



Monthly e-Newsletter – March 2009

What's in this edition?

It is Written.....1
 Places to Go – Things to Do.....2
 Newsletter Notes 3-6
 It isn't over yet5
 For the Poddies, Voddies and Bloggies.....6
 AAIR Committee listing.....6

EDITORIAL OF SORTS

This newsletter has come together in bits and pieces – attending the Big Skills conference in Sydney last week meant my reading diet was transformed into a series of light snacks and writing up has occurred in snatches. Apologies, then, for non-sequiturs and half-baked assessments you may encounter on your travels through these pages.

The Big Skills conference sought to bring coherence to the disparate challenges confronting the VET sector. The quality of keynotes was consistently high. Check them out here, though no PowerPoint can capture Chris Caton's mordant humour or Megan Clark's laser analysis, and you don't have access to the likes of John Buchanan's feisty summary – but what's here is good:
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/Programme_categories/Conferences/Speakers_Presentations.htm

The Deputy PM did a flit between Canberra and Sydney, speaking at the Universities Australia conference one day and the Big Skills conference the next. This week, in Sydney again, she spoke at the *Fin Review's* higher ed conference, where Kim Carr also graced two of these podia. It's wise to read their speeches as a twin set.

So, here we go. Julia Gillard at UA's conference:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_090305_093449.aspx

IT IS WRITTEN

He could not say that he wished 'to be' a lawyer as his father would pounce on the words 'to be' and lecture him on his own being as a precious gift to be cultivated with energy but also with subtle wisdom and consideration. Thus, his father would say, you cannot 'be' a lawyer nor can you 'become' one. Such language, his father would insist, is a way of offering offence to the greatest gift of our Creator – life itself and the grace our Creator offers us to move on from our being and become.

- Colm Tóibín, *The Master*, Picador, 2005.

... and then Julia at the Big Skills conference:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_090304_155721.aspx

... and then at the *Fin Review's* shindig – only brief media reports so far, but presumably the speech will turn up here very soon:
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Pages/default.aspx>

... along with Kim Carr at UA:
<http://minister.innovation.gov.au/Carr/Pages/UNIVERSITIESAUSTRALIAHIGHEREDUCATIONCONFERENCE2009.aspx>

... and Kim at the *Fin's* conference:
<http://minister.innovation.gov.au/Carr/Pages/AUSTRALIANFINANCIALREVIEWHIGHEREDUCATIONCONFERENCE.aspx>

Read them tea leaves and let me know what will be in the May Budget!

I look forward to your feedback and contributions during 2009. Subject to space and relevance to members, the newsletter can run job vacancies and items on upcoming events. I'm always keen to include items you think will be of interest to others.

Please feel free to contact me by email:
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PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

Partners *in* Smart Training & Assessment conference

26-27 March 2009

Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre

I'm a bit conferenced out on the VET front after the Big Skills event last week. If not for that I'd be tempted, as you might be, to swan along to this conference hosted by Queensland's Department of Education, Training and the Arts. The program keeps very close tabs on assessment practice and industry relevance. This page will introduce you to the full box and dice:

<http://deta.qld.gov.au/conference/rto/index.html>

The student experience – what's the deal?

6 May 2009

The Royal Society, London

Now, if you happen to be at a loose end in London on the first Wednesday in May, you might fancy pitching up to the Royal Society's digs just off Pall Mall. It'll cost you close to A\$800 for the day, but as we are about to spend a lot more time in higher ed here in Oz getting up close and personal with the student experience, it might be worth the outlay.

<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wip.asp?ID=129>

And besides, you'd get to check out the building – have a look at the photos here and you might even decide to fly over to the Old Dart just for the day:

<http://royalsociety.org/publication.asp?id=1842>

Pathfinders: The Innovator's Conference

26-28 May 2009

National Convention Centre, Canberra

Okay, so you're back from London but haven't quite got rid of the travel bug. You need to wean yourself off air travel slowly. I understand. How about a trip to Canberra at the end of May? The Cooperative Research Centres Association is holding this conference hot on the heels of the May Budget, when presumably the longer term financing of research and the management of innovation will be translated into numbers. Everything is on the agenda, from gaining policy traction and attracting students to science, to the evolution of lizards:

<http://crca.asn.au/conference/>

International Conference on Learning

1-4 July 2009

University of Barcelona

The 16th International Conference on Learning will be in dowdy old Barcelona. Never mind. You can't have it all, can you? The background to the conference reads strongly, though there isn't a program up yet – the call for papers closes on 12 March. The conference themes are:

- Educational values and values in education
- Learning how to communicate, represent and mean
- Humanising science and technology
- Sites of learning

What I like about this conference is that it tackles learning in the round, rather than make often artificial distinctions about learning in education sectors. Details:

<http://l09.cg-conference.com/>

2009 AARE International Education Research Conference

29 November-3 December 2009

National Convention Centre – Canberra

The Australian Association for Research in Education has chosen as the conference theme, Inspiring innovative research – creating global networks – a capital idea! The call for papers is open until 15 May and this is where you will find out about everything else:

http://ocs.sfu.ca/aare/index.php/AARE_2009/aare_2009

Educating the Net Generation Workshops

Continuing throughout 2009

Everywhere in the Land of Oz

Educating the Net Generation is an ALTC-funded project involving folks from Charles Sturt Uni, Melbourne Uni and Wollongong Uni. The workshops, so saith the blurb, 'are an excellent opportunity, in an interactive collegial setting, to find out about important issues for technology-facilitated learning and teaching, to share emerging good practices and lessons learned across a range of institutions and disciplines and to try out something new to you about using web 2.0 for academic purposes.' Workshops are scheduled throughout 2009 across the length and breadth of the wide brown land:

<http://netgen.unimelb.edu.au/outcomes/workshops.html>

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1. Writing anew

Writing in the 21st Century: A report from the National Council of Teachers of English, offers a short (nine pages) history of writing in its educational context before it reaches the noughties. The advent of digital technologies and web 2.0, reckons the report's author, Kathleen Yancey, heralds the Age of Composition – everyone is writing and they are writing to participate. In her conclusion, Yancey proposes three tasks that educators need to take up if the greatest advantage is to accrue from a shift in the perceptions and purposes of writing:

- Articulate the new models of composing developing right in front of our eyes
- Design a new model of a writing curriculum K-graduate school
- Create new models for teaching.

I read most of this report in an airport and found myself wishing that the never-ending blurt of loud-speaker announcements could be converted to the clear and silent written word. Worth a read:

http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Press/Yancey_final.pdf

2. Prove it

In the *New York Times* books section on 24 February appeared 'In tough times, the humanities must justify their worth', by Patricia Cohen. Simply said, the article suggests that unless liberal arts adherents and institutions can demonstrate immediate vocational relevance in a period of the economic shudders, the curtain will come down. Philanthropists, industry and students will all back off and search out more certain outcomes. Then the cavalry arrives in the form of Derek Bok and others to say that the liberal arts are made for the times.

Cohen's article finishes on a low note, though, quoting in part one her interviewees: 'The essence of a humanities education – reading the great literary and philosophical works and coming "to grips with the question of what living is for" – may become "a great luxury that many cannot afford.'" Funny as it may sound, the unwanted outcome is that the only the wealthy will be able to indulge themselves in an Arts degree. Blimey. Here 'tis: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html?_r=1&8bu&emc=bub2

3. Believe it

Ignoring the Jeremiad from the *New York Times*, an optimistic group of liberal artsers has established ECOLAS – the European College of Liberal Arts. Almost nothing of note on the website yet, but I'll be keeping cockatoo at the liberal arts two-up game over the course of the Global Financial Cockup:

<http://www.ecolas.eu/content/index.php>

4. Are universities at home in their cities?

The UK Work Foundation released back in December last a paper called *Embedding universities in knowledge cities*.

To quote from the Exec Summary: 'This research report, based on a literature review, interviews, and case studies of Birmingham, Brighton, Leeds and Norwich, ... aimed to investigate these questions about how relationships between different cities and different institutions are working at the moment, and where there are opportunities for both to gain from partnership working. Our work found that although both universities and cities recognise the potential that universities have to contribute locally and regionally as well as globally, most higher education institutions and local authorities remain less clear about how best to work together to mutual benefit.'

It may be those very close to the issues will find little more in the report than a round up of what's known. But I don't know very much so I thought it was pretty useful – around 50 pages here: http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/208_ideopolis_education061208.pdf

5. German unis & international student markets

The Centre for Higher Education Development is a German higher ed think tank. In December I came across one of its publications, *Analysing the future market – target countries for German HEIs*. It's a compendious overview of the characteristics of potential higher ed student markets, from Tunisia to Indonesia. The report considers options for maintaining strength and diversity in the German higher ed system in the face of demographic change over the next couple of decades through increasing international student numbers: http://www.che.de/downloads/Analysing_the_Future_Market_Target_Countries_for_German_HEIs_AP107.pdf

6. NZ unis & international student markets

South of the equator, Education New Zealand is the body that shepherds the trade potential of NZ's education services. I just wanted to draw attention to this grand little list of stats for country markets, sector providers and other dribs and drabs:

http://www.educationnz.org.nz/policy_stats.html

7. Sectoral relationships in Ontario

Do you have words that you always miskey? I don't know why, but Ontario always ends up as Ontario. Feel free to send me some deeply embarrassing Freudian explanation for this continuing error. Anyway, as we are entering a new phase of VET and higher ed synchrony, you might want to download a copy of *Making college-university cooperation work*, released in January by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

The different but equal debate isn't one confined to Oz. The paper delivers on its promises to consider a string of supply side questions:

- under what conditions does institutional cooperation blossom?
- how successful have college-university partnerships in Ontario been to date?
- how do the results of Ontario's approach to college-university relationships differ from those of

and obtained an FNTFR score

jurisdictions with a system-wide approach to promoting student transfer?

Only 25 pages:

<http://www.heqco.ca/en-CA/Research/Research%20Publications/Pages/default.aspx>

8. Very PC

In January the Productivity Commission delivered itself once again of its annual Report on Government Services, lovingly known as ROGS. You can always rely on the PC to produce really huge reports with endless statistics. Or can you? This might be the last outing for ROGS because COAG has decided to review whether ROGS actually adds anything to the sum total of our knowledge. Decide for yourself – have a look.

Goodness knows how long the full tome is, but you can visit this webpage and access the bits you care most about. The fact sheets listed on the right hand side are pretty handy summaries of key service areas:

<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs/2009>

9. Making space

UQ took on an ALTC project on learning spaces and produced a report called *Designing next generation places of learning: collaboration at the pedagogy-space-technology nexus*. Darned good. Proposes a framework to work with – almost a manual noting purposes and questions to ask on the way through. The report is here: http://www.altc.edu.au/carrick/webdav/site/carricksite/users/siteadmin/public/grants_pp_projectreport_nextgeneration_uq_jan09.pdf

The project website, with access to a bevy of colloquium presentations, is here:

<http://www.uq.edu.au/nextgenerationlearningspace/>

10. Down to me

In January, the ANU's Centre for Economic Policy Research released a discussion paper called *Exploring the factors associated with youths' educational outcomes: the role of locus of control and parental socio-economic background*, written by Juan David Barón. This is a timely release, as it draws attention to another influence on equity and access outcomes – whether you complete Year 12, or go on to post-secondary education, will be determined in part by whether you think what you do will make a real difference to your outcomes.

Barón tells us his results 'indicate that even after controlling for individual and other parental characteristics, youths who grew up in highly disadvantaged households (e.g. parents' income support use lasted for more than six years) are almost 10 and 20 percentage points less likely to complete Year 12 and obtain an ENTER score'. It's a demanding 55 or so pages, but worth a read: <http://cepr.anu.edu.au/pdf/DP598.pdf>

11. Change the package or the packaging

The National Quality Council released a consultation paper in February called *VET training products for the 21st century*. It poses a range of questions designed to explore whether training packages or their components, or the definitions that glue training packages together, need a good scrub or are all shiny enough. I've got a bottle of Brasso here if anyone wants it: http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/47934/VET_Training_Products_for_the_21st_Century_-_Consultation_paper.pdf

IT ISN'T OVER YET ...

Hot π Day

Those of you with a warped sense of the mathematical will know that 3.14 is how π begins, and for the sake of space, it's best not to go much further. However, another way of looking at 3.14 is that it's shorthand for March 14th. And so we have π Day:

<http://www.piday.org/>

A neat little history of π is to be found here:

http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/HistTopics/Pi_through_the_ages.html

By uncanny coincidence, π day is Einstein's birthday – this year Albert turns 130:

http://web.visionlearning.com/events/Einstein_Mar14_2004.htm

If you want to celebrate Albert's big day in experimental style with the kids, try:

<http://www.physics.org/UploadDocs/Feature/documents/EinsteinsBirthdayPartyPack.pdf>

(And if you guessed that I pulled this lot together sitting for too long in the gate lounge at Mascot, you win a homemade π .)

12. Good and grey

I've followed the steady progress of the Skilling the Existing Workforce project through its various stages since 2006 or so. The final report was recently posted on the Australian Industry Group website. Grey literature about greying workers and good as gold as an insight into how industry needs its training services rolled out. The project asked messy questions, and there are still some messy things to sift through. It's 90 pages long, but rest assured there isn't one that's wasted:

http://www.aigroup.com.au/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/LIVE_CONTENT/Publications/Reports/2008/skilling_existing_workforce.pdf

13. It started like this

The TAFE Development Centre in Melbourne offers a history of VET reform by summarising key documents that have shaped the reform agenda. If you hanker to know how VET got here, try these nuggets, with links to the documents thrown in: <http://www.tafecentre.vic.edu.au/Researchentrypage2008onwards.php>

14. I was reframed

Reframing the Future has provided heaps of VET folk with the opportunity to invent better ways of doing VET practice. Reframing wrapped up its illustrious career at the end of 2008 as responsibility for VET workforce development was delineated as a state/territory gig under COAG agreement. So take a look at what Reframing did for us, before the website succumbs to a cyber black hole:

<http://www.reframingthefuture.net/>

15. Defying the market

Navitas is a rare strong performer on the Australian Stock Exchange. With links to a number of Australian unis, Navitas has facilities in Oz, the UK and elsewhere. You can read the Navitas Annual Report online here:

<http://www.navitasworld.com/AnnualReport/2008/index.html>

16. Regular old stuff

Now chances are I won't have a look around the British Periodicals Collections I and II – I bookmarked it because I like the idea, but I may not get to it. Maybe this is for you, if you want to explore 'magisterial quarterlies and scholarly and professional organs through to coterie art periodicals, penny weeklies and illustrated family magazines' from the 1680s to the 1930s. There are 3.1 million pages to comfort you through every bout of insomnia you could conceivably cram into a lifetime:

http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/british_periodicals

17. Worldly numbers

UNESCO's Institute for Statistics has released the *Global education digest 2008: comparing education statistics across the world*. This one is for reinforced coffee tables only, weighing in at 297 pages – it is one of advantages of cyberspace that texts like this are weightless. About 240 of these pages are given over to tables on education. Huge: http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/ged/2008/GED%202008_EN.pdf

Of course, if you like to travel on your own rather than take the guided tour, you can traipse around the UNESCO database. Even huger:

http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx?IF_ActivePath=P,50&IF_Language=eng

18. Just checking

Mercer is a global corporate that specialises in HR. I only know that because I read it on the website. What I also read there was *Workplace 2012 – beyond the global financial crisis*. Mercer commissioned a report, then the GFC came along and the company commissioned a check up to see if the report's findings still held. Assuming this isn't the end of market capitalism as we have come to know and love it, then the report's findings are solid, with a few twists. Come the recovery we'll be hassling with skills shortages, so the report addresses itself to keeping that long term reality in view. Skills rate a mention on nearly every page: http://www.mercer.com.au/attachment.dyn?idContent=1329160&filePath=/attachments/English/Mercer_Au_Workplace2012_ResearchReportUpdate_Dec08.pdf

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES AND BLOGGIES

Medium Big Mac

MQTV is Macquarie Uni's multimedia website. A list of videos and podcasts as long as your arms. If, like me, you have a visceral dislike for the folly and cul de sac that is postmodernism, you might enjoy the video pieces called *Past tense*, accessed via the archive button at the bottom of this page: <http://www.mqtv.mq.edu.au/Main.php>

The podcast archive is marvellously long and I've only just began to sample the goodies. Real work podcasts I've listened to include:

- *Telling it like it is*, which stars Caroline Trotman, Macquarie's DVC for development and external relations on how Macquarie promotes itself
- *Towards a green Macquarie*, which stars Leanne Denby, head of Macquarie's sustainability office.

The pod list is here:

<http://www.mqtv.mq.edu.au/PagePodcastArchive.php>

Leanne Denby has a staff of two, both current Macquarie students (one undergrad, one postgrad). A very fine thing and there ought be more of it, I reckon. The staff team is here:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/sustainability/ourteam/meettheteam/meettheteam.html>

Leanne also got students to assess the size of Macquarie's ecological footprint. More of that, too, be it uni marketing or project management. The Sustainability@MQ website is here:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/sustainability/index.html>

AAIR Committee – 2009

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