Australasian Association for Institutional Research

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Monthly e-Newsletter – July 2009

What's in this edition?

EDITORIAL OF SORTS

I realise that you are suffering AAIR newsletter overload, as the June edition was very late and this one is nearly on time. I like to keep you guessing.

Three things I'm asked about from time to time:

- Can I tell you in which newsletter such and such was listed? Nope, I can't. Unfortunately I don't maintain an index of what appears or when. I have to leave you to your own devices. Past editions are archived here by and by:
  http://www.aair.org.au/Pages/Newsletters.html
- Can your colleague get the newsletter? Sure. Send me an email address and it shall be.
- Can I distribute notices about an event or whatever? Yes, but only in the newsletter. I don't do separate distributions. There are no guarantees on a distribution date. I do try for around the 5th of the month.

If you are receiving a copy of this newsletter and would prefer not to, email me and I'll scrub you from the distribution list. My email address is:
rob@sharpwords.com.au

Please feel free to contact me by email:
rob@sharpwords.com.au

And here's a clever way to buy time beyond the due date to finish that uni assignment – Turnitin meets Turnitup:
http://www.corrupted-files.com/Home.html

ATEM – Strategic Thinking & Planning for Tertiary Education

Friday 17 July 2009
9.30 am-4.30 pm

**UTS, City Campus,
Building 2, Level 5, Room 30**

(In university space speak, that location is CB2.05.30)

This ATEM workshop has two distinct stages:

- The morning session will focus on strategic thinking, the step before strategic planning
- The afternoon session shifts gear to look at strategic planning in its various forms, where the intent is to move towards a preferred strategy for the future.

The workshop will provide an understanding of:

- the concept of futures or strategic thinking, and how it fits into a strategy development framework
- how strategic thinking can helps focus decision making today
- types of future methods and tools available
- ideas for implementing a strategic planning process and/or performance measurement framework at your institution, and
- a better knowledge of student load planning and other planning processes.

AAIRies will recognise the workshop presenters:

- **Maree Conway** from Thinking Futures
- **Martin Hanlon**, Director of the Planning and Quality Unit at UTS
- **Ivan Skaines**, AAIR's Past Prez and Transition & Retention Project Officer, Newcastle Uni
- **Michael Rothery**, Reporting & Analysis Coordinator, Planning & Quality Unit at UTS.

    ATEM Members and AAIRies: $297
    Non-members: $330

Details at:
http://www.atem.org.au/assets/StrategicThinking17July complete_pub_0001.pdf

PLACES TO GO – THINGS TO DO

19TH ANNUAL AAIR FORUM
11-13 November 2009
Hyatt Hotel, Adelaide

The theme for this year's AAIR Forum is:

Turning water into wine: Institutional research as an essential ingredient in strategic decision making for tertiary education.

The Forum will focus on strategic priorities in the sector, including:
- supporting strategic planning
- adding value to measuring and predicting
- responding to skills shortages
- environmental and economic sustainability.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Get busy, folks. The call for abstracts closes on 29 June. Details about abstract submissions, and awards and prizes on offer, are here:
http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aair2009/downloads/AAIRCallforAbstractFINAL.pdf

REGISTRATION FOR THE FORUM IS NOW OPEN

Early Bird Registration closes on 1 September. AAIR members who register before that date get a seat for three whole days for just $838 – that'll be $279.33 recurring for each day.

Actually, it's better than that. Besides a seat, you also get: a set of forum proceedings, satchel, name badge, lunch, morning and afternoon tea, entry to the Welcome Reception and Forum Gala Dinner, and AAIR membership for 2010.

Registration details are here:
http://www.leishman-associates.com.au/aair2009/downloads/AAIRRegistraionV5.pdf

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley AC

Dr Gavin Moodie
http://www.griffith.edu.au/vc/ate/moodie/

Nick Palousis
http://www.sbpractices.com/nick-palousis

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UTS   UniSA   RMIT   QUT   Flinders   ANU Adelaide Uni

The 2009 AAIR Forum is organised via a partnership of staff from UniSA, Adelaide Uni and Flinders' Uni.

ALIA Public Libraries Summit
16 July 2009
National Library of Australia, Canberra

ALIA – the Australian Library and Information Association – is summiteering under the theme of 'Setting a national agenda'. The idea is to put together ideas about how Australia's 1,522 public libraries can contribute to the objectives of social, educational, cultural, broadband and digital programs and policies. Details here:
http://www.alia.org.au/governance/committees/public.libraries/summit09/

2009 Tertiary Education Policy Seminars
30 July and 31 August, 2009
CSHE and Martin Institute, Melbourne Uni

There was a seminar on 9 June. If you missed it, grab a bag of chips and watch the video:
http://unimelb.flvhost.com/generator/flv/channels/grad_school_2009/tertiary_seminar_2009.html

The second seminar is on Thursday 30 July, from 6pm-8.30pm. The topic is 'Participation and equity: What are the cross-sectoral implications of the Bradley targets for expansion and equity?'

That's a very good question and there are three very good people to lead us through it:
- Chair: Professor Elizabeth Harman, VC at VU
- Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, Melbourne Uni
- Professor Peter Dawkins, Secretary, Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The details for this seminar are here:
http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/seminars09/seminar2.html

The final seminar in the series is on Monday 31 August, from 6pm-8.30pm. The topic is 'Quality, standards and regulation: The start of a new era'.

That's a topic to conjure with, isn't it? The speakers who'll help us locate the quality ace of spades are:
- Professor Alan Robson VC at UWA
- Dr Hamish Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research

The details for the final seminar are here:
http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/seminars09/index.html

Plain Language Association InterNational conference

15 October to 17 October 2009

Four Points by Sheraton, Darling Harbour, Sydney

The battle against obfuscation, confusion and imprecision in the written word is a battle worth joining. I know it isn't fashionable any more to quote to Richard Nixon, but being a contrary soul, I'm going to. Nixon observed that 'If things don't work on paper, they probably don't work'. Quite.

Enter the Australia's Plain English Foundation, stage right. More about the Foundation here:
http://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/

This is the 7th international conference of the international collection of plain language associations, and I recommend the conference website to educators of all stripes:
http://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/tabid/3276/Default.aspx

WorldSkills Calgary 2009

September 1-7, 2009

Calgary, Canada

WorldSkills is too big an event to capture in a few lines. This is the 40th anniversary of a very good idea that grew slowly in the midst of much that was very bloody ordinary in Franco's post-war Spain. Australia hosted WorldSkills in Sydney in 1988 as part of the Bicentennial knees up. The present Antipodean link is that Jack Dusseldorp of the Sydney-based Dusseldorp Skills Forum is President of WorldSkills International.

Anyway, the theme for the Calgary jambouree is 'Live the skilled life'. The website is here:
http://www.worldskills2009.com/

Australia is sending the Skillaroos and New Zealand the Tool Blacks. Follow them as follows:
- WorldSkills Australia:
  http://www.skillaroos.com.au/
- WorldSkills New Zealand:
  http://www.worldskills.org.nz/

And look, if you can't get there, you can pretend you went. Visit the WorldSkills merchandising website. I was especially taken with the gum pack:
http://s56567-3.storefront-solutions.com/cat-Promotional-16.aspx

Research-teaching linkages: practice & policy

11-12 November, 2009

Trinity College Dublin

Ireland has NAIRTL. It's an ungainly acronym, even when I try it with my best Cork brogue. NAIRTL is the National Academy for Integration of Research and Teaching and Learning. There is much and continuing debate about whether too much is made of the research-teaching nexus, but NAIRTL is having none of that. It's a rich vein, as the abstracts from 2008 conference suggest:
http://www.nairtl.ie/index.php?pageID=113

Now there's not much to go on yet – just a date and a venue, but I'm thinking that you might put yourself out and go to Dublin for a good listen:
http://www.nairtl.ie/index.php?pageID=27&eventID=54

NEWSLETTER NOTES

1.   Good theme players

AUQA and the ALTC teamed up to do a thematic analysis of Cycle 1 AUQA audits, called *Learning and teaching in Australian universities*.

Released in June, it clocks in at just half a hundred pages. But if you are short of time, the 8 page Exec Summary is okay, though there is luscious detail later in the piece: lots of good ideas about how to, and how not to, get quality right in learning and teaching.

There can be no surprise in this observation in the report: 'The other challenge which presents itself clearly throughout these audit reports is the gulf between the policy makers and senior decision-makers in universities and the teachers and academic administrators at academic unit level. In large and devolved institutions the gulf is harder to bridge. Many audit reports drew attention to the failure of policies to be acknowledged or implemented at unit level. The problem is often framed as one of communication but, in reality, it is more complex and goes to the heart of the culture of the institution.'

So, we have much more to do it seems. Give it a go:
http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/auqa%20report%20.pdf

2. Curriculum aspirations

Vianne McLean, DVC (Teaching Quality) at QUT, delivered a speech in June titled 'A vision for QUT curriculum: launch of the curriculum design policy'. She hones in on some of the trials and shortcomings of curriculum development in higher ed, and steps us through the approach QUT is adopting: a framework of principles rather than a reliance on approval points and compliance.

McLean notes at one point: 'This traditional approach to curricular design, the approvals process and course quality assurance, would have gone unquestioned, even a decade ago. But the ante has risen exponentially in that period. Systems for monitoring course quality, student experience and teaching quality have become high stakes priorities for universities, and we are about to enter yet another quantum shift with the new push towards sector-wide discipline-specific academic standards that is foreshadowed in the establishment of the … Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The traditional approaches to providing quality university teaching and learning simply won't cut it any longer.'

That's a pretty sound assessment of the ground. You'll find the text of the speech waiting for you at the other end of this perilously long url: http://www.otq.qut.edu.au/OTQ/publications/A%20Vision%20for%20QUT%20Curriculum%20Paper-12%20June%202009.pdf

3. Unplugging at the PowerPoint

Sandi Mann from Central Lancashire Uni wrote an article for *The Guardian* entitled 'Why do 60% of students find their lectures boring?' Mann, a boredom researcher, reckons boredom is more of a problem for students than for most other groups.

I'll track down the study Mann refers to. But for now, I can only report, borrowing from *The Guardian*, that lousy PowerPoint presentations are a good way of promoting ennui, especially when they oblige students 'to spend most of the session attempting to copy copious amounts of text from the screen, while bypassing active processing of the material.' Well, I guess you already knew that, didn't you? Remember life before PowerPoint, when we were awed by the flimsy wonders of the overhead transparency? Shucks. Here's the article: http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/may/12/university-teaching?DCMP=EMC-thewrap08

4. ICT across the sectors

Education.au has released *Collaboration in teaching & learning*. It comes as one of the reports out of the Strategic ICT Advisory Service, a DEEWR funded exercise tasked with looking at how to engineer a good fit between ICT and education.

The report notes that while the Digital Education Revolution 'will have an impact on the school education sector, it must be expanded to include vocational education and training (VET) and the university sector to ensure students have a seamless experience of ICT in education as they move from one sector to another.'

The importance of seamlessness, and the significance of good ICT services as a means of ameliorating educational disadvantage for those in rural and remote areas, are two of the themes explored. The pdf is here: http://www.educationau.edu.au/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/papers/2009_SICTAS_CTL.pdf

5. The way it isn't

Brendan O'Reilly has penned, for the Australian Review of Public Affairs, a broadside about lax use by politicians and others of data which reports how Oz unis stack up on international comparisons.

His article, 'Misinformed debate on public funding of universities', notes that 'Overall, much of the public debate on the funding of tertiary education in Australia has been very ill-informed. This is largely because the OECD's *Education at a Glance*, from which key statistics are sourced, is a technical document and contains only summary tables in the hard copy text. Casual users generally lack an adequate understanding of the basic concepts underlying it and often try to interpret technically complex educational expenditure data intuitively.'

Fair enough. But I reckon it's also fair enough to add that we can hardly have an informed debate about tertiary education policy unless casual users like me are treated with some respect – we need a consistent set of agreed measures which are readily accessible and regularly reported. It's not my fault I'm not an expert. This is a really important area of work for AAIRies with more nous than me. To inform yer actual citizenry, rather than to use stats as a shield from scrutiny. O'Reilly is here: http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2009/06/oreilly.html

6. The way it might be?

The website of the National Survey of Student Engagement in the US offers a list of uni websites that display the NSSE results. Some are pretty simple, and there's Slippery Rock University which is extensive. Most sites use some kind of benchmarking. If you are a suspicious type, like me, you probably expect to see benchmarked outcomes reported only when they are favourable to the uni in question – in which case a visit to the Wheaton College website might improve your estimation of the species. The list is here: http://nsse.iub.edu/institute/index.cfm?view=tools/school_examples

7. The NZ budget and the university sector

The NZ Vice-Chancellors' Committee sized up the NZ budget, which was brought down in late May, and declared that the 'Budget Deals Body Blow to Universities':
http://www.nzvcc.ac.nz/node/410

On the other hand, the Minister, Anne Tolley, thinks the Budget was okay. Interestingly, she spruiked for the Budget at the annual conference of the New Zealand Universities Students Association's conference in July. She listed the priorities of the government in terms of tertiary ed:
- to simplify the tertiary education funding system
- to reduce central bureaucracy
- to strengthen quality and require accountability
- to support and encourage students, and
- to improve the interface between schools and tertiary education institutions.

That list will ring bells this side of The Ditch. The Minister's speech, in very small point size, lurks here:
http://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/auckland+university+business+school+fisher+and+paykel+auditorium

8. Where did they go?

'A closer look at completion in higher education in New Zealand', by David J. Scott of the NZ Ministry of Education has looked at NZ's poor completion rate and suggests it's not as bad it seems. Very high proportions of part-timers, and those changing track, lead us to a more nuanced view:
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/42071/A-Closer-Look-At-Completion-In-Higher-Education-In-New-Zealand-journal-final.pdf

9. How much is too much? (1)

The NZ Ministry of Ed has released *Counting the cost: an analysis of domestic tuition fees*. It's a good primer on the NZ Fee and Course Costs Maxima policy. Lots of useful data, like this:

Figure 3: Average domestic tuition fee per equivalent full-time student
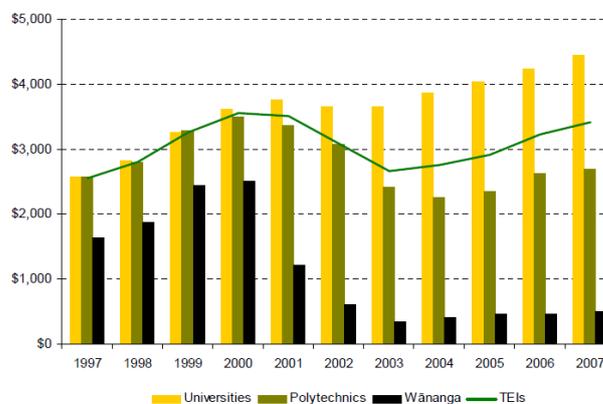
Just 30 pages and here they are:
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/44624/Counting-the-cost---final.pdf

The NZ Universities Students' Association keeps tabs on the cost of tertiary education – see the student debt ticker at the top of its home page:
http://www.nzusa.org.nz/

10. How much is too much? (2)

Cost, commitment, and attainment in higher education: an international comparison was released in May by a mob called Jobs for the Future, based in Boston – not a mob I can tell you much about, but the paper is a goodie. At the moment, anything short gets the nod, and this consumes just 25 cyberpages. What this report does, as it says itself, is compare and analyse 'data on three key indicators of tertiary education in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):
- *Cost:* The amount that countries spend on tertiary education per student;
- *Commitment:* The share of GDP a country spends on tertiary education; and
- *Attainment:* The share of working-age adults holding a tertiary education degree.

It offers pretty useful insights into how the OECD data treats at cert and diploma level quals in its reporting of tertiary ed data. Gives a 25 words or less comparison of policy settings in a dozen countries. Despite its US perspective, there are dozens of references to Oz and NZ:
http://www.jff.org/Documents/MOA_report_051909.pdf

11. How does it work? (2)

Canada's Millennium Scholarship Foundation has released a research note titled *Are student employment and academic success linked?* Another shortie and goodie. This time the focus group is students in secondary school. The authors come to a pretty uncomplicated view: 'While this study is far from conclusive, we are convinced that working while in school is more harmful than is generally thought.' Off the top of my head, I disagree. If the circumstances are right, it's seems to work. However, when the circumstances aren't right, it's a bad look, as this paper points out:
http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/090415_Student_Employment_RN9.pdf

12. How does it work? (1)

George Kuh, the guardian of NSSE, was recently in Australia. I know because I heard him, very engagingly, at the La Trobe Forum on Student Engagement at the beginning of July. Kuh is one of the authors of a paper titled 'First-year students' employment, engagement, and academic achievement: untangling the relationship between work and grades'. The paper appears in the NASPA Journal, 2008, Vol. 45, no. 4. NASPA is (but doesn't look like) the association for Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

This is a handy incursion into the work and study debate. The conclusion has it that 'Working for pay full time, or nearly full time (i.e., more than 20 hours per week), clearly appears to be detrimental to the academic success of first-year students. Conversely, working 20 hours or fewer on campus can be positively related to student success because it is related to greater levels of participation in active and collaborative learning activities and positive interactions between students and faculty members.' But the journey to the conclusion is worth taking – there's a bit to think about along the way:
http://publications.naspa.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2011&context=naspajournal

13. How does it work? (3)

The NCVER has published a literature review called *Employer engagement with the vocational education and training system in Australia*. This one goes on the bookshelf:
http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/commercial/op04230.pdf

15. Performance data in UK further ed

The Framework for Excellence prescribes the collection and publication of performance info on further ed in the UK. The idea is that access to data informs the buyers of education and training, and helps providers improve. I buy that, if the data is really accessible.

So, the Learning & Skills Council will be releasing the data any day now. Some miscreant will no doubt construct a league table based on the data. What is it about human beings and lists? Anyway, check the website from time to time and be among the first to see how it looks:
http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/

14. VET in Schools by numbers

Also from the NCVER, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET in Schools 2006*. This link takes you to the web page from which you can access the 15 page summary report, plus tables for each Australian state and territory: http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2148.html

16. Engaged at school

In the last newsletter I was stuck on pathways and workforce development. This month, I'm stuck on student engagement. I'm constantly struck by the learning and teaching similarities across education sectors. Difference is usually emphasised which probably contributes to the disconnects.

So, student engagement has risen in higher ed, is on the rise in VET, and is already shining on Victoria's public schools. The Vic Dept of Ed has put out *Effective schools are engaging schools – student engagement policy guidelines: promoting student engagement, attendance and positive behaviours in Victorian government schools*. Here: http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/segpolicy.pdf

17. Competing at school

ANU's Centre for Economic Policy Research has released *Choosing to compete: how different are girls and boys?* The paper says both are equally competitive, but competition is context dependent. There are two other studies I need – the distribution of cooperative behaviours (just as important for economic success), and the distribution of competitive and cooperative behaviours between males and females in different contexts. While we wait for those two, read this: http://cepr.anu.edu.au/pdf/DP602.pdf

18. What about us?

The Australian Social Inclusion Board has just produced *Social inclusion – a compendium of social inclusion indicators: how's Australia faring?* I'll have a close look soon, but let me lead you to page 53: '… among 15 to 19 year olds, Australian young people rate relatively poorly in the international rankings of those engaged in education or training or employed – they are in 18th position among 24 countries ranked according to the proportion of young people not in education or training and unemployed.' We should fix that, don't you think? The compendium is here: http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/AusGov/Board/Documents/Compendium.pdf

FOR THE PODDIES, VODDIES AND BLOGGIES

Skills on telly and video

The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence has done nice things with skills, putting them on the telly and on the web. I don't know if it works, but it looks like it should. Have a browse around SkillsOne: http://www.skillsone.com.au/

Learning about teaching

ABC Radio National's *Life matters* frequently strays into education. I'm still astounded that in the diverse fare on offer through Radio National there is no program devoted to education – goodness, there's enough happening at the moment to keep a couple of programs on the go. Wishes aside, there are two Life matters pods you might enjoy.

Melbourne Uni Dean of Education, Field Rickards, enthusiastically changing the face of teacher ed: http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2009/07/lms_20090701_0917.mp3

Denise Bradley on schools and universities: http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2009/06/lms_20090626_0905.mp3

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