

**Welcome***Erica Smith, Convenor - RIVET*

In this second edition of the newsletter of the RIVET team we report on our first VET Research Colloquium, showcase two recent projects and include a message from a visiting scholar from England.

The RIVET team consists of five members: Ros Brennan, Annette Green, Richard Pickersgill, Peter Rushbrook and Erica Smith.

VET Research Colloquium

With the support of the Faculty of Education Research Development Fund, RIVET mounted a research colloquium in November 2003 which is now set to be a biannual event. It was held in the Wagga campus convention centre and was attended by local industry and training provider personnel as well as by staff and students of the university.

The keynote speaker Prof Thomas Deissinger was a great success, providing a clear and critical summary of the famous German "dual" apprenticeship system and some of the challenges it is experiencing. As Germany is regularly cited as a system to which Australia should aspire, it was very interesting to have this insight into the system. RIVET's own Ros Brennan and Peter Rushbrook also provided well-received presentations on their own research: Ros on on-line learning and Peter on his historical analysis of a training tragedy at the Kapooka Army base near Wagga during the Second World War.

Associate Professor Andy Smith from the Faculty of Commerce opened the afternoon session, on research practice, with a talk on VET research based on his experiences as General Manager, Research, at NCVET. Two research students gave presentations on their own research and this was followed with a brainstorming session where students and staff raised questions about research which were addressed by RIVET members.

A participant's view of the Colloquium*Catherine Bindels, Postgraduate Research Student and Teacher, North Coast Institute of TAFE*

My expectations of the colloquium were not only met but exceeded as I was able to interact with various people directly involved with VET research in Australia as well as with a visiting Professor from Germany whose talk compared their system with that of Australia's. Additionally there were opportunities for me to meet people who had assisted me in my learning as a distance education student in my postgraduate studies. On the whole I found the speakers excellent and their topics very interesting, informative and relevant.

After a wonderful lunch and more interaction, it was the turn of those who were in the process of completing their research papers and a chance to comment on how they were progressing. I believe that much was learnt here and I was able to take away many ideas on how I could improve. Finally the highlight for me was the opportunity to have all my questions concerning research answered informally by the 'experts'. This part of the day was by far the most valuable for me as I am hoping to be able to further the research skills I have learnt.

Visiting Scholar from England – February to April 2004

I'm Sandra Rowney and I'm looking forward to visiting Australia and meeting the VET team in Charles Sturt University. I work as a Research Fellow at City College Norwich which is part of Anglia Polytechnic University, and met up with Dr Erica Smith over the internet. We had a mutual research interest in the way teenage full-time students combine part-time work with their studies. One email led to another and has resulted in this exciting opportunity to visit. My research over the past two years has looked at a case study in the South Essex area and included both quantitative and qualitative studies of the students earning and learning patterns. My research findings will make an interesting comparison with the Australian findings. Other research has included; managing the university partnership, mapping course provision, local flexible learning provision, national computer skills training, academic credit transfer and communication skills.

Norfolk is my home county where I've been lecturing in local Further Education colleges for the last ten years or more. I've taught and trained a wide range of students, ages and abilities, including Further Education Colleges, Prison Education, Adult Education, Management Training and Business Start-Up Training. My subjects have included Business Studies and related subjects such as Job Skills and Computer Applications. I've also spent a few years running the Norfolk Enterprise Training Agency to assist local entrepreneurs. By the time I return to Blighty I'm hoping to have a good working knowledge of research, education and training in Australia that will give me a richer perspective when I'm back at City College Norwich.

The development of employability skills in novice workers*Project team: Erica Smith, Paul Comyn, Dawn Edwards and Sue Erickson.*

This research project, funded by the National Research and Evaluation Committee, examined how teenage workers in Australia developed their employability skills in their first formal jobs, either as part-time student workers or as school-leavers. Case studies were carried out in 2002 in twelve Australian enterprises, of varying size, in four States. Industry areas included fast food, retail, hairdressing, manufacturing and newspaper delivery. In each case study, the following staff were interviewed: senior managers and/or human resource

management staff, site managers, supervisors, novice workers themselves, and co-workers working alongside them.

From the case studies, the research team identified what they saw as the six most effective methods for developing employability skills. These were:

- Comprehensive training systems - systems for developing technical skills were also generally effective in developing employability skills.
- Regular team meetings – these involved new workers in the organisation and could also be used specifically to address employability skills issues.
- Performance management approach – the performance management systems for junior staff foregrounded employability skills, and the performance indicators for managers foregrounded their role in developing employability skills in novice workers.
- Third party approach – exemplified by, but not restricted to, Group Training Companies (who employ apprentices and trainees and 'hire them out' to host employers), third parties could provide an additional source of employability skills development as well as intervening in difficult situations.
- Buddying or mentoring systems – pairing the new worker either with a co-worker or a more senior member of staff was highly effective, so long as the partner was selected carefully.
- Supportive environment – one of the most important features of a workplace where employability skills were well developed was tolerance and respect.

Novice workers themselves used a range of approaches to develop their employability skills. They asked questions, practised active listening, sought out more helpful staff as mentors, developed working relationships with managers and mixed socially with other staff. They also sought to make a good impression, smiling a lot, turning up to work early, asking for extra tasks, seeking feedback, and learning when to offer suggestions and when to keep quiet. They developed systems for organising their work and took advantage of off the job training opportunities.

Four additional processes were proposed as a result of the research, which might assist in developing teenagers' employability skills through work:

- A 'work experience' model – preparing employers for a novice worker in much the same way as they are prepared for work experience.
- Individual induction programs – encouraging employers to develop six-month plans for their new staff would enable a range of experiences to be planned.
- Project learning – engaging novice workers in authentic but small projects, which are of immediate use to the workplace, could improve novice workers' confidence.
- Structured training for supervisors, buddies, and co-workers – such training needs to include an understanding of what it is like to begin working life as well as suggested processes for assisting the development of employability skills.

The full report can be downloaded at www.ncver.edu.au

Smith, E. & Comyn, P. (2003). *The development of employability skills in novice workers through employment*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

Mid term Review of the Blueprint for Implementation of Partners in a Learning Culture: Australia's national strategy for Indigenous vocational education and training

Project team: Professor Stephen Kemmis, Marianne Atkinson, Roslin Brennan and Casey Atkinson.

The Mid-term Review, funded by ANTA, was intended to discover whether *Partners in Learning Culture*, the national strategy for VET for Indigenous Australians, is being implemented, whether it needs renewed attention, and whether it needs changing.

The Review was conducted across Australia with team members conducting national consultations with different groups of stakeholders involved in VET for Indigenous people. The Review's findings suggest:

- *Partners in a Learning Culture* is being implemented although progress is slow, patchy and sometimes unsupported
- *Partners in a Learning Culture* needs renewed and concerted emphasis in many parts of the VET system
- some elements of the existing strategy need to be modified to be more responsive to the needs of Indigenous Australians, particularly those in rural and remote areas
- the successful implementation of *Partners in a Learning Culture* requires the creation of a different culture within VET, different kinds of social and organisational relationships, and different kinds of ideas about identity than exist in many places in Australia today.

One of the main findings of the Mid-term Review is that the design, development and delivery of training by ITABs, Training Package developers and reviewers and RTOs must:

- access and respond to Indigenous advice about training
- make clear, definite and determined responses to the needs and circumstances of different Indigenous people and communities
- show explicit and proactive evidence of respect for, recognition of, and responsiveness to Indigenous people and communities.

The results of the Review have informed the development of the National VET Strategy 2004-2010.

To be put on the RIVET mailing list, email vetresearch@csu.edu.au or write to RIVET, School of Education, Charles Sturt University, Locked Bag 588, Wagga Wagga 2678, Australia