and how it is a central part of workforce development, emerged as being the key to its uptake and successful implementation.

A suite of new products, including an interactive website and handbook, were developed and tailored to meet the needs of rail industry assessors, managers, SR applicants and recipients. Dr Davies reported, “We developed these products and tools for the rail industry, but we recognise the broader utility for people who are grappling with Skills Recognition in other parts of the vocational education and training sector”.

The research findings have also featured in CRC conference proceedings and a new book, *Workforce Development: Perspective and Issues* (Springer 2014) edited by UniSA academics and AVETRA members, Roger Harris and Tom Short.

See: <http://www.springer.com/business+%26+management/organization/book/978-981-4560-57-3>

The authors are grateful to the CRC for Rail Innovation (established and supported under the Australian Government Cooperative Research Centre program) for the funding of this research Project No. P4.111 – Skills Recognition in Rail.



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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 **\$160** (GST inclusive) and Student memberships **\$80.00** including GST are available.

If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter please contact Roslin Brennan-Kemmis.