



Welcome

Associate Professor Erica Smith, Convenor – RIVET

2005 is an exciting and challenging year in VET as the policy landscape changes with the assumption by the Department of Education, Science and Training of the activities formerly carried out by the Australian National Training Authority. For practitioners, big changes include the implementation of the new Training Package in Training and Assessment and the revised standards for RTOs included in the changes to the Australian Quality Training Framework. For VET academics at CSU, as well as our many research activities, we are busy revising our Bachelor and Graduate Diploma courses in VET, in which we are embedding the new Cert IV, as well as introducing a new VET focus in the Master of Education. Many VET commentators bemoan change as they see old certainties disappear. But an active research program enables us to examine the real effects of change and opens our eyes to new and positive practices and policies. As a major grant-winning and publishing unit, RIVET shares its research work with others through this newsletter.

The RIVET team consists of five members: Ros Brennan Kemmis, Annette Green, Richard Pickersgill, Peter Rushbrook and Erica Smith, with support staff John Rosser and Chris Goss.

Next RIVET Research Colloquium – Friday November 11 2005

With the support of the Faculty of Education Research Development Fund, RIVET will be holding a half-day research colloquium at the Wine and Food Industry Training Centre. The colloquium begins at 9:00am and is open to all interested people.

The program, built around the theme of "Responding to changing learning needs in your community", will include a keynote address from Dr Shanti Wong of Brimbank/Melton Local Learning and Employment Network, who will be providing an insight into Learning Communities. Three local training providers will form a panel discussing how they respond to changing learning needs in their communities. RIVET's own Erica Smith and Annette Green will be presenting their NCVER research on how school leavers' workplace experiences affect their career pathways. Further information is available on our website.

To register your attendance at the colloquium (which is free, as support is provided by the Faculty of Education Research Development fund) please phone 02-69332335 or email your name and contact details to vetresearch@csu.edu.au by Tuesday 8 November.

Report on RIVET Research Colloquium June 2005

The fourth RIVET Community of Scholars research colloquium was held on the 17th of June 2005. The theme of the day was 'Researching Practice' and the three presentations developed this theme in a variety of ways. The Colloquium was opened by Professor Paul Burnett, the Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research and Graduate Training. Paul spoke of both national and international changes in the research landscape and the effects these changes may have on the future of research activities and the ways they are funded and disseminated. He spoke of a shift from research being rewarded for grants and publications towards reward for impact on industry and practice. He said that events such as the Colloquium served to disseminate research findings to end-users in industry and training in the region. Research evaluation, in the proposed new landscape, will increasingly involve end-users. Of course we are already used to this in VET in Australia with the excellent dissemination work undertaken by the NCVER.

As in previous colloquia, an international speaker was invited, this time Dr Matts Mattsson from the Stockholm Institute of Education in Sweden. Matts presented an interesting model of practitioner related research where he depicted the 'borderlines' of the University as an academy and the potential intersections of research and practice through a series of models. He took us on a journey through the different philosophical models underpinning this model, leading us through to an example of flexibly arranged practitioner research in a Swedish setting which showed the model in action. As the links with industry in the model resonated with the local perspective, much value was seen in Matts' enlightening presentation which is being followed up with further discussions and interaction.

CSU researchers Ros Brennan Kemmis and Marianne Thurling then presented the findings from their NCVER funded research into Indigenous Staffing in VET. Ros explained a series of tabulated statistical findings and Marianne's narration provided an insight into the meaning of these findings in indigenous communities and realities. Although many of the findings were rather daunting and sad, the presentation also pointed to potential for growth and improvement essential to the future of the high indigenous participation in VET.

Tourism and Hospitality teacher from Riverina Institute of TAFE, Melanie Bowman, was invited to present as a VET practitioner. Melanie, a former student in Charles Sturt University's Bachelor of VET course, provided a practitioner perspective of the learning journey which saw her transition from her early interest and career in the travel and tourism industry through her studies at University to her current practice as a teacher in VET.

An Aussie view of the British VET system

Erica Smith

While on sabbatical leave earlier this year in England and Europe I was fortunate to be able to meet with many helpful people who were able to give me insights into the differences between the ways in which different countries manage their VET systems. In this article I will focus on the British system. In fact I will confine the discussion to England as there are some significant differences between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the English system. As well as the difference between the UKL countries, I also noticed while I was there that the nine major English regions are becoming increasingly important in policy planning; not so significant as the Australian States and Territories, but moving that way.

The English system looks superficially similar to ours, with National Vocational qualifications (NVQs) bearing some relationship to our Training Package qualifications. However NVQs are less significant in the English system because there remain many pre-existing qualifications (for example City and Guilds) and some employers are still mistrustful of the new qualifications. The apprenticeship system is much smaller, partly because the old apprenticeship system suffered a severe blow in the 1980s with the major recession of that period, and partly because the Modern Apprenticeship system which was a sort of parallel to our traineeship system was not very popular for various reasons. Since April this year the 'old' and 'Modern' systems have been brought together under, simply, the term 'apprenticeships'. There are around 130,000 apprentices in England which is a relatively small number for its size. One reason for this is that apprenticeships are only open to people under the age of 25. A further problem with apprenticeships is that NVQs do not have the underpinning knowledge of our Training Package qualifications, and so apprenticeships have a 'framework' with the NVQ, a knowledge course and a 'key skills' course. Very often apprentices complete their NVQs but don't complete the two latter components and so don't finish the apprenticeship.

Sector Skills Councils (managed by the Sector Skills Development Agency) parallel our skills councils and have been recently 'reborn' from a series of previous entities. They are much better resourced than our skills councils, although some are described as 'fragile', and play a big role in some national initiatives include the Employer Training Program which funds NVQs for existing workers in industry. Unlike Australia the focus of these programs is really on assisting the worker not the company; companies can only receive funding for those workers who don't already have at least an NVQ level 2 qualification.

FE Colleges are rather different from our TAFE colleges. They run a much wider range of programs with less focus on

the purely vocational. There is a big emphasis on 'widening participation' with funding available for various schemes to encourage access by equity groups. The FE colleges can also offer Foundation Degrees which form the first two years of a full degree. They are supposed to be vocational, and workplace based, and there seem to be some significant challenges associated with their implementation. But the Blair government's target of 50% participation in 'higher education' for all people under 30 means that Foundation Degrees will probably become more widespread. As in Australia there are many private providers but they are primarily involved in 'workbased training' ie on the job apprenticeships.

Like Australia, the VET system continually reorganises itself; one recent change has been the abolition of the Learning and Skills Development Agency which fulfilled some of the duties undertaken by ANTA in Australia. Its functions are being distributed among other agencies. An Adult Learning Inspectorate in England audits VET providers in a similar way to OFSTED for schools. These audits are much more comprehensive than RTO audits in Australia. They cover issues such as the quality of teaching and learning. A big government focus in England at present is 'subject specific pedagogy' ie tailoring teaching to the nature of different discipline or industry areas.

In general I felt that the Australian system for all its faults is more effective and certainly more nationally consistent than the English system. But it is certainly the case that VET systems grow from countries' histories and cultures and are difficult to compare.

2005 Conference Papers from RIVET members

- Smith, E. (2005). Getting down and dirty down under: Battling over trainer qualifications in Australia. *Sixth International Conference on HRD Research and Practice across Europe*, Leeds Metropolitan University, 25-27 May.
- Smith, E., Smith, A., Pickersgill, R. & Rushbrook, P. (2005). Why Australian companies are turning to qualification-based training. *Sixth International Conference on HRD*, Leeds Metropolitan University, 25-27 May.
- Smith, A. & Smith, E. (2005). Learning at a distance: how distance education students use their learning materials. *What a Difference Pedagogy Makes: Researching Lifelong Learning and Teaching*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Stirling, 24-26 June.
- Green, A. (2005) Changing direction to make a difference: New voices in VET in Schools, 2005 AVETRA Conference, Brisbane, 13 - 15 April.
- Brennan Kemmis, R (2005). Pedagogy in the on line learning environment. *Discovering VET pedagogy*. Melbourne: TAFE Development Centre.

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