

Supporting vocational education and training
providers in building capability for the future

CONSORTIUM RESEARCH PROGRAM

NEWSLETTER

Edition 8, January 2008

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Welcome

Welcome to the final newsletter for the consortium research program: *Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future*. This final edition of the newsletter provides a wrap up of the consortium research program, an overview of the research forums and a summary of the research activities to date.

Message from the director

The work of the consortium is winding down now after two years of research activity. It has been an exhausting but very rewarding time. I would like to thank sincerely all those around Australia who participated in various ways in this large research program – the principal researchers and their research teams within the consortium, the associate researchers in the field who helped with information/intelligence, arrangements, gathering data, etc., the VET practitioners in RTOs – both public and private – who participated so willingly in various research exercises as the research program unfolded, those in positions of authority who gave us permission to undertake data gathering within their organisations, and so on. On behalf of the Consortium team, I cannot thank you enough. I only hope that we have done justice to all of the great work that is going on in RTOs across the nation, and that our products are able to stimulate some new thinking and practice and positively inform policy-making at all levels of the VET sector. Roger Harris.



Directors and principal researchers of the consortium research program at NCVER, Adelaide.

NCVER research forums

NCVER and the consortium's principal researchers have disseminated the findings of the research program (as a component of research activity 9) at seven one-day forums in Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Albury. In each forum there were three presentations given by different members of the consortium. The presentations included an overview of the key messages and then two presentations on individual research activities. Forum participants also had the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the implications of the research findings. The feedback on these forums has been very positive and a summary by Hugh Guthrie of NCVER, will be published shortly.

Research activities

The following paragraphs provide a synopsis of the research activities of the consortium research program.

RA2: Career pathways

As organisations continually restructure, so peoples' working lives are reshaped to take into account these new workplace realities. This research examines how staff in the VET sector understood careers and how they unfold during their working lives

Released

- The report for research activity 7: *Approaches for sustaining and building management and leadership capacity in vocational education and training providers* has recently been released. Go to <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1802.html> to download or purchase your copy.
- The report for research activity 3: *Quality is the key: Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training* was released last year. It can be accessed at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1710.html>
- Both reports are accompanied by literature reviews and additional resources and tools.
- The literature review for research activity 2: *'No one grows up saying they want to work in VET, do they?' A study of career pathways in VET* by Michele Simons, Roger Harris, Berwyn Clayton, Phoebe Palmieri, Val Pudney and Sue Gelade is now available at <http://consortiumresearchprogram.net.au/>
- *Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the workforce: Research overview* by Roger Harris, Berwyn Clayton, Clive Chappell is now available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1827.html>. This overview provides a summary of the findings of the consortium research program.

in VET.

Some of the key messages from the research are:

- For many participants, the VET workforce represents a significant career choice and a 'second career'
- The ways in which people commence their careers in VET have changed over time: from permanent to casual; and from single to dual jobs
- VET staff tend to move around within the sector. These moves include promotions, project work or changing from teaching to management roles
- Over the next five years moves out of the sector are expected from long serving employees as well as those who have only been recently employed
- The concept of career is understood as progression and promotion, as well as a vehicle for learning and personal development
- Most respondents viewed their working lives in the sector as careers and expressed satisfaction with their working lives as careers.



Clive Chappell and Michele Simons

RA3: Teaching, learning & assessment

Through a literature review, discussion paper, consultations and field research, this project has identified critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment to inform and influence practice in the rapidly changing VET environment. The key messages include:

- Quality is the most critical issue in teaching, learning and assessment for the majority of VET stakeholders
- Perceptions of quality vary from a focus on quality systems and indicators to a focus on creating cultures to stimulate continuous improvement. Ideally, both perspectives are needed
- VET practitioners need to extend their existing skills to meet the challenges of the new VET environment
- Work-based learning with its emphasis on coaching, mentoring, industry release, work shadowing and the participation in a variety of networks is a successful tool in developing the skills of the VET practitioner
- All VET stakeholders will need to adopt innovative approaches to their various roles, developing a balance between innovation and compliance
- Partnerships and networks support the achievement of high-quality teaching, learning and assessment by encouraging the exchange of information, ideas, techniques and approaches between VET practitioners, their clients and industry representatives.

RA4: Cultures & structures

This study examined the ways in which structure and culture of RTOs impact upon work team and whole-of-organisation capability. Through a literature review, interviews, focus groups and a scan of RTO documents, this research identified how training providers are transforming their structures and cultures to meet the new demands being placed upon them by key stakeholders and clients.

Key messages emanating from the research are:

- Differences in size, age, geography, independence and provider type mean RTOs operating in VET are unique in both cultural and structural terms
- Public providers have initiated extensive change in response to external pressures for them to be more competitive, business-like, responsive and client focused.
- There is general acceptance within RTOs that both structural and cultural

Forthcoming

- The report for research activity 4: *A study in difference: Structures and cultures in registered training organisations* has been reviewed and is being readied for submission.
- The report for research activity 5 is being reviewed.
- The reports for research activity 6 and 8 have been completed, and are about to be reviewed.
- The report for research activity 2 is in preparation.

Visit the website

For products of the consortium or news of research, visit

<http://consortiumresearchprogram.net.au/>

changes are critical, fruitful and need to be adopted in an ongoing way

- Leadership is a critical factor in achieving positive outcomes from change within RTOs.

RA5: Learning through work

This research examines contemporary understandings of the connections between learning and work in order to inform the development of an organisational tool that RTOs may use to identify environmental factors that can lead to greater learning at work.

- This tool can be used to survey staff to create a baseline of staff perceptions of the learning environment in the organisation
- This information can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the learning environment and target specific factors where positive interventions could improve the learning environment of staff
- The instrument can be used to evaluate the impact of interventions
- The instrument can also be used as an internal and external benchmarking tool across divisions and RTOs to identify similarities and differences in the ways staff perceive the learning environment of their organisations.

The instrument and guidelines for its use will soon be available on the consortium website <http://consortiumresearchprogram.net.au/>

RA6: Human resource practices

This research examines the current state of human resource management in public and private RTOs. It also considers how human resource management in RTOs is changing and whether it is becoming a more central, strategic concern for business planning in the VET sector.



Andy Smith

If human resource management is to be strategic:

- Give human resource managers a more strategic role by including them on the senior executive teams of larger RTOs
- Make human resource management a key element of the business processes in RTOs
- Use less bureaucratic and more sophisticated approaches to recruitment, selection, performance management and training
- Build on the positive employee relations climate by introducing more flexible working arrangements.

RA7: Educational leadership

This study examines the existing and potential strategies for sustaining and building greater levels of management and leadership capability in training organisations. 125 individuals employed in 30 training organisations across Australia were interviewed as part of this study.

The key messages are:

- VET providers are well aware of the urgent need to develop the leadership talent that presently exists to guarantee both the current and future success of their organisations



Hugh Guthrie and Victor Callan at NCVER, Adelaide.

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- The programs and initiatives used to build the existing and future management and leadership talent are still in the very early development stages in most VET organisations
- Existing managers and leadership development programs are often fragmentary and short-term, and not focused on longer-term corporate strategies and needs
- VET organisations need to embrace the wide range of available approaches to develop their current and potential leaders and managers
- Currently, there is considerable duplication of effort in developing resources and tools for meeting managers' professional development needs across the sector.

RA8: Decision making

The investigation was concerned with examining the ways in which RTOs make decisions about the development of their workforces and how those decisions relate to the choices that individuals within the RTO make for themselves. This study has explored the interaction of decisions at these two levels for the first time. The research showed:

- Public sector RTOs are working in a context of tension between strong pressures for them to operate like private, for-profit organisations as well as a return to greater central control over workforce development issues
- Non-public RTOs are much smaller and therefore more likely to operate on a relatively informal basis that draws on personal relationships. Many of these smaller RTOs are also experiencing rapid growth and finding their existing workforce development systems increasingly inadequate
- Regardless of the size or status of an RTO, senior management concerns about workforce development almost exclusively focus on the development of their teaching workforce
- The development of individuals is increasingly being linked to their organisation's performance management approach or towards the implementation of new regulatory frameworks rather than towards building the skills or capabilities of staff
- The role of the middle-level manager in medium to large RTOs is recognised as both difficult and problematic. However, these managers play a significant part in implementing workforce development strategies – a role that is currently under-recognised and under-resourced.



Geof Hawke at
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 Technology,
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Future activities

The roll out of materials will continue into 2008 as will evaluation of the research outcomes and process.