Australasian Association for Institutional Research

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Monthly e-Newsletter – July 2008

What's in this edition?

EDITORIAL

Every now and then I grouch about the persistence of false boundaries between HE, VET and school education. I'm happy that the Bradley Review has mused aloud about what the nature of the HE/VET distinction really is. I still want schools to be in the picture, though. What will it take to really join up schools and universities? The link between schools and VET is better, but still underdeveloped. I reckon we could do with an education system rather than a set of education systems.

It's sometimes a struggle to keep up with what's happening across the nation and I'm always grateful for any items you think will be of interest. I'd be especially grateful for any information about what happening in NZ. I haven't had time of late to go a-wandering in Kiwi cyberspace so newsletter entries about action across the Tasman have been sorely wanting.

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

Feel free to contact me at: rob@ with sharpwords.com.au

POSITION VACANT

Business Intelligence Manager
Faculty of Business
UTS

These challenges sound tailor-made for AAIRies:

- Have detailed knowledge of the full range of data collected by UTS information systems, & capacity to interpret the data.
- Maintain expertise in data fields required by designated rankings survey organisations & the weightings that apply to each field which may impact on the overall ranking performance of the Faculty compared with external competitors.
- Maintain detailed knowledge of the information collected & maintained on the University's main research database.
- Contribute to provision & communication of high quality & timely management information to ensure the Faculty's senior management is able to carry out its functions & improve its effectiveness.
- Translate technical data into information to support decision making, & to be able to present this information clearly & concisely, both in written form & verbally.

More details here:

http://www.jobs.uts.edu.au/job/job_details.cfm?id=307367&from=direct

Applications close on 16 July

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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Bruce Guthrie, Graduate Careers Australia
Don Johnston, Southern Cross University
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Andrea Matulick, University of South Australia
Rob Sheehan, Sharp Words Editing & Writing Services (Victoria)
AAIR website: http://www.aair.org.au/

IT IS WRITTEN

We are in the midst of many debates about higher education, courtesy of the Bradley Review. One of them, unsurprisingly, is the now slightly sharper but ongoing discussion about the links between research and teaching, and teaching only unis/academics

In 2007 The University of Sydney published a book that explores the links, and the place of the scholarship of teaching in forging them. There are 22 chapters written by Sydney Uni academics who do the exploration within their disciplines and across the university. *Transforming a university: the scholarship of teaching and learning in practice*, was edited by Angela Brew and Judyth Sachs. Good words abound – I particularly liked these two, but the reading ranges far and deep:

- 'Same words, different meanings: learning to talk the scientific language of pharmacy', by Erica Sainsbury and Richard Walker
- 'Participatory action research in an arts transition program', by Nerida Jarkey.

The blurb from Sydney Uni Press is right here: http://fmx01.ucc.usyd.edu.au/jspcart/jsp/cart/Product.jsp?nID=234&nCategoryID=26

AIN'T IT THE TRUTH

The greatest threat to the social role of the University is its subordination to the immediate purposes of the state and to the establishment which dominates it …

There is an increasing need for scholars of different but related disciplines to work together …
Nowhere is that need more evident than between those who prime concern is … 'the interesting complications' of the market economy and those who are oppressed by the increasing pressure of population, production and consumption on the material resources of the world and the pollution it inevitably involves and who wish to concern themselves with policies to ameliorate their effects on mankind.

> - H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, *Trial Balance*, Macmillan: Melbourne, pp. 212-213. First published in 1981 – a pretty prescient set of observations for a book now twenty-seven years old, don't you think?

PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

Investing in the future: renewing Australian tertiary education

A series of panel discussions at Melbourne Uni picking over the multitude of issues raised in the *Review of Australian higher education discussion paper*.

Dates are: 21 July, 28 July, 4 August, 11 August.

The panel analysis and discussion on 21 July involves:
- Mike Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight
- Sandra Harding, Vice-Chancellor, James Cook University
- Peter Coaldrake, Vice-Chancellor, Queensland University.

The first in the series was held at the Woodward Conference Centre at Melbourne Uni on 30 June. Stephen Parker, VC at Canberra Uni, and Glyn Davis, VC at Melbourne, spoke to a packed room about what needs to change and how it might. Great stuff.

Details on remaining sessions are available here: http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/investinginthefuture/

Open access and research conference
24-25 September, 2008
Stamford Plaza Hotel, Brisbane

We are feeling our way with the web as it upsets epistemological applecarts. The long tradition of the linear is shifting into new terrain as intersections and layers of knowledge disrupt the old familiar. So it's pretty important to keep tabs on how things are evolving. This conference might help. It sports a good list of keynoters:
- John Wilbanks, CEO of Science Commons, on The Future of Knowledge, What Greater Access Means for Research
- Brian Fitzgerald from QUT's OAK Law Project on key copyright issues that are raised in the open access framework
- Warwick Anderson, CEO of the NHMRC, on conditions under which grants are made, in a session called Transitioning to Open Access : The Role of Funders and the Role of Institutions.

Get the conference details here: http://www.oar2008.qut.edu.au/

Third annual university governance and regulations forum: discussing strategies & design for good governance & regulation
29-30 September 2008
Brisbane Marriott Hotel

The website lists of a bunch of meaty topics including IR reform and the HE sector, managing & auditing institutional performance across remote areas and transnational borders, preferred models of governance for TAFE, new federal directions for the way we regulate and govern innovation and research in HE. The conference is supported by the ATN and the Go8.

I'd almost pay to go to the session at which Anne Doolette (Executive Director of the new Australian Qualifications Framework Council) is presenting. One might expect that under its newly appointed chair – that restless reformer, John Dawkins – the AQF is about to get a very overdue smartening up.

I won't get along, I'm afraid. At $2084.50 for two days, it a bit out of my league. At $764.50 I can't even afford to read the conference notes. Ah, what price knowledge and engagement with public policy! Too high a price for this sheltered idealist. Pity. But if you can get along, here are the details: http://www.informa.com.au/ibcoz/marlin/system/render. jsp?siteid=30000000421&marketingid=20001690706 &MarlinViewType=MARKT_EFFORT

eResearch Australasia
29 September-1 October 2008
Sebel and Citigate Hotels, Albert Park in Melbourne

Some speakers at this conference are keynotes at the Open access and research conference, details of which are given earlier. The conference plans to be:
- a catalyst for innovation and collaboration, by bringing together the architects, builders, users, and managers of eResearch infrastructures and services;
- a forum to support the development, enhancement, and harmonisation of national, regional, and discipline-specific eResearch infrastructures and services.

The conference info is here.
http://www.eresearch.edu.au/index.html

(You can access the presentations from the 2007 conference from this address. I haven't done so yet, but several look like good fodder for AAIRies).

NatStats08
Crown Conference Centre, Melbourne
19-21 November 2008

This is where AAIRies emerge from their educational milieu and mix it with the statistical hoi polloi. If you aren't going to the AAIR Forum on 19-21 November, you're either staying home or going to Natstats.

The orientation of the conference is about how to get stats into the evidence base that supports policy development. Goodness knows, education has skated on some thin ice here for a long time – the LTPF, and the postcode as a basis for school funding, spring to mind. Of importance is that the conference will be an important mechanism for developing input to the big OECD bash in 2009 – the World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy. Natstats details are here: http://www.nss.gov.au/natstats/natstatshome.nsf

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES & BLOGGIES

A university. Let's see, that's a place where …

Phillip Adams convened a panel of academics to chat about where the idea of the university is at just now. An amiable chat, with some direct things said about the place, purpose and promise of universities in Oz, the UK and the US. The panelists were:
- Stefan Collini, Professor of Intellectual History and English Literature, University of Cambridge
- Simon During, Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University, Visiting Professor at the University of Queensland
- Judith Shapiro, President of Barnard College, New York.

Download the podcast here – runs just on an hour: http://www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/stories/2008/227 2988.htm

Well, actually, it's a place where …

Murdoch University's first year bloggers are here. Not entirely clear that there is a perfect alignment between what they reckon university is about and what Phillip Adams' panellists reckon. Worth a read: http://www.murdoch.edu.au/News/Meet-our-1st-year-bloggers/

University isn't always what it's cracked up to be

Wake Forest University in North Carolina ran a conference in April to consider how to address the needs of young people who find college a bit more demanding than the carefree time it's often oversold to be.

The bits of the conference – College of the Overwhelmed – I listened to appear to provide a good insight into the thinking behind, and delivery of, student support services in the US.

You can get into the conference by pod, vod, pdf and PowerPoint:
http://www.wfu.edu/voices/overwhelmed.html

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1. Remarkably RED

Hands up if you have transitioned yet from 'Carrick' to 'Australian Learning and Teaching Council'. I'm struggling. We need a shorthand. Maybe it'll be ALTC. Whatever the handle by which it goes, it published two quite remarkable resources in a month.

The RED website – Recognition, Enhancement and Development – provides a great array of resources to support, and enrich our understanding of, sessional teachers in higher ed. Sessionals are around half of the academic workforce, but overall I'd say they get a good deal less than half the attention they deserve. The AUTC did some work on sessionals a few years back, but it doesn't seem to me that it came to much. The good news is that I think RED is probably irresistible.

Here is RED's address:
http://www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED/

(The VET sector needs something like this, by the way. Who picks up that job?)

2. Remarkably led

Okay, the second remarkable publication from what was Carrick is *Learning leaders in times of change: academic leadership capabilities for Australian higher education*. At around 170 pages long, I'm sorry to have to tell you this: *Learning leaders* is compulsory reading.

It's a great example of how institutional reseach skills can be brought to bear on very diverse and complex issues and problems.

It's a rich exploration of how academic managers – program co-ordinators, heads of school, directors of L&T, PVCs academic – see themselves, what capabilities they need, and how to develop them.

Carve out the time and grab your highlighter:
http://www.altc.edu.au/carrick/webdav/site/carricksite/users/siteadmin/public/grants_leadership_uws_acer_finalreport_june08.pdf

(Okay, so where's the VET sector version of this?)

3. Citation maths

The International Mathematical Union's Joint Committee on Quantitative Assessment of Research has released a report titled *Citation Statistics*. The 26 page report calls into question any reliance on citation counts as a way to measure quality or impact.

I struggled with some paragraphs – not my home turf. But there are more than a few unequivocal statements even I could get my head around. For instance: 'Those who promote exclusive reliance on citation-based metrics implicitly assume that each citation means the same thing about the cited research – its "impact". This is an assumption that is unproven and quite likely incorrect.' It's all here:
http://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/IMU/Report/CitationStatistics.pdf

4. Being postgraduate

In April the UK's Higher Education Academy released *Widening participation to postgraduate study: decisions, deterrents and creating success*. It investiages what attracts people to postgrad study, what keeps them at it, and how to support them. The study looks at students who do, or don't, go onto postgrad study following their undergraduate degree, so doesn't deal with those coming to postgrad study after a break. Harking back to the US College of the Overwhelmed conference mentioned earlier, I was struck by the statement that it was surprising 'the extent to which participants in this research indicated that they felt that studying was particularly stressful and that they had been suffering from considerable anxiety while in higher education.' Go to it:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/WPtoPG_Stuart.pdf

5. Foundation skills for workforce participation and social inclusion

DEEWR has released a discussion paper to accompany the review of language, literacy and numeracy program services. The number of training places in VET is set to grow by the tens of thousands, and many of the places are targeted at existing workers with little or no post-secondary training. The migration intake is escalating. Little recognised language, literacy and numeracy programs must become well-recognised foundation stones for success. The paper is here:
http://www.llnp.deewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/71ED5A8B-01FC-48B5-BA3D-C510CD46EAB1/22537/DiscussionPaperFinalPDFVersion.pdf

6. AVETRA conference presentations

The AVETRA conference was held in April. The conference presentations are now available online. Many to choose from. I chose two:
- Gavin Moodie's paper on dual sector unis which is timely given the Bradley Review's interest in whether HE and VET can work together more productively
- a trio from Adelaide Uni's Australian Institute for Social Research – Spoehr, Barnett and Parnis – offer us Meeting workforce planning and development challenges: a direct role for the VET sector.

Hyperlinks aplenty here:
http://www.avetra.org.au/annual_conference/papers.shtml

7. Teaching little tackers

This is a table-splitter from UNESCO – 294 pages. *A view inside primary schools: a world education indicators cross-national study*. I read the foreword and skipped through the rest. If I had time I'd give it more attention. This finding is interesting in view of Australia's intention to develop a national curriculum for K-12: 'The majority of WEI-SPS countries exerted national jurisdiction over school curriculum to ensure that Grade 4 pupils across the country were taught the same scope and level of learning. By exception, Argentina, Brazil and India had a mix of national and local control over curriculum.'

Have a captain:
http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/wei/sps/Report.pdf

8. Speaking of the national curriculum …

Australia's National Curriculum Board has started its consultations on a national K-12 curriculum. This ought to be of interest to people in VET and HE too, though it doesn't seem to have much traction yet. Details here:
http://www.ncb.org.au/default.asp

9. Is the IT in HE up to scratch?

The UK's Joint Information Systems Committee has released *Great expectations of ICT: how higher education institutions are measuring up*. The research started with sorting out what expectations secondary school students had of ICT in HE, then followed them up to see whether the experience matched the hope. By and large, it seemed they were happy. They aren't thrilled with the idea of using mobile technology and social networking platforms for academic purposes, so we need to tread carefully there.

The big message, it seems to me, is that we get carried away with tagging young people as digital natives and assume they know how to make the ICT work for academic purposes. Think again. It wouldn't hurt if secondary schools, unis and training providers were better informed about what they are all doing and expecting – a seamless ICT experience, and the development of skills to go with it, would be a big help.

Here it is:
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/jiscgreatexpectationsfinalreportjune08.pdf

10. International whereabouts in the UK

Here's a nifty little website from *The Guardian* that shows you where foreign students are studying in the UK:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/interactive/2008/may/19/foreignstudents

11. Going away

The new Australians – Study in Europe website is nifty too. Targeted at postgrad students, it's actually useful for anyone who needs a quick explanation of how national university systems, and qualifications, are organised in the 12 countries it covers. Play around:
http://www.asie.unimelb.edu.au/

12. Migration and education (1)

In May Quebec's Institute for Research on Public Policy released *The impact of economic selection policy on labour market outcomes for degree-qualified migrants in Canada and Australia*. Written by Australian Lesley Hawthorne, this has particular pertinence in light of the significant expansion in Australia's skilled migration intake. Here 'tis:
http://www.irpp.org/fasttrak/index.htm

13. Migration and education (2)

The Academy of Social Sciences has released one of its Occasional Papers, this one titled *The population and Australia's future labour force*. Written by Peter McDonald from ANU and Glenn Withers, CEO of Universities Australia. It makes a host of interesting points about the intersection between migration and education provision in Australia. Also helpful for an overview of how demographic change and migration are tied up in policy terms. Twenty-two good pages:
http://www.assa.edu.au/Publications/OP/op12008.pdf

14. Migration and education (3)

ANU's College of Business & Economics produces *Agenda*, an online quarterly. In the recent issue is 'The biggest loser: education and skilled immigration in Australia', by Peter Robertson of the Australian School of Business at UNSW. Thought-provoking policy questions in this 11 pager which considers how skilled migration crowds out domestic education. Robertson poses a stinger to make us think: why bother subsidising domestic education if we can import skilled labour? Go here:
http://epress.anu.edu.au/agenda/015/01/pdf/15-1-AR-2.pdf

15. Buying independence

It's as well to keep a weather eye on the stormy relationship between industry and independent university research. The US Centre for Science in the Public Interest has produced a short paper – *Big Oil U* – which suggests big companies with an economic interest in fossil fuels are finding ways to impinge on independent research. Not as flagrant as buying findings – there are a dozen ways to kill a cat. Taking a hard line is often tricky when, as the report points out, government support for higher education has waned. *Big Oil U* is here:
http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/bigoilu.pdf

16. Apes and ethics

Radio National's *All in the Mind* has just aired a program that looks at the experimental use of primates. Transcripts and podcast are here:
http://www.abc.net.au/rn/allinthemind/stories/2008/2290721.htm

17. Where are you?

The University Planning Office at Melbourne Uni maintains a helpful online directory of university units providing statistical services:
http://www.upo.unimelb.edu.au/Public/About/UPO_Links.html

18. Swivel

I've mentioned Swivel before. An entertaining place for the statistically obsessed AAIRie:
http://www.swivel.com/