

# NCVER's Building Researcher Capacity Program Community of Practice Scholarship Newsletter

November 2011

## What is a Community of Practice scholarship?



Berwyn Clayton is the Director of WERC and helped found the CoP program.

Each year, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) provides **Community of Practice (CoP)** scholarships to up to 10 novice VET researchers. The scholarships aim to **build the research capacity of the VET sector** by introducing VET practitioners to the research process. The CoP participants are supported by NCVER, the Work-based Education Research Centre (WERC) at Victoria University, experienced mentors who are assigned by the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA), and their workplaces.

These novice VET researchers spend 12 months developing their research skills through the community of practice; the end result is a paper on a relevant workplace issue or problem. The CoP introduces participants and their employer organisations to the value of using research and data to make evidence-based decisions and **solve real work problems**.

The scholarship winners are chosen by a selection panel made up of representatives from NCVER, AVETRA, WERC, Adult Learning Australia, TAFE Directors Australia, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, and Group Training Australia.

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*The Community of Practice aims to introduce VET practitioners and their employer organisations to the value of using research and data to make 'evidence-based' decisions and solve real work problems.*

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## One participant's experience

We spoke to past CoP participant, **Regan Harding, Business Capability Consultant from TAFE NSW North Coast Institute** and her manager, Heather McGregor, Director of Community Development & Aboriginal Engagement, about the benefits of the CoP. Regan participated in the 2008 program. She looked at the perceptions of practitioners and learners in an early VET program for Year 8 to 10 Aboriginal students, VTracks.

VTracks is a program at the North Coast Institute that aims to increase high school completions and promote pathways to VET. It provides Aboriginal students with VET 'taster' opportunities, accredited certificates I and II units and opportunities for supported workplace-based learning.

Regan's research has **shaped ongoing evaluation** of the VTracks program and **development of policy and practice** at the North Coast Institute. It also demonstrated the role research can play in identifying ways to keep the program relevant. More broadly, the research contributed to a common understanding of Aboriginal students' pathways to VET across both the VET and school sectors.

Since participating in the CoP, Regan has had the opportunity to contribute to a number of projects, including the Dusseldorp Skills Forum's 2009 *Keeping up* report and also the NSW House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. Regan is also part of a research team that is looking at professional obsolescence of VET practitioners.



*"I felt a personal responsibility to communicate the importance and value of the research with my colleagues."*

Regan Harding,  
2008 CoP participant

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*"The research has been valuable for providing evidence and integrity to a new program. Not only has the research been beneficial to our Institute, it has been great personal development for Regan."*

*Heather McGregor, Director of Community Development & Aboriginal Engagement, TAFE NSW North Coast Institute*

It is a condition of the CoP that participants have a **supportive employer and workplace**. Employers are expected to make a 'matching' contribution, which includes time release for participants to undertake the research and attend compulsory workshops, as well as a monetary contribution to support interaction with the community of practice and the broader research community. Supportive employers who engage with the research are **pivotal to the success of scholarship** holders. Regan had strong support from her employers. They were aware of her deadlines, understood the requirements of the program and provided valuable networks. This employer support was crucial to Regan's successful completion of the project because it provided critical motivation to get the project done.

## Introducing the 2011 participants

NCVER received 42 applications for the 2011 CoP scholarships, of which 10 were selected. The scholarship winners began their project in May, when they came together in Melbourne for a two-day workshop to narrow their research question and begin thinking of ways they would collect their data.

The new researchers are:

- **Anne Bowden from TAFE NSW New England Institute**, who will examine the attitudes of trainers and assessors on the impacts on the completion rates of Aboriginal students.
- **Rodney Towney from TAFE NSW Western Institute**, who is also looking at the completion rates of Aboriginal students, with a focus on students' attitudes and reasons for non-completion.
- **Ibrahim Diab from Victoria University**, who is interested in improving the outcomes of students with low literacy from African backgrounds. He will interview employers to find out what would persuade employers to provide work experience and employment options to those students.
- **David Gutteridge from Government Education and Training International in Tasmania**, who will look at the integration of adult international VET students into their local community.
- **Kathy Piccardi from the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE**, who is examining the role of enterprise learning consultants and how they contribute to VET institutions.
- **Natalie Jaques from the Central Institute of Technology**, who is looking at the role casual VET practitioners and how they can contribute to VET institutions.
- **Tracey Singh from the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE**, who is examining how enterprise registered training organisations can use collaboration to improve training.
- **Emma Lamond from the Australian Industry Group**, who will investigate to what extent employers make use of formal learning compared with non-formal approaches.
- **Penelope Johnston from TAFE SA Regional Institute**, who will look at the development of voluntary carbon inventories and carbon management strategies.
- **Kelly Bramhill from the Australian Institute of Management South Australia**, who will look at the preparedness of businesses to operate in a carbon constrained economy, and the role of VET within this.

A second workshop, held in October, showed the researchers how to analyse their data and write an occasional paper to present the findings. An update of how this year's participants are going will be provided in the next newsletter.



Bridget Wibrow is a Research Officer at NCVER and manages the CoP program.



Geri Pancini is a Research Fellow at WERC. She provides support to participants throughout the program.



Sarojni Choy is a member of AVETRA executive and is responsible for the mentor program.

## Published CoP papers

Researcher	Title
<b>2008 participants</b>	
<b>Regan Harding</b>	<i>Early VET programs for young Aboriginal learners: Perceptions of practitioners and young people.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2196.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2196.html</a>
<b>Mark Mossuto</b>	<i>Problem based learning: student engagement, learning and contextualised problem solving.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2198.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2198.html</a>
<b>Simon Hamm</b>	<i>What's wrong with a career in hospitality? An examination of student choice.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2217.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2217.html</a>
<b>Sherridan Maxwell</b>	<i>Using rubrics to support graded assessment in a competency-based environment.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2236.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2236.html</a>
<b>2009 participants</b>	
<b>Ann Leske</b>	<i>Blind date: An exploration of potential partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2307.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2307.html</a>
<b>Jeanette Learned</b>	<i>Measures of student success: Can we predict module completion rates?</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2310.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2310.html</a>
<b>Kath Curry</b>	<i>Does support for VET reduce employee churn? A case study in local government.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2304.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2304.html</a>
<b>Ruth Walker</b>	<i>Training and assessment (TAA40104) in community providers in New South Wales: Participant intentions and outcomes.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2275.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2275.html</a>
<b>Sandra Cotton</b>	<i>Breaking down the barriers: Strategies to assist apprentices with a learning disability.</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2283.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2283.html</a>
<b>Alan Woods</b>	<i>Moving the fence posts: learning preferences of part-time agricultural students</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2361.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2361.html</a>
<b>Cheryle Barker</b>	<i>Embedding learning from formal training into sustained behavioural change in the workplace</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2405.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2405.html</a>
<b>Coralie Daniels</b>	<i>What is a practical, effective and sustainable approach to leadership development at the Canberra Institute of Technology?</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2417.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2417.html</a>
<b>2010 participants</b>	
<b>Malcolm Reason</b>	<i>Enabling the effective take-up of e-learning by custodial officers</i> <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2427.html">http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2427.html</a>

The papers from the remaining 2010 participants will be coming out later this year. Keep an eye out on the NCVER website, or subscribe to NCVER News at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/subscribe.html> to find out when these papers are published.

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## Do you have a problem in your workplace? Could research help you solve it?

If you know a VET practitioner, who is interested in developing their research skills in ways that are relevant to the workplace, encourage them to apply for a Communities of Practice research scholarship grant today.

Funding of \$4000 is available to new researchers to conduct a small-scale research project relating to a workplace issue over 12 months. Applicants must have the support of their employer who must be willing to match funding. Participants will have a year to complete the project, starting in April 2012.

**Applications close 6 February 2012.**

Visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/opportunities.html> for more information and the selection criteria.

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## 'No Frills' turns 21 in 2012!

NCVER will be celebrating the 21st National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference, 'No Frills' in Adelaide on 11–13 July 2012.

This event provides an excellent opportunity for new and experienced researchers to share their research in a relaxed environment.

As part of the conference program, members of the 2012 Community of Practice will have a chance to discuss their research and receive input from conference delegates on their topics and methodology.

**To register your interest in 'No Frills' 2012 email [events@ncver.edu.au](mailto:events@ncver.edu.au)**

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and Workplace Relations**