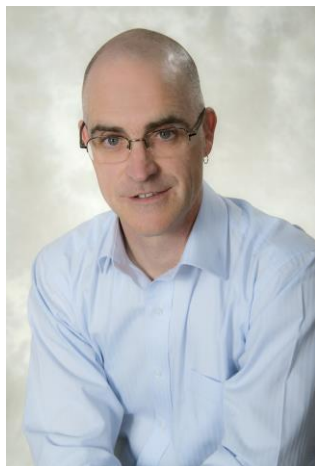


*The Newsletter of the Australasian Vocational Education
and Training Research Association*

AVETRA 'A-NEWS' NEWSLETTER – August 2020



From the President



AVETRA's executive has been busy over the last few months exploring new ways to serve members and the wider VET community. A major new member benefit being trialled this year is the Early Career & Emerging VET Researcher Webinar Series developed by executive members Kira Clarke, Lizzie Knight and Jason Skues. The series is designed for people new to vocational education research, including practitioners, and those who are keen to develop their research skills and to network with colleagues and peers across the Australasian VET field. The first two sessions were conducted in June and July, with another six scheduled over the next few months. The webinar series is covered in more detail with this edition of A-News. But let me add that the series is designed on the basis of listening to the needs of people wanting to research in VET and guided by this input, Kira, Lizzie and Jason have put very considerable expertise into the series design to create one of AVETRA's most promising initiatives. There is still time for you to join in, with Designing a question for your VET research the next session on Friday, August 14.

A second initiative was the AVETRA Policy Forum Webinar led by Robin Shreeve. The webinar, held on 2 July, was devoted to the question of making a submission on the Productivity Commission's interim report on the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) Review. The impetus for the session was recognition of the importance of empowering AVETRA members to make submissions to processes like this that impact on our sector. For this session, Robin was joined by Don Zoellner and Teresa Schmidt, with Craig Robertson from TDA and Troy Williams from ITECA providing video contributions. Lizzie Knight and Kira Clarke provided substantial support behind the scenes to make the session a success. The executive will continue to monitor opportunities for AVETRA members to influence policy development and then facilitate debate.

Speaking of opportunities, nominations are still open for Editor(s) in Chief of AVETRA's own journal, the *International Journal of Training Research*. This is a peer-reviewed journal published three times per year by Taylor & Francis. The journal publishes articles that advance knowledge and understanding of vocational education and training (VET) in Australia and internationally. The focus is on current or recently completed research and reviews of research on training, technical education and vocational education, and publishes original research, articles and book reviews. Journal articles can address the interests of researchers, educators, trainers, policymakers, skills capacity planners, and undergraduate and postgraduate students in training, technical education and vocational education. Nominations should be emailed to me at s.hodge@griffith.edu.au by 21 August 2020 marked 'Chief Editor IJTR'. If you have any questions at all about this role or the selection process, please call me on 0421224474 or send an email.

We also have OctoberVET to look forward to in 2020. This year, Teresa Schmidt and Robin Shreeve are coordinating OctoberVET at the national level. Look out for the announcements!

As always, feel free to get in touch with me to discuss any aspect of the work of AVETRA.

Best wishes, Steven Hodge

Steven Hodge
President, AVETRA

A minute with Mike Dockery, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, Curtin University.

Reflections on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

Many of you will be familiar with the push to enhance the STEM capacity of Australia's workforce. We need more people to gain qualifications in STEM, the argument goes, typically based on one or more of the following lines: the jobs of the future are increasingly going to require STEM skills; industry has trouble recruiting employees with STEM skills; Australia lags behind other countries in STEM skills, which will erode innovation and competitiveness; and increasing the STEM workforce would boost our GDP. Further, realising this future requires promoting women in STEM, given their current under-representation in STEM subjects at school and in post-school courses, such as in IT and engineering.¹

This widely-accepted narrative is increasingly shaping career advice and decision-making for young Australians as well as resource allocation in our higher education and vocational training sectors. Our State Government over here in the West recently released its [‘Take 2 STEM’](#) campaign to promote the importance of STEM to parents and students. The Morrison government's recent [announcement](#) to dramatically increase the cost of university arts and humanities subjects aimed to ‘incentivise students to make more job-relevant choices, that lead to more job-ready graduates’, such as in health, STEM and IT.



Over the past few years, I've been involved in several research projects relating to STEM. While it goes against popular opinion, I have to confess to having become a STEM sceptic. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, colleague Sherry Bawa and I looked at labour market outcomes for women who have graduated with STEM degrees. We were surprised to find very ambiguous evidence in the existing literature or from our own analysis of labour market shortages for STEM graduates. Of particular concern, we found that relative to women with other tertiary qualifications, women who gain STEM qualifications have lower labour market participation rates, higher unemployment rates, are relatively dissatisfied with their employment opportunities and with the extent to which their skills are utilised, and face greater gender wage inequality.

We argued in that paper (Dockery & Bawa 2018) that policies to promote female participation in STEM must be accompanied by measures to address career barriers they face in the labour market. Quite apart from gender issues, I have become dubious of the basic assumptions underlying the STEM narrative. In more recent (as yet unpublished) work, colleagues and I were charged with analysing the evolution of STEM skills in the WA labour market. In seeking to overcome the traditional binary view of jobs as STEM jobs or non-STEM jobs, we developed a measure of the ‘STEM-intensity’ of occupations based on the proportion of persons with qualifications in the STEM fields employed in each of 134 ‘minor-group’ occupations defined in ANZSCO using census data. In addition, whereas qualifications are typically only counted as ‘STEM qualifications’ if they are at the level of bachelor's degree or above, we included all levels of qualification weighted by their associated average wage premia.

Some interesting findings came out of this analysis. First, the STEM- intensity of occupations is very stable over time. The most STEM intensive occupation in 2006 was Engineering Professionals. In 2016 it was Engineering Professionals. In 2006, the occupation of hairdressers ranked 134; in 2016 it ranked 132. Importantly, this stability in STEM-intensity by occupation means we can gauge the growth of STEM skills demand from changing occupation composition of the labour market. Contrary to the popular narrative, employment in occupations that are STEM

¹ See, as examples, <https://www.pwc.com.au/publications/a-smart-move.html>; <https://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2016/03/report-australias-stem-workforce>; <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A56724>.

intensive did not grow particularly rapidly between 2006 and 2016, either in WA or Australia as a whole. STEM is most commonly defined as relating to the fields of study of natural and physical sciences, IT and engineering and related technologies. By our measure, employment growth by occupation has favoured demand for skills in the fields of Health, the much-maligned Society and Culture, and Education, more than any of the three STEM fields. This looks set to continue into the immediate future, based on the Department of Jobs and Small Business' employment projections by occupation to 2023.

Another finding worth noting is that many of the most STEM intensive jobs are not in the 'professions' at all, even though STEM is often defined as associated with degree level qualifications and higher. Many of the most STEM intensive occupations are trade and technical jobs, such as Mechanical Engineering Trades Workers, Electricians, and ICT & Telecommunications Technicians. Recall the measure of STEM-intensity is based on the STEM fields of qualification weighted by the labour market return to those qualifications (i.e. relative wages), and hence relates to market valuation of the skills rather than an arbitrarily imposed entry-level.

The STEM narrative is strongly promoted by groups that have a clear self-interest in doing so: the Vice Chancellors, the Offices of the Chief Scientist at the Commonwealth and State levels, the Australian Industry Group, Engineers Australia and so on. I believe there are grounds to be wary. STEM jobs have not been growing rapidly and I see little evidence they are 'the jobs of the future'. This should not surprise us – as economies mature and become wealthier, it is the services sector that increases its share of output. Accordingly, it is jobs requiring qualifications in health that appear to be growing most rapidly in Australia. Indeed, many argue for the promotion of STEMM rather than STEM – with the second M for medicine. But that raises the more fundamental question: why lump these fields together at all? Space forbids exploring that here. And don't get me wrong – I'm a big fan of science, and wish I could have been a theoretical physicist if my maths had been up to it. I'm sure many jobs in the future, probably a growing share, will require STEM skills, notably IT skills, but that doesn't amount to a need to specialise in STEM in preference to other fields. Presumably those who promote the STEM agenda are well versed in the scientific method. We should expect them to provide a clear rationale for their arguments, setting out assumptions and hypotheses that can be objectively tested.

Reference:

Dockery, A.M. and Bawa, S. (2018), "Labour market implications of promoting women's participation in STEM in Australia", *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 125-152.

Adult Literacy in the time of COVID by Vanessa Iles, Reading Writing Hotline

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unexpected impact on the Reading Writing Hotline. When the lockdown commenced in March, education institutions around the country started closing their doors and moving to online learning. The Hotline anticipated a decline in calls. In fact, there was a 36% increase in calls received at the Hotline in the months of April, May and June when compared with the same months last year.

The COVID-19 shutdown and associated job losses seemed to be providing the time for callers to consider doing something about their literacy and numeracy and many took the opportunity.



Callers tended to fall into a number of categories - those who had lost their job and wished to improve their skills in lockdown; those wanting skills for their current job, parents needing assistance to home school, and those now isolated and struggling with social contact, study and filling on forms online.

Callers to the Hotline wishing to improve their current job skills see this as an ideal time to upskill.

'My cafe business recently closed, and I really want to learn fundamental skills which will help when reopens. It's a very worrying thing. Now I have all this time I need to take my mind off it and improve myself.' Joe

Other callers, reaching out for assistance, want to find new work and realise that the literacy demands of online job applications and safety training are likely to prove barriers to re-entering the workforce.

Leanne has just started working as a family well-being support person but is struggling with reading and writing. Literacy and numeracy have always been her biggest challenge. 'I started my new job 2 weeks before COVID -19 and am now working from home. Suddenly there's a huge increase in the emails, case notes and reports I have to write. I don't want to give up, but I feel like a failure.' Leanne sounded very anxious and kept repeating, 'I don't want to give up the job'.

Hotline staff often fielded calls from anxious parents suddenly having to home school their children and finding that their own reading and writing levels which they may have hidden from their family were revealed.

Natasha is a young single mother trying to educate her children at home however, her she is unable to help them. Her literacy level is too low to be able to access an online TAFE literacy course.

Other callers reported being isolated physically from their family and friends and had been unable to connect using online platforms like Zoom since they had no one to assist them to set up the software.

Jack lives on his own and needs help in setting up basic computing for social contact and online grocery shopping. He has no one to help him. He also has to claim financial assistance and finds all online forms too difficult.

These concerns are echoed by many callers who have had to fill in claims for Jobseeker and Jobkeeper. Filling in hard copy forms has always been difficult for many with beginner literacy levels but the digitisation of many forms for government services adds a further layer of difficulty.

Darlene is very capable and articulate but has concealed her dyslexia for years in order to stay in her current job. She now realises she will not be able to access financial support and work in the future unless she gets some assistance with filling in forms for Centrelink.

What we have all noticed at the Hotline is that Calls during COVID have been considerably more time consuming. Being a free, available phone line at a time when people feel vulnerable and anxious means that calls are often more complex, and it can be hard to unpack the literacy issue from other issues being experienced. We are helping people who are feeling very isolated and limited by their low literacy and digital literacy levels. We can hear the desperation in their voices. In addition, many adults with low levels of literacy are unable to access online learning. A significant number of students, currently enrolled in literacy classes, once the literacy courses went online, have found it too difficult since they needed digital literacy skills as well. The value of having hardcopy learning materials that can be posted to people who find themselves isolated is becoming more and more obvious.

This lockdown period has certainly highlighted the need for literacy and digital literacy. In the past few months, calls to the Hotline's phone service have shone a light on the isolation and frustration felt by many people as a result of their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

In the past 25 years, the Reading Writing Hotline has helped over 165,000 adult Australians across the country to access literacy and numeracy provision. The Hotline is a free national information, advisory and phone referral service staffed by literacy and numeracy teachers. The Hotline takes calls from people looking for assistance in finding appropriate classes and learning resources, or from those who wish to assist others who are struggling due to their literacy and numeracy levels. It is funded by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

Vanessa Iles
Manager, Reading Writing Hotline

TAFE and its future role in Australian Tertiary Education by John Pardy, Monash University

Recently the Prime Minister Scott Morrison's speech at the national press club focused on industrial relations and vocational education. He established that his governments expectations were that vocational education should become a ['first best option'](#). This is a lofty ambition given the presiding context of Australian tertiary education where greater social value and esteem is attributed to higher education and university learning.

There are approximately 1.5 million students enrolled in [higher education](#) and 4.1 million students enrolled in [vocational education](#) in Australia. This enrolment figure in VET would include those studying full courses together with those pursuing a short course of single unit, which in recent years has [been growing](#). The majority of VET students undertaking a full course of study are often in TAFE. Around [13.6 billion dollars](#) of government investment is made in higher education, with approximately [5.4 billion dollars](#) is invested in vocational education. These approximations do not include fee-for service private monies, and much of the government investment in higher education is issued in the form of income contingent loans.

For vocational education to become a 'first best option' in Australia's tertiary education, policy needs to move the two key sectors closer to some semblance of parity. Whilst the enrolment patterns and government investment in the two sectors differ, the two key public institutions, Universities and TAFE, are foundational to the trust and confidence placed in Australian tertiary education. Effective and fair policy and funding are a significant element in sustaining the esteem of Australian tertiary education.

These institutions, Universities and TAFE, are subject to uncertainties that have been heightened and made more visible by the challenges of the present Covid-19 pandemic. The threat to international student markets is already affecting Australian tertiary education, placing more pressure on already resource strapped institutions. The recent higher education [policy reform](#) directions announced by Minister Dan Tehan point to policy intentions that seek to shape what students study, and more importantly what they pay and how much government subsidy will be allocated. It seems from the recent [productivity commission review](#) a similar policy direction will be pursued for vocational education by progressing more nationally consistent and coherent funding arrangements. This implies a streamlining of subsidies and, or seeking to determine through national agreement consistent course subsidy rates. This will reshape the financing of VET with implications for State governments and their funding of TAFE.

What's the future for TAFE?

Policy intentions focused on consistency and coherence are not new to VET. The [national training reform agenda](#) in the 1990s sought to better connect VET to industry and was done in the context of the broader macro-economic reforms of award restructuring and the [accord](#). A key plank of those reforms was the creation a national [training market](#). The training market, like much of the macro-economic reforms at that time were reinforced by the policy of [competitive neutrality](#). This was a significant plank in Australia's turn to national competition policy.

Competitive neutrality means that TAFE institutions are prevented from having any market advantage over a private, or independent registered training organisation. In principle, it renders TAFE institutions as equal to, and no different from a private training organisation. This is instead of treating TAFE as a [public institution](#) that fulfils public policy objectives. TAFE institutions play a significant role in their local, and regional settings. TAFE personnel, including directors, managers and teachers are involved in regional economic development committees, act as representatives on local hospital boards, chambers of industry and commerce and are actively involved in social and cultural initiatives in their local settings. Misrecognising the significant value and purposes of TAFE institutions, the national policy of competition stymies the development of the systemic and institutional capacities of TAFE by State governments.

As the owners of TAFE institutions, States governments enter into a [National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development](#) with the Federal government which provides 1.5 billion dollars of investment annually in VET. The principle of competitive neutrality underpins these national agreements and binds state governments to arrangements that ensure that TAFE institutions are not advantaged against private training organizations. This does not happen in school education or in Australia's marketised higher education sector, or indeed in health and the funding of public and private hospitals.

TAFE, in the context of competitive neutrality has become the somewhat unwanted and expensive appendage in State education departments. Competitive neutrality hampers State government investment in TAFE made more difficult by national partnership agreements that insist on neutrality. Institutions, public or private can never be neutral in an economic and market sense, they have interests to uphold and defend. This was evident in the shambolic actions that occurred with VET FEE HELP that dramatically undermined trust in vocational education.

For State governments to really build up TAFE institutions as a more equal partner in Australian tertiary education, they need to be able to invest in these important public institutions without being subject to cries of giving unfair [advantage](#) to these important education institutions by other vested interests. If State governments are undermined by national partnership agreements from properly resourcing TAFE institutions building up VET as a first best option becomes a faraway possibility.

This piece provided to us by the author has also been published on the Independent Australia website:
<https://independentaustralia.net/life/life-display/the-future-role-of-tafe-in-australian-tertiary-education-,14114>

The role of intermediary organisations in apprenticeship systems, by Erica Smith, Federation University

In response to the growing international interest in apprenticeships and work-based learning in general, the ILO has undertaken a number of studies to better understand the role of various stakeholders and the institutional arrangements that support them. Whilst there is abundant literature on the role of stakeholders in the governance of apprenticeship systems, the roles and services provided by intermediary bodies have not been examined in any detail.

Intermediary organizations in apprenticeships are those which act on behalf of, link, are somewhere in between or mediate between the main parties – apprentices and employers. An intermediary organization in apprenticeship systems is thus one that undertakes one or more of the following activities: employs apprentices as a third-party employer; trains apprentices as part of a specific arrangement with groups of employers; or undertakes other apprentice support activities on behalf of an employer or a specified group of employers.

In the analysis section, this discussion paper highlights different ways of classifying intermediary organizations, provides examples of different types of intermediary organisations and examines the different roles they can play to support the effective operation of apprenticeship systems. In particular, the report includes brief case studies of intermediary organisations in Australia, India, England.

The report finds that intermediary organizations in apprenticeship systems have been shown to provide a useful conduit for the dissemination of information from governments and relevant bodies to employers, apprentices and other parties. Intermediaries are also recognised as encouraging employers to recruit more apprentices and, specifically, to recruit more apprentices from disadvantaged groups as they often possess expertise in matters specific to young people and to disadvantaged groups. These organisations have also been found to improve retention and completion rates in apprenticeships.

The report concludes that intermediary organisations should be regarded as potentially major contributors to apprenticeship systems and as such, this report should be seen as an important contribution to improved understanding and awareness of the roles they play and the challenges they face.

Smith, E. (2019). *Intermediary organizations in apprenticeship systems*. Geneva: International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_725504/lang--en/index.htm ISBN: 978-92-2-133941-0

The COVID-19 pandemic: FAQs from the World Health Organisation

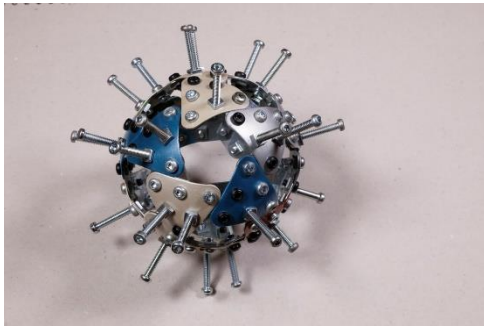


Photo by Georg Eiermann, Unsplash

Click on link below to find out what The World Health Organisation says about a range of topics in the context of COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

Topics comprise COVID-19 issues related to:

- adolescents and youth
- being active
- breast-feeding
- cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces in non-health care settings
- contraception and family planning
- dexamethasone
- ethics: resource allocation and priority setting
- food businesses
- food consumers
- food safety authorities
- health and safety tips for workplaces
- HIV, antiretrovirals
- hydroxychloroquine
- infection and prevention and control for health care workers caring for patients, suspected and confirmed
- influenza - similarities and differences
- malaria
- masks
- mass gatherings
- older people
- pregnancy and childbirth
- schools
- self-care interventions, for sexual and reproductive health and rights
- serology
- tobacco
- transmission
- tuberculosis
- violence against women

COVID-19: Jobkeepers and JobSeekers

On 21st July 2020, the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and the Treasurer Josh Frydenburg, announced a six-month extension to the JobKeeper payments. Originally meant to run their course on 27 September 2020 these payments have been extended to 28 March 2021. The extra government assistance is to help households, businesses and not-for-profit organisations, survive the pandemic and drive economic recovery.

The new JobKeeper payments available to eligible recipients from 28 September 2020 will comprise a two-tiered payment so that the payments can be better aligned with what people were earning prior to the arrival of the pandemic. Payment rates are also set to be reduced for individuals receiving the full fortnightly rate as well as those who had been employed for fewer hours. Other eligibility criteria will remain the same.

[Fact sheet: Extension of the JobKeeper Payment](#)

To ensure that such payments go to those who are eligible the Australian Taxation Office has implemented compliance activities, see [Keeping JobKeeper payment fair](#)

Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) survey of JobSeeker and other welfare recipients

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic saw many Australians lose their jobs as some employers had to lay off workers. The government provided assistance to these newly unemployed workers as well as to existing unemployed persons and those on other social security payments, in the form of a Coronavirus Supplement. A recent ACOSS survey of 955 recipients of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance or other social security payments with the Coronavirus Supplement, recently has found that this boost to payments has placed these welfare recipients in a better position than before the pandemic. The CEO of ACOSS, Dr Cassandra Goldie noted that the findings indicated that the 'increased JobSeeker rate is allowing people to cover the basic essentials of life. Unlike when they were really struggling to get by on the old Newstart rate of just \$40 a day, people now don't have to skip as many meals and are now able to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, while paying their rent and bills'. https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/survey-shows-increased-jobseeker-payment-allowing-people-to-eat-regularly-cover-rent-and-pay-bills-2/.

The media release also provided some testimonials from those who had received the Coronavirus Supplement, with one mother saying 'Until they announced the Coronavirus Supplement, I was honestly terrified. I didn't know what we were going to do for money. I was selling things to keep us going'... I lose sleep thinking about when it ends. We'll go back to paying less of our power and water bills, eating less, we won't be able to afford medication for everyone in the house'. Another respondent reported being more able to eat regular meals. 'My fridge is full, my freezer is full – I can eat every day, mostly 3 meals a day. Before, I usually only ate one meal per day and there were always 3-4 days in the fortnight when I wouldn't eat at all. Now I can afford shampoo, moisturizer and deodorant. I can do a plan to pay off my electricity bill, I'm even thinking of getting a no-interest loan to buy a new fridge.'

\$2billion skills package

The Prime Minister recently announced the government's investment of a \$2billion skills package to enable Australian to acquire the skills required by industry sectors that have the opportunities for jobs, ready for economic recovery post-COVID-19.

This package comprises:

- \$1.5billion for apprentice wage subsidies to keep 180, 000 apprentices employed and continuing with their training, and support for 90,000 small and medium-sized businesses. It adds another \$2billion to the subsidies announced in March 2020. The subsidies are to run until March 2021.
- \$1billion for the JobTrainer program to support an extra 340,700 training places for school leavers and job seekers to enable them to acquire the skills for getting jobs in industry with more employment opportunities. There will be no or little cost to students in areas of in areas of need.
- \$500 million of federal funding will be available with matched contributions from the states and territories.

Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Michaelia Cash said 'the JobTrainer package would form a vital part of the national recovery efforts'. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/jobtrainer-skills-package-economic-recovery-and-growth>

Employers warn \$1.5bn apprentice wage boost may not be enough to create new jobs

Employers have welcomed the [government's \\$1.5bn expansion of wage subsidies](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/16/employers-warn-15bn-apprentice-wage-boost-may-not-be-enough-to-create-new-jobs) but believe more incentives may be required to encourage school leavers to take up new apprenticeships. Source: The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/16/employers-warn-15bn-apprentice-wage-boost-may-not-be-enough-to-create-new-jobs>

Apprenticeships in a post-COVID world

The National Australian Apprenticeship Association (NAAA) has released a paper about 'Apprenticeships and the Recovery'. It investigates how the recession will affect the market for apprenticeships. Peter Hurley from the Mitchell Institute has examined the 'impact of the coronavirus on apprentices and trainees' which looks at how apprenticeships have fared in past recessions. Source: VDC - <https://vdc.edu.au/vdc-news/apprenticeships-in-a-post-covid-world/>

#NoFrills2020 goes virtual

Hosted by NCVER, the *29th National VET Research Conference 'No Frills'* was held online for the first time on 7-10 July 2020. The theme **Workforce ready: challenges and opportunities for VET** encouraged us to explore what 'workforce ready' means for VET, especially in light of the substantial job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With an innovative mix of live and pre-recorded content including keynote speakers, focus sessions, live Q&A and over 30 presentations, #NoFrills2020 delivered something for everyone. Over 400 participants heard from speakers on a wide range of topics including digital skills and technology, apprentices and trainees, VET practice, young people, and access and equity.

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Federal Government Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, opened the conference and emphasised the critical importance of VET to meet the changing skills needs of Australia's modern economy.

Program highlights included a keynote presentation from award winning designer, researcher and futurist [Dr Kate Raynes-Goldie](#), who spoke with great enthusiasm about the power of curiosity and playfulness as the most significant soft skills of 2020.

Participants also heard from the Interim National Skills Commissioner Adam Boyton, who spoke on the role of the National Skills Commission in our economic recovery phase, and Emeritus Professor Tracey Horton AO, Chair, AISC, who spoke on collaborating with industry to meet critical skills needs and strengthen the Australian VET sector.

The two live Q&A sessions facilitated by Steve Davis were a conference highlight and very well attended. Thanks to our Q&A participants John Buchanan (University of Sydney), George Margelis & Anne Livingstone (Aged Care Industry Information Technology Council), Erica Smith (Federation University Australia), and David Redway (Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment) for their contribution to these lively sessions.

Now in its 29th year, the annual 'No Frills' conference is a key part of NCVER's commitment to engage the VET community in research and to build research capacity and capability across the sector.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all our 'No Frills' sponsors, including AVETRA, for their valued support.

- To further explore the role of VET in preparing people for the current and future workforce, download the conference [discussion paper](#).
- Presentation slides from the conference can be accessed from [VOCEDplus](#).
- View presentations from [Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash](#) and [Mr Adam Boyton](#).

Given the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, we are still working through our options for next year's 30th 'No Frills' conference. More information will be released shortly.

June Ingham
NCVER

No Frills Conference 2020 goes virtual



Left: Steve Davis, Q&A facilitator for the conference, shares a light moment with panellists David Redway and Erica Smith during their session.

Keynote speaker on Day 1 was Dr Kate Raynes-Goldie. Here she holds up a Lego creation to illustrate a point about the power of play.



Left: Michael Hardman pre-records his presentation, and then answers his audience live via the online chat function



Above: George and Anne in their Q&A session with Steve Davis

Looking to the future: report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training

This review was commissioned by the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and conducted by a panel of experts chaired by Professor Peter Shergold AC. The panel produced a comprehensive report of 177 pages and delivered 20 recommendations for change.

‘The world is moving at a tremendous rate; going no one knows where. We must prepare our children, not for the world of the past, not for our world, but for their world – the world of the future’. Written on the front cover of the report and reputed to have been spoken by Dewey in a broadcast about 80 years ago they continue to resonate today. In two sentences it gives us a glimpse into what we are about to read in the report.

Speaking as Chair and on behalf of the review panel, Professor Shergold’s opening letter to the Education Council makes a case for crafting a senior secondary education system that is forward rather than backward looking. He also draws on the voices of current students to justify the need for establishing work and further education and training pathways that they feel will be right for them, including both academic and vocational education and training pathways.

Students told the review panel that senior secondary education in Australia was too focussed on academic performance at the expense of other important activities. In addition, attention paid to the achievement of a respectable Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), often meant that there was scant time for students to develop the skills and attributes required for life and to prepare for a ‘successful adulthood’ (p6). With respect to the preoccupation with ATAR achievement, Professor Shergold emphasized the need to think differently about the ATAR. The ‘ATAR should be regarded as just one important measure of success. We need to educate for and assess the diverse learnings that make the whole person. We need to open doors, not narrow pathways’, (p6) he writes.

Notwithstanding the subsequent disruptions to education, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (which arrived well after the panel had started the review) the panel concluded that their recommendations for change be implemented sooner rather than later. The time was now for re-thinking the Australian approach to education in the final years of schooling.

‘At a time when the employment opportunities for senior secondary students are likely to be limited by the consequences of severe economic downturn, and their career prospects challenged by the relentless impact of automation and digitisation, there is increasing acknowledgement that we need to look afresh at the transition years from school. We have a responsibility to ensure that students have learned how to keep on learning through life’ (p7).

The full report detailing all the findings of the review can be read here [Senior Secondary Pathways Review](#)

AVETRA Webinar Series 2020

As Australia's peak national VET research association, AVETRA plays an important role in connecting early career and emerging VET researchers with peers and mentors. In 2020, they were excited to announce a new webinar series, aimed at connecting our membership from across Australia and providing an opportunity for engaging with key VET issues and researcher capability development.

Researcher development

This webinar series focuses on building researcher capacity and offers an opportunity for early career, emerging and practitioner researchers to strengthen their understanding of the research process. For participants with a research idea in mind, the series offers an opportunity to grow a small-scale research project from conception through to dissemination, through each stage of the research cycle.

Hear AVETRA President Steven Hodge speaking about the new webinar series [HERE](#)

Researcher Development Series: Webinar 1

Webinar 1 was held on June 12th 1pm-2pm. It was co-facilitated by Kira Clarke, Lizzie Knight and Jason Skues. It included pre-recorded video content from Teressa Schmidt, Michele Simons, Erica Smith, Steven Hodge, Don Zoellner and Keiko Yasukawa, who spoke about [barriers to research being useful for VET policy and practice](#) and [strategies they use for ensuring their research is useful for VET policy and practice](#). The webinar focused on the role of research for VET policy and practice.

You can access a copy of the recording of Webinar 1 [HERE](#)

Researcher Development Series: Webinar 2

Webinar 2 was held on Friday July 10th 1pm-2pm. It was co-facilitated by Lizzie Knight, Kira Clarke and Jason Skues. It included pre-recorded video content from Teressa Schmidt, Michele Simons, Erica Smith, Steven Hodge, Don Zoellner and Keiko Yasukawa. The structure of this webinar enabled participants to:

- Reflect on their individual development needs using the Researcher Development Framework;
 - Consider the purpose of their research and how this shapes their research problem statement;
 - Hear from some VET experts on how they frame their research (pre-recorded experts' videos);
 - See a modelled process for formulating a problem statement and interact with peers during a breakout room activity; and
 - Learn about where to access literature and research reading resources.
- **Register for the webinars**
- The Researcher Development webinars are free for all AVETRA members. You can register on the website – avetra.org.au

Researcher Development Series Webinar Schedule

Future Researcher Development Webinars are as below:

Topic	Date (Friday 1-2pm)
Designing a question for VET practitioner research	August 14 th 2020
Thinking about your research contexts	September 18 th 2020
Collecting and analysing data for your VET research	October 16 th 2020
Accessing Secondary Datasets	November 13 th 2020
Human research ethics	February 12 th 2021
Sharing your VET research: writing for different audiences	March 12 th 2021

Policy Webinars

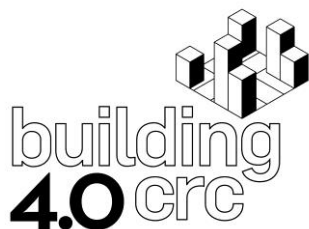
AVETRA has also commenced hosting occasional policy webinars and the first was held on the 2nd July on: The Productivity Commission NASWD. It was hosted by Lizzie Knight, with co-host and technical support from Kira Clarke. It included:

- a pre-recorded introduction from Teresa Schmidt
- a substantive presentation from Robin Shreeve
- a substantive pre-recorded researcher commentary from Teresa Schmidt
- pre-recorded commentary from Craig Robertson of TDA and Troy Williams of ITECA
- a substantive researcher commentary from Don Zoellner.

There were over 40 people in attendance and significant numbers have viewed the downloaded version. Feedback from registered attendees were supportive about undertaking future webinars.

If you missed the policy webinar, you can still watch the recording [HERE](#)

Holmesglen Institute and Building 4.0 Co-operative Research Centre: a research partnership to transform the building industry.



Holmesglen Institute, along with 29 partners drawn from industry, university and government, has been successful in securing government funding from the Australian Government's Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) Program to establish Building 4.0 CRC: a research initiative aimed at transforming the way buildings are designed and manufactured in Australia. Participation in this research partnership will enable Holmesglen, along with industry and university research partners, to work co-operatively on the development of new technologies that aim to modernise the building construction sector.

Holmesglen's involvement will assist in furthering its programme of industry-focussed research and provide its researchers, teaching staff, and students with the opportunity to participate in applied research for the 'digital age'. Research programmes may cover the development of training programs in the use of new technologies (including digital technologies and robotics); innovations to work processes; pre-fabrication construction innovation, and policy and regulations improvement. Furthermore, the CRC will be able to utilise Holmesglen's extensive workshop facilities and trained technical staff to support trials of improvements to the key building phases: development; design; production; assembly; operation; maintenance; and 'end-of-life'.

Exposure to these newly emerging building technologies and advanced product development will provide the Institute with an invaluable research and development opportunity for the design of 'leading edge' education and training programmes to build a workforce that has the requisite skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the 'digital age'.

Further details may be found at: <https://holmesglen.edu.au/Industry/Centre-for-Applied-Research-and-Innovation/>

Dr Henry Pook
Director, Centre for Applied Research and Innovation.
Holmesglen Institute

What's making the news

- Introducing a learner profile for secondary school students

The review of secondary school pathways to work and further education (discussed earlier in this newsletter) has recommended that students should leave school with a Learner Profile comprises not only their ATAR score (where relevant) together with their individual subject results. This Learner profile should also 'capture the broader range of evidenced capabilities necessary for employment and active citizenship that they have acquired in senior secondary schooling' (Recommendation 4 of the report). Source: The Conversation - <https://theconversation.com/students-are-more-than-a-number-why-a-learner-profile-makes-more-sense-than-the-atar-143539>

- Applications for visas by international students fall nose-dive

Applications for international student visas for 2019-2020 financial year have decreased by 20 per cent and 33.5 for all international students. There have been more dramatic falls in applications from Nepal and India, placing further pressure on smaller universities and the private VET market. Source: Sydney Morning Herald - <https://www.smh.com.au/national/quite-serious-international-student-visa-applications-plummet-20200728-p55gbc.html>

- Getting Western Australia back on track

Western Australia has released a Recovery Plan to get Western Australian 'bounce back from the impacts of COVID-19 to reposition itself as a thriving and innovative place in which to live, work, visit and do business' <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/wa-recovery>. The plan also comprises spending for building WA economy and industry <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/premier-and-cabinet/wa-recovery-economy-and-industry>; skills and training: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/premier-and-cabinet/wa-recovery-developing-industry#building-the-skills-wa-needs>; strengthening community, health care, and looking after vulnerable Western Australians: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/premier-and-cabinet/wa-recovery-community>; and building infrastructure to generate jobs, stimulating the economy and connecting communities: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/premier-and-cabinet/wa-recovery-infrastructure>

- Plans to build a hospitality and tourism training centre in Mandurah (WA)

As part of the WA Recovery Plan, government has announced an investment of \$9.17 into a world-class centre for hospitality and tourism training at South Metropolitan TAFE's Mandurah campus. This is aimed at raising the capacity of the TAFE to train highly skilled chefs, front of house staff, and events management and tourism workers for the Peel region. The new centre will focus on training apprentice chefs as well as engaging local secondary students, young people and the long-term unemployed in vocational education and training. [\\$9.17 million for Mandurah TAFE hospitality and tourism training centre](#)

- A new Technical College for Fremantle

The former Fremantle Technical College site has been sold to leading Western Australian tourism company, Prendiville Group. The Group aims to develop a training school for hospitality professionals, and to partner with various institutions, to support hotels in Western Australia create high-quality tourist experiences.

[Leading hospitality group set to develop Fremantle Technical College](#)

- A new state-of-the art centre for training in aged care and disability services in Broome

A new National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Training Centre has been opened at North Regional TAFE's Broome campus, to help students acquire the competencies required for NDIS-related training. The Centre comprises spaces for teaching, and facilities for in-home care and in-hospital care simulations. Customised bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchenettes and living rooms reflect an in-home care environment. Bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms replicate hospitals and aged care facilities.

<https://www.miragenews.com/new-state-of-the-art-centre-to-meet-local-demand-in-aged-care-and-disability/>

- New CIT CAMPUS - WODEN (ACT)

Planning for the design and building of the new WODEN campus and its integration with the public transport interchange has commenced. Minister for Tertiary Education, Chris Steel, announced the project saying 'The new CIT Campus-Woden will be a state of the art facility which will strengthen ties with local industry to create better education opportunities for Canberra's VET students ... The project will bring more jobs to Woden ... creating more opportunities for local jobs, and building skills for Canberrans'.

[Strong endorsement for CIT Campus - Woden as consultation helps shape design](#)

Have your say: <https://yoursay.act.gov.au/CIT-Campus-Woden>

- \$7 million investment for skills and trades in Tasmania

The Federal Government has announced a \$7 million investment for the new Trades and Water Centre of Excellence at the Clarence campus to support more Tasmanians to take up a career in trades and electrotechnology. This is helping the Tasmanian economy to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. 'This funding is part of the Morrison Government's \$50 million investment to help state and territory governments revitalise their TAFE campuses', Minister Cash said.

[\\$7 million boost to support Tasmanian skills and trades](#)

- Jobs windfall for workers in disability and aged service sectors

Although COVID-19 has spelled high levels of unemployment in many industry sectors the disability and aged care services sectors requires more workers. 'The reason the disability sector is growing is because people now are identifying more with mental illness, neurological disorders, or they've just known something's just not right', says, Brooke Anthony, manager of Flagstaff Disability Services.

Source: ABC News - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-21/disability-jobs-boom-despite-coronavirus-era/12473648>

- A Skills package for the mining sector in Australia

The Australian government's JobTrainer skills package will also assist employers in the mining sector to recover from the economic ravages of COVID-19. The package will invest in the training of 100 000 extra apprentices and training or reskilling 340 000 school leavers and unemployed people.

Source: Global Mining Review - <https://www.globalminingreview.com/mining/17072020/skills-package-to-support-australias-mining-workforce/>

- Cairns TAFE: Preparing for the recovery

A \$13 million investment in Cairns TAFE aims to deliver world-class training facilities in Far North Queensland. Minister for Training and Skills Development Shannon Fentiman visited with young automotive apprentices in recently upgraded workshops and battery rooms. Minister Fentiman said, 'we have a plan for Queensland, Unite and Recover for Queensland Jobs, which is all about investing in training and future proofing infrastructure so we have the skills for more jobs in more industries'. Details on Queensland's economic recovery strategy can be found [here](#), including an overview of stage 2: '[Unite and recover for Queensland jobs](#)' (PDF) [Cairns TAFE upgrade to focus on skills for recovery](#)

- 2020 Cyber Security Strategy

The 2020 Cyber Security Strategy Industry Advisory Panel chaired by the CEO of Telstra has gathered feedback from business and the community to inform the development of the 2020 Cyber Security Strategy. Its report can be accessed at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/cyber-security/industry-advisory-panel> [Industry panel report to shape 2020 Cyber Security Strategy](#)

- Sydney Trains recruiting for apprentices

NSW Minister for Transport and Roads Andrew Constance joined Acting Chief Executive of Sydney Trains at Petersham Training College, to launch a recruitment drive for 90 new apprentices. 'The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life for thousands of people across NSW. This apprenticeship program is an opportunity for people who may have been affected to take up an apprenticeship and develop life-long skills in the rail industry', Mr Constance said.

[Record recruitment drive for new apprentices](#)

Resources for your research



Don't forget that the VOCEDplus data base can is a useful resource when you are starting up new research projects or literature reviews. It can be accessed at:

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

The VOCEDplus Pod Network allows instant access to research and a multitude of resources in a convenient and efficient platform. <http://www.voced.edu.au/pod-network>

Link to the whole list of podlets: <http://www.voced.edu.au/podlets>

Link to the feedback form: <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/contact>

NCVER has developed another product to help you with your research work. This is the VET Knowledge Bank.

Click here to start <http://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank>

A focus on Special Collections

The VOCEDplus [Special collections](#) are compiled by the VOCEDplus team to allow users to quickly browse sets of records within collections. A review of the structure and content of the Special collections has been undertaken, merging them into six thematic groups: Key research and policy by region; Program based collections; Organisation based collections; VET/Higher Education pathways; Thesis collection; and Key conferences.



New Titles in VOCEDplus

Browse all recent additions to the VOCEDplus database from the [New Titles page](#).

If you would like to know more about any Votedplus services you can contact the team at voced@edu.au

The [VOCEDplus Highlights](#) for July 2020 are now available.

Call for nominations for Chief Editor(s) of International Journal of Training Research



Dear AVETRA Member,

We are calling for nominations for Editor(s) in Chief of AVETRA's journal, the *International Journal of Training Research*. Details are contained in the attachment.

Please feel free to forward this call to people outside the association.

If you have any questions about this call, feel free to call me on 0421224474 or email s.hodge@griffith.edu.au to discuss.

Nominations close Friday, 21 August 2020, and are to be sent to me via email.

Best wishes,
Steven Hodge, AVETRA President



Call for Chief Editors
of IJTR.pdf

Now online and updated call for papers: 7th Biennial ACSPRI Social Science Methodology Conference 2020

ACSPRI

Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated

New conference dates: Tuesday December 1 – Thursday December 3, 2020; Venue: Now online via Zoom

The ACSPRI Conference is moving online for 2020. We will open the conference with an [evening plenary by David Silverman \(Professor Emeritus Goldsmiths College, London\)](#) on Tuesday December 1, and have live sessions via Zoom starting at 10:30am AEDT Wednesday 2nd and Thursday 3rd December.

Given we are online, the [call for papers](#) has been updated to include regular 15 minute presentations now live via Zoom, and the option for submitting a short video (under 5 minutes) as your submission to the conference. The student poster competition has been updated to a [short video competition](#). The deadline for paper submissions has also been extended to Thursday October 8, 2020.

The conference is organised around four themes:

1. Research paradigms and designs;
2. Research methods and techniques;
3. Research technology and tools;
4. Datasets, data collections and data archiving.

Sessions that have already been proposed include:

- Set theory in social science: data, frameworks, methods and applications
- Using historical institutionalism as a method for qualitative process mapping in comparative politics
- Telephone Surveys and Beyond in the Post-Modern Era
- Open Source Tools for Survey Data Processing and Analysis
- Arts in health methodologies
- Knowledge translation – Methodologies and methods for impactful research

Please use these themes and sessions as guides as **papers on any aspect of social science methodology will be considered**. The conference attracts a wide variety of papers from HDR students to very established researchers. We encourage researchers at all levels to submit abstracts.

The link to the page to submit your abstract is here: <https://conferences.acspri.org.au/2020/cfp>

More details about the conference are available here: <https://conferences.acspri.org.au/2020/>

Need more information: Please get in contact with Adam Zammit, Director of Operations, ACSPRI, by email conference@acspri.org.au or by telephone 03 9013 9653.

Call for OctoberVET Convenors



This year's national OctoberVET coordinators, Teresa Schmidt and Robin Shreeve, would like to invite you to convene an OctoberVET event in your area. OctoberVET is the name of a season of local events to share information and ideas about VET. OctoberVET complements AVETRA's annual conference, and as the name suggests, it runs through October (with a few events usually spilling into November as well).

OctoberVET events range in size and scope, depending on local needs and interests, and range from convivial, small-scale gatherings to larger formal events with speakers. Events can be brief (a couple of hours) or can span a whole day. In 2019, OctoberVET events ran in most Australian states. In 2020 we hope to see OctoberVET events run throughout Australia and in other countries, too. The success of OctoberVET always depends on the good-will and inventiveness of a local Convener (or group of Conveners) who are connected with local VET networks and identities and can find a focus and a space for their event.

AVETRA offers a small seed-grant for all OctoberVET events (which can be used for catering for example), and a national coordinator is on hand to discuss your ideas, and to provide advice and support. AVETRA also advertises OctoberVET events nationally to help draw attention to local events.

Some of last year's themes, listed below, will give you an idea of variety of interests gathered together under the OctoberVET banner:

- Applied Research and Innovation in TAFE
- Putting the 'Teach' Back into Teaching
- Supporting workforces during industry transition: Key elements for success
- Northern Territory: Future of VET Teaching
- Degrees of Difference (Interim Report Launch for the Australian Research Council Discovery Project Vocational Institutions, Undergraduate Degrees)
- Showcasing Applied Research in TAFE

It's time to start thinking about how to bring your local VET community together to share ideas and inspiration. Get in touch with Teresa Schmidt at t.schmidt@cqu.edu.au or Robin Shreeve at shreeverobin@yahoo.com.au to discuss your ideas and find out how to get the OctoberVET ball rolling.

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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 AVETRA e-newsletter with the latest news in the VET sector as well as VET research twice a year.
- 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 would like to subscribe for hard copies of the IJTR journal it is an extra \$20 per year.

Institutional membership is also available
<https://avetra.org.au/pages/membership.html>

We encourage you to get in contact with us about whether your institution is eligible for Institutional membership.

If you are interested in providing leads or contributing to this newsletter, please contact Josie Misko - josiemisko@ncver.edu.au