



Monthly e-Newsletter – September 2008

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EDITORIAL

It seems that VET and school education have taken the education headlines all around the country in the past month or so. Soon enough, higher education will stake out the front pages – the Cutler report is just days away and the Bradley Review is due to table a tome in October. If you are in a dual sector uni your head will be spinning.

We are gearing up for the AAIR Forum in Canberra from 19-21 November. You might like to limber up by looking through the list of papers presented at previous AAIR Forums (and Fora to you, too). The listing is integrated with papers published in the *AAIR Journal*. You can graze by author: <http://www.aair.org.au/jir/html/AuthA.htm>

or by title:
<http://www.aair.org.au/jir/html/TitleA.htm>

I’m always grateful for any items you think will be of interest. Subject to space, and timelines (yours and mine) we can run job ads and event notices of interest to AAIRies. Feel free to contact me at: [rob](mailto:rob@sharpwords.com.au) with [@sharpwords.com.au](http://sharpwords.com.au)

IT IS WRITTEN

Check out the proceedings from the ACER’s 13th Research Conference held in Brissie in August: http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2008_ConfProceedings.pdf

I liked James Athanasou’s (UTS) paper, ‘The intersection of adolescent’s interests and national needs – implications for educators’. He observes the relationship between interest/preference and subject selection, and how student interests don’t match the economy’s needs. His paper put me in mind of a wee poem by 13th century poet, Rumi:

Love for certain work

Traveling is as refreshing for some
as staying at home is for others.

Solitude in a mountain place
fills with companionship for this one,
and weariness for that one.

This person loves being in charge
of the workings of a community.

This other one loves the ways
heated iron can be shaped with a hammer.

Each has been given a strong desire
for certain work, a love for those motions,
and all motion is love.

The way sticks and pieces of dead grass and leaves
shift about in the wind
and with the directions of rain and puddle-water
on the ground, those motions
are all following the love
they have been given.

AAIR Committee members

- President:** Ivan Skaines, University of Western Sydney
- Immediate Past President:** Wendy Marchment, Griffith University
- Vice President:** Josephine Palermo, Deakin University
- Hon Secretary:** Dean Ward, Edith Cowan University
- Hon Treasurer and Membership Secretary:** Marian Thakur, Monash University

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- Don Johnston, Southern Cross University
- Dave Marr, Australian National University
- Andrea Matulick, University of South Australia
- Rob Sheehan, Sharp Words Editing & Writing Services (Victoria)
- AAIR website:** <http://www.aair.org.au/>



19-21 November
Hyatt Hotel, Canberra

Enhancing Quality Research: a Global Perspective

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

The preliminary program is now available on the Forum website:
<http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aaair2008/program.php>.

Early Bird registration closes on 30 September

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Tuesday 18th

Writing an Academic Paper.

One day workshop before the Forum. The venue is University House, ANU.

The facilitator is none other than Dr Gavin Moodie, Griffith University. (Gavin's professional page is here: <http://www.griffith.edu.au/vc/ate/moodie/>). More information on the Forum website.

Wednesday 19th

Bradley Reforms Panel Discussion ♦ Risk Management Workshop ♦ Load Management Workshop
Data Warehousing SIG ♦ Survey SIG ♦ DIISR SIG

Thursday 20th

Keynote: Professor Tim Brown, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), La Trobe University

Measuring Research Performance in Different Disciplines

Winners and Losers: the Legacy of the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK – *Professor John Taylor*

Predictive Modelling of Undergraduate Student Intake – *Anatoli Lightfoot*

Developing a framework for tracking & benchmarking research performance at UTS – *Robyn Peutherer, Michael Rothery*

Using large group methods in change, planning and quality management processes: what you may not know –

Christie Fullarton, Dr Josie Palermo

Enhancing the Quality of Research Student Experience in a University – *Dr Jane Hobson*

Friday 21st

Keynote: Ms Leanne Harvey, General Manager of Research Excellence, ARC

Research Excellence – Assessment and Evaluation in the new ERA

A Qualitative Study of TAFE Students' Exit from TAFE Programs – *Catherine Buchanan*

Benchmarking using Surveys: Look Before You Leap – *Wendy Marchment*

Business Intelligence Development: Compare & Contrast Two Higher Education Institutions in Australia – *Margaret Orth*

The Forum is hosted by Australian National University

Conference Dinner sponsored by Australian Corporate Software

Forum Partners:

Australian Catholic University ♦ Australian National University ♦ Curtin University of Technology

Monash University ♦ Queensland University of Technology ♦ University of Sydney

University of Western Australia ♦ University of Western Sydney

**23rd and 24th September, 2008
Conference and Function Centre,
University of Wollongong**

The conference is the ideal place for delegates from HE institutions, primarily in Australia and New Zealand, to meet and explore new horizons across Data Warehousing, Business Intelligence and Performance Management.

This once a year event brings together higher education delegates for two days of learning and networking. Take the opportunity to cultivate relationships with peers and exchange data warehousing expertise.

The *AAIR Data Warehousing Special Interest Group*, *Cognos – an IBM Company*, *Cortell* and *SPSS* proudly support the 2008 AAIR Higher Education Data Warehousing Conference.

Registration of \$300 includes dinner.

Conference website:
<http://www.uow.edu.au/services/pi/ConferenceDetails/index.html>

For further information contact Nikita Atkins, Director, Performance Indicators, University of Wollongong:

- Phone: +61 2 42215040
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OTHER PLACES TO GO – OTHER THINGS TO DO

**SEAAIR 2008
4-6 November, 2008
Novotel, Surabaya, Indonesia**

The gloriously acronymed South East Asian Association for Institutional Research is holding its 8th annual conference in Indonesia's second city, Surabaya. The list of abstracts accepted is varied and the list of full papers accepted is growing.

The conference theme is Institutional Capacity Building toward Higher Education Competitive Advantage.

Check it all out at: <http://seair2008.com/>

**AUSTAFE conference
1-3 October, 2008
TAFESA Regency Campus, Adelaide**

AUSTAFE bring together senior managers in the TAFE sector. They have a lot to discuss this year.

The content looks grand to me and there are some interesting variations on the standard format for conferences. In addition to the welcome cocktail party and the conference dinner there are things like the Virtual Conference Café, Conversation Café, Ideogoras and Nano-talks by thought leaders.

The conference theme is Forging Dynamic Futures. This divides into four sub-themes that seem right on the money given where the VET policy environment is heading at pace:

- leadership
- business sustainability
- innovation in teaching and learning
- social inclusion.

Conference details are here:
<http://www.austafeconference.org.au/course/view.php?id=6>

**ATN Assessment conference
20-21 November, 2008
Hawke Building, City West Campus
University of South Australia**

The Australian Technology Network of Universities is holding this one. The conference theme is: Engaging students in assessment. Topics will include:

- transforming assessment and feedback for student engagement
- discipline-based practices in engaging students in assessment
- using technology to enhance engagement in assessment.

Linking engagement and assessment is an idea worth pursuing. The conference blog is already doing some of the chasing – if you can't go to the conference, the blog is a pretty decent second prize in its own right: <http://unisaatn08.blogspot.com/>

But if you can go, early bird registrations are open until 3 October. You can track down the details at: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/atnassessment08/>

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES AND BLOGGIES

Economics in the classroom

Andrew Leigh stopped blogging a couple of months ago when he moved from the Economics Program at ANU's Research School of Social Sciences to take a social policy advisor's role in Treasury. A loss to the blogosphere. Amongst his last posts were three experiments he conducted with economics students covering important topics like whether chocolate improved test scores and whether the clobber you wear to class influences student evaluations of teaching. Good fun: <http://andrewleigh.com/?cat=20>

A study in permanency

Background Briefing – an ABC Radio National program – did a show on 17 August that looked at how international students and providers sometimes work the system to secure Permanent Residency. It's not a simplistic exposé of the 'shocking scams' variety – some nuanced reporting.

Australia's Skilled Migration Program provides the backdrop. (At one point there's a reading of some of the jobs that appear on the skills shortage list – one of the jobs is Electorate Officer. I'd have thought that was a recruitment problem rather than a skills shortage problem.)

I suspect the downloadable audio might disappear before you get this newsletter, but the transcript will still be up: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing/stories/2008/2332972.htm#transcript>

There's antimony, arsenic, aluminum, selenium And hydrogen & oxygen & nitrogen & rhenium

You may know these lyrics from Tom Lehrer's song about the Periodic Table. But now we have the Periodic Table on video – one video for each element. This is a bit of a hoot, from Nottingham University: <http://www.periodicvideos.com/>

(The lyrics to Lehrer's song can be found here: <http://www.guntheranderson.com/v/data/elements.htm>

Just for the hell of it, there's also Flanders and Swann's terrific little ditty on the laws of thermodynamics: <http://www.iankitching.me.uk/humour/hippo/entropy.html>

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1. Queensland's VET directions

In 2006 the Queensland government released the first iteration of the *Queensland Skills Plan*. The second iteration – *Queensland Skills Plan 2008* – was released on 29 August. It contains a raft of measures that point the state's VET system towards skilling existing workers, engaging those marginally attached to the labour force, expanded and targeted PD for VET professionals working in both public and private providers, better planning for skills development and skills deepening ... and more besides.

The more includes this: 'A cohesive tertiary education sector relies on seamless linkages between VET and higher education. Actions will be taken to better align higher education and training policies to improve linkages.' The Plan is here: http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/resources/corporate/pdf/pol_qldskillsplan2008.pdf

2. Running Queensland TAFE

At the same time as the *Skills Plan 2008* was released, the Queensland government put on the table the *TAFE Queensland Governance Model: Consultation Paper*. After a bit of experimentation, the government looks set to shift to governance arrangements for TAFE institutes that look a little like those Jeff Kennett introduced in Victoria last century. The days of central planning in TAFE seem numbered, don't they? Here's the paper: http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/resources/about_us/pdf/tafe_gov_consult_paper.pdf

3. Private providers on Qld's TAFE campuses

Going back away, to May 2007, the Queensland government introduced a policy to allow private providers access to TAFE institutes' facilities. The *Skills Plan 2008* includes these two objectives:

- Greater promotion and communication of new third-party access arrangements to TAFE facilities in order to maximise the use of these facilities;
- The promotion of best practice partnering arrangements to encourage greater co-operation between providers.

I wonder if we'll see private providers on public university campuses. Anyway, the third party policy from 2007 is here: http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/resources/about_us/pdf/tpa_policy.pdf

4. And now, VET Victorian style

On 26 August, Victoria's government released *Securing Jobs for Your Future - Skills for Victoria*. The media focus has been on the agreement with the Commonwealth that will allow Victoria to introduce a HECS-style co-payment system for VET learners. But it's much bigger and brassier than that. The decisive shift to a workforce development as the framework for planning and delivering training is another bit of the picture. The funding arrangements for private and public providers are also worth close scrutiny.

The statement makes it clear that Victoria is seeking from the Bradley Review a much better mesh between VET and HE. Read it here: http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/15969/Skills-Reform_web.pdf

5. Political stickativeness

The Victorian Premier, John Brumby, has been tinkering away at the human capital agenda for seven or eight years now, first as Treasurer. The VET reforms are an unusual instance of political persistence, or peskiness, depending on your point of view. Now that the human capital agenda (including VET) is COAG holy writ, it's worth reading Brumby's rationale for that agenda, delivered in the first half of this speech to a Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry Summit in November 07: http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_mymedia&Itemid=36&lang=en&media_id=196&task=text

6. VET market: private providers welcome

Private providers in VET and HE are making big inroads to education delivery, with governments designing policy and funding models to encourage them to expand. Deputy PM and Minister for Most Things, Julia Gillard, spoke at the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) 2008 National Conference on 29 August. VET reform was her focus – in case you're not sure what she has in mind, this speech is a good summary: <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/AustralianCouncilforPrivateEducationandTrainingACPET2008NationalConference.htm>

By the way, papers and presentations from the ACPET 2008 conference will appear here soon: http://www.acpet.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1232&Itemid=1

7. Working out the workforce

The National Industry Skills Committee has released the terrific Online Workforce Development Starter Tool. You have to register before you can log on, but it takes next to no time. Workforce development is the approach of the moment, so you might as well get to know it. Lots of links to excellent resources as well: <http://web3.tvetaustralia.com.au/nisc/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fnisc%2fDefault.aspx>

8. Working out the VET workforce

In April this year Reframing the Future released a report called *Productivity and participation enhanced by VET*. It offers examples from Reframing projects undertaken by VET providers. Quite of the projects took a workforce development approach: http://www.reframingthefuture.net/docs/2008/Publications/OALL_Productivity_participation_29apr08.pdf

9. Small to medium sized innovation

The Commonwealth government has launched Enterprise Connect – a mix of services specifically targeted at small and medium enterprises. The Enterprise Connect network is charged with building innovation capacity. Minister Carr said at the launch: 'I see the network acting as a gateway to Australia's innovation infrastructure in universities, public research organisations and the private sector.' While we wait for the Cutler report you might like to fill in time:

- a) reading the Minister's speech: <http://www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au/Documents/Senator%20Carr%20Speech%20-%20Launch%20of%20Enterprise%20Connect%2021%20May%2008.pdf>
- b) visiting Enterprise Connect's website: <http://www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

10. The teaching-community engagement nexus

There's plenty of thinking, writing and doing about the teaching-research nexus. Even some about the community engagement-research nexus. But there's a third leg of the stool which hasn't been nexused all that closely.

ACU has stepped into the breach with ideas for bringing teaching and community engagement into better relationship: http://www.acu.edu.au/communityengagement/iace/teaching_and_learning/

11. Why did they go?

Interesting report from the Educational Policy Institute and Queen's University called Student transitions and adjustments in Canadian post-secondary education. The report considers why students:

- a) leave their first program without graduating
- b) attempt a second program at the same level
- c) attempt a second program at a lower level.

Here you go:

<http://mesa-project.org/abstracts.html#studenttransitions>

12. Where can you go?

I guess most AAIRies will know about eduroam – a natty little system that AARNet has plugged many Australian campuses into. Instead of that tiresome procedure of having to get a guest account when you want to use wireless internet at a different institution, eduroam lets you log here there and increasingly everywhere. The eduroam website is here:

<http://www.aarnet.edu.au/Content.aspx?p=129>

The folks at AARNet have also devised a ranking of university campuses that tells you how good the local service is – up to five ticks for ease of use and for coverage. So, for a ranking table of a different kind:

<https://wiki.aarnet.edu.au/display/eduroam/For+End+Users>

13. Who's hot webwise?

Another ranking of a different kind. Webometrics Ranking of World Universities is a huge ranking exercise conducted by the Cybermetrics Lab in Spain. Here you can get yourself a list of the top 4000 universities in the world, according at least to the Cybermetrics ranking methodology which puts a lot of emphasis on web presence. MIT gets top billing and the first non-US institution – Cambridge – is at 28. ANU is Australia's first entry at 42:

<http://www.webometrics.info/>

14. An almanac of rankings

To more familiar ranking territory. The Australian Education Network maintains a web page that gathers into one place the outcomes of various rankings. For what the comparisons are worth:

<http://www.australian-universities.com/rankings/>

15. HEEF ho!

Yep, the first funding round of the Higher Education Endowment Fund has kicked off. There are 55 Expressions of Interest that are looking for several squillion dollars more than the fund has to shell out. You can scan the bids in summary here: http://www.heef.deewr.gov.au/Funding_Program/HE2009_EoI_Summaries.htm

16. Go8 stats website

Dave Marr, AAIR 2008 Forum Supremo, and at other times Manager of ANU's Statistical Service Office, writes as follows:

For those of you who are interested in comparative Group of Eight (Go8) benchmarking and statistics, the Go8 have expanded their capacity to collect and analyse data. Alan Mackay and Helen Montesin are putting together a range of measurements from DEEWR, OECD and the ABS. Find out more at:

http://www.go8.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=60&Itemid=191

17. Good e-learning practice

The UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has released *Outcomes from institutional audit – Institutions' support for e-learning: Sharing good practice*. It's a summary of institutional audit reports, with identification of good practice: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/series2/SupportforElearning08.pdf>

You may want to go to the audit reports for more detail on some of the practices. They're here (though it's probably easier and more enlightening to go straight to the uni website and find your way from there):

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/instIndex.asp#U>

18. The UK student's view of ICT in HE

The UK's Joint Information Systems Committee released in June *Great expectations of ICT: how higher education institutions are measuring up*. It's a report on a study of first year university students' views about whether their ICT experience at uni matched the expectations they had of it before they started their courses. The happy news is that news is mostly happy:

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/jisc_greatexpectationsfinalreportjune08.pdf

19. School reform in Victoria

The Victorian government is busy in education right now – VET reforms (see Newsletter Note Number 4) were followed in very quick order by the *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform: School Reform Discussion Paper*. It was released on 2 September, and I confess I have yet to read it. The media release says this is what I will encounter, amongst other things:

- Stronger interventions and more intensive monitoring in under-performing schools
- Providing incentives for the best teachers and school leaders to work in schools where they are needed most
- A scheme to encourage high-performing graduates from other fields to enter teaching
- Improving transitions to school
- Integrating early childhood services with childcare
- Developing a new 0-8 learning & development framework linked to existing learning standards in schools
- Supporting families to provide a home environment that supports development.

The paper is here:

http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/policy/Blueprint2008/bp_schoolreform.pdf

20. National school reform

Oh dear, I haven't read this either. The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister released, on 27 August, *Quality education: The case for an education revolution in our schools*. I haven't even had time to read the media release. All I can tell you now is that it has a nice red cover and has a little bit to say about both VET and HE:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/168E67E8-B266-44E3-BC7C-9169F663E55B/0/QualityEducationEducationRevolutionWEB.pdf>

21. Doing policy together

In June the UK think tank, Demos, released *Making the most of collaboration: an international survey of public service co-design*. It identifies education as a prime public policy area for collaboration between policy makers and service users in designing good services. Given that former Demos thinkers are finding their way into advisory roles for Australian politicians, maybe you should read up:

<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/CollabWeb.pdf>

22. Student activism in Oz

You read and hear a lot about how today's students aren't activists like we used to be. I'm not sure it was a golden age back then. The complaints remind me of the Monty Python Yorkshiremen skit. Anyway, the Whitlam Institute at UWS is putting pitting fact against fiction. It recently released *Young people imagining a new democracy: literature review*. Student activism today is not as bad as you think – different, yes: http://www.whitlam.org/whitlam/images/projects/documents/youngpeople_imaginingdemocracy_literature_review.pdf

23. Student activism in the US

For a slightly less reliable but nonetheless interesting survey on student activism in the US, visit *Mother Jones* – a visit worth making from time to time:

<http://www.motherjones.com/news/other/2008/09/annual-student-activism-roundup-charts.html>

24. Not enough tweaks

A tweak is an engineer. And you can't do much without a very big band of busy tweaks. Unfortunately Australia's band is rather too small, as Engineers Australia shows in the 2008 edition of *the engineering profession: a statistical overview*. http://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/shadomx/apps/fms/fmsdownload.cfm?file_uuid=C359773C-0CAA-2137-A202-95FCA39B4E1F&siteName=ieaust

25. Where the jobs are

DEEWR has released *Australian Jobs 2008*. This year it contains detail on regional job markets, which makes it much more useful. AAIRies will be pleased to note that job prospects for mathematicians, statisticians and actuaries are good. Your average is 37 and you are in the 7th earnings decile:

<http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/FA91FB91-73A8-4F5D-83CF-D391BEDF3538/0/AustralianJobsforWorkplace.pdf>

26. Designing course evaluation questionnaires

Two Hong Kong academics – David Kember and Doris Leung – have published a paper in the August 2008 edition of *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, titled 'Establishing the validity and reliability of course evaluation questionnaires'. Worth a read. This reads to me like a fresh approach. You'll have to get a copy via one of your library databases, so no link, I'm afraid.

SOME GREEN THINGS

Monash runs Greening Up Our Act, an institution-wide sustainability program. Check out campus & building environmental reports, action plans here: <http://www.monash.edu.au/green/>

Monash has a blog for its IT folk to post on green things: <http://blogs.monash.edu.au/greenit/2008/02/11/greening-up-our-act-green-it/#comments>

ANUgreen is a wide-ranging environmental management program that even has an organic community garden on campus. <http://www.anu.edu.au/anugreen/index.php>

ANU is one of the exemplar institutions for the Talloires Declaration – a 10-point action plan for incorporating sustainability and environmental literacy in universities. 350 universities from 40 countries are signed up. More on the Declaration: http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires.html

UTS has long been actively green, since 1998 when it signed the Talloires Declaration. The UTS Environmental Sustainability website tells the story: <http://www.green.uts.edu.au/index.html>

RMIT is about to build a new green building for its Business Portfolio. Green, as in sustainably designed, and green, as in green: <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=3dvcwd2ye5pq1>

The UK's Carbon Trust has a Higher Education Carbon Management Programme that has 48 paid up university members: <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/carbon/publicsector/he>

The Carbon Trust has also produced *A whole school approach: involving the school community in reducing its carbon footprint*, released in April. Focus is primary and secondary schools, but the principles are transferable. You have to register and log in – takes a minute: <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/publications/publicationdetail.htm?productid=CTV037>

The US National Wildlife Federation has a Campus Ecology program: <http://www.nwf.org/campusEcology/>

A good source of ideas is Campus Ecology's recent publication, *Campus Environment 2008: A national report card on sustainability in higher education: trends and developments in college and university leadership, academics and operations*: <http://www.nwf.org/campusEcology/docs/CampusReportFinal.pdf>