

Research Today

RESEARCHERS MAGAZINE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN VET RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Message from the AVETRA President

This has been an exciting year for VET research in Australia and I am pleased to have taken over as AVETRA President at this time. Recognition of the importance of VET research has come through the new 'VET Researcher of the Year' award and also through several exercises in capacity-building in VET research and in initiatives to evaluate the impact of VET research. In some of these initiatives AVETRA has been pleased to work in close partnership with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. AVETRA has also been asked to participate as an informant in OECD visits to Australia this year.

This edition of *Research Today* celebrates the inaugural VET researcher of the year, Roger Harris, a stalwart AVETRA member. AVETRA is delighted that this award has been instituted, and its presentation at the Australian Training Awards recognises the integral contribution that research makes to the VET sector. The edition also reports on the AVETRA 'journal ranking' process, which involved a quality assessment of the VET and adult education journals utilised by and familiar to Australian VET researchers. Many academic disciplines undertook such a process during 2007 and our exercise was carried out with a great deal of rigour compared to others. In this edition we also continue the reporting of VET and adult education theses which we commenced during 2007. It is pleasing to note the continued enrolments of VET practitioners in research higher degrees.

The interest in, and depth of, VET research has been illustrated in recent weeks by the record number of OctoberVET events around Australia. Nine events in nearly every State and Territory were attended by a diverse range of VET practitioners and other attendees. Full details of these can be found on the AVETRA web site at:
<http://www.avetra.org.au/calendar/index.shtml>

Erica Smith
President AVETRA

2009 AVETRA conference 16-17 April, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Coogee Beach

Next year the conference returns to Sydney, where we are expecting a record number of participants. The conference theme is *Aligning Participants, Policy and Pedagogy: Traction and Tensions in VET Research*. Speakers (subject to final confirmation) are overseas academics Penny Jane Burke and Yvonne Hillier, and Australian senior policy officers Craig Robertson (DEEWR), Tom Karmel (NCVER) and Andrew Smith (ACPET). The AVETRA web site has full details of the submission process for abstracts. Abstracts are due on November 28th with full papers due 6th February or 6th March depending on whether refereeing is desired. There are optional pre-conference workshops the afternoon before the conference; details will be posted on the web site in December. Many thanks are due to the conference co-convenors Ros Brennan Kemmis and Melinda Randall and their conference committee of NSW members for their hard work.

Contributions to *Research Today*

We welcome contributions from members of AVETRA to 'Research Today'. Contributions should preferably be 500 words or less and should focus on VET researchers, researching and the impact of research. Please send your contribution to me at e.smith@ballarat.edu.au, or if you wish you may phone first to discuss your idea, on 03-5327 9665.

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AVETRA's journal ranking exercise

During 2007 AVETRA undertook an exercise to evaluate the quality of, and thereby rank, the scholarly journals in the VET and adult education disciplines. Many other discipline areas in Australia were undertaking a similar exercise, prompted by the government's research quality framework (RQF) exercise. Although the RQF has been abolished by the new government, there will be another exercise known as the ERA, in which hard data like journal rankings may be even more important.

AVETRA decided on two basic principles:

- There would be a multifaceted approach to the exercise – it would not rely on a single data source.
- Only those journals which were used by or known to AVETRA members and other VET/adult education academics would be evaluated.

The working party consisted of Erica Smith, Michele Simons, Ruth Wallace, Ros Brennan Kemmis, and Lauri Grace. Our process was among the most thorough of any discipline in Australia; many others relied only on people's general opinions of journals rather than a more exhaustive quality inspection.

This ranking is the official AVETRA ranking and may be quoted by academics and others when wishing to establish the credibility of a journal. We need to emphasise that the criteria were scholarly in nature and it is well recognised that journal have different audiences. Therefore it is not intended to imply that a 'lowly ranked' journal is inferior in any way. It may simply be designed for other purposes instead of, or as well as, scholarly discussion.

The process had two phases:

Phase 1: A list was drawn up of around 30 journals in the adult education/VET area. A survey was sent to approximately 100 members of AVETRA (only academics were invited to respond) and to other VET/adult education academics via their Deans. There were 17 responses. People were asked to provide their opinions only for journals in which they had published or with which they were familiar, so the numbers of responses for some journals was quite low. People were also asked to nominate additional journals to add to the list.

Phase 2: We contacted all of the journal editors on the amended list and invited them to send multiple copies of one edition of the journal (we asked for an edition from early 2006 to maintain some sort of parity). Not all editors responded to our request, despite reminders. We decided that we could only evaluate and rank those journals for which we were able to inspect copies, so 22 journals were evaluated in this way. A panel of three senior external reviewers covering a range of sectors within the VET and adult education discipline as well as two of the working party assessed all of the

journals, proving ratings and comments on different aspects of the quality of individual articles as well as an overall judgment on the journal. Only journals which had peer-reviewing processes were included in the ranking.

A ranking table was drawn up based on the results of these ratings, and the survey results were used to help decide where to draw the line between the different tiers. The ranking tiers used are A*, A, B and C. The RQF exercise required around 50% of 50% journals to be ranked as C. The AVETRA web site contains the ranking table – follow the 'AVETRA Journal Rankings' links from the front page at www.aveutra.org.au

The five most highly ranked journals were as follows:

| | |
|---|----|
| Journal of Education and Work | A* |
| Journal of Further and Higher Education | A |
| International Journal of Lifelong Education | A |
| Journal of Vocational Education & Training | A |
| Studies in Continuing Education | A |

Thank you to the external experts who evaluated the journals: Professor Paul Hager, Professor Victor Callan and Associate Professor Peter Smith.

The first winner of the Australian VET Researcher of the Year: Roger Harris



The inaugural VET Researcher of the Year winner is Roger Harris, who is also the only winner to date of the AVETRA Ray Barker Award for Distinguished Service to VET Research (2006).

The VET Researcher award is part of a suite of initiatives to build researcher capacity and promote excellence in VET research. It aims to promote the value of an evidence base in improving policy and practice in the VET sector. The Award forms part of the Australian Training Awards with the inaugural award presented in Darwin on 20 November 2008.

The criteria state that 'the award will be given to a VET researcher of high standing whose work has had an impact on policy or practice in the VET sector.' The winner receives a \$5000 cash prize,

trophy and travel to the award presentation ceremony.

Roger Harris was Director of the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work at the University of South Australia for 14 years and is currently a Program Leader (Education and Training) in the Co-operative Rail Centre for Rail Innovation.

Roger has been responsible for, or assisted as, a team member in, winning over his career approx. 75 grants totalling over \$3.5million, including 22 National Competitive Grants (Category 1). In total, Roger has been responsible for the publication of around 200 scholarly publications during his career. Roger is frequently invited to be a keynote speaker, including at many international events.

Roger's work has always involved research into matters of importance to VET. He was one of the first researchers, in 1982, to win a grant from the (then) TAFE National Centre for Research and Development and his work on competency-based training influenced a generation of VET practitioners. Most of Roger's research, under national competitive grants, has been undertaken in collaboration with end users, particularly in industry and the public sector.

Roger's 'Crazy Paving' reports on learning pathways have generated considerable media interest in the *Australian*, *Advertiser* and *Campus Review* in 2006 and early 2007, and led to Roger's being invited to present at a meeting of the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee Pro Vice Chancellors in 2005, as well as the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training think-tank (Agora XXV) of 30 people in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 2007.

Roger has been the Director for the past two and a half years of the national VET research consortium, *Supporting VET providers in Building Capability for the Future*. This has involved directing a national team of 16 researchers, undertaking extensive research in the field and acting as the spokesperson for the consortium with policy-makers and NCVER. The consortium's work is having a major influence on policy and practice in the VET sector.

Recently, Roger was invited to develop a Discussion Paper for the SA Government's *Skills for the Future Ministerial Inquiry*. He has been appointed to the new SA Training and Skills Commission, a Ministerial appointment.

During his career as a VET researcher, Roger has become well known for his work to promote the use of research teams that draw on colleagues from both the university and VET sectors. He has also promoted the development of future VET researchers through his continuing work as a

supervisor of higher degree students in the VET sector and as coordinator of a current three-year project, funded through the NCVER, on *Working in partnership with VET organisations to build researcher capacity*.

Through his work, Roger has worked tirelessly to bring credibility and rigour to research in the VET sector and has steadfastly promoted the value and significance of VET as an important but under-recognised element of the education field. But more than this, Roger provides leadership in an unassuming way, in a way that shifts the limelight – in a way that encourages and inspires those around him to see the value of teamwork, the value of his discipline and its importance to the Australian community.

Roger was a foundation member of the AVETRA Executive, serving as an elected member for six years including two years as Vice President. He has been a convenor of one (2001) and a member of the organising committee for a second (2008) AVETRA conference held in Adelaide.

The inaugural 2008 award was nominated and decided by a sub-committee of the NCVER Board. From 2009, nominations will be sought publicly with nominations opening in February 2009 and closing in June 2009. To be alerted when nominations for 2009 NCVER VET Researcher of the Year are open, subscribe to NCVER News at: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/subscribe.htm>

VET research theses 2007

The excellent work produced for theses written for PhDs, EdDs and Masters degrees does not always become as widely known as it deserves. Last year we invited AVETRA members to submit details of such theses completed in 2006, and received a number of submissions which were showcased in the 2007 editions of *Research Today*. Here are details of some 2007 theses. You are invited to contact the authors for more information. We welcome further submissions. Details of dissertations produced as part of coursework masters degrees are also welcomed, but space allows only the title and author to be recorded.

▲ 30 Years on from Kangan: An Analysis of the Current Policy Position of TAFE Queensland. (EdD thesis)

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Within Australia, VET encompasses the TAFE sector, private providers, community education and training, and work-based training. Additionally, some VET activities are embedded within the

secondary school and university sectors. As the major provider of Government-funded vocational education and training, TAFE has undergone significant change since its establishment in the 1970's. Historically, TAFE has provided broader education and social opportunities for individuals beyond a narrower focus on the achievement of training outcomes for economic benefits. However, shifts in policy direction in 1980's and 1990's have seen the delineation between broader education and economic outcomes becoming less distinct. While this is perhaps true of all education sectors, it has potentially impacted more on TAFE than any other sector. This thesis investigated these impacts within the context of TAFE's social service and economic utility roles. It was undertaken by analysing seven seminal Commonwealth and Queensland documents and through interviews with senior executives within Queensland's Department of Employment and Training and TAFE. The key findings indicate that TAFE Queensland continues to perform a number of functions or activities that can be associated with a social service role. However, the findings also show that, for TAFE Queensland, there has been a shift towards an economic utility role. Since the Kangan Report (1974), TAFE's role has become more focussed on meeting Queensland's economic and industry needs within a broad view that Australia needs a flexible workforce, qualified to industry standards of competence and able to compete in a globalised world. The complete document is available in the public domain by accessing:

<http://adt.library.qut.edu.au/adt-qut/public/adt-QUT20080326.151112/>

▲ **Nurses practising safely: an analysis of law curriculum - what is taught, learnt and applied in nursing.** (EdD thesis)

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The understanding and the ability of nurses applying law to their practice is an important responsibility when educating Registered Nurses. The serious ramifications of poor nursing practice, and the associated legal actions that can result, are concerning to all the profession. The aim of this research was to discover how law was taught, learnt and understood at the undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing level and how new Registered Nurses (RNs) used their law knowledge in their professional practice - thus addressing a research deficit in this area. The research investigated how the profession's competency regarding law was interpreted into curriculum, what undergraduate students and graduates in their first year of practice perceived they learnt from that curriculum and what both groups actually learnt. It looked at how new

RNs applied their knowledge of law and showed this competency within their clinical practice.

The study used a mixed method approach including content analysis of documents and university websites; interviews with curriculum developers (1), course-coordinators (12), new graduates (1) and senior Registered Nurses (3); questionnaires to undergraduate students (72) and new graduates (17); and direct observation of new graduates (5). Participants came from three public hospitals in Adelaide and the University of South Australia.

About a sixth of Registered Nurse competencies relate to law and these competencies vary in their interpretation into curriculum. The interpretation process is of concern to the profession because most nursing practice is in some way based on law. The case study showed the most emphasised law-related objectives were medicines, communication, consent, mental health, mandatory reporting and duty of care. Law learning was found to be sound for students and new graduates alike in the main areas. The learning and application of law by new graduates was affected by the confidence of the graduate, their 'face fitting' (physical demeanour, language used and observation of unwritten rules) and the quality of the mentoring received during the transition (or graduate) year. New graduates were found to practise safely, applying their law knowledge most obviously in the two areas of medicine administration and communication. While this safe practice is heartening, the nursing profession must remain vigilant regarding legal ramifications of practice and all processes to minimise the likelihood of patient misadventure. Simple law learning was achieved at undergraduate and graduate levels but complex law learning occurred only with experience, consolidation and time following the graduates' first year of practice.

The overall analysis of law teaching, learning and application both corroborated previous research and created new knowledge, specifically a model curriculum for law in nursing. Recommendations included changes to rectify non-alignment between shades of curriculum and strategies to close the theory-practice gap.

▲ **An Investigation of trade trainers' perceptions of the Mayer Key Competencies** (Thesis submitted as part of a coursework Masters)

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