



**Monthly e-Newsletter – April 2008**

**What's in this edition?**

AAIR 2008 Forum – Canberra.....1  
VET changes shape – again! .....2  
It is Written.....3  
NatBES Update.....3  
Places to Go – Things to Do..... 3-4  
Seminar Report..... 4-5  
For the Poddies, Voddies & Bloggies.....5  
Newsletter Notes ..... 5-7  
Job Vacancies .....7

**EDITORIAL**

Apologies for the lateness of the April newsletter. A couple of unexpected jobs threw me off my stride.

An update on the St Petersburg European University I mentioned in the last newsletter – forced to close, officially, because it had failed to meet fire regulations. The unofficial theory is closure followed criticism by academics of Putin and his team and because the University and the EU were jointly planning to monitor the vote in the recent Russian elections. Anyway, the University re-opened after the elections and is now making up for lost time by extending the current semester.

Contributions to the Newsletter are warmly welcomed. Mostly what you get is a list of things I've read, planned to read, or listened to. That's a limited view of the world. Broaden our vistas – drop me a line.

Subject to space and relevance to members, the newsletter can run job vacancies and items on upcoming events.

Contact me at: [rob@](mailto:rob@sharpwords.com.au) with [sharpwords.com.au](http://sharpwords.com.au)

**AAIR FORUM 2008**

19-21 November  
Hyatt Hotel, Canberra

**Hosted by ANU**

The 2008 Forum website address is:  
<http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aaair2008/index.php>

Our 2008 theme is:  
Enhancing Quality Research:  
a Global Perspective

**Call for abstracts opens 18 April.**

Registration information is being added to the website at present.

Partner universities along with ANU are University of Sydney, UWA, Monash and Curtin. We are grateful to Australian Corporate Software for sponsoring the Forum dinner.

If you'd like more information about the Forum please email Dave Marr Chair, AAIR 2008 Forum Organising Committee, at ANU:  
[dave.marr@anu.edu.au](mailto:dave.marr@anu.edu.au)

**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

**General Committee:**

- Bruce Guthrie, Graduate Careers Australia
- 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.aaair.org.au/>

## VET changes shape – again!

The VET sector continues to morph in fascinating ways. The pastiche that follows considers just a couple of the new shapes that are materialising in terms of private provision and inter-sectoral co-operation.

**Kaplan Professional** (<http://www.kaplanprofessional.edu.au/default.asp>) will now be known to many of you. This is a dual sector provider of education to a particular niche - financial services, tax and accounting and real estate. Part of the Washington Post group, Kaplan is a big international private provider. It has been on an expansion binge in Oz.

In August 2007, Kaplan bought the well-regarded Bradford College, and Grange Business School to boot, both in Adelaide. In the same month, for \$36m, it bought Finsia Education, education arm of the Financial Services Institute of Australasia, itself the product of a merger between the Securities Institute and the Australasian Institute of Banking and Finance. Finsia's board thought its members would fare better through provision of accredited training by a provider with specialist expertise.

In 2006, Kaplan bought Tribeca – a vocational education specialist – for \$55m.

Kaplan aims to provide accredited training from Certificate through to postgraduate level, and is targeting both local and international students. It has a presence in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. The official launch of Kaplan Professional on 20 February this year was marked by an article in *The Australian*: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23242451-12332,00.html>

My guess is that times are ripe for more consolidation in the private VET provider market, as much as the times are ripe for the emergence of more new private providers.

In February the South Australian government launched ***New Ways, New Engagement: A Skills Strategy for South Australia's Future***: <http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/Portals/2/downloads/skillsstrategyfull200308.pdf>

Amongst other things, the Strategy promises to increase the level of state government funding available on a contestable basis from 25% of total funding to nearly 50% by 2012, it encourages partnerships between public and private providers, and it proposes increased access to public training facilities for private providers.

On March 19 Deputy PM Gillard released the Discussion Paper ***Skilling Australia for the future***: [http://www.productivityplaces.deewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/1FB46BC3-1F99-4053-BDBF-363DC5450067/20903/SAFF\\_discussion\\_paper\\_020408.pdf](http://www.productivityplaces.deewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/1FB46BC3-1F99-4053-BDBF-363DC5450067/20903/SAFF_discussion_paper_020408.pdf) You've got until 30 April to respond to the raft of critical questions the Discussion Paper poses. It's interesting to note that the only specific mention of TAFE is this: 'The current training system is highly centralised, with staterun TAFEs dominating the market and government funding delivered primarily to these and other public institutions'. It also suggests that greater contestability of funding is a key to ensuring a more responsive and dynamic training system. So if you were thinking about setting up a private RTO, now might be the time to register your business name.

You probably know about the signing of an MOU between Melbourne Uni and ANU: [http://info.anu.edu.au/ovc/Media/Media\\_Releases/2008/March/20080326\\_mou.asp](http://info.anu.edu.au/ovc/Media/Media_Releases/2008/March/20080326_mou.asp)

This kind of mutual piggy-backing isn't the preserve of higher education, though Victorians are making the running. **Box Hill TAFE and Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE have signed an MOU** which Victorian Minister Skills and Workforce Participation, Jacinta Allan, announced like so, helpfully listing the specific points the agreement covers: [http://www.jacintaallan.com/media\\_releases/media1.asp?ID=264](http://www.jacintaallan.com/media_releases/media1.asp?ID=264)

In part, the MOU should deliver to both Institutes greater efficiencies across a range of areas like curriculum development and applied research, and allow them to be more competitive in the training market here and offshore.

## IT IS WRITTEN

Nothing to do whatever with education, at least not directly. But maybe of interest to the bibliophiles.

There are now a number of services like Library Thing: <http://www.librarything.com/>

What you can do at Library Thing is catalogue your own library, or just put down the title of the book you are reading now, and share that with everyone else. You can use the Dewey classification system to organise your collection. You can get recommendations from others, and supply your own reviews.

If you want, Library Thing will join you up with other people who have got the same books as you so you can share ideas about where to go for your next fix.

Pretty natty. Not costly. In fact free for the first 200 books, or \$25 for a lifetime's access. I'm not sure how you define 'lifetime' on the web – it changes too quickly for the usual definition to make sense.

Libraries, authors, publishers and booksellers can use it, and you can even buy a pretty boring t-shirt. There's a good introductory online tour.

More evidence that the book isn't dying.

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## NATBES UPDATE

Dean Ward, our redoubtable AAIR Secretary, says many AAIR members and HE Stats Users have queried the status of the NatBes. For those unfamiliar with this project, the National Benchmarking System for Australian Higher Education Statistics (NatBes) is a project funded under the Workplace Productivity Programme (Round 1) which was 'won' by Edith Cowan University in 2006. The project has moved slowly forward and reflects the current employment market where computer consultants are scarce.

Dean anticipates that the Beta version will become available to the Reference Group for testing shortly, before being released for broader testing by AAIR members and others.

## PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

### **8<sup>th</sup> Quality in postgraduate research conference Adelaide 17-18 April 2008**

This is just around the corner. Always an area of immense importance, with an Innovation Review and the expansion of scholarship numbers, and more Federation Fellows – well, it has added bite this year.

The conference theme is: *Research Education in the New Global Environment*. Details here: <http://www.qpr.edu.au/2008/>

### **Seminar on Innovative Approaches to Turning Statistics into Knowledge 26-27 May 2008 Stockholm**

Anonymous from Queensland let me know about this OECD offering, thinking it might be of interest of AAIRies. Like Anonymous, I was drawn to the pitch for the seminar:

'... the focus of the seminar will be on innovative applications of tools, e.g. so called story-telling applications. Tools and applications for making statistics more popular will be looked at, while avoiding the pitfalls of populism, over-simplification or propaganda. All these initiatives will be looked at on a scientific basis and the basic principles of objectivity and good communication will be observed. Experts in statistical methodology, cognitive science, and communication are therefore welcomed as active participants in the seminar.'

If you just can't be bothered traipsing all the way to Stockholm, then join Anonymous and me in watching the video that will be on the website after the seminar. Just like being there, really. More information here:

[http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3343,en\\_2157136\\_1\\_31938349\\_39800246\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3343,en_2157136_1_31938349_39800246_1_1_1_1,00.html)

### **17<sup>th</sup> National VET Research Conference Launceston 9-11 July 2008**

The focus of the conference is on developing research capacity in the VET sector by promoting the professional development of VET researchers. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/trconf/trconf17.html>

**8th Annual SEAIR (South East Asia Association for Institutional Research) Conference  
Surabaya, Indonesia  
4th-6th November 2008**

*The following message has been received from the SEAIR conference organisers*

Thank you for your support of the 6th and 7th Annual SEAIR Conference in Langkawi and Bangkok respectively in 2006 and 2007. We do look forward to you and your friends joining us this year in Surabaya, Indonesia, from 4th - 6th November 2008 for the 8th Annual SEAIR (South East Asia Association for Institutional Research) Conference.

Conference theme: *Institutional Capacity Building toward Higher Education Competitive Advantage.*

The sub-themes are:

1. Capacity building through quality assurance and quality management
2. Institutional research in higher education capacity building
3. Managing and sustaining higher education competitive advantage
4. Learning and teaching to enhance institutional capacity
5. Industrial network to support higher education competitive advantage.

The deadlines are:

- Abstract Submissions: *May 31st, 2008*
- Abstract Acceptance: *June 30th, 2008*
- Full Papers Submission: *August 15th, 2008*
- Registration: *September, 15th, 2008*

Please feel free to log onto the SEAIR website at [www.seair.au.edu](http://www.seair.au.edu) or directly into the conference website [www.seair2008.com](http://www.seair2008.com) for more information.

We do welcome doctoral candidates use of the Conference as a platform for review of their academic work.

We look forward to seeing you and hope you can bring your colleagues so we can expand our regional networking in Institutional Research.

You can track more information about Surabaya at Surabaya Tourism: <http://www.surabayatourism.com/>

**AARE 2008 Conference  
Brisbane – November 30-December 4**

The Australian Association for Research in Education really packs in presentations – there might be as many as 800 this year. Why not graze the papers from the 2007 Conference? Here they are:

<http://www.aare.edu.au/07pap/abs07.htm>

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**Writing an Academic Paper –  
Report on the Seminar from Dave Marr**

On 12th March 2008, the ANU in conjunction with AAIR, ran a one-day seminar titled 'Writing an Academic Paper'.

One purpose of the seminar was to assist AAIR members to develop essential skills when preparing a paper for this year's AAIR Annual Forum to be held on 19-21 November at the Hyatt Hotel, Canberra.

The day was presented by Dr Gail Craswell of ANU's Academic Skills and Learning Centre, and was held in the Common Room at ANU's University House. Of the 36 participants, nine were AAIR members. The majority were PhD students and academics from the various research schools, including several from the Mt Stromlo Observatory, and from faculties of the ANU. There were also three curators from the National Museum of Australia.

Feedback from participants was generally very positive with 57% of respondents giving it a 'highly effective' tick of approval while the rest thought it 'effective'. No-one responded that the day was 'ineffective'. Typical of the comments received was, '(It) gave me confidence to utilise skills I have learned in a different profession. Gail's experience in teaching and her expertise was evident. I'm so glad I came along.' Many simply said 'Thanks'. With the success of this day, it is envisaged that another one-day follow-up seminar on 'Presenting an academic paper' might run in the second half of the year.

As a forerunner to the Annual Forum in Canberra it is planned to hold a similar session on preparing papers for AAIR on the 18th November 2008. Times, costs, presenter and venue are still to be

finalised but information will be made available through the AAIR 2008 Forum website (<http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/air2008/>) and the AAIR e-newsletter.

If you require any further information about the seminar just held at ANU or about what's being planned for 18th November, please feel free to email Dave Marr at ANU: [dave.marr@anu.edu.au](mailto:dave.marr@anu.edu.au).

If you have any views on whether this style of seminar would be attractive to AAIR members in your city, then let one of the AAIR Executive know.

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## **FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES & BLOGGIES**

### **Primary podcasting**

This is a nice five pager from the Australian Literacy Educators' Association. Its slant is the use of podcasting in primary schools, but you can apply the principles and the ideas any old place with appropriate adjustment:

<http://www.alea.edu.au/site-content/publications/documents/pp/PP%20Northcote.pdf>

### **Science and society: bridging the gap**

The UK Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham, is a scientist himself – a *rara avis* in the political flock.

Denham addressed the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce in January about the importance of science explaining itself to society: a key element in the UK government's innovation strategy.

The Minister is introduced by the disarmingly charming Matthew Taylor, CEO of the RSA. The response to Denham's speech is delivered by Professor Lord Robert Winston (of telly's *The Human Body* fame) who tackles the Minister head on in a couple of instances, along with giving credit where he thinks it's due.

The Q&A session is worth listening to on its own. You can download the event here: <http://www.thersa.org/audio/lecture160108a.mp3>

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## **NEWSLETTER NOTES**

### **1. Schools Plus NZ**

Schools Plus was launched by the NZ PM and her Minister for Education just a few weeks ago. The policy objective comes down to this: All young people are in education, skills development, or structured learning, relevant to their needs and abilities, until the age of 18.

It has the ring to it of new policy objectives adopted recently in the UK. The Schools Plus website is very good – it will acquaint you efficiently and comprehensively with what it all means:

<http://www.schoolsplus.govt.nz/>

### **2. Making first year a winner**

Good idea. UNSW has launched *First year teaching: a community website for staff*. Lots of good resources for teachers of first year courses, for first year advisors, for academic managers. The community of practice idea drives the website. Some great first year case studies are amongst the suite of resources. Well worth a gander: <http://www.firstyear.unsw.edu.au/content/default.cfm?ss=0>

The site made me think that perhaps we needed, somewhere, a site dedicated to first year HE teachers.

### **3. The first AUSSE**

ACER has released the first AUSSE report. As it stands, it's a great resource. When we have the longitudinal data, and more universities in the dataset, it will be magic. Access is here:

[http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AUSSE\\_2007AustraliaUniversityInstitutionReport.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AUSSE_2007AustraliaUniversityInstitutionReport.pdf)

### **4. The next engagement frontier**

AUSSE will help us get our heads around engaging students. The Educational Policy Institute in the US is helping too with the release of *Engaging faculty and staff: an imperative for fostering retention, advising, and smart borrowing*.

How might we organise the bits and pieces of universities – learning and teaching, and student services – to improve retention. There is an emphasis on student loans that doesn't quite apply in Australasia, but that aside, food for thought. There's an excellent reference list:

<http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pub/pubpdf/EngagingFaculty.pdf>

## 5. Make Education Fair

The Young Liberals are taking aim at bias in high school and university teaching. The thesis is that Liberals – and presumably any young person aligned to that political church – are intimidated by a culture that penalises them because of their political views, or intimidates them so they can't express their views. I don't buy it, but you might: [http://www.younglibs.org.au/site//index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=47](http://www.younglibs.org.au/site//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=47)

## 6. Getting ranked

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn, Dublin Institute of Technology gave a seminar at Melbourne Uni's Centre for the Study of Higher Education on 7 April. There doesn't seem to be a paper, but the slides from her presentation – *The rising popularity of university rankings: lessons and implications* – are really worth working through. I mean really worth it. It's more serious than I thought: <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/HazelkornSlides070408.pdf>

## 7. Not true!

I was taken to task for saying in the last newsletter that state governments don't report much in the public domain about the universities they are responsible for. For example, said my interlocutor, what about the Review of University Legislation being undertaken by the Victorian government. Fair enough, I said. Let me tell the AAIRies about it. Here's the background paper, issued in January: [http://www.diird.vic.gov.au/corplivewr/\\_assets/main/lib60026/attachmentone-backgroundpaper.doc](http://www.diird.vic.gov.au/corplivewr/_assets/main/lib60026/attachmentone-backgroundpaper.doc)

More evidence to undermine my cavalier statement is welcome!

## 8. Animal research

The use of animals in research, and the ethics of animal research, is under activist pressure in some places in the US and the UK. The Scientist.com ran a lengthy excerpt from a new book on the subject – *The Animal Research War* by Michael Conn and James Parker, to be released in May. Read up: <http://www.the-scientist.com/2008/4/1/40/1/>

## 9. Plagiarism 1

Plagiarism hunter – Turnitin – was in a US court earlier this year. Students complained copyright in their written work was infringed because their

papers were retained for comparison purposes. Eric Goldman, a professor in the Santa Clara University School of Law, blogged about it last month. The action lost, but Goldman raises a couple of issues about Turnitin that trouble him: [http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2008/03/clickthrough\\_ag.htm](http://blog.ericgoldman.org/archives/2008/03/clickthrough_ag.htm)

## 10. Plagiarism 2

Plagiarism now has a superhero in Plagiarism Man. Swinburne Uni offers a guided quiz, fronted by Plagiarism Man, that helps to sort out the difference between plagiarism and fair play: <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/ads/showcase/plagiarismQuiz.htm#>

I showed it to some uni students recently. Helpful, they said, but thought it could be grungier. I asked for an example. They put me on to Strongbad. Entertaining in its own way, but to be honest, nothing at all to do with plagiarism or education: <http://www.homestarrunner.com/sbemail170.html>

## 11. Understanding private HE

I haven't explored this site yet, but thought I'd pass it on. If it's any good, let us all know. It's a global network called PROPHE (Program for Research on Private Higher Education) and run out of the School of Education at University of Albany, NY: <http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/index.html>

## 12. A long way from home

A paper titled 'Loneliness and international students: an Australian study' is available on the CSHE website, ahead of publication in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*. Its bottom line is that efforts to link local and international students in sustained ways are critically important: <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/JStIE%20online%20Sawir%20et%20al%20loneliness.pdf>

## 13. A long way from fair

Another study about the lot of international students (most by the same authors responsible for the paper mentioned in 12 above) is *International students – a segregated and vulnerable workforce*. It's one of the Monash University Department of Management Working Paper Series. Not a great story, which is why you should read it: <http://www.buseco.monash.edu.au/mgt/research/working-papers/2007/wp24-07.pdf>

## 14. Sessional staff 1

There is some good material on supporting sessional teaching at the following UNSW address. The 'general links and resources' page is helpful:  
[http://www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/content/sessional\\_staff/Managing%20sessional%20staff%20-%20intro.cfm?ss=0](http://www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/content/sessional_staff/Managing%20sessional%20staff%20-%20intro.cfm?ss=0)

## 15. Sessional staff 2

Going back a little in time, the Australian University Teaching Committee commissioned a project on sessional teaching. The project details and outcomes are still online here:  
<http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/sessionalteaching/>

## 16. Shining the light on universities

In the UK, Beacons for Public Engagement are being established. They are tasked with linking universities to communities and society, demonstrating their relevance and rendering them more welcoming. Details are here:  
<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

## 17. Education in India and China

I'm itching to hop into this, but haven't had the time. The Rand Corporation has just released *Education and the Asian surge: a comparison of the education systems in India and China*.

The only thing I can tell you about is from the short summary which I have read, to wit: '...China has outperformed India in primary and secondary education along a broad spectrum of access, quality, and delivery indicators. India, on the other hand, enjoys a competitive edge over China in higher education. Recently, India has begun catching up with China in K-12 education, while China has already overtaken India in terms of the college enrollment and number of graduates.'

A doddle at 55 pages:  
[http://rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2008/RAND\\_OP\\_218.pdf](http://rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2008/RAND_OP_218.pdf)

## 18. EQAR

By way of information, the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) was launched on 4 March. Not much on the website yet:  
<http://www.eqar.eu/>

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## JOB VACANCIES

The College of the Marshall Islands is located at Majuro in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Jim Mulik, AAIRie and Vice-President for Research, Planning and Grants at the College, wants you to know about two jobs vacancies at the College.

So, your first questions is: [Where are the Marshall Islands?](#)

If you want info about the College beyond the College website, try the following page from the US National Centre for Education Statistics:  
<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=College+of+the+Marshall+Islands&s=MH&id=376695>

Interviews for the jobs will be in May. You can get more info about both positions from the College website: [http://www.cmi.edu/job\\_openings.html](http://www.cmi.edu/job_openings.html)

And look, let's be realistic. If you take on one of these positions, you'll need a couple of spare rooms. The rest of us will be up for a visit. In fact you get on with applying for the job and we'll start planning the trip to see you – let's start with the Marshall Islands Visitors Authority website:  
<http://www.visitmarshallislands.com/travel.htm>

## Director of Institutional Research and Assessment

- The position supports five broad areas of focus: institutional research capacity and training
- measuring student learning and satisfaction with the College's academic and student service programs
- benchmarking the College against peer and aspirant institutions
- fulfilling ad hoc research studies and data requests
- forecasting the future resource needs of the College, specifically in terms of financial, human, information technology, and physical resources.

## Senior Network and Systems Administrator

This is a full time, continuing position to begin in June 2008. The Administrator will work with a team of technicians in the design, development, and implementation of infrastructure projects. The successful candidate will also play an integral role in maintaining infrastructure at remote sites of the College of the Marshall Islands.