

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are critical for every VET researcher. We need to build a reputation of the highest ethical standards in the field.

This means thinking carefully in the planning stages, gaining peer review of our project ethics and ceasing the data collection process if we have any cause for concern.

Where VET researchers are working within an institution they should follow the protocols ***recommended by that institution*** for ethical clearances.

The AVETRA code of practice is viewed as an effective tool for discussion and decision-making.

The AVETRA voluntary code of practice is divided into three sections referring to the aims, conduct and reporting of research.

1. Aims of research

Research should always be directed towards the enhancement of some human good and be of benefit to the participants. In particular, it should aim to advance the knowledge of vocational education and training and the skills to practice within the field.

Research within the field should be of significance, not guided by trivial concerns, nor should it wastefully consume resources that could be used elsewhere with greater efficacy.

Research on disadvantaged groups should be designed to be for their direct benefit.

Researchers should guard against unintended outcomes that might turn well intentioned research into the reinforcement of stereotypes.

Researchers should not exploit participants for personal gain or for the benefit of their employer or sponsor.

2. The conduct of research

Approach

Researchers in the field of vocational education and training should undertake their work with integrity and honesty.

Researchers should remain informed of developments in the means of gathering and analysing data in order to advance practice.

Rigour should be enacted in the design, planning and conduct of research activities.

Harm

The conduct of research should avoid the risk of causing significant harm.

Significant potential harm to participants that should be avoided includes:

- physical or psychological harm or damage
- loss of privacy, whether through exposure to scorn or victimisation
- the release of data which could leave it open to misuse
- loss of opportunity or educational advantage as a result of participation in research
- harmful social or psychological consequences, such as loss of self-esteem
- subjects being deceived about the purposes of research

Significant harm can relate to the participants in research and to individuals and groups who might be associated with participants.

It is the responsibility of researchers to inform themselves of and to be sensitive to cultural, religious, gender and other significant differences in the planning, conduct and reporting of research.

Consent

Informed consent should be secured from all participants in research.

Consent for minors to participate in research needs to be secured from either parents or organizations that have a legal duty of care for the minors.

Being informed refers to knowledge about the purpose, procedures and outcomes of the research activities.

Participants should know when they are participating in research activities and have the right to withdraw. Participants' right to withdraw is founded in part in their right to decide for themselves by what values their life will be governed. It is not open to researchers to overrule this decision in the interests of the general good.

Research on unwitting participants is normally unacceptable. However, where the material or participants' actions are public this is acceptable provided that either the material is contextualised or reasonable efforts are made to expunge the identity of the source.

Deception of participants is seen as undermining informed consent, and should be avoided. If deceit is necessary for the purposes of inquiry, an institutional ethics committee should approve the procedures. Moreover, on completion of the

research, the participants who have been deceived should be apprised of the real purposes of the research activities.

Participants have a right to be informed of the outcomes and practical consequences of the research.

Confidentiality

Participants have the right to expect to remain anonymous. The removal of identification or presumption of investigation should assist their privacy. Where participants are required to be identified for the purposes of inquiry or are identifiable for other reasons (e.g. they are the only subjects at that site) efforts should be extended to protect their integrity and identity. If there is a risk to anonymity, participants should be warned of this prior to participation. Researchers should report findings and data in such ways that anonymity of participants is maintained and to minimise the prospects that data and findings will be taken out of context or be misused.

Primary researchers have the responsibility to ensure secondary researchers maintain the anonymity which they have established and also that the data will not be misused. This undertaking is likely to be in the form of written assurances.

3. Reporting the outcomes of research activity

Publication of research activities should take account of the rights to privacy.

In reporting research, care should be taken to minimise the likelihood of the data being misunderstood or misrepresented – that is, the context and purpose of data gathering should be made explicit. The limitations of data and deductions from the data should be made explicit. The limitations of data and deductions from the data should be reported as a matter of routine.

Researchers should recognise the uncertainty of all claims to knowledge, and in particular should recognise that justifications for research methodologies depend upon epistemological views that are disputed.

Humility, tentativeness and caution are to be exercised in the reporting of research findings, never more so than when they are likely to influence government policy and practice in vocational education and training.

When reporting findings, researchers should guard against unintended outcomes of findings on particular disadvantaged groups that might transform well intentioned research into the reinforcement of stereotypes.

It may not be desirable to publish the results of the research should there be a belief that injustice will be done to the participants or those cohorts represented by the participants.

The reporting of research should be undertaken with honesty and integrity. Researchers should report findings without concerns for the fear of or favour of those sponsoring the research.

The limitations of research designs should be declared as well as their strengths. Findings should not be overstated or misrepresented. Details of the methodology for gathering and analyses of the data should be provided with enough clarity and detail to permit knowledgeable, trained researchers to understand and interpret them.

Researchers should avoid arrangements where the dissemination of their work will be restricted, unless a case could be advanced that the public good would not be served by wide dissemination.

Authorship

Intellectual ownership is a function of creative contribution, not effort, nor formal relationship or status.

All those who make a substantive creative contribution to a product are entitled to be listed as authors of the product. This may include research assistants or students.

To be named as an author of an article or other work for publication, the individual must usually have had substantial participation in all of the following:

- concept and design, or analysis and interpretation of the data
- drafting or revising critically for important intellectual control
- final approval of the version to be published.

Anyone listed as an author must have given consent to the listing.

The contributions of others to the production of an intellectual product should be appropriately acknowledged.

It is improper to use positions of authority to appropriate the work of others or claim credit for it.