

Researching VET and the voluntary sector: getting started

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For those who are concerned about the value, to the community, of work that is undertaken in our society, work in all its manifestations must properly to be considered, not just that which generates remuneration for individuals and profit for enterprises. Vocational education and training in Australia has predominantly focused on work in the market sector. Work in the voluntary sector, in particular, has received little attention; yet it is a vital source of social capital. Vast numbers of volunteers contribute their labour with as much commitment as those in paid employment do. And for those in receipt, for example, of counselling, fire fighting, or teaching support, the demand is for a high quality service, regardless of whether the work is paid or not.

How do volunteers currently gain their skills? To what degree does training currently meet the needs of the organisations for which they work? What are the constraints on training of volunteers? Are Training Packages and the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training applicable to the needs of volunteers? These are some of the questions that CEET is seeking answers to in a new program of research. Some initial insights were received when it hosted a one-day seminar in November 1999, attended by about thirty people with different interests and attachments to the voluntary sector. Those findings and their possible implications for policy, practice and further research will be discussed.

Conference theme: The changing nature of work and implications for VET policy and practice.

Key words: Social capital, training, voluntary sector, volunteers, work.

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